

# VOICES

*from Syria* 2024

*Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview*



**Whole of Syria**  
Gender-Based Violence Area of  
Responsibility





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# Foreword

**Dear readers,**

In 2024, the lives of Syrian women and girls remain deeply impacted by the harsh realities of conflict, displacement, and violence. Over the past 13 years, gender-based violence (GBV) has become a daily struggle for countless women and girls across Syria. This ongoing crisis has worsened with time, as the fabric of communities continues to fray under the weight of instability, economic collapse, and the absence of a reliable justice system. Now, more than ever, we must turn our attention to their stories and the increasing risks they face.

This year, Syrians are enduring their worst conditions since the crisis began as numerous challenges converge. Ongoing artillery shelling, air strikes, land mines, and unexploded ordnance continue to endanger civilians and disrupt humanitarian aid. The capacity of basic services like water, sanitation, and public health is rapidly eroding, with critical systems under severe strain due to lack of development investment. Communities face worsening disease outbreaks, water shortages, vaccine-preventable illnesses, and food insecurity, leading to rising mortality, malnutrition, and increased demand for aid. These issues are compounded by the spillover from other regional crises, placing additional pressure on already weakened systems.

Throughout Syria, women and girls continue to report a growing spectrum of GBV, including harassment, intimate partner violence, early and forced marriage, sexual exploitation, and new forms of violence, such as those facilitated by technology. The prolonged conflict has entrenched harmful patriarchal norms, reversing hard-won gains in gender equality and women's rights. As more than 8 million women and girls find themselves in dire need of humanitarian aid, the threats to their safety and dignity are escalating at an alarming rate.

In the face of these profound challenges, the Whole of Syria GBV Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR) and UNFPA remain unwavering in its commitment to protect and uplift every woman and girl in Syria. Alongside our partners, we are working tirelessly to provide services that prevent and respond to GBV, while also advancing crucial research to better understand the evolving dynamics of this violence. Our Voices from Syria series has been instrumental in shedding light on the lived experiences of women and girls, serving as a vital tool for shaping more effective, data-driven humanitarian responses. Over the years, it has become a global model for ethical data collection in conflict settings.

Throughout 2024, in our conversations with Syrian women and girls, one message has echoed with clarity: "we feel forgotten." Despite their resilience, there is a profound sense of abandonment. They long for peace, empowerment, and a future free from violence. As we look to the future, the GBV AoR and UNFPA are committed not only to documenting these realities but to using this knowledge to enhance GBV response efforts. We will continue to champion the rights of women and girls, ensuring that their voices are heard and that their insights guide our work.

Sincerely,



**Laila Baker**  
Regional Director, Arab States

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# Executive Summary

# 1. Executive Summary

Thirteen years since its onset, the Syrian crisis remains one of the world's worst and most enduring humanitarian situations. In 2023, Syrians faced one of the worst years of this crisis, marked by a multitude of converging challenges that included ongoing hostilities, human rights abuses, economic collapse, disease outbreaks, natural disasters, climate shocks, mass displacement, food insecurity, and others. Coping capacities of households reportedly reached an all-time low and, despite increasing needs, there was a drastic reduction in humanitarian assistance due to funding shortfalls. As in previous years, women and girls fared the worst, with heightened risks of falling victim to negative coping mechanisms and gender-based violence (GBV).

**Most women and girls in Syria experience compounded forms of violence and discrimination, in addition to facing high barriers to accessing humanitarian assistance and specialised GBV services. Women and girls described an ever-present feeling of insecurity in their daily lives. They reported persistent and growing GBV both inside and outside of the home, including sexual violence and kidnapping; child and forced marriage; tech-facilitated GBV; movement restrictions and denial of education, inheritance, and other rights; and intimate partner and domestic and family violence. These forms of violence are systematically normalised and reinforced through patriarchal gender norms, traditions, and institutions that maintain gender inequality and increase the barriers women and girls face when attempting to disclose violence and seek support. Risks of GBV for women and girls in Syria vary depending on their age, marital status, ability, and displacement status.**

Despite this, women and girls in Syria continue to find ways to navigate the nearly insurmountable barriers to supporting themselves and their families. **Women and girls continue to dream of a future free from violence, in which they could have opportunities to study, pursue careers, play a role in their communities, and be regarded as equals.**

However, as household resources and humanitarian funding continue to plummet, the resilience of women and girls has become even more precarious. In these challenging times, GBV programming is more crucial than ever, providing necessary and lifesaving interventions. In 2023, women and girls in Syria continued to face significant and growing barriers to voicing their concerns, seeking support for the violence they experience, and asserting their rights.

The voices of women, girls, men, and boys across Syria have been collected, analysed, and narrated in this report, in order to provide much-needed insights into the lives and experiences of women and girls vis-a-vis GBV.

## Key Findings

- 1. The types of violence against women and girls in Syria are numerous and interrelated.** Women and girls suffered GBV both inside and outside of the home, as well as online.
- 2. The forms of GBV encountered in Syria have greatly increased as a result of the shocks of the past year,** including rampant insecurity, deepening poverty, and earthquake- and conflict-related displacement. Women and girls described increased incidence of intimate partner violence (IPV) and domestic and family violence, including in its most extreme form, femicide; sexual violence, including sexual harassment, rape, sexual exploitation,

and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA); kidnapping; child and forced marriage; tech-facilitated GBV; and systematic denial of resources, services, opportunities, and rights. Incidence of violence was particularly heightened in the post-earthquake collective shelters and camps.

3. **IPV and domestic and family violence continue to be the most common forms of GBV experienced by women and girls in Syria. However, women and girls have indicated that they also face growing risks of sexual violence and kidnapping when moving around the community, due to widespread insecurity.** There have been reported increases in several types of violence against women and girls in Syria, including kidnapping, tech-facilitated GBV, and sexual exploitation and SEA. Due to the heightened vulnerability of households and their inability to meet basic needs, negative coping mechanisms are also dramatically increasing, including school drop-outs, child and forced marriage, sexual exploitation and SEA, and survival sex.
4. **Widowed and divorced women and girls, adolescent girls, women and girls with disabilities, older women, unaccompanied and separated girls, and displaced women and girls in Syria are particularly vulnerable to GBV risks** and face compounded barriers to accessing humanitarian assistance and specialised GBV services.
5. **The resilience of women and girls in Syria is reported to be at an all-time low,** due to the compounded shocks faced in 2023 and the heightened vulnerability of households. **The majority of women and girls continued to stay silent when experiencing GBV due to fears around disclosing violence and seeking support.** Women and girls described significant barriers to reporting and addressing situations of GBV, including fear of stigma and retaliation from perpetrators, limited resources and options, and the risk of losing child custody.
6. **The decreased accessibility and availability of women's and girls' safe spaces (WGSS) and other GBV service points has drastically limited women's and girls' opportunities to receive life-saving support, mitigate their daily exposure to GBV, and recover from GBV.** Women and girls who live far from a WGSS facility, especially those in remote areas and camps, typically could not access the centres due to insecurity, family restrictions, limited availability of transport, and fears of sexual violence. Barriers to legal recourse were also cited by women and girls as a primary factor limiting their disclosure of GBV and seeking support services.
7. **A dramatic reduction in humanitarian assistance and services** in Syria over the past year, paired with inflation, **has made it more difficult for households to meet their basic needs, exacerbating negative coping mechanisms and elevating women's and girls' risks of GBV.**
8. **Women and girls in Syria face significant barriers and risks to accessing humanitarian assistance,** particularly in light of growing insecurity and increasingly constrained movement. Barriers to accessing humanitarian services were 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. **The lack of systemised risk mitigation measures across humanitarian efforts and actors has also increased the likelihood of women, girls, and marginalised groups facing GBV and SEA** when seeking humanitarian assistance, particularly in collective shelters and camps<sup>1</sup>.

*"All people are exposed to violence, but women and girls are more vulnerable to it and most women and girls who remain silent during exposure to violence choose to submit in order to not be harmed by the abuser and by community." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Tadaf)*

*"Women are the most exposed to violence in society because of customs and traditions; society says women are a minor rib and should be beaten and not given any value." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tel Tamar)*

*"Women, girls, the elderly, people with disabilities, and children are exposed to all types of violence, such as physical, psychological, verbal, and economic violence, early marriage, sexual violence, and other types of violence." (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*"Violence has become very widespread after the war and women and girls are exposed to all its forms (beating, abuse, threats, deprivation)." (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Aleppo, Jarablus)*

*"Of course, violence has increased, and its many types have multiplied (beating, bullying, cursing, deprivation of work, harassment, murder, honour crimes due to the large amount of drugs and alcohol, the spread of weapons, the lack of safety and peace, the chaos. We are thinking when to go out of the house and when we return and when the movement stops." (Woman, As-Sweida, Salkhad)*

*"Women and girls feel more insecure than in the past." (Man, Idlib, Dana)*

1 Review the GBV Advocacy Brief at the link, for targeted recommendations for the GBV sector, other humanitarian sectors and actors, policymakers, and donors.

<https://arabstates.unfpa.org/en/publications/overview-gender-based-violence-syria-2024#:~:text=As%20in%20previous%20years%2C%20women,assistance%20and%20specialised%20GBV%20services.>





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**Introduction**

## The intended audiences for the Voices from Syria report include:



GBV actors and personnel supporting GBV programmes



Humanitarian actors supporting other humanitarian sector programmes, including: Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM); Education; Food Security and Agriculture; Health; Livelihoods and Early Recovery; Non-Food Items (NFIs); Nutrition; Protection, Child Protection, and Mine Action; Shelter; Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH); etc.



Humanitarian-sector leadership



Donors

## 2. Introduction

### Objective and Scope of 'Voices from Syria 2024'

#### *Aim and Intended Use of Voices from Syria*

Now in its 13th year, the Syrian crisis continues to impose severe stressors, shocks, and violence on women and girls, yet their resilience and hopes remain undiminished. This report aims to amplify the experiences and voices of these women and girls, particularly regarding gender-based violence (GBV) in their daily lives. The report serves as a crucial platform for them to share their experiences, needs, and capacities, providing invaluable insights to inform multinational and institutional efforts aimed at addressing GBV.

Voices from Syria 2024 is an essential resource for those engaged in GBV prevention, risk mitigation, and response efforts, as well as those striving to empower women and girls affected by the crisis. 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 localised participatory consultation as part of ongoing programmatic approaches for affected women, girls, and communities. It is important to note that this publication is not intended to present a picture of Syria to the media or provide journalists with information on GBV. If any journalist is interested in further information on GBV in Syria, they should contact the GBV coordinators at the Whole of Syria (WoS) level, who are listed at [humanitarianresponse.org](http://humanitarianresponse.org).



Moreover, this report adheres to an intersectional feminist approach<sup>2</sup>. The methodologies and approaches used in its development are further detailed in Annex<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> An analytical approach and methodology centered on women and girls that recognizes their lived experiences as expert knowledge on the discrimination and violence they face. It also reflects how social categories interact with gender to reinforce marginalization and inequalities and compound risks of GBV, such as age; disability; marital status; diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC); race/ethnicity; displacement status; and socio-economic status. This approach aligns with the GBV Guiding Principles to do-no-harm and be survivor-centered.





## Scope of Consultations Used to Inform this Report

The scope of consultations with women and girls, wider community members, and GBV experts that took place are summarised in the tables that follow:




### Total Number of Focus Group Discussions Held for Voices from Syria 2024

<b>128</b>	total Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted with community members, including:
 <b>94</b> FGDs	with women and girls
 <b>9</b> FGDs	with women and girls with disabilities and their caretakers
 <b>34</b> FGDs	with men and boys
<b>1,066</b>	<b>total participants in community FGDs</b>

### Total Number of FGDs and Participants, Disaggregated by Age and Gender

	Gender/Age Groups	# of FGDs	# of Participants
	Adolescent Girls	<b>34</b>	<b>284</b>
	Adult Women	<b>60</b>	<b>497</b>
	Adolescent Boys	<b>17</b>	<b>143</b>
	Adult Men	<b>17</b>	<b>142</b>
	<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>1,066</b>

### Total Number of FGDs and Participants, Disaggregated by Disability and Other Considerations

	Gender/Age Groups	# of FGDs	# of Participants
	Adolescent Girls and Women with Disabilities and Their Caretakers	<b>9</b>	<b>98</b>
	Older Women	<b>13</b>	<b>111</b>
	In Camps	<b>10</b>	<b>349</b>

## Key Contextual Developments in 2023

*“Violence has increased in our community because the situation in general is getting worse in all aspects of life.” (Man, Aleppo, Al-Bab)*

*“Among the new factors this year, climate change and deteriorating economic conditions compared to the previous year have contributed to an increase in rights deprivation, lack of access to medical consultations, lack of education, and an increase in physical, emotional, or sexual abuse by men who have become psychologically distressed, causing them to ‘vent’ or release their anger and pressure on the women in their homes.” (GBV Expert, Syria GoS areas)*

*“Yes, we feel more insecure than before. Violence develops more because of displacement and war conditions.” (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Tweina)*

Women and girls throughout Syria emphasised the stark reality of worsening conditions over the past year. The year 2023 was extremely fraught for the Syrian people, with new, compounded, and overlapping stressors exacerbating the pre-existing vulnerabilities. Although not new, the economic crisis and resulting insecurity have greatly increased in severity over the past few years. Inflation, shortages of necessities, and crime rose exponentially in 2023. Women and girls described how households have reached a breaking point. Under these accumulated pressures, with scarce and depleted resources and eroded social structures, tensions have continued to increase within households and communities. Further shocks, in the form of destructive earthquakes and subsequent displacement, compounded these issues. The combination of ongoing violent conflict, economic recession, earthquakes, displacement, disease, and climate change have proven to be a deadly combination, severely impacting the lives of women and girls in Syria and greatly increasing their exposure to exploitation and violence.

These stressors have disproportionately affected women and girls and other marginalised groups and reduced their resilience, leaving them vulnerable to GBV. Women and girls described being unable to meet basic needs or move freely around their neighbourhoods without fear, as well as being constrained and subjected to violence in every aspect of their daily lives.

### Continued Insecurity

The impact of insecurity was a recurring theme across the vast majority of focus-group discussions (FGDs). Widespread and increasing incidence of kidnapping, sexual violence, theft, and other forms of violence have generated high levels of fear and alarm for women and girls when moving outside of their homes. In 2023, there was also an escalation of hostilities in certain parts of the country, such as Deir Ez-Zor and north-west Syria, that forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee.<sup>3</sup> A protection report explained that “conflict and displacement have fuelled increased poverty and insecurity and escalated the rates of violence, including sexual violence, abuse, and abductions.”<sup>4</sup> The spread of drugs and alcohol and increased access to weapons have further heightened insecurity. While this insecurity has impacted the entire community, women and girls have been disproportionately impacted and constrained in their movement, facing daily risks of violence when going to school or work or seeking services. Insecurity was described as a commonplace feature within camps and collective shelters, as well as when navigating and travelling between areas. Women and girls have described living conditions in which the areas they can navigate freely are drastically shrinking.

### Continued Economic Deterioration, Heightened Food Insecurity, and Water Crises

The economic situation in Syria continues to spiral downward, plunging a greater number of households into severe poverty. Inflation; shortages of water, food, electricity, and fuel; the impact of climate on agriculture; and a lack of work opportunities have caused severe hardships for

3 UNSC. “As Regional Violence Spills Over to Syria, Special Envoy, Briefing Security Council, Urges De-escalation, Refocus on Country’s Political Process.” 2023.

4 Fletcher School & NRC. “Children on the Margins: The Impacts of Depriving Children of their Right to Nationality & Legal Identity in north-west Syria.” 2023: 63



households.<sup>5</sup> Across the country, food insecurity remained extremely high. With an estimated 12 million people who are severely food-insecure, Syria ranked amongst the 10 most food-insecure countries globally in 2022.<sup>6</sup> Women and girls have described being unable to meet their needs and secure essential necessities, including sanitary and hygienic materials. Women-headed households, households with persons with disabilities, and displaced populations have especially struggled to meet their basic needs. Economic pressures are also correlated with increasing levels of violence in families and communities, which disproportionately affects women, girls, and other vulnerable groups.

## Reductions in Humanitarian Assistance

Worsening economic conditions have been coupled with a drastic reduction in humanitarian assistance, due to funding shortages.<sup>7</sup> Despite growing needs, there have been increasingly widening gaps in the provision of humanitarian assistance, including the delivery of GBV services. According to the UN Security Council, “5.5 million people who benefitted from general food distributions at the beginning of 2023 will no longer receive it.”<sup>8</sup> Respondents across Syria reported that, despite initial aid mobilisation to support earthquake-affected areas, the level of assistance has been inadequate and is declining. High prices, lack of job opportunities, and the ongoing food and water crisis have led to households across Syria requiring additional assistance. These shortages have put added stress on households, with direct impacts on the level of violence being experienced by women and girls. Despite this increasing incidence of violence, many women and girls have not been able to access WGSS and GBV services due to their limited availability and compounded access barriers. Closures of WGSS and mobile teams in 2023 also had serious repercussions on the wellbeing of women and girls, including GBV survivors.

## Earthquakes, Displacement, and Disease Outbreaks

Moreover, 2023 was characterised by a host of unexpected shocks — most notably the earthquakes that hit Syria and Turkey in February. Families that had already been displaced multiple times were forced to start over once again. Households that had already lost family members to hostilities faced further losses, with the number of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC or ‘orphans’) increasing. Individuals living in camps and collective shelters in north-west Syria following the earthquakes were also highly susceptible to infectious diseases like cholera, due to overcrowding and poor conditions.

In the past year, all of these issues compounded together have led to sharp increases in the incidence and types of GBV faced by women, girls, and other vulnerable groups.

5 OCHA. “Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023: Syrian Arab Republic.” 2022: 13-16, 25-29.

6 “In 2021 and 2022, Syria ranked 106 out of 113 countries assessed in the Global Food Security Index.” (OCHA. “Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023: Syrian Arab Republic.” 2022: 26.). According to the Humanitarian Situation Overview in Syria (HSOS), “in May 2022, 91% of assessed communities reported that essential food items were unaffordable, even within the context of reliance on aid. Both host community residents and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) reported food as their highest priority need, closely associated with the need for livelihoods support; 92% of households reported insufficient income; and 51% reported a lack of employment opportunities.” CARE. “In the Eye of the Storm’: Assessment of How Culture, Customs and Conflict are Deepening Protection Risks in north-west Syria.” 2022: 9.

7 OCHA. “Briefing to the Security Council on the Humanitarian Situation in Syria.” 2023.

8 OCHA. “Briefing to the Security Council on the Humanitarian Situation in Syria.” 2023.

## Key Trends in GBV in 2023

*“The phenomenon of verbal and physical violence has increased compared to previous years due to poverty and deteriorating living conditions.” (Older Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Deir-Ez-Zor)* Women and girls across Syria have emphasised the overlapping and increasing forms of violence they face, both inside and outside of the home. The intensifying pressures of the past year exacerbated intimate partner violence (IPV) and wider domestic and family violence; kidnapping, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, and other forms of sexual violence; and tech-facilitated GBV. At the same time, the presence and incidence of negative coping mechanisms like restricted movement, denial of education, child and forced marriage, and child labour for women and girls also increased. Experts described how the growing incidence of complex and severe forms of GBV has been paired with reduced coping capacities of women and girls in Syria, further increasing their exposure and vulnerability to violence.



### INCREASING FORMS OF GBV

- Sexual harassment, sexual assault, rape, and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA)
- Sexual, economic, and labour exploitation
- Tech-facilitated GBV including sextortion, blackmailing, sexual harassment, and defamation.
- Intimate partner violence (IPV) and wider domestic and family violence (DFV)
- Child and forced marriage (CFM)
- Restricted movement and denial of education
- Denial of child custody, denial of inheritance, and other forms of economic violence



### PRIMARY LOCATIONS WHERE GBV TAKES PLACE

- Home
- Camps and collective shelters
- Schools and workplaces
- Transportation, streets, markets, toilets and bathing sites, and other public spaces
- Humanitarian distributions and facilities where services are provided
- Detention centres
- Online and in virtual spaces



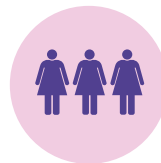
### MAIN RISKS FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO GBV

- Gender norms and other social factors
- Economic crisis, including water and food shortages, rising prices, and lack of employment
- Increased insecurity
- Earthquakes and subsequent displacement
- Disease outbreaks (cholera, COVID-19, etc.)
- Overcrowded living conditions in collective shelters and camps
- Access to arms, growing drug and alcohol addiction, and increased access to social media
- Reduction and gaps in humanitarian assistance and GBV services



### PRIMARY COPING MECHANISMS BY WOMEN AND GIRLS

- Silence and avoiding confrontation
- Speaking to a trusted family-member or friend (particularly mothers, sisters, friends, and neighbours)
- Visiting Safe Spaces and/or seeking GBV services
- Resorting to negative coping mechanisms (e.g. CFM, leaving school, survival sex)



### AFFECTED POPULATIONS AT HEIGHTENED 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
- Women and girls, men and boys in detentions, and women and girls released from any form of captivity
- Persons with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC)

<sup>9</sup> As described by GBV experts, as well as trends shared by women and girls in FGDs. The observation of complex and severe forms of GBV was based on: reported high incidence of women and girls experiencing multiple and compounded forms of GBV; GBV throughout their life cycle stages; and GBV both within and outside of the home, with a reported increase in forms of GBV with life-threatening and severe consequences (e.g. rape, kidnapping, femicide, and risks of suicide by women and girl affected by GBV).







3

**Findings**

## 3. Findings

### Types of GBV

#### Types of GBV:

*"There is no type of violence that has not been practiced in the camp, such as physical and verbal violence, harassment, and psychological violence, which remains the most common type of violence that we are exposed to." (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*"Of course, violence has increased and its many types have multiplied: beating, bullying, cursing, deprivation of work, harassment, murder, and honour crimes, due to the large amount of drugs and alcohol, the spread of weapons, the lack of safety and peace, and [the increase in] chaos." (Woman, As-Sweida, Salkhad)*

*"Women and girls are exposed to many problems in community, such as being deprived of education, deprived of inheritance, deprived of making decisions in and outside the home, and they are exposed to exploitation, especially displaced women, widows, and divorced women." (Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*"There are many types of violence: beatings, psychological and physical abuse, harassment in the streets, and exploitation, especially among girls who they are displaced." (Male Caregiver, Al-Hasakeh, Malikiyah)*

*"The most common types of violence to which women and girls are exposed: kidnapping, beating, psychological violence, rape." (Male Caregiver, Al-Hasakeh, Malikiyah)*

*"There are many types of violence in our community, such as beating that is practiced at home on the wife and children, or even beating in schools, and there is also verbal violence through insults and bad speech by employers." (Man, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

#### Key Findings on the Types of GBV

**The types of violence perpetrated against women and girls in Syria tend to be multiple, compounded, and interrelated.** Women and girls face GBV both inside and outside of the home, as well as in virtual spaces. Often, forms of violence experienced inside and outside of the home to hand in hand, such as the fear of sexual violence outside the home leading to increased restrictions on freedom of movement imposed within the home.

**Forms of GBV are greatly increasing across Syria due to an increase in the number, types, and severity of stressors placed on the population.** During the past year, this included growing insecurity, deepening poverty, and earthquake- and conflict-related displacement. Women and girls have described **rising levels of IPV/domestic and family violence; sexual violence, including sexual harassment, rape, sexual exploitation, and SEA; kidnapping; child and forced marriage; and tech-facilitated GBV.** These forms of violence were particularly heightened within the post-earthquake collective shelters and camps.

**IPV/domestic and family violence within the home continued to be the most common form of GBV** experienced by women and girls in Syria, with increases in physical, verbal, sexual, and economic violence often accompanied by elevated restrictions placed on women and girls, including restrictions on freedom of movement. However, women and girls indicated that **they are also facing growing risks of sexual violence and kidnapping when moving outside the home,** due to widespread insecurity.

**There has been a reported increase in the types of GBV experienced in Syria and an evolution in the nature of how GBV is perpetrated against women and girls.** This includes growing risks of kidnapping for ransom, especially of adolescent girls; new forms of tech-facilitated GBV; and increased exposure to sexual exploitation in the workplace.

**Women and girls in Syria are increasingly subjected to forms of GBV that stem from the economic vulnerability of households.** Due to the growing pressures to meet basic needs and the scarcity of job opportunities, **risks of sexual violence and negative coping mechanisms are multiplying for women and girls,** including child and forced marriage, sexual exploitation, and SEA.

**Denial of child custody, denial of inheritance, and denial of housing, land, and property (HLP) are common forms of GBV** in Syria. The risk of losing child custody serves as a powerful deterrent that prevents women and girls from reporting IPV and from seeking divorce or other legal recourse.

**While typically less visible, the denial of resources, services, opportunities, and rights has left women and girls in Syria dependent on male family members.** This has led to increases in other forms of GBV, such as child and forced marriage and limitations on the abilities of women and girls to reach their full potential.

## LOCATIONS OF VIOLENCE



Homes



Workplaces (and on the way to and from)



Schools (and on the way to and from)



Service facilities and distribution points



Public and community spaces



Streets



Collective shelters and camps



Detention centres



Water, Sanitation, and Health (WASH) facilities



Public transportation



Online

## Physical Violence

Women and girls in Syria have reported that incidents of physical violence have increased significantly, both inside and outside of the home. It is one of the most common forms of violence identified, and has been described as spreading *“in all places”* (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa), with women, girls, and children most affected. The increase in physical violence has been largely attributed to economic pressures and growing insecurity, further exacerbated by the earthquakes, influence of alcohol and drugs, and overcrowded living conditions. Beatings and other forms of physical violence continue to be a major component of IPV/domestic and family violence. Within the household, women and girls most often experience physical abuse from their husbands, as well as from fathers, parents, and brothers. Physical violence tends to go hand in hand with verbal violence, and is often experienced in conjunction with other ‘traditional’ forms of control (e.g. denial of movement and economic violence). Physical violence has also been growing in schools and workplaces, at distribution points, and in the streets.

### Physical Assault

Beatings are the most common expression of physical violence directed toward women and girls, most frequently from fathers and husbands. However, women and girls are also subjected to physical violence from other members of the family, including brothers, parents/caregivers, in-laws, stepparents, and uncles. In some cases, mothers have also experienced physical violence at the hands of their sons, children, or stepchildren, including in the case of older women. Some women have also been reported to incite or encourage their sons or other male family members to beat other women and girls.

Women and girls have indicated that beatings by men and boys often took place *“without any justification”* (Older Woman, Aleppo, Jarablus) due to the normalisation of violence. With men and boys facing an increase

### Physical Violence:

*“The type of violence that girls and women are [most commonly] subjected to is beating by the husband, especially girls who are married early.”* (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tweina)

*“The debate between the woman and the man has become very intense and man is nervous and cannot bear and, in the end, it develops into beating.”* (Woman, Idlib, Ariha)

*“Physical violence from the husband, older brother, or father due to the weakness of women and male control over them as a result of customs and traditions.”* (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tel Tamer)

*“The girls suffer like us and of course a little more, and we are used to this, we reach a time when our parents no longer beat us, but the girls are still beaten and they are forbidden to go out, other than physical violence with the belt, pulling the hair, biting, burning. Many girls we know have died from beatings by ignorant mindset in some families if girls say they want something. They are forbidden to go out to study in the university, and they study just here no matter what they get.”* (Adolescent Boy, Dar’a, Dar’a)

*"(Spoken in a state of annoyance) What can I tell you about physical violence! There is beating within and outside the family." (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*"Beating, especially using hands or by kicking. There are several women who are being beaten but they cannot show as they afraid of getting divorced. In my opinion, there is no change or hope." (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

### **Rationales of perpetrators and communities when blaming women and girls for their own homicides**

- They are accused of having a sexual relationship outside of marriage (including with fiancés prior to marriage)
- They are accused of adultery
- They are accused of bringing 'shame' or 'dishonour' to their families or their own reputation because of the acts of others (e.g. harassment and assault by boys and men) or because of rumours about their own behaviour (e.g. rumours that they are talking to boys and men outside their families)
- They are accused of not performing their household duties well
- They refuse to marry or remarry
- They have divorced or have expressed the desire to divorce

### **Femicide:**

*"Recently...even honour crimes increased in this period, and for unknown reasons." (Woman, As-Sweida, Salkhad)*

*"One girl was accused of having dishonoured her family and they killed her, although she was innocent. Many girls were killed for honour. Honour crimes happen a lot, and whenever they want to get rid of a girl, they accuse her of dishonour. For example, for the sake of the inheritance, they would accuse a girl of dishonour and kill her so that they take her share." (Older Woman, Dar'a, Dar'a)*

*"[There was] a case of murder of a girl who refused to marry her cousin (she was killed by her brother). [There are] high rates of murder of girls by their families." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh)*

in the number and severity of stressors, family tensions can escalate to hitting "for the most trivial reasons" (Man, Aleppo, Al Bab). Women and girls have described how asking for money for household needs is often met with violence. Women and girls living in overcrowded conditions or regarded as a "burden" on the household have faced even further elevated risks. Physical abuse is regularly exercised under the guise of "discipline," "education," and "punishment" by husbands, fathers, and parents. Violence is often seen as the right of men and the fault of the wife. In some cases, violence is used to punish female family members for perceived social transgressions, such as refusing to marry or getting divorced, or for adolescent girls who have been caught or accused of speaking to boys. It is also used by husbands as form of retaliation when women flee to their parents' house or disclose other instances of violence, or when family members or bystanders attempt to intervene or mediate. In its most extreme form, physical violence can lead to death (see also: *Femicide*). Drug and alcohol use is seen as a major contributor to the escalation of physical violence within the household. In general, adolescent girls experience higher levels of physical violence from parents, brothers, and families than their male counterparts. For married girls, physical violence as part of IPV is a by-product of child marriage that has affected most child marriage victims. Men and boys who experienced physical violence from male family members, peers, teachers, and employers often take out their frustrations on their wives, sisters, and children. There have also been concerns about violence being taught to boys at a young, formative age, with influence coming from their families, friends, social media, extremist factions, and criminal groups.

Outside of the home, women and girls often face physical violence in the workplace, perpetrated by their employers. They have also noted increasing levels of violence in schools, with girls experiencing physical abuse at the hands of teachers and other students. Physical violence was also reported to be increasing at distribution centres, service facilities, and public and community spaces, which ultimately elevates the accessibility barriers at these spaces and further compounds the risks faced by women and girls. Growing tensions and discrimination have led to fights in communities, including the increasing use of weapons in disputes.

### **Femicide**

Femicide, including so-called 'honour' killings, is increasing across numerous regions of Syria.<sup>10</sup> Since 2019, several organisations have documented "more than 185 cases of 'honour killing,' and more than 20 victims who were killed as a result of domestic violence." However, these incidents are likely to be underreported "due to fear, to avoid stigma, or to protect male perpetrators."<sup>11</sup> Femicide within families was most often carried out by intimate partners, brothers, fathers, and other male relatives, as well as caregivers and stepparents. In addition to the killing of women and girls, there was a report of a young girl and boy child being killed by their stepfather after their mother remarried.

So-called 'honour' killings and other forms of femicide are closely interrelated. The regulation of women's sexuality by families and communities has been linked to male control over women's and girls' choices more broadly. For example, women and girls can be killed as a punishment for divorce or for refusing to marry. Furthermore, the stigma from women who were killed for 'honour' can be transferred to and associated with their daughters or other women in proximity to the victim. Perpetrators have also used false

<sup>10</sup> Syrians for Truth & Justice. "Syria: 185 Cases of 'Honor Killing' since 2019." 2022: 1.

<sup>11</sup> "185 recorded cases of femicide of women and girls, including 20 due to physical violence as part of domestic violence, since 2019 until November 2022." (Syrians for Truth & Justice. "Syria: 185 Cases of 'Honor Killing' since 2019." 2022: 1).



accusations related to 'honour' (e.g. claiming that the victim was having an affair) in order to cover up or minimise responsibility when the physical abuse of a female family members results in their death.<sup>12</sup> In the most recent assessment, some of the women and girls consulted even made reference to instances of so-called 'honour' killings by men in order to take inheritance from female relatives.

## Psychological Violence

### Types of Psychological Violence Described by Women and Girls in Syria

- Insults, curses, and derogatory terms
- Humiliation, mockery, ridicule, belittling/disparagement, and disrespect
- Blaming, scolding, and judgment
- Screaming and shouting
- Intimidation and threats
- Bullying, body-shaming, spreading rumours, and defamation

As with physical violence, women and girls across Syria have indicated that psychological violence is significantly increasing, exacerbated by greater economic hardships and poor living conditions. Psychological violence, also referred to as verbal and emotional abuse, often goes hand in hand with physical violence. Emotional abuse is commonly part of IPV or domestic and family violence perpetrated toward women and adolescent girls. Psychological violence and bullying also happen more widely within communities, especially toward marginalised groups, such as women and girls who are widowed, divorced, or living with disabilities.

Blame is a recurring theme of psychological violence directed toward women and girls, both within families and at the community level. Women and girls are often blamed by their families and communities for the violence they experience, including sexual violence. Women are often blamed by their husband for "everything that goes wrong" in the household, as well as by families and communities for not having children (and male children in particular), having 'failed' in their marriage if they get divorced, or for angering their husbands. Frequently, adolescent girls are blamed by their parents and communities if they experience sexual harassment or are perceived to be transgressing norms on gender and sexuality (e.g. in their choice of attire, in talking to boys, in going to university).

Women and girls have noted that the impact of emotional abuse can be equivalent to that of physical violence, as "*harsh words resemble physical assault*" (Woman, Aleppo, Jarablus). The spread of rumours and accusations about women and girls can also lead to significant risks of other forms of GBV, such as physical violence and even so-called 'honour' killing.

Stigmatising labels, such as being called a "burden," "useless," or a "failure," are reportedly used frequently against women and girls with disabilities, older women, displaced women and girls, and unaccompanied and separated girls. During the cholera and scabies outbreaks, older women described how they were perceived as "unclean," along with UASC/street children and persons with disabilities (PwDs). While men and boys have been referenced as the primary culprits of this kind of harassment, bullying, insults, body-shaming, gossip, rumours, and judgment from other women and girls also frequently occur, especially in schools and online.

*"One of the women mentioned that after her neighbour got divorced [she got divorced because of her husband's mother], her brother killed her because she had brought shame and stigma to the family. The incident is recent." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh)*

*"A girl whose mother was killed because of an accusation of what they call adultery, and now the girl is exposed to violence and 'stigma' because of her mother's accusation [including burning, beating, and insulting]." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hole)*

### Psychological Violence:

*"Psychological violence is widespread in the community, as they consider it normal for a husband to scold his wife in public or in front of her children, and to direct all kinds of insults at her." (Man, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*"The most widespread form of violence is verbal violence (cursing, swearing, mockery), so the reactions are largely negative, and the violence increases to reach physical violence and beating." (Woman, As-Sweida, Salkhad)*

*"[We often see] psychological violence [in the form of] those who insult their daughter, sister, wife, or others due to community upbringings." (Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"Widows and divorced women are called abusive names." (Adolescent Boy, Al-Hasakeh, Tweina)*

*"Older women are subjected to psychological violence by being told that they are useless... They are exposed to abusive words because they are considered a burden on society." (Older Woman, Idlib, Dana)*

*"Women are mostly bothered when being insulted and belittled... Disrespect for women is much uglier than beating." (Woman Caregiver, Aleppo, A'zaz)*

*"The thing I see most is psychological violence. [It is] the thing that most affects and breaks the person, especially on social networking sites, where there is clear bullying and we can't state our opinions." (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

12 Syrians for Truth & Justice. "Syria: 185 Cases of 'Honor Killing' since 2019." 2022: 3.

**Sexual Violence:**

*“There are many types of violence, including verbal harassment and rape, and in our neighbourhood, a girl was kidnapped.” (Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)*

*“There are other types of violence that we have not yet discussed, because they are only rarely disclosed in our communities due to fear of stigma, so girls, women, or boys who are exposed to this type of violence are kept [secret] by parents or by the [victims] themselves. These types are exploitation, sexual abuse, and rape, and violence [like this] can occur in the home, street, or workplace.” (Woman with Caregiver, Deir-Ez-Zor, Khasham)*

*“Even when the girl is walking in the street... if she is not veiled or even the veiled woman is exposed to these things. Both are exposed to harassment and rape and everything, even if she is wearing abaya.” (Woman, Damascus, Damascus)*

*“There is violence in the prisons, physical, verbal, and sexual violence, and rape. One female detainee... after leaving detention, her family rejected her, so she resorted to another place so that she could live because people did not accept her and her family considered her a prostitute, knowing that she has no guilt.” (Woman, Idlib, Ariha)*

*“A new trend in violence is child rape and harassment. [There is] harassment between children, employers harassing working children, and students in schools harassing each other.” (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh)*

*“There are some kinds of violence that are hidden, or people hide them shyly, such as harassment and rape.” (Woman, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)*

**Sexual Harassment:**

*“Sexual harassment is one of the most prominent types of violence that women and girls are exposed to after displacement.” (Older Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Malikiyah)*

*“There is sexual violence, which includes verbal harassment and dirty looks given to us as we go to the market, especially if the girl is on her own.” (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Areesheh)*

**Sexual Violence**

Women and girls throughout Syria have expressed a sense of immense insecurity due to sexual violence. Sexual violence has been cited as one of the main fears for women and girls and their families, exacerbated by the growing insecurity, displacement, and rampant drug and alcohol usage. Women and girls have emphasised that the risks of sexual violence are greatly increasing and limiting their ability to move around freely in their communities. Sexual violence risks have particularly increased in overcrowded or mixed-gender settings where unrelated families and individuals are co-living, such as in the post-earthquake collective shelters.

Sexual harassment is widely recognised as something that takes place on a large scale, while rape and sexual exploitation are reported to be on the rise. There have also been widespread reports of sexual exploitation and SEA committed by persons engaged in providing humanitarian assistance, including during the earthquake response.<sup>13</sup> Widowed and divorced women and girls are often exposed to sexual exploitation, due to the pre-existing shame associated with their status, and because they are perceived as not having a protector to “defend” them. Adolescent girls, young women, and women and girls with mental disabilities are also often targeted for sexual violence due to their perceived vulnerability. Fears of sexual violence have led households to embrace negative coping mechanisms, with women and girls in collective shelters and camps particularly at risk of having their movement restricted, being pressured into dropping out of school, and being pushed into child and forced marriage. Restrictions on movement are often cited as a ‘protective’ measure designed to prevent sexual violence from happening. At the same time, communities and families perceive women and girls as bearing the responsibility for preventing sexual violence from happening to them. The isolation that results from these social stigmas and from limited access to economic resources and freedom of movement ultimately results in at-risk groups feeling less capable, entitled, and safe to speak up about the violence they experience. Women and girls who experience sexual violence are often blamed and in extreme cases can become victims of so-called ‘honour’ killings. Due to the associated stigma and risks of violent repercussions, there are significant barriers for women and girls to report sexual violence.

**Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment including “uncomfortable looks, touching, and sexual words” (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hassakeh) is reportedly widespread and increasing across all parts of the country. It is the most frequent form of sexual violence experienced by women and girls and takes place “everywhere: in the streets, in the lanes, at the school... at the very least, they use foul language” (Woman, Rural Damascus, Madaya). Sexual harassment is often reported to take place in crowded, mixed-gender spaces, such as markets, bakeries, public gatherings, parks, in the streets, and on means of transportation, with heightened risks in the collective shelters. Women and girls, particularly if unaccompanied, were exposed to sexual harassment when walking and when using both public (e.g. buses) and private (e.g. taxis) transport. It is frequently reported to happen on the way to and from schools and workplaces, especially on the way to agricultural areas, because of the great distances involved in these commutes. Sexual harassment has also occurred at aid distributions and service facilities, including WASH facilities, distribution points, and health facilities.

<sup>13</sup> WoS GBV AoR. “An Overview of Gender-Based Violence Risks in the 2023 Earthquake Response: Advocacy Brief.” 2023; Syria Direct. “After the Earthquake, a Wave of Gender-Based Violence in Syria.” 2023.

Women and girls have described being harassed by youth loitering in their neighbourhoods, passing by in cars and on motorcycles, and online, with the influence of social media and drugs and alcohol contributing to heightened risks. One woman described how *“young people bully girls because they want to attract their attention as a man, and the abuse starts verbally, then increases. They imitate what they see on the internet”* (Woman, Rural Damascus, Babella). Displaced women and girls face heightened risks of sexual harassment in camps and within their host communities. Despite these women and girls using avoidance strategies to minimise risks, such as not taking the bus or moving in groups, harassment is regarded as a daily constant in their lives. Women and girls kept silent about sexual harassment due to *“fear of the family”* (Woman Caregiver, Deir-Ez-Zor, Khasham) and of stigma. Girls who experience sexual harassment are often blamed by their families, bystanders, and community members: *“if a girl is harassed and tells her family, they blame her and scold her, and they may beat her”* (Woman, Rural Damascus, Madaya). Families often restrict the movement of women and girls or pressure them to drop out of school in response to incidents of sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment is a significant deterrent for women and girls' access to education and work, as well as their access to the provision of UNFPA services. In addition to restrictions imposed by families, in some cases, adolescent girls, widowed women, and divorced women and girls isolate themselves out of fear, electing not to leave the house or attend school.

## Sexual Assault & Rape

Incidents of rape are reported to be increasing in Syria, occurring in the streets, agricultural areas, collective shelters and camps, toilets, and other WASH facilities. Risks are especially heightened in abandoned areas and at night, facilitated by the lack of electricity. Women and girls are also afraid of sexual violence from neighbours and assailants in their homes, particularly in collective shelters and camps, due to the lack of security measures. While less visible and more taboo to discuss, rape is also perpetrated by husbands and other assailants inside the household. Marital rape is typically hidden but *“the high levels of domestic violence reported... reinforces these expectations of decision-making by men within marriages; where there is physical and emotional violence, there is also likely to be sexual violence, including marital rape and forced pregnancies.”*<sup>14</sup> There are also cases of women, girls, and children being sexually abused other family members. Women and girls face steep barriers to disclosing and seeking support for rape, due to the fear of social repercussions and further violence, such as so-called ‘honour’ killings.

Sexual assault and rape also take place in detention centres, with female detainees particularly at risk. Once women leave detention, they bear a high level of stigma due to the generalised assumption that they have been raped, which drives further exposure to violence and retaliation. In contrast, men released from detention are often celebrated as *“heroes,”* despite the fact that they may have also been exposed to sexual violence in detention.

Although there is less information available regarding sexual violence toward men and boys and persons of diverse SOGIESC, increasing cases of rape of boys have been reported in several governorates, particularly in the post-earthquake accommodation centres, *“especially for boys who had lost their caregivers.”*<sup>15</sup> This sexual violence is primarily perpetrated by

*“There is a lot of harassment of girls in the streets. This leads to girls being afraid to go to school or anywhere outside the home.”* (Adolescent Boy, Aleppo, Al Bab)

*“Cars pass by us in the street and offer us a ride, and when we refuse, they try to run us down or start saying bad words and cursing at us. That happened to me two days ago and the guy in the car threw a paper at me with his number on it and he told me to take it, and I was so scared and I entered a nearby shop immediately.”* (Woman, Dar'a, Hrak)

*“Harassment [includes] directing sexual words and asking to meet them alone when going to school or the market.”* (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tel Tamer)

*“Most cases of violence occur in alleys and streets, such as harassment (verbal)... it happens in agricultural areas during work or in the car while commuting to the land, because of the large number of workers in the car and they are mixed [men and women].”* (Woman, Idlib, Dana)

*“For girls, they are harassed a lot and sometimes they need to work but they can't due to being exposed to harassment in shops.”* (Older Woman, Lattakia, Lattakia)

*“There are many girls who are deprived of going to school due to harassment... boys go to the school fences to watch the girls and harass them.”* (Older Woman, Lattakia, Lattakia)

### Sexual Assault and Rape:

*“Rape cases increase due to the lack of electricity, darkness, and loss of security and law.”* (Older Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hassakeh)

*“There is a dangerous type of violence that we hear about every period that is done against women or children by... drug users who lose their minds... which is rape violence, and the spread of this violence has increased due to the spread of drugs among young men, as they have become easy to obtain.”* (Man, Aleppo, Al Bab)

*“Living with people who are not relatives [causes] adolescent girls and girls with disabilities to be exposed to harassment, psychological violence, and rape.”* (Adolescent Girl with Disability or Caregiver, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)

14 CARE. *“In the Eye of the Storm’: Assessment of How Culture, Customs and Conflict are Deepening Protection Risks in north-west Syria.”* 2022: 26.

15 WoS GBV SC. *“GBVIMS+ Data Gathering Organizations Survey Findings about the GBV Trends in north-west Syria after the Earthquake.”* 2023: 4.

*“Abandoned houses and uninhabited areas of the city increase the rates of adolescent girls being dragged and subjected to harassment and assault, including sexual assault.” (Older Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Deir-Ez-Zor)*

*“There was a mentally disabled woman walking in the street at noon, no one paid attention to her and there were three young men abusing drugs, and while the street was empty, they took advantage of that and raped her.” (Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*“There are many cases of rape, and there is a young girl who was raped a month and a half ago while she was herding sheep alone.” (Older Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hassakeh)*

*“There is violence... such as a girl who was raped by her grandfather.” (Older Woman, Rural Damascus, Kafr Batna)*

*“Women and girls are most exposed to violence in detention because most of them are raped there.” (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hassakeh)*

### **Sexual exploitation:**

*“Violence happens because of financial pressures and lack of job opportunities for women, which makes men exploit women and force them to do things they don’t want.” (Woman, Aleppo, Jebel Saman)*

*“Among the types of violence are exploitation... as for women, they are vulnerable, especially when they have orphans.” (Man, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*“Many women are subjected to sexual exploitation while working, as they are asked to enter an intimate relationship in exchange for raising their salary and reducing working hours, and there are many who accept that because of their weakness and need for money.” (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hassakeh)*

*“The community considers divorced women to be the reason for the failure of the marital relationship, and they are subjected to abuse and sexual and economic exploitation.” (Older Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Malikiyah)*

other men and boys. Men and boys who experience sexual violence often face difficulties seeking support, due to stigma and the lack of entry points to GBV services for male survivors.

## **Sexual Exploitation**

As with the other forms of sexual violence, sexual exploitation is exacerbated by the difficult living conditions. Risks of sexual exploitation were particularly high within collective shelters and camps, and often linked to the financial vulnerability of women and girls, with displaced women and girls subjected to exploitation by both camp residents and members of the host community. Additionally, sex work and online sexual exploitation were reported as growing trends.

Men in positions of power — including employers, landlords, and university professors—continue to take advantage of women and girls who are struggling to meet basic needs and access opportunities. A growing number of women and girls are engaged in the types of work and child labour that are often associated with high risks of sexual exploitation, such as agricultural labour and online work. Employers take advantage of the economic hardship of women and girls to coerce them into sexual favours. Women and girls have been threatened with the loss of their job and non-payment of salary if they reject advances, or are offered a salary increase or promotion in exchange for sexual favours. As one woman explained, *“Although awareness has increased, violence is still increasing, due to the lack of job opportunities... spreading awareness against violence has become less efficient and employers are exploiting the fact that there are no job opportunities” (Woman, Aleppo, Jebel Saman)*. In some cases, university professors threatened to fail female students in order to obtain sexual favours, especially students from poor backgrounds (Syria GoS areas). These concerns have contributed to parents preventing their daughters from attending university. Youth and men, including those from the host community, groom at-risk women and girls by providing them with material goods and support.

Adolescent girls and widowed and divorced women and girls are particularly at risk of sexual exploitation, including via virtual spaces, due to their isolation and financial need. As part of this sexual exploitation, women and girls are often threatened with ‘evidence’ that could be incriminating and cause damage to their reputation.

Women and girls who are particularly stigmatised, such as those who were divorced, widowed, or released from detention, *“must accept any kind of exploitation or harassment” (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*. Widow camps have been identified as particularly high-risk locations: *“in some widows’ camps, sexual and material exploitation are not reported for fear of stigma” (Man, Idlib, Ariha)*.

Women and girls, as well as UASC, are increasingly engaging in survival and transactional sex to meet financial needs. There have been reports of men coercing women in their household to engage in sex work, as well as increased reports of sex trafficking, although there is limited information available on this particular topic. Individuals engaged in sex work are less likely to seek humanitarian services, and sex work is typically under-reported due to fear of stigma and prosecution.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> GBV experts, Syria GoS areas

## Reports of survival and transactional sex and sex work in Syria

"We haven't discussed that women are forced to work [selling their bodies] with low wages and deprived of the financial wage they deserve; this happened due to the lack of abundant job opportunities." (Man, Aleppo, Jarablus)

"There are things that increase the exposure of women and girls to violence and exploitation, including [poor] living conditions and the inability to secure the basic needs of the family... they are exploited by employers, [in addition to facing] harassment and [being coerced into] sex for money." (Male Caregiver, Al-Hasakeh, Malikiyah)

"Women are exploited in exchange for some money through the internet, and minors are also exploited and harassed." (Man, Aleppo, Jarablus)

"Divorced women, for example, work to provide basic needs, and if they can't, they send their children to work, or they work in brothels for money." (Adolescent Boy, Al-Hasakeh, Tel Tamer)

"Child labour [can be found] in construction works, begging, and brothels, where girls are exploited." (Man, Aleppo, Jarablus)

"[On the topics of] transactional sex and sex work, we have received some cases of [women and girls taking part]... to enhance their economic situation. In one case, the father was leading and forcing the wife and the daughter to do it." (GBV Expert, Syria GoS areas)

"There is violence practiced on women... I know people who let their wives work in prostitution to bring them money due to drug abuse, and this is considered violence against them." (Man, Aleppo, Al Bab)

"Divorced women and widows are exploited by men, they try to give them material things in exchange for sexual services. When I applied for a job, he asked me about my status. Everywhere I work I face harassment, because I am divorced." (Woman, Rural Damascus, Harasta)

"Displaced women are also exploited by the host community, especially men [in the host community]. The man exploits her circumstances and offers her help at the beginning and then asks for other things, often immoral. There is nothing for free. Girls of our age are exploited by youth in the host community. They think that she is young and displaced and seems desiring to talk to him... especially by older men." (Adolescent Girl, Rural Damascus, Sahnaya)

"Some young men resort to exploiting the girl's love for them." (Woman, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)

### Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA):

"Women in camps may be subjected to sexual or material exploitation and, often, it is from the camp administration. This exploitation can be sexual or a share in the assistance, as a result of the power of the camp manager." (Man, Idlib, Ariha)

"Some types of violence are also material violence and exploitation in many methods, including sexual exploitation or material [exploitation] during the distribution of assistance or the provision of services, as a result of the ignorance of the beneficiary." (Man, Idlib, Ariha)

"There are employees who blackmail women, for example, 'go with me to get the assistance and if you refuse you will not be registered.'" (Woman, Idlib, Ariha)

"There are some things happening in distribution services, such as asking for something in exchange for a second food ration or requesting messaging on the mobile to get another mall voucher. Raising girls' awareness and emphasising the importance of reporting reduces the risk of exploitation and abuse." (Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)

## Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA)

SEA committed by persons engaged in providing humanitarian assistance and services has been widely reported by women and girls in Syria. Some affected persons have been asked for a fee or favour in order to "obtain the service, like half of the parcel or a sum of money, and some were asked to have a sexual relationship in exchange for the service" (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hassakeh). According to women and girls, the displacement, economic collapse, and the inability to meet basic needs has significantly increased SEA over the past year. There were concerns regarding levels of SEA in collective shelters following the earthquakes, linked to the vast and quick scale-up of assistance during the earthquake response. SEA has also occurred in camps and in host communities. Some of the contributing factors identified include the presence of untrained volunteers and staff delivering assistance, lack of organisation and limited supervision at distribution points and service facilities, gaps in monitoring mechanisms, and limited presence of female staff or gender-segregated distribution lines.

Women and girls cited incidents of SEA when receiving food rations, NFI parcels, vouchers, and water assistance,<sup>17</sup> and during the provision of humanitarian assistance services more broadly. SEA has been perpetrated by humanitarian staff, local authorities and councils, and

17 Noting that this does not indicate that risks of SEA were not present in other sectors.

*"Vulnerable groups, such as pregnant women, widows, divorced women and girls, the elderly, people with disabilities... they are more vulnerable to exploitation in exchange for access to assistance, because they are considered a vulnerable group and the community views them as inferior, and anything that happens to them they are to be blamed, so they are more vulnerable to exploitation." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hassakeh)*

*"If someone asks for something in exchange for parcels [of aid/assistance], they say it is girl's fault, as she [must have been] kind with him, so he dared to ask her." (Woman, Rural Damascus, Babella)*

*"If they ask for something in exchange, it is over, we will not go anymore. It is impossible to prove something, because they will say we offered something, not the contrary. The girl can stop the person, but if her reputation is 'bad,' for sure they will not believe her." (Adolescent Girl, Dar'a Dar'a)*

### **Denial of Resources, Services, Opportunities, and Rights:**

*"Deprivation is the biggest violence that exists: women's right and efforts are lost here. Girls may be deprived of education." (Woman, Lattakia, Jobet Berghal)*

*"Cases of violence in the community are numerous and deeply rooted, and they are considered the norm, especially cases of economic violence, because the community prefers boys over girls in education and work, as well as in inheritance." (Man, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*"What women, girls, widows, and divorced women are exposed to is deprivation of inheritance, resources, and opportunities... that has become widespread more than in past years." (Woman, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*"Violence occurs inside the house, such as women being deprived of money, decision-making, and discussion. Those who are most affected are the mothers." (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

camp management involved in registration, distribution, and service provision. Due to the increased presence of non-traditional actors involved in providing assistance, references to the specific actors perpetrating SEA are not always clear. It is not always possible to determine whether reports are related to employees working with humanitarian organisations, government actors/authorities, community and local leaders, volunteers, or private individuals. Women and girls have indicated that the involvement of community representatives and delegates—a common modality used in these contexts, due to limited access—poses significant risks. SEA took place both at distribution centres and at service facilities. At times, individuals involved in the provision of humanitarian assistance have requested and used personal information, such as phone numbers, to harass women and girls or seek them out at their homes.

Persons who experienced SEA face great difficulties in disclosing their abuse, due to the power differential. Fears of survivors include not being believed, facing retaliation, facing stigma from the community, and losing their access to aid. SEA was understood to be widely underreported for these reasons. Many women, girls, and other vulnerable persons are not aware of their rights and how to report SEA, or have expressed distrust toward reporting mechanisms.

In some cases, fears of SEA have prevented women and girls from accessing humanitarian assistance and services: *"most divorced women cannot go to receive assistance because sometimes there are people who do not provide assistance except in exchange for something material or physical, and they are exploited, and they constantly feel fear and anxiety of these people finding out where they live" (Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*. One woman indicated that *"she no longer receives assistance due to her continuous exploitation by a member of distribution team" (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Quamishli)*.

Reports of corruption, fraud, and nepotism within the provision of humanitarian assistance and services are also associated with increased risks of SEA. Due to widespread favouritism, there have been heightened barriers to access for at-risk women and girls and other marginalised groups looking to register for and receive humanitarian assistance and services. The exclusion of vulnerable women and girls from humanitarian assistance served to further increase their risks of sexual exploitation and SEA. For further information regarding SEA within humanitarian assistance and services, see also: Humanitarian Sectors.

## **Denial of Resources, Services, Opportunities, and Rights**

The denial of resources, services, rights, and opportunities is another form of GBV commonly reported across Syria. The denial of access to education and economic opportunities for women and girls has been significantly increasing. Economic abuse and denial of inheritance and property rights are also widespread. The various types of rights denied to women and girls are closely interrelated and mutually reinforcing, and often share common drivers. For example, drivers for the denial of education include a fear of sexual violence, which leads to the implementation of measures that are perceived to be "protective," in order to prevent sexual violence and the associated 'shame' it causes for the families of victims. Most of the measures identified as "protective" ultimately represent other types of abuse, and drive even more forms of restrictions and violence, such as the increased risk of child and forced marriage. In reality, these restrictions exacerbate the cycle of isolation and vulnerability experienced by women and girls, inhibiting their access to vital services,

opportunities, and rights.

Men tend to exercise control over women and girls by imposing limitations on their lives. Women and girls who were consulted described how families and communities reinforced men's 'right' to exercise control over women and girls. Restrictions on women and girls and pressures to conform to ascribed gender norms are frequently enforced by multiple members of the family, especially husbands and fathers, as well as brothers, mothers, in-laws, caregivers/stepparents, and other relatives.

Many women and girls are under constant and intense scrutiny from their families and communities. This includes daily restrictions on what they can do and wear, in order to avoid gossip and judgment. The perceived risks of rumours and scandal have fuelled restrictions on women and girls, who have expressed the desire to access rights and opportunities that are not considered socially appropriate by their families and communities. Groups of women and girls who are perceived as being associated with 'shame,' who are at a higher risk of exposure to sexual violence, and who have been labelled a 'burden' are at an especially heightened risk of being denied their rights and access to resources and opportunities. In particular, adolescent girls and widowed, divorced, and displaced women and girls face heightened mobility restrictions and control. Women and girls with disabilities and older women are also frequently constrained and deprived of their rights by families and communities. Most women and girls feel that they are not able to freely express their opinion and be heard within the household. They have described the impact of these restrictions as a form of "killing" their ambitions and dreams.

Women and girls who are perceived to be transgressing norms through their self-expression or behaviour must often confront gossip and rumours from the community, which can lead to serious repercussions, including violence. Respondents to the latest round of assessments indicated that accusations and rumours originated from both men and other women. Widowed and divorced women and girls are often subjected to defamation simply for trying to engage in everyday activities, such as shopping or taking vocational courses. The widow's "life is [expected to be] over" as she is expected to have no more "freedom in her life" (Adolescent Girl, As-Sweida, As-Sweida) and "all is forbidden" (Older Woman, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin). There is a perception that widowed and divorced women and girls are guilty by default, as they do not have a man present in the household. This often limits their social circles, as friends will avoid them in order to avoid association with negative stigmas, which further contributes to their isolation. Allegations against a woman's reputation can also affect the wellbeing of her female relatives, for example, by lowering their chances of getting married. There have been instances where the alleged adultery and "bad reputation" of one woman has caused the divorce of the accused woman's sisters or a neighbour. In one case, after a woman was killed for 'honour,' her daughter was subjected to bullying. Women and girls who are seen to fall outside of social customs and norms are often punished by their families, with the threat of so-called 'honour' killings representing the most extreme form of violence used to restrict women's freedom of expression and enforce strict, traditional gender norms.

## Economic Abuse

Economic abuse, also known as economic violence, has been frequently reported by women and girls in Syria as a common component of IPV/ domestic and family violence. Men often control the household financial resources and deny women and girls their financial independence.

*"For girls, [they struggle with] control of all their affairs and the deprivation of most of their rights. For women, [they struggle with] excessive control over them, especially widows and divorcees." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Jarablus)*

*"Adolescent girls are vulnerable to deprivation of rights and control." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Jarablus)*

*"We are deprived of all sorts of resources, and education is the most important of these, as it is the most basic of rights for us girls, especially because we suffer from financial violence." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Areesheh)*

*"A disabled woman is more exposed to abuse, as she will be forced to give up her rights, especially if she is old. Widows and divorced women are considered weak and they are not entitled to seek their rights. The rights of unaccompanied children are lost as well." (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

### Economic Abuse:

*"Even when a woman works, she often hands over her entire earnings to her husband, who may continue to abuse and humiliate her while depriving her of her most basic rights. Driven by the abuse, she gives him money to escape further injustice and humiliation and to ensure she can stay with her children. Additionally, her family may withhold her children from her to pressure her into returning to her husband, thereby avoiding the financial burden of supporting her." (Woman, Aleppo, Atareb)*

*"Economic violence... they do not give us allowance, neither the family nor the husbands." (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*"Of course, here... it is known they don't give the girl her right to inheritance, and they even take her salary." (Adolescent Boy, Dar'a, Dar'a)*

*"[There was] a case of a woman who worked, but the husband took all her money and used her money to get married again." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hole)*

*"One of the girls works in a brick press in order to improve the financial situation and help buy a house for her family, but her husband took the money from her and bought food only for himself and did not care about the lady." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh)*

*"[We experience] deprivation of [humanitarian] assistance, when the man sells it... (the woman here stated that she lives with her mother-in-law who deprives her of humanitarian assistance)." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Tweina)*

*"He said that he comes from a family that does not allow women to assume any role in economic life, and that they do not involve women in any financial or economic decision-making." (Man, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

### **Denial of Inheritance and Housing, Land, and Property:**

*"Deprivation of girls' rights to inheritance... the great-grandfather registers all the properties for the benefit of the boys and does not give the girls anything, and their right to inheritance is denied." (Adolescent Girl, Rural Damascus, Duma)*

*"My sons and I were deprived of inheritance... my husband's family deceived us and seized everything that my late husband owned. I feel a great deal of injustice." (Older Woman, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)*

*"There are fears that when women obtain an inheritance, for example, if they do not share it with their husband, he will get angry with her... and if she does share it with him, she is afraid that he will take the money and remarry. Most women give up their inheritance rights to their brothers for fear that they will get angry with them and not talk to them." (Man, Al-Hasakeh, Tweina)*

Economic abuse included resource deprivation, including denial of basic necessities such as food, clothing, and medicine. In some cases, male family members took salaries from working women and girls in their household against their will, or took their provisions of humanitarian assistance, either to use for themselves or to resell. Because of their lack of control over financial resources and their restricted movements, women and girls have limited ability to purchase food, clothes, and other basic needs. In some cases, women and girls are actively denied food or medicine by family members, either because they are seen as a "burden" or as a form of punishment or retaliation. In addition to husbands and fathers, economic violence toward women and girls took place at the hands of parents, stepparents, caregivers, in-laws, stepchildren, and other relatives. Economic violence is often concurrent with the denial of inheritance.

As resources have become more scarce, economic violence has increased, particularly in contexts of displacement and among at-risk women and girls with limited power in their households. Marginalised groups of women and girls—such as older women, women and girls with disabilities, and girls separated from their families—often face heightened levels of neglect in households, including the deprivation of food, medicine, and to the means of accessing health care and other services. Some wives (and their children) in polygamous families were deprived of basic needs and, at times, divested of their salaries, possessions, and inheritance. In some cases, men took money and financial assets from their wives and used it to remarry with an additional wife or divorced them: *"my husband took my gold jewellery, and I could not claim my rights because there is no proof, and now my husband has left me and dismissed me out of the house where I am living with my daughter and [refuses to] pay the rent of the room in which I live. I wish I could get back my gold to buy a house"* (Older Woman, Lattakia, Lattakia). Many women and girls described being abandoned without any form of financial support after their husbands left or took another wife.

Women and girls are frequently excluded from household financial decision-making. While some women and girls who earn income are able to gain a greater say, in other cases, they still have little control over resources.

## **Denial of Inheritance and Housing, Land, and Property**

The denial of inheritance, property, and alimony for women and girls is also a common practice in Syria, and is deeply intertwined with other forms of economic violence. It is often perpetrated against widowed and divorced women and girls, older women, women and girls with disabilities, and UASC. A CARE report<sup>18</sup> 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."

There have been examples of widowed women and girls who lost family assets to their deceased husband's family, increasing their risks of exploitation.<sup>19</sup> Widowed and divorced women and girls and older women

18 CARE. "In the Eye of the Storm": Assessment of How Culture, Customs and Conflict are Deepening Protection Risks in north-west Syria." 2022: 20.

19 "Older women, especially widows, are highly vulnerable and unsupported. As noted, they may



also face evictions or coercion to transfer or sell their houses: “[they say] it is not possible to prevent the family of the deceased or divorced husband from taking the children from [the woman] or expelling her from the house because those are private issues” (Man, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah). In the case of divorce, women (and their children) are typically forced to leave the marital home and return to their family. Widowed women can also be driven out of their homes by their deceased husband’s family, and older women are sometimes pushed by their sons or siblings to sign over or sell their property. Some family members, for example, will take advantage of women with lower levels of literacy by stamping their fingerprint on documents for the transfer of property ownership. Additionally, divorced women “will be blocked by the law first when it comes to ‘nafaka’ [the financial entitlement that the divorced woman takes from the husband to raise their children]” (GBV Expert, Syria GoS areas).

Married women are also often excluded from inheritance by their families, or they are pressured by their husbands or siblings to sign over their shares. Women have expressed concern about sharing their inheritance with their spouses, due to fears that their husband will use these resources to divorce them or to remarry. Families tend to regard any inheritance that is allocated to married women—for example, anything intended to pass to her upon the death of her father—as belonging to her husband instead. In one FGD, women highlighted how the perception among families is that any “inheritance [shared with women is] being delivered to her husband” (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab), which leads to women being denied their shares of inheritance or property. In other cases, maintaining control over inheritance was cited as a reason for male family members to refuse to grant women permission to marry.

The practice of depriving women and girls of their inheritance is enabled by patriarchal societal norms that view men as the authorities and “controllers” of their families, and the stereotype that they are more capable of managing resources. Women and girls are further disadvantaged by discriminatory laws and beliefs, as well as a lack of awareness and application of policies designed to overcome this kind of gender discrimination. Women who choose to speak up for themselves and their rights often face reprisal and punishment. One woman shared that “the family denies her right and ostracises her from the family. The community also looks at women as inferior because they demand their right of inheritance” (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah). If a woman tries to maintain her inheritance rights, she may be subjected to anger or violence at the hands of her husband or brothers. In extreme cases, respondents shared that women could be accused of ‘dishonour’ and killed for their inheritance.

## Restrictions on Freedom of Movement and Expression

Restrictions on the movement and expression of women and girls is closely intertwined with gendered social norms related to shame, control, and perceived “protection.” Due to worsening conditions, restrictions on women’s and girls’ mobility have continued to significantly increase over the past year, severely limiting their ability to access school, work, and humanitarian services, and subjecting them to increased scrutiny of their actions. Adolescent girls, young women, and widowed and divorced women and girls are most frequently targeted by these kinds of restrictions, along with displaced women and girls in collective shelters

“One form of abuse is to deprive a married woman of her right to inherit properties, especially after the death of her father. The community will falsely consider this as wealth being transferred to her husband rather than to her. If the woman insists on her right to inherit, they would shun her and refuse. This type of abuse hasn’t changed in the past year.” (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)

“Women are at risk of being dismissed from home; my son takes the rent for the house from me.” (Older Woman, Lattakia, Lattakia)

“Denial of inheritance is a widespread phenomenon in the community. When a woman wants to claim her right to inheritance, the family denies her right and ostracises her. The community also looks at women as inferior if they demand their right to inheritance. There are brothers who take the fingerprints of their sisters on the property papers; some of [these women] do not know how to read or write, she just fingerprints [the paperwork] and gives up her rights. This way, if she turns to the court to claim her rights, the man will show the paperwork to the court and the woman is deprived of her legal rights [to property and inheritance].” (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)

“For the sake of inheritance, [families will] accuse a girl of dishonour and kill her so that they take her share. They will forbid a girl from getting married so that they don’t have to allow her husband to take a share of the inheritance. We are grandmothers, and they forced us to sign over and waive our shares of the inheritance.” (Older Woman, Dar’a, Dar’a)

### Restrictions on Freedom of Movement and Expression:

“Restricting the movement of adolescent girls and making them unable to move freely inside and outside the camp [is often done] in order to preserve honour and prevent them from making mistakes, as well as preventing them from forging friendships with peers, whether of the same sex or opposite. This is normal for our community.” (Older Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Malikiyah)

not have sustained their right to their inheritances through divorce or widowhood and may find themselves with extremely limited means. For widows who are responsible for children – their own children, or their grandchildren – this can leave them wholly exposed to sexual exploitation and abuse, and their children to exploitative and dangerous work” (CARE. “In the Eye of the Storm’: Assessment of How Culture, Customs and Conflict are Deepening Protection Risks in north-west Syria.” 2022: 33)

*"Divorced women suffer a lot, as everyone watches them wherever they go when they are out of the house, [whether] to buy groceries or anything." (Older Woman, Dar'a, Dar'a)*

*"[Women and girls are deprived] of their choice of clothing and a certain type of dress is imposed on them." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tweina)*

*"The community imposes restrictions and a system that prevents women from going out well-dressed or taking care of themselves. And if she takes care of herself [and her appearance], the community will talk bad about her (she will be labelled as having bad morals). Cases have been reported of married women being accused of dishonour by other women in the camp, which exposes them to psychological violence." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hole)*

*"There is also violence from woman to woman, such as the mother who prevents her divorced or widowed daughter from leaving the house or wearing makeup, and deprives her of work, trips, and picnics, fearing for her reputation and doing anything to ensure that people will not talk about her. If she is a widow, she is forbidden from wearing anything other than black clothes, she will be deprived of her education and her freedom in her life." (Adolescent Girl, As-Sweida, As-Sweida)*

*"Most parents forbid girls, widows, and divorced women from leaving the house, accessing protection services, or owning personal phones, because they fear exploitation and extortion." (Older Woman, Idlib, Dana)*

*"An adolescent girl whose father is dead was talking to someone and her uncle locked her in the home. She escaped to her aunt, but they brought her back to lockdown and she was beaten. This incident occurred two months ago." (Woman, Idlib, Ariha)*

*"In general, women and girls here can't express their opinion freely at all, and if they say anything, they are told that they are females and that they don't know what they are talking about." (Woman, Tartous, Tartous)*

and camps. Restrictions were exerted and enforced through social and familial pressures, threats, physical violence and restraint, blame, judgment, and social rejection.

**Restrictions on movement:** As with previous years, women and girls in Syria continue to face severe movement restrictions during the past year. The constraints placed on women and girls have greatly increased, due to growing insecurity, displacement, and poverty. A significant number of women and girls were largely restricted to their homes, requiring accompaniment or permission to move outside. In addition to restrictions on mobility imposed by their families, criticism from community members also serves to limit their movement, particularly for widowed and divorced women and girls and adolescent girls. There have been examples of girls who are "locked up" by their families as punishment after a perceived transgression, in order to avoid shame or stigma. Many women and girls are prevented from going to school or work or from visiting family and friends. During the most recent assessment period, respondents described the vast differences in freedom of movement for women and men, and between adolescent girls and adolescent boys.<sup>20</sup> In a few locations, it has been reported that camp administrations or other authorities have imposed movement restrictions on women and girls (north-east and Syria GoS areas).

Movement restrictions imposed on women and girls tend to be stricter following displacement and within collective shelters. For women and girls in camps, movement is often restricted both within and outside of the camp. For women and girls with disabilities, movement restrictions are two-fold: they are imposed in order to protect them from sexual violence due to their perceived vulnerability, and because some families are "ashamed" of their disability and prefer to hide them in order to avoid the 'stigma' associated with disability. Older women also experience movement restrictions imposed by their children or stepchildren, often under the pretext that they are "old and must stay at home" (Adolescent Girl, Rural Damascus, Sahnya). While widowed and divorced women and girls face a high level of mobility constraints due to being under greater scrutiny, there are also widespread restrictions on the movement of married women imposed by their husbands and in-laws.

These movement restrictions severely hamper women and girls across all domains of their lives. In addition to the psychological impact of feeling that they are under "imprisonment," restrictions prevent women and girls from accessing educational and employment opportunities, humanitarian and social services, and social activities, and inhibiting their participation in public life more broadly. Family-imposed movement restrictions have been reported by some women and girls as a barrier to accessing WGSS and GBV services. Women and girls under movement restrictions not only face greater exposure to GBV within the home, but they are then unable to access support services for the abuse they experience. There continue to be close correlations between movement restrictions, school drop-outs, and child marriages, with housebound girls at a particularly high risk of being married off at a young age. Movement restrictions and child marriage share several common contributing factors related to a fear of shame and a desire to 'protect' girls.

**Restrictions on expression:** Women and girls in Syria have spoken extensively about the enormous extent to which their freedom of expression is restricted: "everything is considered shameful and forbidden" (Woman, Rural Damascus, Harasta). Women and girls consulted during this assessment described being unable to express their opinions and

<sup>20</sup> Men and boys faced certain movement limitations due to insecurity and risks of forced/child recruitment and arbitrary detention near checkpoints and areas with hostilities, however, they did not face restrictions related to shame.

explained that they did not feel listened to and respected. In many households, women and girls are expected to “obey” male family members. Due to intersectional social factors related to age and gender, girls are less able to express their thoughts and make decisions than women. Although the level of women’s decision-making can vary by household, some women in FGDs indicated they were not even able to decide what to cook or make decisions about other household matters. While it is often a more overlooked type of violence, women and girls continue to stress upon the significant degree to which restricted self-expression has impacted their wellbeing and development, with one respondent referring to it as the “*abolition of their personality*” (*Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah*). These kinds of restrictions also have long-term consequences for their futures: “*it is forbidden [for a woman] to express an opinion, even in matters related to her life, which makes her deprived of education and married forcibly and at early age*” (*Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Aleppo, Jarablus*).

There are numerous examples of women and girls facing pressure to wear socially ‘appropriate’ attire. Women and girls can be judged as immodest if they are thought to take too much care of their appearance or use makeup. At the same time, they may also face bullying and body-shaming if they look too unkempt or if they are perceived as poor or displaced. Widows are typically required to wear black. In some cases, women and girls are controlled in their relationships and prevented from developing friendships or spending time with family. There were also a couple cases of boys who were seen as feminine (“like a girl” or “weak”) being subjected to bullying by other boys for their appearance and behaviour.

## Denial of Access to Education, Work, and Services

Denial of education, work, and access to services is closely interlinked with movement restrictions being imposed on women and girls. One woman described how these restrictions “*kill a woman’s ambition*” (*Woman, Aleppo, Jebel Saman*) by limiting her pursuit of educational and work opportunities. In addition to suppressing their potential, the inability to obtain an education and generate income left women and girls dependent on the men in their environment, making them more susceptible to various forms of GBV. Denial of education and school dropout rates continue to increase for girls in Syria, tied to the worsening situation and the growing rate of child marriage. While more women and girls are engaging in income-generating activities to meet household needs, there were still many who were not permitted to work by their husbands and families. Some women and girls were also prevented from accessing services by family members, including safe spaces and sexual and reproductive health services.

**Denial of education:** Denial of education continues to be one of the most widespread issues facing girls in Syria. Girls throughout the country have emphasised that being able to continue their education was a top-priority concern for them. Denial of education, movement restrictions, and child marriage are all closely connected: “*They resort to marrying girls at an early age... in their opinion, the solution is [for her] to have a husband, and to deprive her of education*” (*Woman, Aleppo, Jarablus*). Increasingly, child labour has also contributed to heightened school drop-out rates, as more girls are engaging in income-generating activities in order to support their household. Family members often prevent girls from enrolling in or continuing their education, particularly at the secondary level: “*my parents provide my brother with educational courses, and yet they do not allow me to complete my education*” (*Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin*). Informants noted that girls typically begin dropping out of school between fifth and ninth grade. Restrictions to accessing education are most often imposed

### Denial of Access to Education, Work, and Services:

“*Deprivation of education. My parents made me leave school when I was 14 and get married. When a girl reaches the age of 15, her family makes her leave school; even if she doesn’t get married, she stays at home and she is not allowed to work.*” (*Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Deir-Ez-Zor*)

“*Deprivation of freedom of opinion and education. As girls, we are deprived of our right to education, because of customs and the crisis that we went through. Our parents prefer to marry us off early, because they’re afraid of the shame that will fall on them. My cousin got married at the age of 13.*” (*Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa*)

“*Deprivation of education for girls [who are] displaced, because the location of the school is far away.*” (*Woman, Aleppo, Atareb*)

“*One type of violence practiced against girls is depriving them of educational opportunities to keep them away from harassment [that occurs in] education centres or while commuting to school, and to prevent them from mixing with*

boys of this age.” (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)

“Most girls are deprived of their right to education because of the father’s refusal to send them to school, for fear of the girls mixing with young boys.” (Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)

“[Women and girls experience] deprivation of rights, such as not being allowed to complete their education in order to stay at home and help with household work.” (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Atareb)

“A girl shared that her family stopped letting her go to school when she was in third grade because they think she doesn’t need to learn more. They say she’ll just end up living at her husband’s house and that knowing how to read and write is enough since she’ll only need to work in the kitchen. Her brother even said that if he marries a girl who has finished school, he’d hang her diploma in the kitchen to show her that’s where she belongs. Some guys don’t like girls to study too much, so they tell their parents not to let them go to school.” (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Areesheh)

“Some husbands prevent their wives from working or studying, as they consider this a bad thing because they belong to a community that maintains tribal customs and traditions and does not allow women to leave the house.” (Man, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)

“One of the women I know is a widow and wants to work, but her family prevents her from working.” (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Atareb)

by fathers or other parents/caregivers or, in the case of married girls, by their husbands. Displaced girls, girls with disabilities, unaccompanied and separated girls, and married girls were most at risk of dropping out of school. Girls from severely impoverished families and rural areas also faced heightened financial, logistical, and security constraints that prevent them from reaching and accessing schools.

The reasons that families cite in their decision to restrict girls from going to school often stem from fears of sexual violence and concerns about girls’ reputations. Families have expressed alarm at the high rates of sexual harassment, kidnapping, and other forms of sexual violence against girls that happen at and on the way to schools, with these fears increasing following the earthquakes. The distance and lack of safe, accessible transportation play a key role in girls leaving school, due to growing insecurity. Distance to school is an especially challenging issue for girls in camps and remote areas, particularly for those at the secondary level upward. Girls cited the heightened difficulties of remaining in school if travel to other towns is required to reach school facilities or take exams. Parents also expressed concerns about mixed-gender settings in schools; in some cases, families have pulled their daughters out of school in response to situations of sexual harassment or other incidents of violence. Overcrowding, poor quality of instruction, insufficient supervision, and staff shortages at public schools have also been referenced as factors that contribute to families’ safety concerns for girls, further leading them to feel that the risks of attending school outweigh the benefits. Economic pressures represent another driving factor that is increasingly leading to the denial of education for girls. Families are increasingly unable to afford the costs of school supplies, transportation, and other fees. And the inability to meet the needs of the household have led to higher rates of child marriage and child labour, which also result in girls dropping out of school. Similar concerns related to the mixed-gender educational environments, fears of sexual violence, distance, lack of transport, and high costs were also cited as reasons for families to prevent young women from accessing university education.

Household financial constraints have affected both boys’ and girls’ attendance in school. However, some families “prefer boys over girls, as boys go to school even if the schools are far away” (Adolescent Girl, As-Sweida, As-Sweida). While boys primarily drop out due to child labour, for girls, school drop-outs tend to be tied to issues like restricted movement and child marriage. The double standard in treatment between girls and their brothers is based on social norms that girls are not “entitled” to an education, and that their future is defined by marriage. Some girls expressed that their parents felt it was “enough [for them] to know how to read and write” (Adolescent Girl, Rural Damascus, Duma). There was a common perception among many families that, because girls will ultimately get married and will be primarily engaged in domestic work, a high level of education would be wasted. As one woman shared, “there is always this view that a girl’s future is only in marriage” (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh). In some cases, girls have been forced to drop out of school to help with housework. A couple informants also described how some men prefer not to marry an educated woman: “people say if she is educated, she will be better than him. They think that she will be arrogant, so men do not like educated women” (Woman, Rural Damascus, Harasta).

**Denial of work:** Due to the growing economic needs of households and families, there have been more opportunities for some women and girls to enter the workforce; however, husbands, parents, and in-laws often restrict women and girls from working. In addition to fears of sexual violence and shame, social norms and traditions regarding the perceived role of women have also played a role in denying women the right to work. Movement restrictions imposed by families and communities are another factor that interferes with women’s abilities to attend vocational

courses, seek employment, and earn income. Widowed and divorced women and girls face particularly high barriers to employment, due to concerns about their reputation, and are often denied the opportunity to support themselves and their children. There have also been examples of women who had previously worked but, following displacement, were told by their husbands that they were no longer allowed to do so. In other households, husbands and families force women and girls to work – often in high-risk labour sectors, such as agriculture – and, in some cases, to support husbands with drug addictions.

**Denial of access to services:** Restricted movement poses considerable barriers for women and girls looking to access humanitarian assistance and services. There are many examples of parents and male family members preventing women and girls from accessing services. Family restrictions on women's and girls' access to services are heightened within camp settings and in remote areas, and are often related to insecurity, distance, and lack of awareness. There is also considerable neglect of some older women, women and girls with disabilities, and UASC, and, as part of this neglect, families and caregivers sometimes refuse to provide these women and girls with access to health care and other services, despite their need. There have been several examples of women and girls who have been prevented from accessing health services, including after being subjected to intimate partner violence (IPV): “[these is] an example of a doctor who beat his wife and prevented her from receiving treatment, and she almost died” (Man, Idlib, Ariha). In another case, a woman was beaten by her husband for being attended to by a male doctor, and her treatment was discontinued: “we heard the story of someone in the college... when she was about to finish the treatment, her husband discovered that she was being treated by a male, so he beat her and did not let her continue” (Woman, Damascus, Damascus). As women and girls are increasingly required to have a chaperone when moving outside the home, the possibility of receiving confidential services in health facilities and other spaces has been reduced, limiting their ability to safely disclose GBV.

There has been more acceptance of women and girls looking to access WGSS due to the dedicated nature of the spaces for women and girls, which is perceived as more culturally acceptable. In locations with an existing WGSS, family and community trust in WGSS as female-only spaces has been built up over several years. Nonetheless, some women and girls are still prevented from attending by their husbands or parents. Reasons for why certain families restricted girls' and women's ability to visit safe spaces included limited awareness, a lack of trust, unfamiliarity with the space, and failing to see the value of the space and its activities. For more information about barriers to accessing humanitarian assistance, see also: Humanitarian Sectors.

## Domestic and Family Violence, including Intimate Partner Violence

Domestic and family violence, including IPV, continues to be the most common type of GBV experienced by women and girls in Syria. Women and girls across the country have described rising tensions and increasing violence in the household due to stresses from the external environment. IPV and broader incidents of domestic and family violence often involve a combination of physical and psychological violence, together with denial of resources, opportunities, and rights. These types of GBV can also include sexual violence, such as marital rape or sexual abuse by family members. Women have described a significant increase in GBV against women and girls in the home over past year, expressing the sentiment that it is “practiced by all” (Woman, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa) due to the normalisation of violence. Physical violence can escalate to severe levels, causing serious injury (e.g. broken bones, miscarriage)

### Domestic and Family Violence, including Intimate Partner Violence:

“Women are frequently abused by parents and husbands verbally, physically, sexually, and economically.” (Woman, Aleppo, Atareb)

“Most forms of violence occur in the family, from the brother-in-law, relatives, or husband.” (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tel Tamer)

“There is violence in the home... the husband beats his wife, the brother hits his sister, and every person with authority or control exploits it against the weaker.” (Woman with Disability or Caregiver)

*"Many children, women, and girls are beaten, neglected, and deprived by the fathers and husbands." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hassakeh)*

*"Domestic violence is widespread due to the difficult living situation, as the man has become angry at his wife and children, so he can beat them for the trivial reasons." (Man, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"Often the brother or husband practices violence and, in most cases, the mother cannot defend her daughter, because she herself is exposed to violence." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tel Tamer)*

*"If a girl lives in the house of a brother or sister or with a stepfather, the violence that she will be exposed to and the control will be inflicted by the people with whom she lives, and there are many families that discriminate between men and women." (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Deir-Ez-Zor, Deir-Ez-Zor)*

*"Yes, there is domestic violence against wives and children, but we do not hear about it much, because it remains inside the house, due to fear of disclosing it or causing divorce or scandal." (Man, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"Violence [can happen] within the same family when relatives interfere, such as the husband's mother, who incites her son to beat his wife because of the pressures he is exposed to." (Woman, Aleppo, Afrin)*

and, in some cases, death. A recent report described how femicide as a product of domestic and family violence and so-called 'honour' killings is increasing, with perpetrators typically being intimate partners or family members of the victims: "in addition to physical and psychological harm, this violence led to the killings of several women and prompted some victims to commit suicide."<sup>21</sup>

Men are described by women and girls as being under high levels of pressure and regularly taking out their anger and frustration on their families, with small matters escalating quickly. The growing use of drugs and alcohol has also fuelled violence in the household, with addiction identified as a newer and growing concern for families. Widespread access to weapons also increases risks of women and girls being severely injured and even killed by members of their families, including via so-called 'honour' killings. Because of gendered social norms and traditions, it is seen as justified and socially acceptable for men and boys to exert violence and control over the women and girls in their lives. Women and girls are expected to obey their husbands, fathers, brothers, and other male family members, and are expected not to object to violence. Across numerous focus-group discussions (FGDs), women and girls explained that no matter what they did or did not do, they were seen to be at fault and blamed for the violence exercised against them. Informants explained that as "no one sees" violence in the home, as it is often hidden. Even when neighbours or family members are made aware of GBV within the home, there is a sense that they can "not intervene" due to it taking place in the private sphere. There is strong social disapproval of women and girls who disclosed the abuse they faced and complained about abuse at the hands of family members.

Violence is often directed at members of the family who are perceived as weaker, with women, girls, and children most affected: *"persons with authority or control exploit it against the weaker"* (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Aleppo, Jarablus). Women and girls often experience violence at the hands of multiple perpetrators within the home or family.

While all women and girls are vulnerable to IPV and domestic and family violence, certain groups face heightened risks. Displaced women and girls are often subjected to elevated restrictions and violence due to their difficult living conditions, particularly among those residing in collective shelters and camps. Widowed and divorced women and girls have described how, following their divorce or the death of their husband, they continue to experience high levels of violence and scrutiny in the home. Adolescent girls also face increased control and bear the brunt of violence from all sides of the family. Girls separated from their families are frequently subjected to high levels of abuse, mistreatment, and neglect by caregivers and stepparents, as are older women and women and girls with disabilities. Girls who marry early and women and girls in polygamous households are also at a heightened risk of IPV/domestic and family violence.

21 Syrians for Truth & Justice. "Syria: 185 Cases of 'Honor Killing' since 2019." 2022: 5.

## Characteristics of intimate partner violence and domestic and family violence in Syria

- Women and girls often experience violence at the hands of multiple perpetrators within the household and the wider family (e.g. husbands, parents, brothers, and other family members)
- Women and girls typically face a combination of several forms of violence inflicted by family members (e.g. physical, verbal, sexual, economic, restricted movement, and additional denials of resources, opportunities, and rights)
- Violence tends to 'cascade' down, inflicted by those with authority/power against 'weaker' members of the household (e.g. from husband to wife, parents to children, or brothers to sisters)
- Women and girl often experience a cycle of violence throughout their lives:
  - Violence from fathers/parents and brothers in their family home
  - Violence from husbands and in-laws after they are married
  - Violence from parents or brothers if they divorce and return to their home
  - Violence from brothers and sons/children as they get older
- Boys often learn, imitate, and are enabled to exercise violence against the women and girls in their home, which then carries forward into their adult relationships with their wives and children

## Intimate Partner Violence

IPV continues to be the most widespread form of GBV against women and girls in Syria. While IPV was present before the crisis, it has since increased due to multiple factors, with one being the inability of men to fulfil their expected role as breadwinners and meet household needs. This, in turn, causes them to transfer their frustration and feelings of inadequacy to their partners: *"intimate partner violence has increased due to resource scarcity and rising costs"* (GBV Expert, Syria GoS areas). Women and girls have indicated that, when men have bad days due to not finding work or facing workplace abuse, they often return home and direct their *"anger episodes"* (Older Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Deir-Ez-Zor) toward women and children. When women go to their husbands to ask for money for food and other basic needs for the family, they are often met by violence. Married women and girls have recounted how small matters can quickly escalate, sometimes exacerbated by drugs and alcohol. Women are also under greater pressures — including increasingly needing to work outside of the home — and can be punished if they "fall short" on household responsibilities. The earthquake and subsequent displacement have only intensified the pressures that contribute to IPV, particularly in collective shelters: "[there was] an increase in reports of domestic violence in the weeks and months after the earthquake"<sup>22</sup>

IPV is described as being frequent, "routine," and ongoing for women and girls. Violence often takes place in front of children and other relatives, adding to the humiliation of women and girls and having a negative impact on the children. It also teaches young boys that they can mistreat and disregard the women and girls in their lives. Married women and girls are often held hostage to these violent living conditions by the pressing fear of losing their children, with husbands commonly wielding

### Intimate Partner Violence:

*"The most common experience for women and girls in general is intimate partner violence, especially in homes, because there is no supervision."* (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)

*"The most violence against women is committed by husbands, whether via beatings, insults, or deprivation of rights."* (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Aleppo, Jarablus)

*"Women are frequently beaten by their husbands and, due to the bad living conditions and the increase in pressure, the violence has increased a lot."* (Woman, Hama, As-Salamiyeh)

*"The husband [inflicts] violence on his wife when she falls short in her duties, and this is caused by the poor financial situation and the large number of needs."* (Woman, Aleppo, Afrin)

*"... women are exposed to the same violence, due to the poor financial state. The wife asks her husband for food or money which leads to violence, and this causes the disintegration of the family."* (Adolescent Boy, Aleppo, Atareb)

*"One woman said, 'I live with my mother-in-law and father-in-law and I am often subjected to violence by my husband, because he comes home angry and cannot support everyone.'" (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Tel Tamer)*

*"When the man is beating his wife, they say that it is normal, that for sure she is guilty or wrong, because immediately they will blame her, because he is the man."* (Woman, Rural Damascus, Babella)

*"The reason for my divorce is that I faced my husband and told him not to beat me and verbally abuse me in the presence of my relatives and neighbours; so he kicked me out and sent me to my family and divorced me."* (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Hajin)

22 Syria Direct. "After the Earthquake, a Wave of Gender-Based Violence in Syria." 2023.

**Domestic and Family Violence:**

*"Girls are sometimes beaten by the father or brothers." (Woman, Lattakia, Jobet Berghal)*

*"I know a girl who put a loaf of bread with the dry bread and her father beat her a lot. We hear a lot of these stories." (Older Woman, Dar'a, Dar'a)*

*"My brother asked me for water and when I did not bring it, he beat me. If I don't obey my brother, he will beat me. I once said to my brother, 'You bring water for yourself,' so he insulted me and hit me." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Areesheh)*

*"My husband beat me in the past and has taken a second wife. Now, my son is has become a young man who is stubborn and who is violent towards me as well." (Woman, Idlib, Ariha)*

*"Divorced or widowed adolescent girls are the most vulnerable to violence, especially by parents and caregivers, because of society's view of divorced and widowed women." (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*"Violence [is often inflicted by] relatives, and especially by the father's family against our mothers and us." (Adolescent Girl, Dar'a, Dar'a)*

*"My daughter-in-law does not respect me and encourages my son to hit me, and my son discriminates between me and his wife and children, and I have no opinion or say at home." (Older Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hassakeh)*

*"If the mother marries [another partner], the children will be subjected to violence... from the stepfather." (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Deir-Ez-Zor, Deir-Ez-Zor)*

**Child and Forced Marriage:**

*"There is widespread violence of control and coercion directed at girls, women, and children, such as forcing girls to marry against their will, often to relatives like cousins. This violence has intensified due to factors like ignorance, poverty, and increasing economic pressures on families." (Man, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

the threat of taking away their wives' child custody if they leave or disobey. Women and girls in polygamous households usually experience inequitable distribution of resources and economic abuse, which can include the loss of inheritance (see also: Denial of Inheritance and HLP). When their husbands remarry, first wives often faced abuse, neglect, and abandonment.

**Domestic and Family Violence**

The frequency and severity of domestic and family violence have also been sharply climbing over the past year. There are endless combinations of violence within households, with women and girls often facing multiple types of abuse from multiple sources. Women and girls have reported that their fathers and brothers often exercise control and violence against them. Other family members commonly cited as perpetrating violence against women and girls include sons, brothers-in-law, uncles, grandfathers, and stepfathers. Women and girls describe how power is given to boys from an early age to beat and "control their sisters" (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah), with girls often expected to serve their brothers. Women can also exercise control over other women, playing either a direct or indirect role in their abuse and enforcing their compliance with gender norms. For instance, some mothers-in-law interfere with what their daughters-in-law do or wear. Some women also enable their sons to exercise violence against their wives and encouraged them to remarry. One woman provided an example of having to ask her husband's family for permission to leave the house. Women and girls who leave a situation of violence with their husbands often face violence elsewhere from other family members, which deters them from disclosing IPV or seeking divorce.

Parental violence is often regarded as a means to "educate" and "discipline" children. Parents have described how, when they were overwhelmed and stressed, they would often take it out on their children. Adolescent girls are especially targeted by violence and control, especially by fathers and other male family members. In FGDs, adolescent girls were consistently recognised as facing much higher levels of physical and psychological violence and denial of opportunities and rights than their male siblings.

Violence against women and girls is often used by male family members to exercise control and enforce gender norms, particularly regarding their sexuality. Women and girls can face violent repercussions from their families for transgressing social norms. Respondents have described situations in which women and girls have been punished by relatives for being seen speaking to someone of the opposite gender, being accused of having a premarital or extramarital relationship, committing adultery, refusing to get married, or seeking divorce. (See also: femicide).

**Child and Forced Marriage**

Child marriage and forced marriage continue to be pressing concerns for women and girls in Syria, particularly among adolescent girls. Child and forced marriage are reported to have significantly increased throughout Syria over the course of the past year, especially in earthquake-affected areas.<sup>23</sup> Child marriage and forced marriage have similar underlying contributing factors, with key drivers including insecurity, the inability of families to meet their needs amid mounting economic pressures, and displacement. Women and girls in overcrowded collective shelters and

<sup>23</sup> Syria Direct. "After the Earthquake, a Wave of Gender-Based Violence in Syria." 2023: 2-3; WoS GBV SC. "GBVIMS+ Data Gathering Organizations Survey Findings about the GBV Trends in north-west Syria after the Earthquake." 2023: 5.



camps were particularly at risk, as well as widowed and divorced women and girls and unaccompanied and separated girls. Marriage is often regarded by families to 'protect' women and girls from potential exposure to the risks of sexual violence, and as a mechanism to avoid bringing shame or 'dishonour' to the family: *"in their opinion, the solution is to have a husband"* (Woman, Aleppo, Jarablus). Families also use child or forced marriage to relieve the 'burden' of having to provide for girls and women, and to alleviate crowded living spaces and financial pressures facing their households. In some cases, widowed and divorced women and girls were forced to remarry, because of their inability to meet their own economic needs (and those of their children), due to the community stigmas that restrict their movement.

Pre-existing gender norms also play a role in child and forced marriage. There is a sense that women and girls needed to marry before they become "too old" and have fewer marriage prospects. Traditions also dictate that women cannot be left alone, even with their children, and that they require a male guardian in the household. Girls are taught from a young age that their purpose in life is to be married. Some families expect that girls will inevitably end up married and engaged full-time in household duties, and therefore perceive anything more than a basic education as being "wasted" and "unnecessary." When women and girls (or the women and girls around them) transgress social norms, they are often quickly married off as a punishment and to protect their reputation and the family's 'honour.'

#### Factors contributing to increased risks of child and forced marriage, as reported by women and girls in Syria

- Girls experiencing an incident of sexual violence
- Increased fears of sexual violence being perpetrated against the victim (e.g. when living in crowded conditions or among a mixed and unknown community)
- Concerns by parents/caregivers that a girl or woman is showing interest in or talking to a person from the opposite gender
- Poverty, the inability to provide for children, and a desire to reduce expenses
- Poor living situations, crowded spaces, and a desire to alleviate overcrowding within the home/tent
- Increased fears that girls will experience sexual violence during their commute to and from school, or within the schools themselves, especially when the school is far away or the girl faces other educational barriers
- Lack of awareness about the rights of girls, the consequences of child marriage and early pregnancy, and the importance of girls' education
- The perception that a woman is a 'spinster' and undesirable for marriage after a certain age (e.g. 18 years)
- Girls being taught the "dream of marriage" (Older Woman, Aleppo, Jebel Saman)

*"Marrying off daughters to relatives." (Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Jisr-Ash-Shugur)*

*"Parents often marry off their daughters out of fear of harassment, seeking to protect them but showing little concern for whom she marries, as long as she has someone to 'support' her. When a young man proposes, decisions are frequently made based on financial considerations rather than moral qualities. While not all cases are like this, it is unfortunately the reality for the vast majority." (Adolescent Girl, Rural Damascus, Duma)*

*"If the father dies and the mother gets remarried, the girl may be forced to live in her uncle's house and forced to marry her cousin without her consent." (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"Forced marriage [happens] for the purpose of conserving the girl, and she is deprived of her right to get a divorce and she is forced to be patient and tolerant even if her husband beats her, in order to stay with her children." (Older Woman, Aleppo, Jebel Saman)*

*"[Girls are] forbidden from expressing an opinion, even in matters related to their lives, which leads them to be deprived of education and married forcibly and at an early age." (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Aleppo, Jarablus)*

*"[There was one incident of] a man who tied his daughter to a tree and left her all night alone because he wanted to marry her off to a young man abroad, and she said, "I don't want to, I want to study." He beat her and tied her to the tree without allowing her to eat or drink until she agreed, and no one dared to help her." (Adolescent Boy, Dar'a, Dar'a)*

*"Some [girls] attempt suicide as a response to the violence: one of the girls mentioned that, in 2017, a girl was married by force: on the night of the marriage, she asked her father to divorce, but he refused. On that night she killed herself in response." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh)*

**Child Marriage:**

*“Early marriage is one of the most prominent types of violence against girls.” (Older Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Malikiyah)*

*“Early marriage is widespread, due to fear of the security situation and the spread of poverty.” (Woman, Idlib, Jisr-Ash-Shugur)*

*“[The marriage of children and young girls happens] because we are afraid that our daughters could experience harassment and rape.” (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*“In camps, they marry off girls at an early age, claiming that there is a lack of money in the family.” (Woman, Aleppo, Atareb)*

*“Girls work in agriculture, so they don’t go to school in most cases, and they are prone to early marriage. Society is ruthless, and parents see marriage as the best protection for girls, so that they are not dishonoured.” (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tel Tamer)*

*“Early marriage of girls at 14 or 15 [is done so families can] get rid of their expenses... some of them are 13 years old.” (Older Woman, Rural Damascus, Kafr Batna)*

*“I was forced to agree when my husband made the decision to marry our daughter at a young age in order to relieve himself of her responsibility and allowance, although her age was not suitable for marriage. She was only 13 years old... and now my daughter suffers from health issues and psychological problems related to living with her mother-in-law and her husband.” (Older Woman, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)*

*“If the girl grows up and becomes 22 years old [without marrying], she is a spinster. Some [girls] get married when they are young because, at the age of 20, they fear they will become spinsters... they think that after that, they will not be able to get married. The rate of early marriage is very high (looks of astonishment). It is unfair to marry girls off at an early age, depriving them of their childhood. There is no awareness among the parents.” (Adolescent Girl, Rural Damascus, Duma)*

*“The phenomenon of early marriage is widespread: especially in times of war and displacement, when the female reaches the age of 14 or 15 years, she must marry. Some girls marry before they reach adulthood and stay with the husband until puberty; after a short period of time, she is divorced, and the reason is the lack of awareness.” (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

**In focus: decision-making processes and rationales related to child and forced marriage**

- The perception that women and girls “must accept” and “cannot reject” marriage proposals they receive, particularly if they are perceived as getting “too old,” or they are widowed, divorced, or displaced
- The fact that the opinions of women and girls—especially adolescent girls and widowed and divorced women and girls—and those of their mothers are typically not considered or taken seriously
- The perception among families that marriage is a solution to the fear of sexual violence and associated stigma, as well as a way to alleviate economic pressures placed on the household
- The idea among some families that marriage is a way to obtain money, with the adage “get money not morals” repeated by many, and the sentiment that families “do not care who marries her, they just want someone to support her” (Adolescent Girl, Rural Damascus, Duma)
- The fact that women and girls often face pressure and retaliation at the hands of their fathers, brothers, or other family members—and even, at times, from the men and boys they reject—if they did not wish to marry, including extreme cases of being locked up or killed

**Child Marriage**

GBV experts have described significant setbacks in addressing the harmful practice of child marriage: “After seven years campaigning against early marriage, changing beliefs about the role of women, the earthquake felt like we were back to square one.”<sup>24</sup> Adolescent girls who are displaced, separated, or from impoverished families are seen as particularly at risk, as well as adolescent girls with disabilities. Child marriage is associated with high rates of divorce, primarily because of husbands divorcing and abandoning girls. Divorced girls are often regarded as being at fault for “having failed” in their marriage, and they are frequently bullied and stigmatised by their families and communities, often transitioning from one violent situation to another. They also risk losing custody of their children to their former husbands upon divorce or remarriage.

The marriage of girls is widely regarded as a ‘protective’ mechanism in response to rising levels of sexual violence, which are often seen to dishonour the family: “Early marriage remains one of the types of violence that families still use, either to reduce the burden on the family or to gain a sense of protection that, ‘before my daughter faces rape or is sexually abused, it is better if she is in an official marriage.’”<sup>25</sup> Families have expressed fears related to the fact that unknown mixed populations are living together in collective shelters, with girls often living in close proximity to unrelated men.

Parents are more prone to marrying girls off early in response to crowded conditions in camps: “Risk factors for underage marriage – economic distress, destroyed schools, and overcrowded shelters – have increased due to the disaster.”<sup>26</sup>

24 Syria Direct. “After the Earthquake, a Wave of Gender-Based Violence in Syria.” 2023: 6.

25 Syria Direct. “After the Earthquake, a Wave of Gender-Based Violence in Syria.” 2023: 6.

26 Syria Direct. “After the Earthquake, a Wave of Gender-Based Violence in Syria.” 2023: 6.

Economic stresses have further increased the likelihood of families turning to child marriage: “Families are marrying off their daughters to ease financial burdens and because they do not have enough money to buy food for them.”<sup>27</sup> Separated girls are especially likely to be married off by caregivers, in order to reduce the burden on the household and transfer the responsibility for the girl to someone else.

While fathers tend to be the primary decision-makers on such matters, other household members also play a role in normalising and forcing girls into child marriage, including other parents, caregivers, stepparents, and other male relatives, such as brothers, uncles, and in-laws. Adolescent girls and widowed and divorced women and girls generally have less power to refuse marriages. Child marriage is reported to frequently take place as soon as girls reach puberty or receive an offer of marriage. Child marriage of younger adolescent girls has been reportedly increasing and, in some cases, girls as young as 12 or 13 years of age are married off. Cases of child marriage before puberty have been linked to forced puberty, although data on this is limited. At times, parents have resorted to marrying girls to men living outside of their camp or community/area, to navigate around policies that prohibit child marriage (such as in north-east Syria). Girls who refuse to be married are reportedly punished, insulted, beaten, or locked up until they submit and, in the most extreme cases, have even been killed by family members.

Child marriage often results in girls being married to older men, or to cousins or other relatives. Child marriage innately goes hand-in-hand with sexual violence, as minor girls cannot provide informed consent. Typically, these girls also experience physical, psychological, and economic violence at the hands of their husbands, together with the wider denial of opportunities, resources, and rights. Girls who are married early usually drop out of school, losing their opportunity to receive an education and fulfil their full potential. They tend to be isolated in the home and separated from their peers. Women and girls have described how married girls lose their childhoods and are not ready for the responsibilities of being a wife and mother. Adolescent girls also tend to face health complications from early and repeat pregnancy, with negative developmental outcomes on their children as well.

While child marriage continues to predominately affect adolescent girls, there have been a few newer reports of early marriages among adolescent boys, due to the increased hardships faced by households: “There are cousins who marry at a young age because the parents do not want to worry about their financial burden” (Woman, Tartous, Tartous).

## Forced Marriage

Forced marriages of women in Syria have been increasing, due to economic pressures, insecurity, and displacement. Based on underlying gender norms, women are thought to be “spinsters” from an early age (referenced as starting at age 18, or even earlier), and families are often afraid they will be considered “too old” to marry. There is a common perception that women cannot be “alone” and are “lonely” in they are unmarried, even if they have children, and that they need a man in the household to protect and guide them. The earthquake has further contributed to the rise in forced marriage, due to the influx of widows and the growing economic constraints. Incidence of forced marriage is particularly high in collective shelters and camps, with many families resorting to the forced marriage of women and girls in order to avoid the increased possibilities or accusations of ‘shame’ within crowded and insecure living conditions. Widowed and

### Forced Marriage

“Another type [of GBV that has] increased is forced marriage... either for economic reasons or to avoid stigma from the community.” (GBV Expert, Syria GoS areas).

“Forced marriage [is an issue for women and girls], as the community considers women over the age of 18 as being spinsters and undesirable. If someone would propose to her, her opinion wouldn’t be considered.” (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)

“Forced marriage: they say, ‘when they call you spinster, you must accept anyone.’” (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh)

“The community considers widows and divorcees to be lonely women who need someone to marry and support them.” (Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)

“Sometimes divorced women are forced to do many things, including forced marriage, as a result of financial hardship and poor income and to reduce their expenses.” (Man, Idlib, Ariha)

“Some widowed or divorced women have been forced to beg in order to secure the livelihood of their children, and sometimes they are forced to leave their children and marry.” (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)

“As for the divorced woman... they oppress her and she must marry even if the person proposing is older.” (Female Caregiver, Idlib, Ariha)

“Violence increases toward divorced women and widows; after divorce, [women have] no right to express their opinions or accept or reject marriage after divorce or widowhood, [due to] the high stigma of divorce.” (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh)

“Sexual harassment and exploitation [often happen to] widows who are forced to go out and look for a job. Most men try to harass them, because they don’t have someone to support or defend them. They are also forced to get married, or they won’t be allowed to work.” (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)

<sup>27</sup> WoS GBV AoR. “Tipsheet: Sector GBV Risks Mitigation Mainstreaming Priorities and Commitments: Nutrition.” 2023:1.

### Other Marriage-related Violence

*"For women, [they must deal with] beating, abandonment, and break away." (Man, Aleppo, Afrin)*

*"[Some women face] abandonment by their husbands, especially if he is married to another woman or two women, his wife has children, or he doesn't provide her with what she needs. This type of abuse has not changed from last year. The woman feels weak and insecure, as the man feels that he is the stronger one. Disabled women are more exposed to violence and abandonment." (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"Women are abandoned... the husband leaves his wife with her family and never asks about her." (Older Woman, Lattakia, Lattakia)*

*"[There are] new trends, such as threats of second marriage. One of the women mentioned that her husband forces her to work and give him the money to spend on the second wife." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Qamishli)*

*"There are some men who marry two women, their way of treatment differs from one woman to another." (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*"I know many [cases where] the husband married again and started beating the first wife." (Woman, Idlib, Ariha)*

*"I know a lady who fell down while picking olives and became paralysed, and her husband then divorced her. There is a woman who has a disability in her arms, and when she became 55 years old and stopped having her period, her husband left her and married another woman." (Older Woman, Dar'a, Dar'a)*

*"[Women] may be deprived of marriage by their family under the pretext that it is a shame to marry more than once, and that the widow must take care of raising her children and not think about remarrying. There are widows who are exploited by their parents, who control their money and the aid they receive." (Older Woman, Idlib, Dana)*

divorced women and girls are at a particularly heightened risk of forced marriage, due to the stigma associated with their status and the economic constraints faced by their families. In one example, a man residing in a camp attempted to force his sister to remarry after she was widowed during the earthquakes: "I told him that if he is under economic pressure, maybe I can help him find a job, but he said, 'No, she has to marry.'"<sup>28</sup> Remarriage can be seen as a way to 'fix' the social stigma associated with the marital status or widowed or divorced women.

Widowed and divorced women and girls, as well as women who are considered to be getting "too old" (starting from age of 18), have limited decision-making power over whether they marry or who they marry, and often have to "accept anyone" or accept the first proposal that comes along. Widowed and divorced women and girls usually lack the ability to "accept or reject" marriage prospects, and in some cases are married to older men, relatives, or, in the case of widowed women, the brother of the deceased husband. Widowed and divorced women and girls are also less likely to be able to escape from an abusive second marriage, and are often pressured to stay in an abusive situation. Informants have noted that families feel that remarried women and girls cannot be subjected to further disgrace. Divorced girls also face elevated levels of social stigma and restrictions, leaving them and their children extremely vulnerable to sexual exploitation and other forms of GBV.

Women who remarry often lose custody of their children (*see also: Denial of Child Custody*). In some cases, women who escape abusive relationships or who get divorced face pressure from their families to return to their husbands or remarry them.

### Other Marriage-related Violence

In addition to IPV/domestic and family violence and child and forced marriage, there are also other forms of marriage-related violence perpetrated against women and girls in Syria.

**Informal temporary or serial marriages** are a form of forced marriage and/or sexual exploitation reported to be increasing in Al Hol camp, although there is limited data available. However, this does not indicate that informal/temporary marriages are not also taking place elsewhere.

**Denial of Marriage:** In certain cases, women have been prevented from (re) marrying by their fathers, brothers, and other family members, particularly in the case of separated girls and widowed or divorced women and girls. When this occurs, it is typically used as a means of controlling their inheritance; benefitting from their salary, widow/orphan sponsorship, or assistance; or forcing them to stay at home and engage in domestic servitude/labour. It has also been reported in locations where women are confined within camps and where authorities have imposed mobility and other restrictions, such as in the internment camps in north-east Syria.

**Abandonment, Divorce, and Polygamy:** There are growing reports of women and girls being abandoned by their husbands due to divorce or remarriage. (*See also: Denial of Inheritance and Child Custody*). When men abandon or divorce their wives or marry another wife, women are often blamed by their families and communities. Divorce and polygamy often lead to (and are go hand-in-hand with) economic violence and broader IPV/domestic and family violence. In cases of polygamy, there tend to be inequitable distribution of resources, as well as other abuses within the household.

According to the social norms and customs of the community, divorce and remarriage are perceived as a men's right. There are also gendered expectations placed on women related to reproduction. In some cases, women have described situations in which mothers-in-law or other family members have encouraged men to find a "new wife."

#### Ways in which divorce or marriage of another wife can be used as a form of GBV

- When it is used as retaliation or punishment by men, to show authority and exercise control over their wives
- When it is related to allegations about a woman's reputation, including stigma by association (e.g. if the woman's neighbour, friend, or sister is accused of adultery or has a "bad reputation")
- When it is justified by a lack of (male) children (even if infertility is related to the man)
- When it occurs following disability, menopause, or hysterectomy

**Denial of Child Custody and Access to Children:** Denial of child custody is often associated with the denial of rights and inheritance, especially for widows and divorced women and girls. In fact, women and girls frequently lose access to their children upon divorce or remarriage.

While some widowed and divorced women and girls are left to raise children on their own with little support, in other cases, their children are taken away or they are forced to leave them behind. Children can be separated from their mothers by their former husband or by his family. In the case of (forced) remarriage, women and girls often must leave their children with their parents or other family members, or the children can even be left alone to fend for themselves.

In other cases, women are only allowed to keep female children. Divorce and women's loss of child custody is seen as one of the causes of the widespread prevalence of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). Children taken in by the husband's family or other family members face greater risks of neglect, mistreatment, child marriage, and child labour. When children can remain with their father or mother, they also often face abuse from stepparents. There was a particularly extreme case reported of two young children being killed by their stepfather after the mother remarried (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hole). In certain locations, there has been mass separation of widowed women from their male children due to the policies of authorities, especially in internment and widow camps (north-east and north-west Syria)<sup>29</sup>. Divorced, widowed, and abandoned women and girls have frequently reported that they are prevented from seeing their children, either by their former husband, in-laws, or new husband.

While there is limited information available about this practice and the degree to which it takes place across different regions, it was regularly mentioned by women and girls in FGDs as a priority concern,<sup>30</sup> and the fear of losing access to their children has been cited as one of the primary

#### Denial of Child Custody and Access to Children

*"Yes, [divorced and widowed women and girls are more commonly subjected to violence] because of society's view of them, and [they can] take custody of their children from them." (Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Basira)*

*"[One form of violence seen in the community is] depriving children of their mother after being divorced." (Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Jisr-Ash-Shugur)*

*"I am divorced. I can't go to my children; my husband prevents them from receiving me." (Older Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hassakeh)*

*"Some widows are deprived of their children by the husband's family if they remarry." (Older Woman, Idlib, Dana)*

*"Even when the girl gets divorced, there are many parents who refuse to bring her children [back to the family home] with her. And some people [distribute child custody] according to the sex of the child: the boy goes with his father and the girl can go with her mother." (Woman, Rural Damascus, Madaya)*

*"My daughter is married and meets the needs of her husband and children without default, and he always harms her and humiliates her and treats her with lack of respect, and she does not do anything about it for the sake of the children, but her patience ran out and she got divorced, so the children were lost, as their father took them and threw them to his relatives from house to house." (Older Woman, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)*

*"[Children are abandoned for reasons such as travel], or when divorce pushes the woman to marry another man and leave her children, or when the father marries another woman and leaves the children with the grandmother." (Older Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Malikiyah)*

*"And we also know that the rightful custody of kids is for the mother, but the parents of a divorced woman allow her to keep the girls only, and [she must] leave the boys out." (Older Woman, Dar'a, Dar'a)*

29 Col. "Gendered Impact of the Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on Women & Girls." 2023: 10.

30 "In areas under the control of non-State actors, the same Syrian legal frameworks are largely applied, with notable exceptions. For example, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)<sup>49</sup> is reported to rely on sharia law and jurisprudence (fiqh). While Syrian laws are applied in most areas under the self-administration in north-east Syria, in some areas, there have reportedly been attempts at enforcing new rules that promote gender equality." Col. "Gendered Impact of the Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on Women & Girls." 2023: 7.

### Kidnapping

*"[Women are exposed] to fear and panic due to the spread of kidnappings in the community." (Adolescent Boy, Aleppo, A'zaz)*

*"Recently, cases of kidnapping of minor girls and young women have increased. We have become afraid to walk alone in the street. Due to insecurity and chaos, we do not send our daughters anywhere alone, not even to schools. In some cases, when a girl is exposed to such a thing, she commits suicide to get rid of the blame of the community and the stigma that may stick to her." (Older Woman, Al Bab)*

*"It is the same for girls: sometimes farmers convince girls' parents [to let them work] and they gather a larger number of girls and take them to another governorate to work in agriculture without the presence of the parents, claiming that the wages are higher; here, cases of rape, kidnapping, and fraud occur." (Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*"No one can move between villages and cities, especially at night, due to kidnapping, rape, murder, and the requests for ransom money in order to release [the kidnapping victims]." (Adolescent Boy, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"Girls and women cannot move completely freely, due to the general conditions and lack of safety; there are many cases of kidnapping," (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tweina)*

*"Public cars are unsafe and kidnappings are happening." (Woman, Homs, Homs)*

*"[Women and girls] whose houses are far away are exposed to kidnapping or heat stroke. There were two female students who were going to school and a car came to take them to school, but the driver kidnapped them. There was also a female student who was walking alone in the street and she was also kidnapped." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Atareb)*

*"Taxis have become a red line, and people are afraid to get into the taxi, as they may be robbed or kidnapped. Girls are afraid, or they [are not allowed to] take a taxi alone, so they must go back walking." (Woman, Damascus, Damascus)*

reasons why women fail to leave abusive situations with their intimate partner. Denial of child custody is also employed as a threat by husbands, as a form of emotional violence. Women and girls have indicated that in order to stay with their children, they resign themselves to abusive situations and do not complain about IPV or seek divorce.

Reproductive Coercion and Abuse: While there is limited data available on reproductive rights and decision-making, there were several references to forced abortion, forced pregnancy, and lack of control over the timing and spacing of pregnancies. Following menopause or hysterectomy, women are at a higher risk of divorce or polygamy by their husbands. A couple cases were referenced of women and girls with mental disabilities being forced to undergo hysterectomies. A report also indicated that "unregistered girls as young as 12-14 years old are being married, with the parents sometimes claiming that their children, especially girls, are older. There have been anecdotal... reports of girls also being subjected to 'forced puberty,' that is, injecting young girls with hormones to induce puberty for the purposes of child marriage."<sup>31</sup>

### Denial of Child Custody among Widowed and Divorced Women and Girls in Syria

- In instances of divorce, death of the husband, or remarriage, children can be taken away from their mothers; some widowed and divorced women are pushed by their families to remarry
- Divorced and widowed women are often required to leave their children with their former husband, the family of their former/deceased husband, or their family, and are denied access by these guardians
- Women who remarry may be forced to give up custody of their children or may be denied access to them by their new husband
- In instances where the former husband takes custody of the children, they may not always stay with him, and can end up shuttled around to different family members

### Circumstances Under Which Women and Girls May Lose Child Custody

- Upon the death of or divorce from the husband; her children can be taken by the former husband or his family
- Upon the remarriage of the widowed/divorced woman or girl; her new husband or her family may require her to leave her children with other relatives or abandon them, or her children may be taken by the family of the deceased/former husband

## Other Forms of GBV

### Kidnapping

Kidnapping is widely reported to be increasing across all regions of Syria, linked to insecurity and the economic crisis. Contributing factors cited by respondents include the availability of weapons and the "presence of uncontrolled armed men" (Woman, Aleppo, Afrin), living or working in remote areas, long-distance commutes, and poor infrastructure with lack of adequate lighting. Women and girls and their wider communities have

31 Fletcher School & NRC. "Children on the Margins: The Impacts of Depriving Children of their Right to Nationality & Legal Identity in north-west Syria." 2023: 69.

expressed growing alarm regarding the recent spread of kidnappings. While the rise in insecurity has started to impact the movement of men and boys, women and girls remain the most affected by the threat of kidnapping, with adolescent girls at an especially high risk of being targeted. Fears of kidnapping limit the freedom of movement of women and girls and greatly increase restrictions imposed by families. While there is limited information available about the perpetrators of kidnappings or how these crimes take place, the issue was frequently highlighted during community consultations as a growing phenomenon across regions.

The risks of kidnapping are reported to be particularly high at night and when moving in between towns; however, incidents have been spilling over into the daytime and inside town borders. Risks are especially heightened in camps, places with overcrowded and mixed populations, and abandoned areas. Most women and girls can only move outside their homes when accompanied by a male family member or in groups, with zero mobility permitted at night. Due to their perceived vulnerability and potential for higher ransom amounts,<sup>32</sup> adolescent girls and young women are thought to be particularly targeted by kidnappers.

Women and girls across all regions of Syria have reported that they do not feel safe to move around and are spending more time in the house as a result. Fears of kidnapping have also significantly increased mobility restrictions imposed on women and girls by their husbands, fathers, parents, and other family members, leading to higher rates of school dropouts and child and forced marriage. The fear of kidnapping combined with subsequent family restrictions have worked together to reduce women's and girls' access to resources, opportunities, and services—such as WASH facilities. The increasing incidence of kidnapping was cited as a factor that limits women's and girls' access to community centres, schools, and work opportunities, particularly if travel or a lengthy commute is required. Some women and girls are no longer able to visit family members in other areas.

Women and girls who have experienced kidnapping and were subsequently released have gone on to be subjected to blame and stigma from their families and the communities. This includes risks of so-called 'honour' killings or suicide due to the associated 'shame.' In one documented case, a young woman was shot and killed by her brother two days after being ransomed and freed from kidnapping.<sup>33</sup>

## Tech-Facilitated GBV

Tech-facilitated GBV was frequently cited by women and girls across Syria as a rapidly growing issue. Access to and use of social media continues to spread within communities, particularly among younger generations and, with it, associated risks of cyberviolence. Incidents of cyberviolence affect all social groups and demographics, with disputes nowadays frequently transferred to online spaces: *"a fight takes place on the internet, and when they quarrel defamation is done through the internet"* (Adolescent Boy, Aleppo, Atareb). However, women and girls are the primary targets of tech-facilitated violence. Women and girls experience sexual harassment and exploitation online, as well as bullying, body-shaming, and defamation. Women and girls have explained that the forms of cyberviolence and strategies utilised by perpetrators are rapidly multiplying and evolving. Perpetrators of tech-facilitated GBV can include both known and unknown men and boys. Online

### Tech-Facilitated GBV

*"This year, cybercrimes have appeared and spread."* (Woman, Rural Damascus, Madaya)

*"Girls are being sexually exploited and young men are threatening them with their pictures or conversations with them."* (Adolescent Boy, Dar'a, Dar'a)

*"The danger of chatting platforms that make more profit the more women and girls participate, and make concessions by forcing them to send pictures and make video calls, taking advantage of their need for money and the absence of a supportive husband or family."* (Older Woman, Idlib, Dana)

*"Girls and women are exploited through mobile phones, where they are required to send pictures or audio clips in order to be included in groups and chat programmes on phones under the pretext that if they participate in these programmes, they will earn money."* (Older Woman, Idlib, Dana)

*"Girls and young women are blackmailed through social media. They are also deceived by work contracts via the internet, and in many cases, they are surprised when they are exploited [and manipulated into] carrying out immoral acts under threat and blackmail."* (Woman, Hama, As-Salamiyeh)

*"Girls' social media accounts are often hacked to steal their photos, which are then digitally manipulated onto other bodies. This has led us to enroll in a mobile maintenance course to avoid having to take our phones to repair shops where such theft could occur, leading to potential blackmail. The blackmailers sometimes start by demanding money, but often their demands escalate. For instance, after my aunt paid the initial sum, they coerced her into visiting their house for further exploitation. This pattern of escalating demands is particularly common among young teenagers."* (Woman, Dar'a, Hrak)

*"A girl innocently took a photo with a*

32 "Adolescent girls are reported to be a particular target for ransom since their 'value' to their families is high in relation to their honour and their potential for marriage" (CARE. "In the Eye of the Storm": Assessment of How Culture, Customs and Conflict are Deepening Protection Risks in north-west Syria." 2022: 18).

33 SNHR. "On International Women's Day the Devastating Earthquake that Hit Northwestern Syria Has Exacerbated the Dire Situation of Women." 2023: 20.

*man who had promised her marriage, but their relationship didn't work out because he kept delaying their engagement. When she moved on and got engaged to someone else, he retaliated by sending the photo to her father and her fiancé's family on the day of her engagement. This led to the cancellation of her engagement; she was beaten, confined to her home, and barred from continuing her college education. Her life was tragically upended due to this act of betrayal facilitated by social media, making her the victim and the one with all the losses in this situation." (Older Woman, Dar'a, Dar'a)*

bullying and rumours can also be perpetrated by other women and girls. Adolescent girls and young women are most at risk, as well as widowed and divorced women—particularly in camps, because of the greater likelihood of social isolation and financial vulnerability.

The misuse and hijacking of technology as a vehicle for cyberviolence is facilitated by the proliferation of online social media platforms, chat groups, games, and, increasingly, online income generation. The lack of monitoring and oversight measures, as well as other legal and regulatory loopholes, allow these platforms to be easily abused. Women and girls have described the increased exposure and easy access of children to pornographic, violent, and other inappropriate material online, which plays a role in influencing boys to be more violent. Additional contributing factors include the lack of awareness of women and girls and their parents about cyber-risks, lack of supervision by parents, addictive design of platforms and games, increasing social confinement of women and girls, and economic pressures. A growing addiction to social media has been observed, especially among youth. The potential for viral dissemination of potentially harmful, malicious, or incriminating materials has greatly heightened the reputational risks of women and girls and the consequences they may face.

Women and girls have highlighted that the approaches used by perpetrators of tech-facilitated GBV are numerous and ever-evolving. Some men and boys have acquired the phone numbers or online profile information of women and girls in order to harass them or ask for sexual favours, including men in positions of power, such as university professors, teachers, and persons supporting humanitarian assistance. Women and girls have also mentioned the risks of having their data stolen by individuals providing phone maintenance at local shops.

In other cases, boys or men who had dated or been in contact with women and girls have leveraged conversations and photos for the purposes of blackmail or retaliation. Perpetrators will threaten to release pictures to the family members of the victim or to publish them online in order to sexually exploit them (a form of sextortion). Online perpetrators use a variety of deceptive practices: In some cases, they pretended to be girls with fake profiles, infiltrating chat groups and channels exclusively for women and girls, and hacking pages in order to digitally modify photos. Perpetrators also use false advertising of products and employment or income-generating opportunities in order to connect with and lure in women and girls. A common approach of these perpetrators is to collect "evidence" against the target and then use it to extort her into paying money or engaging in sexual acts, often with an escalation of demands.

Perpetrators also frequently utilise common grooming techniques in order to form emotional connections and make women and girls vulnerable to exploitation. Women and girls working online face increased risks of tech-facilitated GBV. In some cases, women and girls have been deceived by false online work contracts and coerced into virtual or in-person transactional sex-work.



## In focus: tech-facilitated GBV in Syria

### Forms of tech-related GBV facilitated via online platforms and phones:



Cyberbullying and body-shaming

Defamation and spreading rumours online, including as a form of retaliation



Cyberstalking and harassment

Blackmail and extortion, in exchange for money or sexual favours



### Strategies used by perpetrators of tech-facilitated GBV



Posting deceptive job listings and fake work contracts, often framed as online work or other opportunities to earn money

Creating false advertising (e.g. weight-loss products)



Making requests for information, photos, audio clips, or videos, either to sign-up or enter a group, as part of an online game, or in the context of a relationship

Creating fake profiles pretending to be women and girls, either to communicate directly with potential victims or to infiltrate girls' channels and groups



Hacking girls' and women's pages and changing their photos or personal information

### Expansion of strategies used by perpetrators:



Collecting photos, videos, and conversations of women and girls, often without the other person's knowledge

Obtaining contact information of women and girls through the invasion of privacy and abuse of power



Providing false and deceptive information

Grooming and forming an emotional connection



Initiating blackmail or extortion with requests for money, and then escalating to sexual favours

Threatening to share photos, conversations, or personal information online, either by sending them to male relatives or by publishing more widely online



### GBV Risk Factors

*“Poverty, the [worsening] financial situation, displacement, and the earthquake are a big reason for the increase in cases of violence.” (Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Al-Dana)*

*“The rate of violence has increased due to ignorance, the poor economic situation, the lack of laws that hold [perpetrators] accountable, and the spread of drugs.” (Woman with Disabilities, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*“All participants [in the focus group] stated that there are things that increase the risk of exposure to violence and contribute to the increase in cases of violence—namely, poverty, frequent displacement, early marriage, and wars and earthquakes, and this has [all] been observed in recent months.” (Woman, Idlib, Jisr-Ash-Shugur)*

*“There is no freedom of movement within the community or to neighbouring regions, as there is a fear of being harassed and kidnapped and robbed... year after year, the situation worsens due to lack of security.” (Woman, Al-Hassakeh, Hassakeh)*

*“The rate of violence increased from last year due to bad living conditions, the expansion of [violent or extremist] factions, and lack of security and stability.” (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*“In the past, women and girls moved easily from one area to another, but it is different now due to many factors: chaos, lack of security, economic crisis, and lack of transportation, have all caused problems within the family, with violence moving from the community-level to the family-level. To me, it feels like we have gone back 50 years.” (Woman, As-Sweida, Salkhad)*

## GBV Risk Factors











### Key Findings on GBV Risk Factors

- **Risk factors tend to be amplified or compounded by other risks factors, contributing to heightened and multiplied risks of GBV.** Families often attempt to mitigate the risks of GBV through negative coping mechanisms, which ultimately lead to other forms of GBV and further reduce women's' and girls' freedom, choices, and access to services and opportunities.
- The **deepening economic crisis, growing insecurity, escalation in hostilities, earthquake, and increased displacement over the past year has exacerbated GBV both inside and outside of the home,** and greatly has reduced women's and girls' mobility and access to services, assistance, and opportunities.
- **Insecurity in the community is reported to be greatly increasing** and is severely constraining the mobility of women and girls, who face growing, daily risks of sexual violence and kidnapping. Women and girls often feel that there are no safe spaces for them to navigate.
- **Harmful gender norms and traditional gender roles and concepts, such as the concepts of 'honour' and 'shame,' disproportionately impact women and girls and contribute to incidents of GBV.** Women and girls who speak up, claim their rights, and access opportunities are often seen to be engaging in socially inappropriate behaviours, and can be exposed to punishment and stigma. The normalisation and social acceptance of men and boys exercising violence against women and girls, paired with the growing pressures and expectations placed on men and boys, has led to increasing incidences of GBV.
- **Social factors such as gender, age, marital status, displacement status, and ability are often compounded in a way that leaves specific groups of women and girls extremely vulnerable and at a greater risk of GBV.** These groups are often stigmatised and face additional limitations in terms of freedom of movement, access to resources and services, economic independence, and decision-making.

An increase in risk factors over the past year has contributed to and escalated GBV across Syria. The intersection of insecurity, economic crisis, disease outbreaks, displacement from earthquakes and hostilities, lack of decent and safe work opportunities, poor living conditions, and other risk factors have pushed many households to the brink, with women, girls, and marginalised groups most impacted. Due to these factors, women and girls have faced increasing vulnerability to the risks of GBV, coupled with a reduction in coping capacities when they do experience violence.

## Types of Risks Factors

### Key risk factors contributing to GBV in 2023, as identified by women and girls

	Prolonged conflict and, in some areas, ongoing and increased hostilities	
	Worsening economic crisis, poverty, lack of safe and decent work opportunities, and inability for households to meet basic needs	
	Rising prices/inflation; water, food, and fuel crisis; impact of climate change on agriculture	
	Growing insecurity, lack of law and order, militarisation of the general population, increased access to weapons, and rising rates of drug and alcohol use/addiction	
	Increasing Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) concerns and needs	
	Displacement related to the earthquakes, hostilities, and the return of displaced persons and communities	
	Poor, insecure, and crowded living conditions, particularly in collective shelters and camps	
	Reduced availability and high costs of safe transportation	
	Growing tensions and discrimination between different groups in the same communities	
	Lack of civil documentation, with women and girls more likely to face barriers	

### Earthquake and Displacement

*"During the earthquake period, we heard about cases of increased psychological and physical violence." (Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Dana)*

*"Violence increased after displacement and the earthquake due to tension and fear and the large numbers of people inside the shelters, which are uninhabitable tents. It increased due to different cultures and gathering in one place." (Woman, Aleppo, Afrin)*

*"[There has been] deprivation of education and food due to poverty and fear of children going out to the street. Violence increased due to the earthquake and poverty." (Woman, Aleppo, Afrin)*

*"Exploitation of women [happens] because they lost all their money after the earthquake and they need the necessities of life." (Woman, Aleppo, A'zaz)*

*"After the earthquake, communities became different, and the population became crowded; this limited the freedom of movement." (Female Caregiver, Aleppo, A'zaz)*

*"People with disabilities are treated badly and are bullied and belittled, as well as the elderly, and children are beaten and prevented from playing... It increased after the earthquake and war, and the temper of people has changed." (Woman, Aleppo, Afrin)*

### Earthquake and Displacement

The 2023 earthquakes worsened an already severe situation, leading to displacement and poor living conditions, insecurity, and poverty, all of which escalated GBV risks.<sup>34</sup> The loss of family members in the earthquakes (as well as from bombings and hostilities) has increased the number of unaccompanied, separated, and 'orphaned' children, as well as the number of woman-headed households. The earthquakes have also had a profound psychological impact on affected persons, increasing their levels of stress and fear.<sup>35</sup> Displaced women and girls living in temporary shelters have faced heightened GBV risks due to the overcrowded conditions, lack

34 WoS GBV AoR. "An Overview of Gender-Based Violence Risks in the 2023 Earthquake Response: Advocacy Brief." 2023: 2-3.

35 Equity & Empowerment Organization. "The Effects of the Earthquake on Syrian Women Throughout Syria from a Feminist Perspective: Policy Paper." 2023: 8.

### Insecurity

*"There is no sense of security; women cannot walk alone in the street." (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*"[We are deprived] of moving freely in the darkness; we cannot go out [because there are young men with alcohol or pills]." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tweina)*

*"Regarding safety, there is no safety, and there is no longer security at all. Safety on the road does not exist." (Adolescent Girl, Rural Damascus, Sahnaya)*

*"Some families have concerns about safety issues facing women and adolescent girls, such as burglary, rape, sexual harassment, drugs, and insecurity [due to] customs and traditions. In this place, such things are permissible." (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*"Women and girls do not have complete freedom of movement as men and boys [do], especially in the absence of a car or when living in camps away from service centres, cities, and educational centres, due to the customs and traditions imposed by society and the lack of safety, due to the spread of multiple phenomena after displacement, such as harassment, kidnapping, and rape." (Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)*

*"Women in general [widows, divorced, adolescent girls, and even displaced women] are exposed to many types of violence: physical, psychological, verbal, social. And they feel uncomfortable and unsafe at the moment." (Woman, Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa)*

of privacy, mixed populations, and the insecurity of living in tents. This includes facing challenges when attempting to use latrines, bathe, or take care of personal and menstrual hygiene. Earthquake-related damage to facilities and heightened gaps in capacity have further increased barriers for women and girls to access essential services. Displaced communities also face a lack of work opportunities and rising prices. Divorced and widowed women and girls, women and girls with disabilities, older women, and unaccompanied and separated children are increasingly perceived as a burden within their families or communities considering the scarcity of resources and living spaces. Displaced women and girls in particular have less access to private space, which can play an important role in mitigating violence. Community tensions in camps have increased, with reports of bullying and harassment of displaced women and girls also by host communities.

Sexual violence was especially heightened during the period directly after the earthquake, due to the widespread movement of people and the difficult and insecure living conditions. Insecurity in collective shelters, coupled with the remote locations of shelters and lack of transportation, has limited the movement of women and girls displaced by the earthquakes, in addition to restricting their access to schools and work. Because of the need to secure basic goods and necessities, earthquake-affected women and girls are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and SEA by those involved in providing humanitarian assistance. The stress created by the earthquake and the related economic pressures have also exacerbated domestic and family violence in households and have increased the incidence of child and forced marriage as a negative coping mechanism employed to 'protect' women and girls in mixed-gender settings.

### Insecurity

Women and girls across Syria have stressed that insecurity is drastically increasing, and they face a continual lack of safety that has affected all domains of their lives. Factors contributing to insecurity include hostilities; lack of law and order, and impunity for perpetrators of violence; lack of adequate lighting and electrical outages; limited availability of transport; the proliferation of weapons, drugs, and alcohol; the economic crisis and lack of jobs; and remote and unsafe aid distribution locations. In Deir Ez-Zor and north-west Syria, the increased risks of shelling and shooting in 2023<sup>36</sup> further affected the mobility of women and girls. Women and girls across all regions of the country have experienced fears related to movement outside the home, due to smugglers, bandits, armed men and groups, and persons under the influence of drugs and alcohol. Theft is widespread, with women and girls and persons with disabilities perceived by perpetrators to be particularly vulnerable targets. A greater number of fights have also been reported due to diminished resources, including at distribution sites, with disputes escalating more quickly because of the availability of weapons.

Insecurity is particularly heightened at night and when travelling between locations or in remote or abandoned areas. There are also greater security risks at checkpoints (particularly in north-east and north-west Syria or when moving between areas under different control) and near borders (north-west Syria). However, women and girls have also faced growing safety risks when moving about locally during the daytime: *"there are many thefts in broad daylight, especially if we go out alone; there is no safety, neither day nor night. I mean, when I go out, I must have one of my sisters with me" (Older Woman, Idlib, Maaret Tamrin)*. Camps and collective shelters are reported to be particularly insecure places for women and girls, due to overcrowding, mixed populations, and lack of proximity to services.

36 UNSC. "As Regional Violence Spills Over to Syria, Special Envoy, Briefing Security Council, Urges De-escalation, Refocus on Country's Political Process." 2023.

The earthquake and subsequent displacement further exacerbated this insecurity: *"I do not feel safe due to change of housing, as I do not know anyone. Men feel more secure, they can protect themselves. We never felt safe because we are new to the region and we cannot move freely, but men can move more because they are strong and because of the community's view of them"* (Woman, Aleppo, Al-Bab). In general, most women and girls have lost all ability to move outside the home at night, including facing difficulties in safely accessing essential facilities like latrines. In some areas, insecurity has also affected the ability of humanitarian and GBV actors to reach women, girls, and communities in need.<sup>37</sup>

## Economic Crisis, Food Insecurity, and Lack of Safe and Dignified Work Opportunities

Poverty resulting from the deepening economic crisis has increased GBV risks for women and girls across Syria.

Women and girls have noted that *"the rate of violence is constantly increasing from last year, due to the lack of materials and the high cost of living"* (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah). One woman stated that the economic situation facing households in Syria is *"worse than the war days"* (Woman, Homs, Homs). Basic necessities such as food, water, fuel, hygiene materials, clothes, and school supplies are unaffordable for most families, significantly impacting women, girls, and marginalised groups. In some cases, female-headed households and other vulnerable households have taken out loans to pay for medical costs and other expenses (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Areesheh), with amplified risks of exploitation linked to debt. Families are often forced to share small living spaces due to the inability to afford rent, exacerbating violence at home.

Economic pressures have contributed to GBV both inside and outside of the home: *"the violence is still the same violence we faced last year, but it has increased exponentially due to poor financial conditions and increased prices"* (Woman, Idlib, Dana). Financial constraints on households are correlated with increases in school drop-out rates, increased cases of child and forced marriage among adolescent girls, and growing rates of child labour among girls. Informants have reported growing tensions in families, with husbands often lashing out at their wives for *"needing money,"* food, or household items. The strained economic situation has contributed to the deprivation or denial of salaries or allowances for some women and girls by their husbands and other family members, as well as the denial of inheritance to women and girls. Widowed and divorced women and girls, unaccompanied and separated girls, women and girls with disabilities, and older women are frequently viewed as a 'burden' and face growing neglect and abuse. As households struggle to meet their needs, there have also been reports of increasing sexual exploitation, SEA, survival sex, and sex-work,<sup>38</sup> including online. Economic pressures have also contributed to rises in theft, drug addiction, and insecurity in communities, which further increases the risks of kidnapping and sexual violence for women and girls.

Women and girls face significant risks of GBV in the workplace, with employers often taking advantage of their situation via various forms of exploitation, including sexual exploitation—in addition to the dangers women face when travelling to and from work. Adolescent girls engaged in child labour are particularly exposed to GBV. Restricted mobility due to insecurity and lack of transport have also impacted the ability of people to seek employment opportunities—especially among women.

### Economic Crisis, Food Insecurity, and Lack of Safe and Dignified Work Opportunities

*"Men are under psychological and economic pressure due to the deteriorating living situation. The man beats others because he is angry that he doesn't have money."* (Older Woman, Lattakia, Lattakia)

*"At home, verbal and physical violence [are mostly directed] toward girls and women. The greatest impact is on the children and the wife, [precipitated by] high prices."* (Woman, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)

*"Men do not find work and take out the pressure on women and children."* (Woman, Idlib, Dana)

*"Sometimes, due to poverty, families marry off their daughters to reduce expenses. Unfortunately, these young girls may only live with their new husbands for a month or two before suffering abuse and facing divorce at just 16 or 17 years old. In my view, those who are impoverished are particularly vulnerable to this kind of violence."* (Woman, Idlib, Ariha)

*"There are factors that increase the exposure of women and girls to violence and exploitation, namely, living conditions and the inability to secure the basic needs of the family; they are exploited by employers and are subjected to harassment and sex for money."* (Man Caregiver of Woman/Girl with Disabilities, Al-Hasakeh, Malikiyah)

*"Violence happens because of financial pressures and lack of job opportunities for women, which makes men exploit them and force them to do things they don't want to do."* (Woman, Aleppo, Jebel Saman)

<sup>37</sup> GBV experts, north-east Syria and north-west Syria.

<sup>38</sup> WoS GBV AoR. "Tipsheet: Sector GBV Risks Mitigation Mainstreaming Priorities and Commitments: Health." 2023: 1.

### Poor and Crowded Living Conditions

*"Sometimes, problems occur due to the presence of a large number of family members in the same house or tent, as severe overcrowding inside the tent causes more disputes, and there are disagreements about the basics of living inside the house or the tent." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"In the post-earthquake period, overcrowded places such as markets, camps, and shelters increased violence and harm. Overcrowded places and having to share facilities like bathrooms in camps and shelters increase the risks." (Woman with a Disability, Aleppo, Jarablus)*

*"The camp is mixed, and a lot of problems occur as a result of overcrowding, shared bathrooms, and the short distance between tents causes many problems that may escalate to killing; it all leads to many problems." (Man, Aleppo, Afrin)*

*"Women and girls do not feel safe or stable, and we are deprived of privacy because the whole family is in two very small rooms adjacent to the neighbour's house." (Woman, Idlib, Dana)*

*"In the evening, when darkness falls in the camp, especially with lack of electricity most of the time, harassment increases among adolescents, so many families are forced to stay in their tents and not go out unless necessary." (Male Caregiver of a Woman/Girl with Disabilities, Al-Hasakeh, Malikiyah)*

*"What increases the danger of violence are places where there is darkness, lack of lighting, destroyed places... the family home where many families live together may face problems, as everyone wants to intervene." (Adolescent Girl, Rural Damascus, Duma)*

### Drug and Alcohol Use and Addiction

*"There must always be someone with me, because it is not safe outside and there is kidnapping, and there are deviant people who take pills even in the daytime, and these people are dangerous and they have increased in numbers these days." (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

The lack of decent work opportunities, in combination with the depressed economic situation, has severely increased the vulnerability of households and their reliance on negative coping strategies. These factors have negatively impacted the ability of women and girls to meet their basic needs and heightened their risks of sexual exploitation, SEA, child and forced marriage, and child labour. Limited resources also pose barriers for women and girls when it comes to accessing GBV services and humanitarian assistance; for example, they may have difficulties affording the transportation necessary to access these services.

### Poor and Crowded Living Conditions

Overcrowding and poor living conditions have exacerbated violence against women and girls in Syria. These conditions are most commonly found in the post-earthquake collective shelters, and more widely in other camps and "residential complexes." Living spaces often house a large number of household members, due to high rent prices and a lack of available homes. These spaces often lack privacy, leading to dignity concerns for women and girls, and heightened risks of sexual violence: *"it is possible for violence to occur at home if there is more than one family living in the same place and using the same public facilities, as this leads to embarrassment and psychological and verbal violence. Women and girls do not feel safe or stable, and we are deprived of privacy because the whole family is in two very small rooms adjacent to the neighbour's house"* (Woman, Idlib, Dana). These cramped spaces escalate tensions and interference between household members, increasing the likelihood of IPV/domestic and family violence and restrictions on women and girls.

In collective shelters, unfamiliar persons from different population groups often live in close quarters, with unrelated persons of mixed genders living 'adjacent' to other groups or families. The inability to secure tents, due to a lack of doors and locks, often causes women and girls to feel unsafe: *"living in camps causes a feeling of fear, while living in houses gives a feeling of security, due to the presence of windows and doors that can be closed when needed, and which can prevent the entry of strangers, animals, and insects"* (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Al-Bab). Shared bathrooms in collective shelters, camps, and temporary housing are also a source of tension and increase the risks of sexual violence: *"in most of the camps, the blocks of bathrooms are far from the tents, and there are widely known stories of sexual violence; this is the only type [of gender-based violence] that no one can mention, because of the scandal, and the reason for this violence is the war and the camps"* (Woman, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin). The interruption of electricity along roads and in latrines have also limited movement during the night, particularly for women and girls. Shelters and camps are located far from cities, making it difficult and dangerous for women and girls to access services. These living conditions have greatly contributed to increased risks of sexual harassment, rape, and other forms of sexual violence, as well as restrictions and child and forced marriage imposed by families.

### Drug and Alcohol Use and Addiction

Growing drug and alcohol addiction was identified by women and girls across Syria as a significant risk factor contributing to GBV. The increasing number of men and boys using drugs and alcohol, particularly adolescent boys and young men, has significantly increased abuse in homes and communities: *"drug abuse is a major cause of the increasing cases of violence"* (Man, Aleppo, Jarablus). Alcohol and drugs are a negative coping mechanism used "to escape reality." Poverty, job scarcity, exploitation at work, barriers to continuing education, and isolation are all contributing factors to addiction, as well as the peer pressure to 'prove' one's masculinity. Boys engaged in child labour and recruited by armed groups are particularly at risk, and conversely, drug use is also a driver for boys to be recruited by armed groups or criminal gangs, to be able to afford their habit.

Addiction can lead drug and alcohol users to resort to theft and physical assault, further increasing the insecurity and GBV risks faced by women and girls outside of the home. Women and girls cited incidents of rape when moving around the community and have expressed fears of sexual violence perpetrated by men and adolescents under the influence of drugs. The movement of women and girls is particularly limited at night and near abandoned buildings, public parks, and alleys: *“men have become monsters and are using drugs now. We only move within our neighbourhoods but other than that, we don’t dare”* (Older Woman, Dar’a, Dar’a). Families have referenced drug-related fears and safety risks as a reason for limiting the mobility of girls and restricting their access to schools. Greater drug and alcohol use is also directly correlated with increasing IPV/domestic and family violence within the household: *“violence [is sometimes] due to drug abuse and the impact of drugs on family relations; when the head of the family uses drugs, it reflects negatively on his relationship with his wife and children”* (Man, Aleppo, Jarablus). There have been growing reports of abuse by husbands toward their wives and children while under the influence of drugs and alcohol, and some women have taken on dual roles within the household to provide for the family, due to their husband’s addiction.

### Humanitarian Assistance Funding Cuts and Lack of GBV/SEA Risk-mitigation Measures

The inability of families to meet basic needs and the decreased funding for humanitarian assistance have increased women’s and girls’ exposure to SEA and contributed to IPV/domestic and family violence. The reduction and closure of WGSS, mobile teams, and other facilities that served as entry points for GBV services have posed barriers for GBV survivors who are attempting to access support, and has been linked to the increased exposure of women and girls to violence.

Negative coping mechanisms, such as child and forced marriage, child labour (including among adolescent girls), and survival/transactional sex, have also increased as a consequence of the economic struggle and the reduced availability of humanitarian aid.

This situation, coupled with increasing prices, has heightened the needs of households, particularly in camps, due to the lack of work opportunities and dependency on assistance: *“there is a scarcity in the provision of humanitarian assistance, including distributions... [it] is one of the reasons that increases the suffering of the displaced in the camps, which leads to a rise and escalation of many protection risks”* (Adolescent Boy, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa). Women and girls in host communities stressed that they are also increasingly unable to meet basic needs due to the economic crisis, yet they are typically not included in distributions. Underserved areas have been identified by community respondents, with certain camps, cities, and neighbourhoods not being supported by assistance. In some cases, humanitarian actors have struggled to access certain areas, due to security concerns or restrictions, including delays in transporting and delivering assistance in the immediate and intermediate aftermath of the earthquake.<sup>39</sup> Community respondents described how some distributions are being conducted in remote or unsafe locations that are difficult to reach. These barriers pose difficulties for women, girls, and vulnerable groups looking to access assistance, due to their more restricted movements and limited transportation options. Additionally, mobbing, disputes, and fights have been escalating at these distribution points: *“the shortage in assistance makes women more vulnerable to violence, especially during [aid] distribution or while distributing water to people”* (Man, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah). Women and girls face sexual harassment due to overcrowding and mixed-gender

*“[Some people] may steal and drink alcohol, or become addicted to narcotic substances like energy beverages sold in stores within the camp. [Some of these people] are exploiting older youths or harassing or raping women or girls because they need money and are looking for pleasures to [satisfy] their instincts.”* (Woman, Aleppo, Jebel Saman)

*“A large percentage of boys are addicted to drugs, and for this reason, parents prevent their daughters from going to school.”* (Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)

*“Domestic violence [is sometimes] caused by drugs, and there are cases of rape [resulting from drug use].”* (Man, Aleppo, Afrin)

*“[The risk of GBV increases] if the husband is drinking alcohol or using drugs. I know that my neighbour was being beaten every day by her addicted husband... drug abuse is a main cause of violence, as the addicted person will lose his mind and will do anything—breaking everything, hitting, and stealing—in order to get drugs or pills.”* (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)

### Humanitarian Assistance Funding Cuts and Lack of GBV/SEA Risk-mitigation Measures

*“Stopping the distribution of the parcels caused us great distress and problems in the family; when we ask our husbands to bring us any of the foodstuffs (oil, rice, bulgur), they start screaming and sometimes beating us, because they do not have the ability to buy them, because of the lack of work, cheap labour wages, and high prices.”* (Woman, Idlib, Dana)

*“Places [where people go to get water can increase risks]... there are many cases of violence against women and young people. Inhabitants fight and sometimes beating one another due to the lack of water.”* (Man, Al-Hasakeh, Tweina)

*“Support during the earthquake period was provided at random. There is a lot of discrimination during the distribution [of humanitarian assistance], especially against the displaced, disabled, poor, and elderly. I have been displaced for 12 years, and I did not receive humanitarian assistance, and we were abused while demanding it.”* (Woman, Aleppo, Atareb)

39 Syria Direct. “After the Earthquake, a Wave of Gender-Based Violence in Syria.” 2023: 9.

*"At distribution points, there is sexual violence, physical and verbal... women are exploited in return for service and aid." (Woman, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*"In places of [humanitarian] assistance, females are sexually exploited in exchange for food rations or shortened waiting time." (Adolescent Girl, Rural Damascus, Sahnaya)*

*"At times, the protection policy is not enforced during the distribution of humanitarian aid, leading to instances of exploitation, particularly of adolescent girls. For example, there have been recorded cases where employees have demanded favors in exchange for aid. This often occurs because the victims lack awareness of exploitation and harassment, do not understand the protection policies in place, and are unsure how to report such incidents. Many adolescent girls, fearing the loss of humanitarian assistance or stigmatization by their communities, which often blame women for their own harassment and exploitation, end up complying with these demands." (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

### **Gender Norms: Focus on Masculinity**

*"In the past, these types of violence against women did not exist, because the financial situation was different, and men could find jobs and secure the house expenses. But now men cannot secure the needs of the house because of the lack of job opportunities, and this why they release their pressure using violence against women." (Woman, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)*

*"We are prone to strike at any time, due to financial pressure, and financial distress is the basis of violence that is practiced against us as men. When we return home, we practice it against our children and wives, and we compare our previous and current situations." (Man, As-Sweida, Salkhad)*

*"What increases violence is the lack of work or places to go for adolescents, which makes them practice violence on their younger brothers or their mothers or sisters (they told us that one adolescent boy broke his mother's hand). What increases violence is when adolescents imitate each other in practicing violence." (Adolescent Boy, Al-Hasakeh, Tel Tamer)*

situations at distribution sites, at times having to pass through large groups of young and adolescent men in order to reach sites. There have also been reports by community members of rampant nepotism, favouritism, and discrimination. These factors have contributed to an increasingly hostile environment for women, girls, and vulnerable groups, both at distribution centres and when commuting to and from these sites, with heightened risks of SEA, other sexual violence, and exclusion from assistance.

The lack of SEA and GBV risk mitigation measures represent a humanitarian failure in implementing standards and strategies to protect women and girls from the risks of sexual violence. Women and girls have described numerous and widespread incidents and risks of SEA while accessing services, receiving assistance, or using facilities provided or managed by humanitarian agencies, especially in collective shelters following the earthquake.

A growing challenge in Syria is the large number and variety of actors involved in providing assistance to communities. This included non-traditional actors who are not necessarily participating in humanitarian coordination and who may not be in alignment with humanitarian standards, such as private individuals, associations, authorities, violent/extremist factions, and armed groups. Community members and 'volunteers' are sometimes engaged in the support and delivery of humanitarian assistance, despite their lack of knowledge and training on basic humanitarian and GBV principles. On many occasions, committees and leaders engaged in humanitarian assistance have been primarily composed of men, who often uphold discriminatory beliefs and gender norms, creating the potential for unsafe and inaccessible assistance conditions for women and girls. Women and GBV experts have also identified the need for further engagement and training of privately or publicly run spaces, such as shelters, orphanages, and youth centres. See also: *Humanitarian Sectors*.

### **Gender Norms: Focus on Masculinity**

Traditional concepts of masculinity<sup>40</sup> and the expectations placed on men and boys in Syria also contribute to GBV. Men and boys face pressures to provide financially for their families—demands that have become increasingly difficult to fulfil, due to the country's economic circumstances. Women and girls have described how men "return home angry" when they cannot secure resources, and frequently take out their frustrations by beating their wives and children, or by shouting, spewing insults, breaking things, or storming out of the home. Household disputes over expenses have skyrocketed, with men often resorting to anger and abuse when women "ask for the smallest of necessities" (*Woman, Idlib, Dana*). Lack of decent work opportunities, long working hours, exploitative conditions at work, and needing to support an increased number of household members have all further fuelled tensions. Women have indicated that men's confidence is negatively affected when they are unable to find work or provide for their family, and are therefore unable to live up to their socially expected role as the breadwinner. These women described how men often relieve this pressure and try to retain their sense of control by inflicting violence on others: "a man feels his masculinity when he practices violence against women" (*Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tel Tamer*). Men's sense of masculinity is further challenged when women in their households need to enter the workforce.

Moreover, given the traditional perception of men as "strong," they also

40 "The mythology of gender dominant within cultural representations of males, reflecting normative behavioural ideals for males in a culture in a particular period. Such representations promote stereotypical masculine heterosexual values. Also, those men who exemplify, perform, and perpetuate the mythology of dominant masculinity, who are implicated in the subordination of women and of men who represent marginalised masculinities." Oxford Reference. "Hegemonic Masculinity."



feel entitled to exert “male control and domination” over women and children: *“violence increases because the strong hit the weak and the weak are silent and do not complain” (Adolescent Boy, Idlib, Ariha)*. Participants in FGDs described how customs and society have taught and encouraged violence against women and girls, at times with incitement from other women, such as mothers-in-law. Violence has been normalised as a way for men to release stress and demonstrate their strength. Men and boys will take out their “feelings of inferiority” on those who have less power in the household — for example, after experiencing mistreatment by their employers. Women and girls have described how communities *“justify males’ every action” (Woman, Dar’a, Hrak)* as “right” and blame women. Women are expected to obey the authority of their male family members and not defend themselves against violence. Other factors cited by women and girls as feeding into harmful norms on masculinity include *“applying religion in a wrong way” (Adolescent Girl, Rural Damascus, Sahnaya)*, “ignorance,” poverty, traditions, and men’s fears of women becoming stronger or more empowered. One woman shared an example of how *“men will be sitting with each other, and they start making fun of one of them, saying that his wife is in control of the house, and so he goes home and beats her just to prove to them that he is a man” (Woman, Dar’a, Hrak)*. According to social norms, men are supposed to be strong and not show weakness, which also leads to violence against men and boys who are perceived as weak or feminine.

Participants in the focus groups also spoke about how the normalisation of violence and widespread militarisation have affected adolescent boys and young men. Boys are exposed to violence in their families early on, as well as from their peers and on social media, and will then *“imitate friends and internet games” (Woman, Dar’a, Hrak)*. Many boys are raised to have *“infinite powers and entitlement” (Adolescent Girl, Rural Damascus, Sahnaya)*, which includes authority over their sisters. The permission they are given to beat their sisters, and sometimes even their mothers, later transfers into violence against their wives. Boys experience and learn physical and verbal violence from their fathers, older siblings, classmates, and employers. They are often bullied if they do not conform to the expected norms of masculinity. For example, *“if they are obedient to a woman” (Woman, Aleppo, Jebel Saman)* or they do not *“smoke or quarrel with other boys,” boys can be accused by their peers of being “like girls” (Woman, Aleppo, Jebel Saman)*. In one FGD, boys described bullying directed against another boy who was perceived to be transgressing traditional gender norms, due to having long hair and being *“weak like a girl.” Boys are also vulnerable to recruitment by armed or criminal groups, including for the purposes of drug trafficking, in order to “prove their masculinity... by taking up arms and obtaining financial gain” (Older Woman, Idlib, Dana)*. One woman explained that *“boys engage in hostilities and join military forces because they receive higher salaries than other jobs, and because of the child’s curiosity to carry weapons and his sense of masculinity” (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*.

Respondents described how men often respond to problems and violence with more violence. Easy access to weapons and heightened tensions have led fights to escalate quickly. Increases in so-called ‘honour’ killings and the femicide of women and girls have been observed.

## Social Identity Factors

Various social factors have created layers of vulnerability and compounded risks; these factors include considerations like age, gender, disability, marital status, and displacement status. Across all these categories of identity, gender is a common social denominator that greatly compounded an individual’s risks. Adolescent girls, widowed and divorced women and girls, women and girls with disabilities, older women, and displaced women and girls all face unique and heightened risks of social judgment and stigma, isolation, and violence. GBV in the domestic environment

*“There are some boys who even bully and beat their mothers, and this is a result of the poor upbringing of the child...they promote the role of the male over the female from a young age, saying, ‘you are a man and you are the owner of the house,’ so the son bullies his sisters and even his mother until they lose control over this son. This is caused by poor community upbringing, and by giving boys limitless powers and turning him into a man who control his sisters and mother, and then his wife, children, and daughters.” (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*“The man has not changed, because of the customs and traditions that support him. A child who sees his father abusing his mother will decide to beat his wife in the future, just like his father.” (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh)*

*“When the boy is raised in an atmosphere full of violence, he will grow up to be violent as well.” (Older Woman, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)*

*“In addition to beating children and preventing them from playing, [young boys are prevented from] expressing feelings and they are not allowed to cry because, in their mentality, [this will make him] a strong man in the future.” (Woman, Aleppo, Afrin)*

### Social Identity Factors

*“Everyone is exposed to violence, but vulnerable groups like children, PWDs, widows and divorcees, elderly women, and girls are more exposed because they [often] have no family, community, or laws to protect them from violence, so they cannot mitigate it.” (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hassakeh)*

*“For the most vulnerable groups in the community, such as PWDs, elderly women, widows, divorced women, and adolescent girls and boys, they are the most vulnerable to marginalisation and the denial of opportunities to participate and express their opinions on topics that concern them.” (Adolescent Boy, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*“Women with disabilities, widowed and divorced women and girls, women aged 60 years and over, and displaced women are more likely to be asked for something in exchange for humanitarian assistance, because they*

*are more vulnerable in the community and usually do not have the strength to defend themselves, as they do not know their rights and are more afraid of the feeling of shame. Therefore, they are exploited more than others.” (Woman with Disabilities or Caregiver, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

affects women and girls regardless of their marital status. Women and girls with multiple intersecting vulnerability factors have a greater likelihood of experiencing GBV, and face steeper barriers to seeking support. As resources continued to deplete, these groups face growing risks of neglect, abandonment, and exposure to negative and dangerous coping mechanisms. *See also: Affected Groups.*

### Factors Informing and Reinforcing Ideas of ‘Masculinity’ in Syria and Contributing to GBV



Frustration generated by a lack of jobs and economic opportunities, resulting in an inability to provide for the family



Lack of awareness and community acceptance of GBV, including incitement to violence by other family members



Local customs, traditions, and the influence of certain religious interpretations or authorities



Exposure to violence at an early age from their fathers/parents, peers, and social media



Normalisation of violence exercised by the ‘stronger’ against the ‘weaker’



Lack of community centres and positive outlets, particularly among unemployed and underemployed men and boys, as well as limited MHPSS services



Easy access to weapons, growing influence of drugs and alcohol, and radicalisation and recruitment by armed groups and criminal factions



Bullying and other consequences faced by men and boys who fail to conform to traditional norms related to masculinity



Fear of losing power as a result of women's empowerment

## Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

### Key findings on coping mechanisms and resilience

- **The resilience of women and girls in Syria is reported to have been significantly reduced in 2023**, due to the compounded stress factors placed on these women, girls, and their communities. **As resources and options became increasingly scarce, the use of negative coping mechanisms continues to increase, heightening risks of GBV.**
- **The majority of women and girls continue to stay silent when experiencing GBV**, due to the widespread fear of disclosing violence and seeking support. **Key barriers to reporting and disclosure include fear of shame or retributive violence, the tendency of families and communities to blame survivors, and the normalisation of violence within the community, lack of awareness of rights and how to ask for help, limited recourse to obtain legal protection, fear of losing child custody, and a lack of viable options.** Women and girls have highlighted significant barriers to reporting sexual violence and GBV within the home.
- **Common coping strategies for women and girls tend to vary** according to their identify factors and circumstances, as well as by the type of GBV, the perpetrator, and the location of violence. Women and girls **often exercise multiple and interrelated coping strategies.**
- **Common coping strategies** reported by women and girls **include avoidance of the perpetrator, in an attempt to decrease the level of tension or temporarily minimise their exposure; going to their family's home; and talking to a female family member or friend.** Some women and girls also **sought support at WGSS and community centres**, which were identified as spaces in which they could find relief and support.
- **Increased awareness and understanding of GBV among women and girls has helped them to recognise violence and seek services.** However, in light of the worsening context, **barriers to disclosing violence and seeking support continue to grow.**

### Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

*"[My coping mechanisms include] crying, leaving the house, asking for help from my relatives, going to my family's house." (Older Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hassakeh)*

*"[A woman can try to cope with GBV by] developing her self-confidence and hobbies and turning to protection centres or to a trusted older person to help reduce violence." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Atareb)*

*"Violence cannot be something that we get accustomed to, but it is tolerated due to the lack of available solutions for considerations like shelter and financial support. It is also tolerated due to pressures from families." (Woman, Aleppo, Jebel Saman)*

*"There are no new strategies, especially as living and economic conditions are getting worse. We rarely see positive adaptive mechanisms being employed by women, especially with the ongoing economic and security deterioration." (GBV Expert, north-east Syria)*

*"In the past, when people experienced violence, they used to think it was normal for women to be subjected to it. But now, girls and women are capable of at least recognising their own situation, acknowledging that they are experiencing violence, and potentially seeking help or services." (GBV Expert, Syria GoS areas).*

Most women and girls in Syria remain silent about their experiences with GBV, because of the steep barriers to disclosing violence and seeking assistance. Key barriers identified by women and girls include the fear of more violence, survivor-blaming and the resulting shame, lack of awareness of their rights and available services, and a general sense of hopelessness. Other fears include losing custody or access to children, so-called 'honour' killings, and femicide.<sup>41</sup> These fears and risks all deter women from speaking out. Despite the risks, women and girls continue to fight to survive and overcome GBV, identifying and developing strategies for mitigating and reducing their exposure to GBV. Most of the mechanisms employed by women and girls are enumerated and explained below.

<sup>41</sup> Syrians for Truth & Justice. "Syria: 185 Cases of 'Honor Killing' since 2019." 2022: 4.

## Types of Coping Strategies

Types and Examples of GBV Coping Strategies Reported by Women and Girls in Syria\*

Seeking Support from Others	De-escalation and Avoidance	Seeking Services	Confronting Violence	Changing Behaviour or Environment	Self-Care and Empowerment	Coping Strategies with High Risks
Family support/ temporarily returning to their family's home	Self-isolation and avoidance of the perpetrator	Accessing WGSS	Safety planning	Being accompanied by another person while moving	Find comfort and joy through other outlets (e.g. hobbies, religious practices, housework, visits to family and friends, social media)	Dropping out of school
Support from peers (e.g. friends, neighbours)	Temporarily leaving the home	GBV services (most often through WGSS entry-point)	Dialogue, problem-solving, or mediation	Relocation	Increasing awareness, empowerment, and skills (e.g. through participation in WGSS activities)	Child and forced marriage
Community support, including informal justice and redress mechanisms	Staying silent	Psychosocial Support (PSS) and Protection services	Speaking up and/ or self-defence	Divorce		Begging and other forms of child labour
		Health services		Changing dress or appearance		Running away
		Legal, justice, and security services				Joining armed factions (in certain areas)
						Survival/ transactional sex
						Inflicting violence on others (e.g., children)

\* Some of the coping mechanisms listed may fall under more than one category.

### Staying Silent

*"Women are the ones who most often keep silent in order to protect the family." (Woman, Al-Hassakeh, Hassakeh)*

*"[Women often] remain silent due to fear or threats from their husband that they will be deprived of their children or that they will not have a supporter and a home to protect themselves after divorce." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh)*

*"At the present time, women are accustomed to violence, because they cannot find a home to receive them if they leave their husband's house. Women and girls have surrendered to violence." (Older Woman, Idlib, Dana)*

*"[Women and girls are] keeping silent, because the girls in our community are not able to discuss these issues with parents or defend themselves; girls often wish that their parents were aware." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Afrin)*

### Staying Silent

Across all regions of Syria, the majority of women and girls stay silent when faced with GBV, due to their fears of experiencing even more violence and stigma. Because of the steep barriers to disclosure and many potentially negative repercussions, there is consensus among women and girls that most cases of GBV go unreported and remain "hidden." While some women and girls turn to a supportive person or seek GBV services, the vast majority feel that they have no option but to accept violence: *"I cannot confront the violence to which I am subjected; I remain silent and keep everything that hurts me in my heart, so that I am not exposed to more violence"* (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Aleppo, Afrin). Because of the fact that the worsening economic conditions and stressors of the past year having reduced coping capacities, women and girls face high barriers to confronting and disclosing violence.

Women and girls have reported facing difficulties when seeking to disclose sexual violence, due to the shame and scandal associated with sexual violence and other forms of GBV. It is also not considered socially acceptable to report IPV and domestic and family violence, as it is seen as taboo to report members of one's own family. Women and girls who file complaints of abuse or seek divorce from their husbands can risk losing access to their children, leading many women and girls to endure IPV "for the children," so that they can remain "in the home" with them. Women and girls have underscored the lack of viable options available to them following the disclosure of GBV, due to their financial dependency and lack of a safe place to go.

Moreover, some have noted that by disclosing or leaving a violent situation, they would only be moving from one violent environment to another — for example, transitioning from abuse at the hands of their husband to abuse at the hands of their parents and/or brothers. Others who have left a violent situation have described how the violence has been replaced by the stigma and abuse they face as divorced women. In addition to having poor, limited options and choices, women who report violence can also face severe repercussions. Respondents have described common scenarios in which women and girls who speak out then face worse violence: *“I didn’t hear about anyone who stood up to violence and benefitted from doing so. On the contrary, the violence increases and their situation becomes worse”* (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Hajin).

Another woman described *“a success story of a girl who was exposed to violence and decided to complain to the judiciary system; but after the violence ended, she was exploited for money whenever she wanted to receive humanitarian aid, because everyone in the community hated that she resorted to the judiciary system when she was exposed to violence”* (Woman, Aleppo, Jebel Saman). Secondary data also points to an increase in so-called ‘honour’ killings over the past year, with women and girls citing cases of femicide against women and girls who refused to marry or who had divorced. This alarming trend serves as another deterrent for women and girls who wish to confront and reject violence.

Vulnerable women and girls are more likely to remain silent about GBV, due to their constrained mobility, lack of awareness of available services, limited understanding of their rights, limited family support and resources, and a sense of disempowerment. For marginalised groups, such as widowed and divorced women and girls, there is a high likelihood of being blamed and facing stigma—for example, gaining “a bad reputation.” There are also unique disclosure-related challenges for men and boys who are survivors of sexual violence: *“there are cases of sexual assault of boys, but it is kept secret, without disclosure, due to fears that people will gossip. From their point of view, it is shameful to disclose these cases”* (Woman, Idlib, Jisr-Ash-Shugur). Cases of SEA also face heightened barriers to reporting, due to power differentials, lack of awareness of reporting mechanisms, fear of losing access to aid, and fear of retaliation.

*“If a woman is abused by her husband, she keeps silent and withdraws in order to protect the family, and for the sake of her children... Women endure violence of all kinds for the sake of their children, because they cannot sacrifice their children for themselves. A mother bears anything in order to be close to her children.”* (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hassakeh)

*“Silence and avoiding violence is better, because talking can increase it.”* (Adolescent Girl, Lattakia, Lattakia)

*“the woman who is beaten by her husband does not tell anybody, and even if she tells her family, no one will stand by her side and defend her.”* (Adolescent Girl, Lattakia, Lattakia)

*“There are other types of violence that we have not yet discussed, because they are only rarely disclosed in our communities due to fear of stigma; when girls, women, or boys are exposed to this type of violence, it is kept [secret] by parents or by the [victims] themselves. These types of violence are exploitation, sexual abuse, and rape, and these kinds of violence can occur in the home, street, or workplace.”* (Woman with Caregiver, Deir-Ez-Zor, Khasham)

*“Being exposed to violence can lead to social isolation and fear of scandal or murder.”* (Older Woman, Idlib, Dana)

### Barriers to GBV Disclosure for Women and Girls in Syria



Lack of power, support, resources, and alternative living/livelihood options



Fear of additional violence or retaliation



Lack of awareness of rights and available services; feeling unable to ask for help



Fear of shame, scandal, stigma, and rejection



Limited recourse to legal protection



Survivor-blaming among communities and family members, normalisation of violence, and local customs



Fear of losing custody of or access to children

### Avoidance

*"I try to stay away from my husband when I am subjected to violence; I change my place and go to my neighbour, and when my husband leaves the house, I return and relieve the pressure through housework." (Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"Women try to contain the anger of their husbands by making sure the house is tidy and food is ready and the clothes are clean, in order to avoid making their husbands angry." (Older Woman, Jebel Saman)*

*"I do not do anything. I try to isolate myself and stay away from violence and away from the abusive person. Even if I am the one who is being abused, I try to ignore the abuse and avoid thinking about it. I try to stay away from the sources of violence as much as possible." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"For divorced and widowed girls... most of them resort to withdrawal and isolation; despite this, the harm does not stop, and is likely to increase." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Jarablus)*

*"Women and girls mostly remain silent and tolerate the violence, as they fear being blamed, and they try to avoid the triggers associated with harassment, such as avoiding riding the bus because [they were] harassed when using it once before." (Woman, Aleppo, Jebel Saman)*

### Avoidance

Avoidance is frequently employed as coping mechanism by women and girls when they are unable to disclose or confront violence. FGD participants described how often "women resort to isolation and avoidance" (Woman, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa). Women and girls attempt to stay away from violent situations or try to de-escalate the situation in order to minimise the harm inflicted on themselves: "we try to avoid the causes of violence, but we don't always get results" (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh). Often, women and girls are only able to postpone violence, particularly when perpetrators reside in the same household.

#### Avoidance and de-escalation coping mechanisms employed by women and girls in Syria



Leaving the home and going to the home of their parents, other family members, neighbours, or friends



Staying inside the room or home



Staying away from locations where violence has taken place



Avoiding the types of activities in which violence has taken place



Avoiding or ignoring the perpetrator or certain groups of people (e.g. host community)



Trying to keep the perpetrator happy and "contain their anger" in an attempt to de-escalate the situation, often by:

- Being "understanding" and "kind" and "speaking good words"
- Avoiding things that "bother" or "trigger" the perpetrator (e.g. not asking for food or money for the household; fulfilling household responsibilities)
- Not "replying" or engaging in arguments or charged conversations
- Using "dialogue and negotiation skills"

Adolescent girls and widowed and divorced women and girls are reported to be particularly likely to use isolation and staying at home or in their room to avoid violence, harassment, and stigma: "Teenage and adolescent girls will respond by isolating themselves and not leaving their rooms" (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab).

In some cases, women and girls who leave their spouses to stay with their families have described facing additional blame and violence at their parents'


homes: *“Whenever I am subjected to physical violence from my husband, I go to my parents’ house, and over there I experience more psychological violence. [I must deal with] the community’s perception, customs, traditions, and bullying from my brothers and my father, and so I am forced to accept violence and allow it to become part of our social standards”* (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Areesheh). Leaving the home is not a possibility for all women and girls, due to insecurity and family restrictions, as well as mobility constraints for women and girls with disabilities and older women. By contrast, it is much easier for men and boys to leave the house when they feel under pressure or threat of violence—and thus it tends to be a strategy that is much more frequently employed by men and boys. Within the home, there is a limited capacity to avoid perpetrators, due to overcrowding and poor living conditions. Isolation and other avoidance strategies also came with their own negative consequences: *“solve a problem with another problem”* (Woman, Damascus, Damascus).


### Changing Behaviours or Environments


Some women and girls resort to changing their behaviours, family situations, or environments to reduce their exposure to violence (even if only temporarily). These strategies can also be seen as forms of avoidance, de-escalation, or confronting violence.

**Behavioural and environmental change strategies employed by women and girls in syria to avoid or cope with GBV**


**Changes to behaviour:**


 Changing one’s attire, dress, or appearance


 Changing one’s pattern of movement, e.g. through isolation, staying in the home, not going out unaccompanied, or not going out at night

 Avoiding certain means of transport, e.g. not taking the bus


**Changes to domestic or familial situation:**


 Moving to their parents’ home or going to live with other relatives, such as children or grandparents


 Separating or divorcing their spouse

 Getting married (particularly among divorced and widowed women and girls)

**Changes to environment:**

 Relocating to another camp/location (e.g. to escape a perpetrator or social stigma)

 Moving girls to another school

 Living with persons from a similar background or trying to integrate further into the community

### Changing Behaviours or Environments

*“I was able to stop the harassment. I used to wear a normal veil (hijab), and when the harassment I was experience became too much to bear, I decided to dress according to the community’s standards and wore a burqa.”* (Adolescent Girl, Rural Damascus, Duma)

*“Older women who are exposed to violence cry or move to live with another person in the family. For example, an elderly woman lives with her eldest son, and after being subjected to violence, she moves to live with the other son.”* (Woman, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)

*“One of the girls answered that she does not go out without her family to protect her and prevent strangers from teasing her.”* (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)

*“Last year and this year, the rate of divorce increased, and women are resorting to it more and more.”*(Woman, Dar’a, Hrak)

*“Frankly, I reached a stage where I changed my place of residence and relocated to another nearby area, just due to bullying.”* (Woman, Rural Damascus, Madaya)

### Seeking Support from Others

*"If teenagers are subjected to physical violence or bullied by their friends, they can tell their parents; but if teenagers are harassed or abused on the mobile phone, they would tell their friends or older sister." (Older Woman, Idlib, Dana)*

*"If I wanted comfort, I would go back to my family and complain to my mother and talk to her. I don't have a friend whom I trust, and all the people [in my life] are already tired and I don't want to burden them further." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Afrin)*

*"The impact of violence is minimized by [appealing to] local authorities...or by turning to an influential person, such as a sheikh or uncle, who has authority [or influence] over the abuser." (Older Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Malikiyah)*

*"Some women complain to notable community figures, such as a sheikh, or they submit a complaint to the Women's Home or a government centre." (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

More women are reportedly filing for divorce to escape violence in the home, however, *"the percentage is [still] small and cannot exceed one percent"* (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh).

It is important to note that families and communities often use the argument that women and girls should be able to 'avoid' GBV, and their failure to do so can become a source of blame (as opposed to blaming the perpetrator of violence) or a means of exerting control over them. For example, adolescent girls are usually blamed when they experience sexual harassment and are then scrutinised for things like taking the bus or the way they dress.

### Seeking Support from Others

Seeking support from others is another common strategy used by women and girls who are experiencing violence. Women and girls most often sought support from a mother, sister, friend, or neighbour.

### Examples of people who women and girls in Syria turn to in situations of violence

- Family members: Mothers and, to a lesser degree, fathers or other parents/caregivers; (older) sisters and, to a lesser degree, brothers; other relatives (e.g. aunts, grandparents, family of the deceased husband)
- Friends and peers: Female friends and neighbours; sisters and cousins; older children/adolescents
- Community members: Teachers, principals, or school counsellors; staff at women/protection centres or other service providers; local religious and community authorities and structures (e.g. sheikhs/mosques, mukhtars, committees), influential figures, camp managers, police, courts, tribal clans)
- In general, women and girls turn to "trusted" and "supportive" people in their family or community. They reach out to people who demonstrate a "high [degree of] awareness" and who are "wise," "mature," or "influential," or those who they feel will understand their situation, either because they are close to them, or because they have experienced a similar situation.

The degree to which women and girls can rely on family support varies across and within families. While in some households adolescent girls feel that they can turn to their parents, in other cases, girls need *"someone to advise them because their mothers do not listen to or understand them"* (Adolescent Girl, As-Sweida, As-Sweida). There are examples in which the families of abused women and girls will complain to the husband's family about mistreatment; however, in other situations, families will blame women and girls for the abuse, sending them back to the partner who has been exercising violence against them. Even when relatives of survivors are supportive, there are limitations to what they can do: *"When subjected to beatings and violence, we turn to our mothers, who in most cases cannot do anything to defend their daughters. In this case, we turn to someone we are comfortable with, like my cousin, because she is living in similar conditions"* (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tel Tamer). Seeking support from community leaders and support structures also had mixed outcomes—in some cases intensifying violence.



Compared to women and girls, men and boys “are more powerful and always have a support system” (*Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Jarablus*) to which they can turn. Informants also noted that men and boys do not need to seek support from others as much, as they have more ways of defending themselves and more outlets to release pressure.

## Seeking Services

Despite fears related to the disclosure of violence and the barriers to accessing services, some women and girls are able to seek humanitarian, medical, or legal support when experiencing abuse. Women and girls who experience violence most often turned to WGSS as their preferred support service structure.

### Services Sought by Women and Girls in Syria in Response to Cases of GBV:

- WGSS, Protection, MHPSS, and youth centres and services—including for awareness, PSS, case management, and legal counselling
- Medical facilities and service providers
- Justice and security services, including courts, police, women's councils, and local authorities
- Associations offering support through civil registration, vocational courses, or widow/orphan sponsorship

However, not all women and girls “can access WGSS due to issues of control and local customs” (*Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Jarablus*), with adolescent girls and widowed and divorced women and girls facing particularly steep access barriers. One girl described how “girls can come to the women's centre, which provides them with protection and support; despite this, there is a large proportion of girls who cannot reach the centre” (*Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Jarablus*). Women and girls with disabilities and older women also face challenges in accessing services offered at WGSS, due to mobility constraints.

Women and girls primarily turn to WGSS due to feeling of comfort and safety they can enjoy there. They have also indicated that confidentiality, privacy, female-only spaces, and good relationships with staff are the key factors facilitating disclosures of GBV. Some survivors have also accessed GBV support by using medical centres as an entry point. Women and girls have highlighted the importance of having entry points for GBV services that can camouflage the true purpose of their visit, to minimise the risks of stigma and retaliation. Although some women and girls have sought legal support and gone to the courts, there is widespread distrust of the judiciary system across all regions of Syria. Many women and girls perceive the judicial system as being accessible to them or failing to protect them. In certain locations, women councils and committees (north-east Syria, north-west Syria, and GoS areas) and “women's homes” (north-east Syria) have been referenced, but the degree to which these facilities offer an entry point and/or support for GBV survivors requires further investigation. See also: *GBV Services*.

## Confronting Violence

During consultations, women and girls described how it was easier and more permissible for men and boys to address and confront the violence they faced in their lives. Nevertheless, some women and girls spoke up and reported the abuse that they experienced. Other strategies women and girls use to confront violence include safety planning, dialogue, and

## Seeking Services

“Knowledge of the existence of safe spaces for women and girls has become very [widespread], because any girl can come to the centre and disclose any violence she faces to [a knowledgeable] person, instead of asking for help from her friends, who are the same age and may advise her incorrectly, increasing her risks.” (*Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah*)

“I knew that there is a case management service within humanitarian organisations, and I keep coming to this department to relieve the pressures facing me.” (*Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Afrin*)

“Women resort to the safe space when we are exposed to a distress or if we have a problem; we go to the safe space to get help and support.” (*Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Deir-Ez-Zor*)

“[One of the ways women and girls try to] mitigate violence is by going to support centres. The nearest and safest centres include... the centre, the medical department, the protection section for women, and the general protection department, because they have always been supportive of us.” (*Man, Al-Hasakeh, Tel Tamer*)

“Sometimes they can turn to protection centres, such as women's empowerment centres, to attend awareness sessions or receive psychological support, and they can turn to the camp manager to explain their problem.” (*Older Woman, Idlib, Dana*)

## Confronting Violence

“There are people who use their awareness and skills [learned in sessions] to mitigate the violence practiced against them.” (*Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Aleppo, Jarablus*)

“Awareness-raising sessions, such as the ‘relationship with parents’ [session] and the ‘planning for personal safety’ [session], play an effective role in understanding the methods of dialogue and choosing the right time to talk to parents.” (*Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah*)

“My mother asked for a divorce after 13 years of marriage, due to the continuous beating she used to receive from my father.” (*Woman, Aleppo, Jebel Saman*)

*“When we are bullied and faced psychological violence, we used to be silent so as not to be exposed to more, but now, after attending many sessions on violence and prevention methods, I have some strength with which I can defend myself and report abuse.” (Woman, Der-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*“[Confronting violence] has been observed through impact measurement and observation, especially after the spread of awareness programmes. For example, if women are at risk, they now know where to turn, whom to contact, how to empower themselves, and how to create a safety plan for themselves. They now have strategies.” (GBV Expert, north-west Syria)*

### Self-care and Empowerment

*“We don’t have electricity to listen to music; I like to listen to songs and I don’t even have a mobile phone, so I resort to doing housework that might relieve me, which is better than hitting my kids and staying mad.” (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Areesheh)*

*“Some people sleep and others cook, clean the house, or go out walking; this reduces violence and psychological pressure.” (Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*“I can stay away from violence by releasing distress and anger through dancing, singing, walking, and exercising.” (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*“Crying, remembering God, and using social media to relieve pressure.” (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Aleppo, Afrin)*

*“I am crocheting at home to get my own money and to relieve pressure on my father; this reduces his nervousness with me.” (Adolescent Girl, Lattakia, Lattakia)*

*“Some women have learned to protect themselves through education and economic empowerment, such as participating in vocational training in order to become financially independent.” (GBV Expert, Syria GoS areas).*

negotiation techniques. Some women and girls stated that they had learned these techniques at WGSS. Awareness activities and legal sessions were described as having specifically contributed to increased awareness of their rights, how to access services, and safety planning.



### Self-care and Empowerment

Women and girls often look for outlets and sources of comfort that can help them release stress after being exposed to violence. Engaging in activities within and outside of the home and spending time with family and friends helps them to feel better and brings them solace. Women and girls have also shared ways in which they seek to obtain information and develop skills that advance their empowerment. Women and girls regard education and economic empowerment as means of becoming more independent, more self-sufficient, and strong enough to be able to prevent and address GBV.

Older women are most likely to “seek comfort in praying, crying, and beseeching God” (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab). For women and girls who are able to access a safe space, spending time with other women and girls and participating in activities helps to alleviate pressure, increases their awareness and self-confidence, and supports their skill development.

Nevertheless, women and girls face challenges when attempting to find comfort and relief from exposure to violence. For example, because of the lack of electricity, some women and girls were limited in their ability to listen to music or access to social media. Social, financial, and transport-related constraints also limit their ability to engage in hobbies and interests. A widowed woman from Rural Damascus described having to deal with gossip in the neighbourhood after she enrolled in a knitting course. Adolescent girls have much more restricted access to recreational and other outlets than their male counterparts, while women and girls with disabilities and older women are even more likely to be constrained to the house.

## Coping Strategies with Increased Likelihood of Risks

Women and girls often resort to 'negative' or 'high-risk' coping strategies to escape violence. It is important to note that the classification of 'negative' coping is not a judgment of the actions and choices of women and girls but rather used to denote strategies that have a high likelihood of harmful consequences, including further exposure to GBV. Women and girls who turn to more dangerous coping strategies often perceive that they do not have other pathways or options available to them. 'Negative' coping strategies are often decided by or resulting from pressures imposed by the family and community. Women and girls usually have limited decision-making abilities within the household, including with regard to marriage and access to school or work. Over the last year, these 'negative' coping strategies have greatly increased due to narrowing options and depleting resources.

Drug and alcohol abuse is increasingly used as a coping strategy for men and boys looking to relieve the pressures they face, which further increases GBV risks for women and girls.

*"Although she might seem tough on the outside, inside she is broken into pieces." (Older Woman, Dar'a, Dar'a)*

Women and girls in Syria continue to face severe, life-threatening, and long-term consequences of GBV:

- **Psychological effects ("psychological destruction"):** Crying and/or screaming; excessive sleeping and/or exhaustion/fatigue; withdrawal and isolation; feeling afraid, lonely, sad, depressed, anxious, angry, and worthless; low self-esteem; feelings of humiliation, self-blame, and shame; exhibiting hostility or aggression; other signs of psychosocial distress; and, in certain cases, the development or exacerbation of mental health disorders
  - Continued reports of increasing self-harm and suicide of women and girls affected by GBV, in particular linked to child and forced marriage, IPV/domestic and family violence, and social shame following sexual violence or defamation
- **Physical effects, including impacts on reproductive health:** Injuries from physical and sexual violence, at times leading to disability and death; unwanted and repeated pregnancy; negative health outcomes related to early pregnancy for adolescent mothers and their children; miscarriage; negative health outcomes related to neglect and deprivation of access to resources and services (e.g. malnutrition)
- **Social and economic effects:** Retaliation for speaking out, including shame, rejection, and ostracisation from the family and community; eviction (being "kicked out") and loss of inheritance and/or child custody; loss of work; lack of social interaction due to restricted movement; limited ability to realise their potential, due to denial of access to education and employment; loss of childhood because of child marriage; divorce and abandonment (e.g. following child marriage, or after being released from detention)
- **Other effects:** High risks of experiencing additional forms of GBV; harmful impact on children living in households where GBV is taking place

### Coping Strategies with Increased Likelihood of Risks

*"Many girls accept early marriage to get rid of the violence that occurs in the family." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tweina)*

*"Widowed and divorced women will agree to get married again to get rid of the abuse." (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"Girls who are exposed to violence run away and join the soldiers to escape. A 13-year-old girl fell in love with a young man, and when her family refused, she joined the soldiers. Due to the recurrence of these incidents, our families became afraid, so now they prevent us from going out." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Areesheh)*

*"Men look for girls' weaknesses in order to learn how to exploit her more. Unfortunately, the young girls who are subjected to violence are running away from this violence by marrying, even if they are young. Or they get to know someone online." (Woman, Rural Damascus, Madaya)*

*"I heard a lot about girls who run away from their material reality or from the violence that happens at home by marrying someone who is much older than them. Or she will marry a stranger abroad, and she doesn't know his origin or what he might do with her... For a divorced woman who has no children, she is forced to marry a widower with children. And if she has a child, she will abandon him, because she does not retain her ex-husband's child." (Woman, Damascus, Damascus)*

*"A story happened where a displaced girl lost all her family members and got married because she needed a supporter. Now she cannot leave her husband, as there is no one to protect her." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh)*

*"We have also noticed an increase in negative coping strategies among women, such as substance abuse, suicide, and prostitution." (GBV Expert, north-west Syria)*

*"They are exposed to physical abuse, such as beating and kicking, which causes physical injuries, in addition to psychological violence, such as humiliation and insults, which causes psychological problems, and sometimes sexual harassment or sexual exploitation." (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*"Have you heard about the woman whose husband hit her with an iron on her head and she died? She was 50 years old, maybe. The husband said it was by mistake: he wanted to hit her son and she defended him and the blow came to her. You know that her family reconciled with him and didn't claim their right in punishing him?" (Adolescent Boy, Dar'a, Dar'a)*

*"Our neighbour beat his wife and broke her hand. Our neighbour beat his wife until she had a miscarriage." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh)*

*"To relieve my pain, I remain silent and ignore it. I have to be gentle with my husband and children because he comes back from work mad, so I avoid making him angry and fighting with him. But, honestly, I stay tired because although silence helps in keeping things calm, it is also making me very tired." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Areesheh)*

*"Widowed women who are insulted, beaten, or cursed often become depressed, abuse their children, or attempt suicide, and sometimes there are widowed women who run away from their responsibilities towards their children or they neglect themselves and their personal hygiene as a result of violence they are exposed to." (Older Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Malikiyah)*

*"I am very afraid when they say bad words to me or when they beat me. In reaction to this, I isolate myself and I feel depressed." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Afrin)*

*"There were suicides among married women due to domestic violence, husbands marrying a second wife, and lack of adequate support from parents." (Older Woman, Idlib, Dana)*

*"To mitigate the effects of violence, women can resort to surrender, suicide, and other ill-considered reactions; they develop mental illness and depression and accept violence without resistance." (Woman, As-Sweida, Salkhad)*

*"Some attempt suicide as a response to the violence. In 2017, a girl was married by force. On the night of her marriage, she asked her father to allow her to divorce, but the father refused. On that night, she killed herself in response to that. There is another story where, in response to physical violence, a girl burned herself twice, and died the second time." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh)*

## Examples of high-risk coping mechanisms for GBV



Child and forced marriage or remarriage, often perceived as a 'protective' mechanism to minimise the risks of sexual violence and stigma



Child labour, including begging and theft



Prostitution, sex work, and transactional sex



Dropping out of school, due to incidents of sexual harassment or bullying



Joining armed groups/factions (primarily in north-east Syria)



Heavy or addictive use of social media, increasing exposure to the risk of tech-facilitated GBV



Inflicting violence on others, e.g. women beating their children or children abusing other children



Substance abuse

# Affected Groups

The vulnerability of women and girls and their risks of GBV increase based on other social identity factors that intersect with gender, such as age, disability status, marital status, or displacement status (see also: *Risk Factors*). Adolescent girls and young women, widowed and divorced women and girls, women and girls with disabilities, and older women continue to be some of the most marginalised groups in society and experience high rates of GBV.<sup>42</sup> These at-risk groups have limited support structures available to them and face greater barriers to accessing assistance and services, leading to both higher risks of violence and lower resilience when it comes to mitigating the consequences of violence. Worsening insecurity, poverty, and displacement over the past year has only deepened the vulnerability of these groups



<sup>42</sup> Consulted women and girls pointed out that risks and coping capacities varied by individual, household, and geographical area. However, the following groups were identified in FGDs as particularly exposed to and affected by GBV. Women and girls with multiple vulnerability factors faced even greater risks, such as displaced widows or girls with disabilities.

## Adolescent Girls and Young Women

### Common types of GBV

**Adolescent girls and young women** in Syria experience high levels of violence, marginalisation, and denial of rights. They describe feeling 'powerless,' being taken advantage of, and facing abuse from parents, brothers, husbands, employers, peers (in particular, adolescent boys and youth), and others.

### Factors contributing to GBV risks

- Being undervalued and overlooked in favour of the prioritisation of boys, especially with regard to resources and opportunities, including schooling, employment, freedom of movement, etc.
- Being controlled by families due to fears for their safety and 'honour,' particularly with regard to the fear of sexual violence and premarital relationships, the perception that they are vulnerable, [*"everyone sees that they need to be guarded"* (Man, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)], and the fact that they are a common target for sexual violence and kidnapping (due to their ransom value, related to honour and marriage)
- Being restricted from moving unaccompanied outside the home, including to access services, assistance, school, and work
- Being vulnerable to body-shaming and bullying during puberty and adolescence
- Being socially isolated and exposed to GBV risks through social media
- Being unaware of GBV, their rights, and how to seek support: "they are young and do not know the difference between harassment and tenderness" (Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)
- Being limited in their decision-making power, including for decisions related to education and marriage
- Being forced to submit to negative power relations, e.g. adolescent girls married to adult men

### Quotes

*"As for adolescent girls, they are exposed to violence more, especially at home by their father or brother, and they are often deprived of their right to education, or they are married off early and without their consent. They are also exposed to physical abuse, such as beating and kicking, which causes physical injuries, in addition to psychological violence, such as humiliation and insult, which causes psychological problems, and sometimes sexual harassment or sexual exploitation."* (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)

*"The adolescent girl's actions are all monitored and she is not allowed to study or work."* (Older Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hassakeh)

*"There is a lot of harassment of girls in the streets. This leads to girls being afraid to go to school or anywhere outside the home."* (Adolescent Boy, Aleppo, Al Bab)

*"Adolescent girls suffer from forced marriage to relatives, deprivation of education, and discrimination between them and their male siblings."* (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Jarablus)

*"As for teenagers, they are exposed to violence, especially adolescent girls, as most families deliberately force them to marry at a young age, without considering their opinion or consulting them."* (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)

*"Adolescent girls are more exposed to exploitation, due to lack of knowledge and their young age. Adolescents are more vulnerable than others because they do not have sufficient knowledge of the risks."* (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)

*"There is no freedom of movement for us as girls. Our young brothers can be late coming back [home], and we can't... and we are suffering from people's gossip [if we] do go out... as if we are in a prison. We can't breathe, we just fear. We want to get rid of these problems."* (Adolescent Girl, Dar'a, Dar'a)

*"Girls cannot move freely because of [the risk of] kidnapping. One of the neighbours allows her son to leave the house and prevents her daughter [from doing so] for fear of kidnapping and [gossip]."* (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Atareb)

*"Against girls, violence is more [common] in the street or the market and in mixed centres (institutes). The girl does not want to go out due to harassment, and she is exposed to cyber-violence due to a threat of having her picture published online if she does not go to [the man]."* (Adolescent Girl, Rural Damascus, Duma)

## Widowed and Divorced Women and Girls

### Common types of GBV

**Widowed and divorced women and girls** are regarded as one of the most stigmatised groups in Syria. A few respondents indicated that the stigma against them had slightly lessened over time, thanks to greater awareness resulting from the higher numbers of widowed and divorced women and girls found in communities. However, there was a consensus across FGDs that the level of judgment, control, abuse, and exploitation faced by widowed and divorced women and girls remains quite high. In certain locations, women and girls also face specific risks related to residing in widow or internment camps (in Northwest and north-east Syria).

### Factors contributing to GBV risks

- Being pressured and controlled by families and communities, with limited decision-making abilities
- Being influenced by the perception that their 'life is over' and that they are not allowed to develop or enjoy themselves
- Being perceived as lacking a male 'protector,' and therefore being seen as a vulnerable target for exploitation
- Being stressed due constrained mobility, limited work opportunities and income, and, in some cases, being heads of households responsible for dependents
- Being restricted from moving about unaccompanied, limiting access to services, assistance, and work
- Being exposed to shelter-sharing with other family members or in-laws
- Being unable to obtain civil documentation
- Being socially isolated, stigmatised, and discriminated against
- Being unaware of GBV, their rights, and how to seek support
- Being limited in their decision-making abilities

### Quotes

*"A widowed or divorced woman is ostracised from society." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh)*

*"The word 'widow' bothers me very much. In our society, when a woman divorces or her husband dies, her brothers control her and control her future, so she is not allowed to go out, everything is forbidden to her. You feel that you are far from this world and need anyone to save you from [the situation] you are in." (Older Woman, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)*

*"Widowed and divorced women are one of the groups that always face violence, including sexual assault and psychological violence, because of their inability to provide the basic needs for themselves and their children, and because they do not have a breadwinner." (Woman, Idlib, Jisr-Ash-Shugur)*

*"Widowed women are exposed to more violence, because they are more vulnerable and there is no one to protect them or anyone to provide for them. They are forced to work in order to secure resources for their children, and through that, they are exposed to sexual exploitation or harassment during work, and they are bullied by the community and deprived of their inheritance." (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*"[Society believes that it] is my fault that I am divorced. Here, men look at divorced woman with inferiority, and my parents do not allow me to go out freely for fear of gossip and because they fear that I will be harassed. I suffered a lot: my husband used to beat me and insult me and treat me harshly, arguing that he can no longer bear the bitterness of displacement, so he took out his anger on me. And today, after the divorce, I suffer as well." (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*"The community does not accept the idea of divorce, no matter how much violence [the woman] is exposed to. Therefore, the woman suffers a lot from violence, and she cannot speak up, because once she has become divorced, the whole community will stand against her. In their eyes, she is a bad woman who did not protect her home and her husband. She will be subjected to pressure from family members and prevented from going out or working. [People will] manipulate her feelings and emotions, pressure her to have sex against her will, and exploit her in order to reach their personal goals." (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*"A divorced woman is prevented from going out; they say she must stay at home. My divorced neighbour wanted to complete her education to be able to work and support her children, but she faced defamation and restrictions. Even women's families sometimes are against them. A divorced woman has no free will, as her family controls her, and everyone monitors her. I am a widow, and people in neighbourhood gossiped about me when I enrolled in a knitting course in the centre, saying, 'Where does this widow go?'" (Woman, Rural Damascus, Harasta)*

*"There is exploitation of widowed women in the camps by camp managers and those with authority, as the camp director forces the widow to share her [aid] basket with him." (Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Dana)*

## Women and Girls with Disabilities

### Common types of GBV

**Women and girls with disabilities** face high levels of discrimination and stigma. They are more likely to be confined to the home by family members due to fears of sexual violence and “shame” related to their disability. The lack of inclusive accommodation in public spaces poses a challenge to their mobility and access to services, support, and opportunities. The types of risks they face vary by the type of disability, with women and girls with mental disabilities facing an especially heightened risk, because they are less aware of forms of violence and less able to speak up and defend

themselves. Older women with disabilities are also particularly likely to be neglected and abused.

### Factors contributing to GBV risks

- Being dependent on others for support, with limited financial independence
- Being limited in their mobility and affected by health issues that restrict their access to assistance and services, which is compounded by poor infrastructure, lack of assistive devices and services, and high costs for transportation
- Being perceived as ‘useless,’ a ‘burden,’ and ‘unclean,’ along with family fears of ‘stigma by association’
- Being perceived as ‘weak’ and unable to speak up and defend themselves, and therefore regarded as a vulnerable or ‘easy’ target
- Being controlled by their families due to fears regarding their safety and ‘honour,’ related to the fear of sexual violence
- Being limited in their decision-making abilities and personal freedoms
- Being less aware of the types and risks of violence, their rights, and the available support services
- Being socially isolated and exposed to stigma and discrimination

Due to the gendered division of labour, caregivers for PwDs are primarily women.

### Quotes

*“Sometimes our parents lock us up at home because they are ashamed of the world’s view of us.” (Woman with Disability, Rural Damascus, Babella)*

*“Girls with physical disabilities are exposed to bullying from the community, and financial and sexual exploitation.” (Adolescent Girl with Disability or Caregiver, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*“[I experience] violence when they look at me inferiorly and [treat me as though] I am less than them. [They see me as] different and not normal, and they describe me as disabled and useless.” (Woman, Aleppo, Afrin)*

*“For people with disabilities, they suffer from bullying and discrimination, in addition to verbal and physical abuse and control [at the hands of the] people around them, and sometimes [they face] sexual violence and harassment—especially females.” (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Jarablus)*

*“Many girls who suffer from physical disabilities are harassed, and sometimes they are raped, and they can’t do anything.” (Woman with Disability, Rural Damascus, Babella)*

*“Girls with mental disabilities are in great danger if they leave the house, as they are exposed to exploitation and sexual violence.” (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Areesheh)*

*“[We experience] economic violence and we are deprived of our most basic rights. Even if we work, the employer exploits us through our working hours or our salary, and this is all because of our disability. People look at us with pity, and we may be subjected to bullying and ridicule.” (Woman with Disability, Rural Damascus, Babella)*

*“Most disabled women and girls prefer to be at home in order to avoid being exposed to any kind of violence.” (Woman with Disability, Rural Damascus, Babella)*



## Older Women

### Common types of GBV

**Older women**<sup>43</sup> at times are respected and listened to due to their age and perceived maturity. In some cases, this group has been able to influence decision-making or to have less restricted movement and less social judgment than their younger counterparts. However, it is more often the case that this group is highly marginalised and subjected to abuse, due to being regarded as not having any 'purpose' and being seen as a 'burden.'

### Factors contributing to GBV risks

- Being unable to independently support and take care of themselves, including having limited financial independence
- Being exposed to chronic health issues, impacting their mobility and access to services and assistance
- Being served by infrastructure that is not inclusive of their age and needs, including a lack of assistive devices and transport
- Being perceived as 'useless' and a 'burden,' as well as being viewed as 'unclean' in the context of disease outbreaks
- Being discriminated against and prevented from entering job markets
- Being socially isolated
- Being unaware of GBV, their rights, and how to seek support
- Being limited in their decision-making ability

### Quotes

*"We are the most exposed to violence and we do not have any opinion or say in the house. We suffer from humiliation, disrespect, and lack of [freedom of] expression." (Older Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hassakeh)*

*"Nowadays, elderly women are deprived of their most basic rights: medicine, food, and even opinions." (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Aleppo, Jarablus)*

*"Women over 60 are exposed to humiliation and abuse by their husbands, children, or daughters-in-law in most cases. They also suffer from lack of resources. We often hear about women who are unable to receive treatment when they are sick because they have no children to treat them or provide for them." (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*"There are older women who are exploited in the workplace, especially on agricultural lands, as some of them do not receive their full wages, under the pretext that their production at work is weak compared to younger women." (Older Woman, Idlib, Dana)*

*"Older women face difficulties in accessing services due to mobility challenges, their health status, and their shyness to go out of the house and go to these centres. For the elderly, these centres were not available before and [I think that] they are not used to them, so they do not have confidence in these centres because they have not dealt with such places before." (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

43 Whole of Syria GBV AoR. "GBV Prevention and Response to Older Women in the Whole of Syria." 2022.

## Unaccompanied and Separated Girls

### Common types of GBV

**Unaccompanied and separated girls** face significant risks of GBV due to the lack of a protective environment and limited access to services and opportunities. Due to being regarded as a 'burden,' they are frequently pushed into child marriage or child labour. Factors contributing to the GBV risks faced by unaccompanied and separated girls in Syria include:

### Factors contributing to GBV risks

- Being deprived of parental support and supervision, including financial support
- Being regarded as a 'burden,' seen as inferior, and subjected to stigma and discrimination
- Being perceived as a vulnerable target for exploitation
- Being controlled and restricted while living in the home of extended family or other caregivers, especially for separated girls
- Being at a heightened risk of dropping out of school (e.g. due to lack of papers or because they've behind academically)
- Being deprived of the opportunity to have civil documentation
- Being limited in their ability to leave poor conditions or independently support themselves, especially when compared to their male counterparts
- Being socially isolated and facing stigma and discrimination
- Being unaware of GBV, their rights, and how to seek support
- Being limited in their decision-making ability

### Quotes

*"There is a girl whose parents had died and no one cared for her, and now she is with her uncle, but he wants to marry her off and she is still 13 years old. [Her uncle wants] to get rid of the responsibility [of caring for her] as he can barely afford to provide for his own children." (Older Woman, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)*

*"These are the most oppressed people in the area, because everyone deals with them badly and exploits them. If it is a boy, they make him work in any job, and if it's a girl, they marry her off at a young age." (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Hajin)*

*"The boys and girls who don't have parents, or whose parents are divorced, suffer a lot, because they can't find anyone to support them and everyone takes advantage of them, and the girls are forced to get married [so that their guardians can] get rid of them." (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Hajin)*

*"If there is an orphaned or unaccompanied girl in the family, she brings pity to those around her and she loses most of her rights, such as [her right to] education. Most of the time, she will be forced to marry at a young age." (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"Because there is no caregiver, these people can become more aggressive, and girls are more vulnerable to violence, rape, child marriage, and joining armed factions than girls who live with their parents." (Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*"Unaccompanied or separated girls are exploited for sexual and commercial purposes, and they are exposed to child labour, physical torture, lack of attention, and lack of resources." (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Ar-Raqqqa, Ar-Raqqqa)*

## Displaced Women and Girls, including IDPs, Refugees, and Returnees

### Common types of GBV

**Displaced women and girls** in Syria face compounded risks, particularly among those residing in collective shelters and camps.<sup>44</sup> Displacement deepens economic and social vulnerabilities, multiplying the risks of GBV. Displaced women and girls are restricted in their mobility, subject to discrimination, and targeted for exploitation and abuse, due to being perceived as vulnerable. Although there is less data available, there are specific and increased risks noted for widow and internment camps in Northwest and north-east Syria,<sup>45</sup> including a higher likelihood of sexual exploitation, SEA, and other forms of sexual violence. Refugee and returnee women and girls also face unique risks. Factors contributing to heightened GBV risks among displaced women and girls include:

### Factors contributing to GBV risks

- Being subjected to overcrowded living conditions in camps and collective shelters
- Being subjected to a lack of available housing, living in unsecured tents or damaged buildings, and having unmet needs for basic necessities
- Being housed in mixed-gender shelters, with unrelated persons in close proximity; living in shared accommodation among extended families
- Being subjected to poor infrastructure, lack of WASH facilities, and lack of lighting
- Being housed in areas that are far from towns and facilities, with high costs of transport
- Being unfamiliar with the area, lacking access to support systems, having limited integration in the community, and living among mixed populations that are suddenly forced to share the same space, thereby increasing social tensions
- Being unable to easily register for educational institutions and opportunities (for displaced children)
- Being limited in their ability to access economic and work opportunities
- Being socially isolated and facing stigma and discrimination, including being seen as 'inferior,' 'poor/needy,' and from a 'different culture'
- Being deprived of the opportunity to obtain civil documentation
- Being unaware of GBV, their rights, and how to seek support
- Being limited in their decision-making ability

### Quotes

*"The people of [the] district look at camp inhabitants with pity and superiority, especially displaced women and girls, who are subjected to sexual, physical, and emotional exploitation. Those who work for the [host community] are paid lower wages [and] are exploited." (Older Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Malikiyah)*

*"Displaced women and their children are subjected to abuse and violence, especially from their neighbours within the host community. They feel vulnerable and lonely and, because of that, some suffer from isolation and introversion in their homes for fear that they or their children would be exploited, especially by those who have control over the distribution of bread and gas." (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*"[Displaced] women and girls are often insulted and ridiculed by the local community, who look at them as inferiors. They are also exposed to exploitation and harassment, and they are followed in the streets." (Male Caregiver, Al-Hasakeh, Malikiyah)*

*"Displaced girls have a greater and higher level of risk and violence than girls [from the host community], as those in the host community enjoy the protection of family, community, and tribe." (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*"Displaced people are exploited due to the conditions of displacement; for example, there are those who ask for marriage from them, claiming that they are in need." (Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"Displaced women usually suffer from social marginalisation and lack of integration into the community. They also suffer from sexual exploitation accompanied by threats. They live in a community that is strange to them, so they are often more vulnerable to violence and exploitation." (Woman With Disability or Caregiver, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*"[It is necessary to] reduce violence for displaced people, as these girls have no one to support them. There is a story that happened to a displaced girl who lost all her family members and she got married because she needed a supporter. Now she cannot leave her husband, as there is no one to protect her." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh)*

<sup>44</sup> It is important to note that this does not indicate that host community women and girls or women and girls residing outside of camps did not face significant risks of GBV.

<sup>45</sup> Col on the Syrian Arab Republic. "Gendered Impact of the Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on Women & Girls." 2023.

## Other Groups

### Women and Girls Released from Detention

**Women and girls who are released from detention** face a high level of stigma upon their return to society. In addition to dealing with the aftermath of detention and torture, ex-detainee women and girls often experience rejection from their families and communities. They are seen as 'unwelcome' and 'undesirable' due to the shame associated with the assumption that women and girls experience sexual violence in detention. Some previously detained women were divorced by their partners and lost their children, or were ostracised by their families.

#### Quotes

*"During detention, women are exposed to violence more than others. A detained girl is considered an undesirable woman by the community, and her existence is unacceptable. As for the detained woman, the community's view of her is that she is bad, inferior, and unwelcome." (Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"Women and girls suffer more than men and boys because of the shame that haunts them after detention and the loss of their husband, home, and children due to detention. Men and boys usually integrate quickly back into the community. They may find it difficult to obtain a job opportunity or suffer from a lack of resources. As for women and girls, they suffer more, because of shame: even the close family stays away from her and does not house her, and she may lose her husband and children. She also suffers from exposure to more exploitation and sexual harassment, because in the eyes of community, in detention, all kinds of violence can happen to her, especially sexual violence, so in their opinion, she must accept any kind of exploitation or harassment." (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*"Detained women are not welcome in the community, unlike men, who have celebrations when they go out [of detention]." (Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"The matter of detention is a very sensitive one, and women are most insulted and looked at poorly after leaving detention; they are described in inappropriate ways. Women suffer from stigma and difficulty in conducting their lives, so some of them resort to travelling and changing their place of residence." (Woman, Idlib, Jisr-Ash-Shugur)*

### Persons with Diverse SOGIESC and LGBTQIA+ Individuals

While there is limited primary data available on persons with diverse SOGIESC, this lack of data itself speaks to their enormous marginalisation and the sensitivity of the topic due to social norms. LGBTQIA+ persons continue to face a high level of discrimination, elevated risks of violence, and increased barriers to accessing services.<sup>46</sup> Men and boys who do not conform to hegemonic norms of masculinity in terms of their appearance or behaviour face bullying and violence by other men and boys (e.g. being called 'weak' and 'like a girl'), which serves as another means of enforcing traditional gender roles (see also: *Masculinities*).

(For more information on the types of GBV and how they create barriers to accessing assistance and services, see also: *Types of Violence, GBV Services, and Humanitarian Sectors*.)

#### Quotes

*"There is a guy here in school with long hair who is weak like girls; the boys call him cute and say that he is a girl. He is exposed to abusive words, and if we defend him, they will think we are like him. We don't interfere but we feel sad for him. We say, 'ok, leave him alone, enough guys,' but this is all we do." (Adolescent Boy, Dar'a Dar'a)*

*"Boys are also exposed to violence, especially insults and swear words. If they have a calm demeanour, if they visibly express feelings, or if they do not smoke or fight with boys, they will be treated like girls." (Adolescent Girl, As-Sweida, As-Sweida)*

*"I think LGBTQIA+ people are still facing challenges in accessing GBV services because of the social stigmatisation, family rejection, and social rejection they face. In addition, the perception among communities and even UN staff is that GBV is only happening to women and girls, so we don't have sufficient numbers of male staff or service providers who are working on GBV. Despite all efforts, the services are for women. The number of male staff is low, and you cannot reach men with female staff." (GBV Expert, Syria GoS areas).*

*"We still do not have specific services for LGBTQIA+." (GBV Expert, north-east Syria)*

## Prevention and Response to GBV (GBV Services)

### Availability, Reach, and Perceived Impact of GBV Services

#### Availability and Reach of GBV Services<sup>q56</sup>



##### **Specialised GBV services for at-risk women and girls and GBV survivors, including case management, medical care, legal assistance, and CVA for survivors:**

Case management services provided by case managers/workers are available in many WGSS, as well as through other entry points, such as community centres, health facilities, and mobile teams. In addition to the closure of some WGSS, some women-focused health centres are reported to have also closed over the past year. While some women and girls benefitted from legal, civil documentation, and cash assistance, these GBV services are less widely available and less known by community members. GBV experts have confirmed that there are critical gaps in terms of medical care for survivors, legal assistance, and options for safe shelters,<sup>47</sup> as well as challenges in the development of referral pathways to these services.



**GBV awareness sessions:** Many women and girls have attended awareness sessions on rights, GBV, and available GBV services. The recent increase in awareness sessions, including the introduction of legal awareness sessions, was often referenced by women and girls as a positive development. Despite this, in many locations, GBV awareness activities are not available, and there is a need for greater dissemination of information about available GBV services. A gap consistently mentioned by respondents was the lack of GBV awareness sessions and social and behavioural change initiatives targeting men and boys.



**Women's and girls' psychosocial and empowerment programming:** Programming designed to enhance the well-being and empowerment of women and girls has incorporated structured PSS, skill-building, and/or learning activities. Learning activities that are offered include vocational, literacy, and language courses.



**Provision of dignity kits and menstrual hygiene and health materials:** The distribution of personal hygiene and sanitary materials for women and girls took place occasionally in some locations, but these efforts have suffered significant cuts over the past year. Dignity kits are unavailable or infrequently distributed in most areas, despite the great need for them. Women and girls requested wider and more frequent distributions of menstrual hygiene and health materials.

#### **Availability, Reach, and Perceived Impact of GBV Services**

*"There is a case management team of [an agency] that provides us with awareness sessions." (Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Ariha)*

*"There are places that girls can go, such as safe spaces for women and girls... and they can get support and assistance through psychosocial support services, case management services, and vocational empowerment." (Man, Idlib, Jisr-Ash-Shugur)*

*"Divorced women can get help... through safe spaces for women and girls and via access to a case management service that helps them meet some of their needs, such as legal, material, and medical services, and through empowerment activities and small grants. The area has protection services for women and girls provided through the organisation, which offers a safe space for women and girls, psychosocial support services, response to survivors of GBV, and legal counselling." (Idlib, Jisr-Ash-Shugur)*

*"I talk with the specialist at the centre who helps me." (Older Woman, Lattakia, Lattakia)*

*"As my friend said, the girls can come to the space here and see the case manager." (Adolescent Girl, Lattakia, Lattakia)*

*"I didn't hear of any woman subjected to sexual violence or harassment who had the courage to talk; maybe people are not aware of services that can help." (Adolescent Girl, Lattakia, Lattakia)*

*"If the girl gets raped, she must speak up and report it in order to be protected, but there is little information about post-rape services. There was a girl who was raped and became pregnant, and the rapist did not acknowledge the child, and when she threatened to reveal him, he left the camp, and now the girl needs support." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Areesheh)*

*"The best place to help reduce violence is the women's centre. Women find a safe space and supportive people regardless of their situation or need." (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Aleppo, Jarablus)*

<sup>47</sup> Often "shelters" referenced in group discussions describe care homes supporting 'orphans'/UASC rather than women's shelters.

*“Cultural and social norms restrict women and girls from accessing survivor services, legal support, and MHPSS support.” (GBV Expert, north-east Syria)*

*“[There is a] lack of case management services and limited understanding of the risks and experiences of women in those areas.” (GBV Expert, north-east Syria)*

*“There are centres that have been opened for women and children, but they are not enough for the large population.” (Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*“Safe spaces have been significantly reduced due to funding. This is a huge barrier to women accessing the necessary services—especially case management services.” (GBV Expert, north-east Syria)*

*“In some areas, like the camps, we at least have safe spaces for women and girls to access in cases of GBV. However, even in the camps, we have limitations in terms of who can access the safe spaces... [it is difficult for certain people], like women with disabilities and the elderly. We still do not have specific services for LGBTQIA+. [There are] no [safe spaces] in host communities or collective centres for other vulnerable populations. With the decrease in funding, donors are also very specific about where they want their services being provided.” (GBV Expert, north-east Syria)*

### **Barriers to Accessing WGSS and GBV Services**

*“Women and girls do not usually resort to the judiciary and justice mechanisms, and there are several reasons for this, including fear of community, fear of revenge, fear of scandal, fear of the perpetrator, lack of knowledge of their rights, and lack of financial resources.” (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*“[There is a] fear of the lack of integrity of the judiciary and of the violent reaction of the perpetrator.” (Older Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Deir-Ez-Zor)*

### **Case Study on Integrated GBV Case Management and CVA**

A study conducted in north-west Syria and published in 2022<sup>48</sup> validated the impact and numerous benefits of cash and in-kind assistance as part of GBV case management. The report described how CVA provided within the framework of GBV case management “not only reduced GBV and associated risks for survivors, but also improved economic capacity, personal well-being (and the well-being of children), interpersonal relationships with family members, and interactions with the host community.” The integration of CVA with GBV case management and of the linking of survivors to livelihood support and opportunities were identified as critical gaps in the context of Syria, requiring further investment.<sup>49</sup> Women and girls across Syria who participated in FGDs regularly called for cash and income-generation assistance as a means of mitigating the risks and effects of violence and supporting their independence and empowerment.

## **Barriers to Accessing WGSS and GBV Services**

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. One adolescent girl described how *“many times, there are women who would like to come to the centre, but because they are old, they can’t reach it. And there are divorced women and widows who are afraid of what people will say, and there are fathers who prevent their daughters and wives from coming or from walking there alone, because they are afraid for them because of the new problems that are happening in the region, because there is no safety”* (Adolescent Girl, As-Sweida, As-Sweida). While mobile and remote delivery modalities are beneficial, women and girls prefer to have a physical space available to them with regular in-person activities and services. Some women and girls could not access online modalities, due to limited access to phones, electricity outages, poor internet connection, and lower levels of digital literacy, as well as feelings of distrust, due to the risks of tech-facilitated exploitation and GBV.

### **Barriers to Legal Recourse**

Women and girls in Syria have described significant barriers that prevent the majority of them from pursuing legal recourse in cases of GBV. The barriers for GBV survivors to pursue legal avenues also serve as a deterrent for survivors to disclose violence and seek support. Women and girls in Syria are often afraid to attempt to escape situations of violence, as they feel like they have a low likelihood of being able to secure their protection and obtain justice. In many of the FGDs, they expressed the sentiment that reporting GBV was futile and would only leave them in a worse situation. One woman explained that *“there is no recourse to the judiciary or justice for several reasons, including the lack of fairness from the authorities. The other reasons include local customs and traditions, as the wife, sister, or mother who is subjected to violence is afraid of what people say if she files a complaint against her brother or husband. When women and girls go to the justice system and are not redressed, they have put themselves in greater danger”* (Female Caregiver, Deir-Ez-Zor, Khasham).

48 CARE, WRC, & Syrian Relief and Development. “No One Has Power Over Me: The Impact of Integrating Cash Assistance into GBV Response in Northwestern Syria.” 2022.

49 CARE, WRC, & Syrian Relief and Development. “No One Has Power Over Me: The Impact of Integrating Cash Assistance into GBV Response in Northwestern Syria.” 2022: 6; 20-21.

Because of gender discrimination and survivor-blaming, survivors who do turn to community structures or to the judiciary can face poor or unfortunate outcomes. At times, women and girls may even be placed at greater risk, experiencing retaliation from perpetrators or stigmatisation from the community. Participants in FGDs shared cases in which women and girls who filed claims or sought divorce lost access to their children. There were also examples of women and girls who faced additional GBV after disclosure, such as blame, beating, or being locked up, and, in extreme cases, so-called 'honour' killings or femicide.

Other barriers to seeking legal recourse that were cited by women and girls include not having viable housing options if they have to leave their homes and a lack of financial independence, as women and girls are typically reliant on male breadwinners in the household. Some women and girls also lack awareness of their rights, and may not be able to recognise GBV or know where and how to go about seeking support.

Women and girls in Syria have expressed a high level of mistrust in the judiciary and other authorities. They often face mistreatment, dismissal, and exploitation by these authorities. Even when cases proceed, respondents indicated that the process takes too long. Survivors often do not hear back from the authorities, or perpetrators go free without facing consequences.

*"Women never resort to the judiciary, especially in cases of harassment and sexual violence. Women are afraid of the procedures used by the police stations or the courts, especially if there is an assault or theft by another party, because it takes a long time and it will cause rumours to spread about them. Sometimes they will resort to the judiciary in the case of divorce. Turning to the courts causes scandals and results in them losing their rights." (Older Woman, Idlib, Dana)*

*"There are women who avoid turning to the judiciary system in order to avoid the social stigma and to keep their children and avoiding losing them through divorce." (Woman, Aleppo, Jebel Saman)*

*"There are married women who are prohibited from visiting legal offices because they are unaccompanied." (Older Woman, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)*

## Overall 2023 achievements of the WoS GBV AoR



Number of GBV Actors  
**50**



People in Need of GBV Services  
**8,528,219**



Number of Women, Men, Girls, and Boys Reached by GBV Prevention and Empowerment Activities:

Achieved: **582,043** % of Target Reached: **32.3%**  
Target: **1,800,000**



Number of GBV Response Services Provided to GBV Survivors and At-risk Women and Girls:

Achieved: **260,429** % of Target Reached: **51.1%**  
Target: **510,000**



Number of Non-humanitarian Workers Trained on or Sensitised to GBV Risk Mitigation:

Achieved: **594** % of Target Reached: **24.8%**  
Target: **2,400**



Number of Male and Female GBV Actors Trained on GBV:

Achieved: **1,519** % of Target Reached: **28.7%**  
Target: **5,287**



## Mitigating the Risks of GBV through Humanitarian-sector Interventions

### Key Findings on GBV Risks within Humanitarian-sector Interventions



The dramatic reductions in humanitarian assistance in Syria over the past year, coupled with inflation, has made it increasingly difficult for households to meet their basic needs, exacerbating the prevalence of **negative coping mechanisms and elevating women's and girls' risks of GBV**, including when accessing humanitarian assistance.



**Women and girls in Syria face significant barriers to accessing humanitarian assistance and services, particularly in light of growing insecurity.** Common interrelated barriers that women and girls experience include **long distances to service points and distribution centres, high transport costs and lack of accessible transportation, increased risks of sexual violence and kidnapping during the commute to and from service points and distribution centres, increased risks of sexual violence and GBV at service points and distribution centres, and movement restrictions imposed by families and communities.**



**Difficulty and inability to obtain civil documentation** was also a barrier to accessing assistance, especially for widowed and divorced women and girls and their children.



**There is limited availability of other service modalities** (such as mobile services and outreach), which limits women's and girls' safe access to services, especially for the most vulnerable groups.



**Women and girls and marginalised groups have a higher likelihood of being excluded from assistance or having to pay a fee or portion of their assistance, in addition to a higher likelihood of experiencing SEA when attempting to receive assistance.**



**Women, girls, and GBV experts identified critical gaps in GBV and SEA risk-mitigation measures at distribution sites and service facilities, particularly in post-earthquake collective shelters.**



Gaps in risk-mitigation interventions exacerbate existing barriers and make access to humanitarian assistance unsafe and difficult.



**Women and girls indicated that they are rarely consulted on the design of humanitarian programming.**

## GBV Risks and Access Barriers in Other Humanitarian Sectors

The following GBV risks and access barriers related to humanitarian assistance and services were observed across different sectoral interventions.

### GBV Risks and Access Barriers in Other Humanitarian Sectors

*“Humanitarian assistance [is important] to reducing violence, especially on women and girls. Humanitarian aid plays an important role in reducing violence.” (Man, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)*

*“No one offers us anything — no food, no water, no medicine, no clothing — and we need all these things because we have nothing, and our household doesn’t have a breadwinner.” (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*“Nepotism plays a major role in obtaining humanitarian assistance, including food and other forms of assistance.” (Adolescent Girl, Rural Damascus, Sahnaya)*

*“During the distribution of assistance, those in charge often demand financial compensation from the recipients, claiming it covers transportation fees. Many recipients feel unable to refuse or report these demands due to fears for their own safety. This practice particularly affects divorced and widowed women, who lack defenders, and also targets people with disabilities, demanding money under the guise of registration for assistance.” (Man, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*“A return of financial or sexual compensation is requested, especially from divorced women and widows. For people with disabilities, financial compensation is requested for registration and delivery of assistance.” (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Quamishli)*

*“[Women and girls face] difficulties in transportation, non-compliance with distribution standards, and exploitation by distributors. A divorced woman mentioned that she no longer receives assistance due to continuous exploitation by a member of the distribution team.” (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Quamishli)*

### GBV risks and access barriers for women and girls seeking humanitarian assistance and services

*Barriers faced by women and girls attempting to access humanitarian assistance and services*

- **Long distances to distributions and service facilities, coupled with a lack of transportation**, with women, girls, and vulnerable groups most likely to have limited access to safe transport options
- **Difficulties in the movement of women and girls** and other vulnerable groups when attempting to reach distributions and service points due to poor infrastructure, particularly during winter and weather/climate hazards
- **Movement restrictions imposed on women and girls by family and community** (and in certain locations, by authorities), and requirement for women and girls to be escorted by male family members, limiting their ability to reach assistance and services, particularly for unaccompanied women and girls
- Poor conditions at distribution points and facilities, due to crowding, long wait times, mixed gender/male-dominated environments, and disputes, all serving as deterrents for women, girls, and marginalised groups to access assistance safely and comfortably
- **Costs associated with accessing assistance and services**, making access to distributions and services difficult for women and girls with limited economic capacities, who may then resort to dangerous coping mechanisms, such as sex work or being subjected to SEA, in order to access basic services or necessities
- **Widespread discrimination, favouritism, and mistreatment at distribution points and service facilities** by distribution staff, community structures and delegates, and authorities, increasing the risks of exclusion and being subjected to SEA or turning to negative coping mechanisms such as sex work. Forms of discrimination include:
  - Prioritisation of family members and friends in registration, distributions, and activities
  - Asking for payment or taking a portion of aid to keep or resell
  - Dismissal and verbal or physical abuse
- **Lack of awareness about available services and assistance and how to access them**, particularly among women and girls with limited mobility and those from remote areas, those with limited access to technology, those with lower levels of literacy, or those who are displaced:
  - Reports of distributions taking place without advance notice, posing particular barriers for unaccompanied women and women heads of household, who are often unable to reach the distribution sites in time, due to their limited access to information, restricted mobility, and various caretaking responsibilities
  - Lack of familiarity with the area and available service providers for displaced women and girls

- **Lack of civil documentation<sup>50</sup> limiting the mobility and access of women and girls to humanitarian assistance and services**, particularly for widowed and divorced women and their children, women and girls with missing husbands, displaced women and girls, and unaccompanied and separated children
- **Lack of consultation with women and girls in order to identify access barriers and GBV risks and to inform the delivery of assistance and services**, including consideration of their preferences for accessible and safe locations, hours, and modalities of distribution and service provision
- **Feedback and response mechanisms are often inaccessible**, unknown, or perceived to be unresponsive to the concerns of women and girls
- **Challenges in coordinating between the GBV sector and other humanitarian sectors in order to better identify and implement approaches** to facilitate the safe, meaningful access of women and girls and mitigate the risks of GBV
- **Lack of prioritisation of women and girls' needs and risks by other humanitarian sectors**, such as the limited gender-responsive lenses integrated into the earthquake response<sup>51</sup>

#### *GBV risks related to humanitarian assistance and services*

- **Increased fears and risks associated with women's and girls' movement to and from service points and distribution centres** due to heightened insecurity
- **Exacerbated risks to women and girls during their movement to access assistance and services because of poor infrastructure**, with higher risks at night and during winter due to lack of lighting
- **Exposure to sexual violence on the way to and from, and at, distribution centres and service facilities**, including sexual harassment, rape, and other forms of sexual violence
- **Exploitation by porters and private transport drivers** via increased prices and requests for sexual favours
- **Lack of GBV and SEA mitigation measures at distribution and service points**, resulting in issues like overcrowding, lack of gender-segregated lines, long wait times and limited prioritisation of at-risk women and girls, lack of female staff and male-dominated environments, lack of lighting and locks, and limited training of staff on GBV and SEA
- **Risks and incidents of SEA inflicted by persons engaged in the provision of assistance and services**
- **Lack of accessible, diversified feedback and complaint mechanisms that women and girls can access and trust for reporting SEA and limited awareness among women and girls of how to report SEA**
- **Inequitable distribution of assistance within the household and taking/stealing of assistance by family members, neighbours, or other community members**, particularly from widowed and divorced women and girls, persons with disabilities, and separated children
- **Lack of awareness-raising efforts on gender norms in parallel to distributions and services**, including awareness on equitable access to resources, women/girls' participation in decision-making, GBV, SEA, reporting mechanisms, and available GBV services
- **Challenges with referrals and coordination between GBV and other sectors** for referral purposes, especially for at-risk women and girls and GBV survivors

*"Exploitation by workers, such as water tankers, [is a problem for women and girls]. [There is] exploitation by the head of the organisation that delivers the products. After finishing the distribution, the distribution contractor in the camp administration recollects the products from the people by buying them at cheap prices and then he sells them outside the camp. The camp administration knows about the issue." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hole)*

*"In most cases, divorced women are deprived of assistance because they do not have the necessary identification documents (such as marriage contract, divorce paperwork, or registration papers)." (Older Woman, Idlib, Dana)*

*"Women, and even men, may be subjected to violence at assistance distribution points by powerful or influential people who do not wait in the queue during distribution, which creates chaos and problems and clashes between some beneficiaries." (Man, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"There is overcrowding during the distribution of material support, and men and women get mixed, and harassment and verbal abuse frequently occur." (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"Most of the places where violence occurs include shared school bathrooms, destroyed places, abandoned houses, streets that do not have lighting in the evening, agricultural fields where people are exposed to violence from their employers, popular markets on Tuesdays and Fridays, and at the village council when distributing assistance and bread." (Adolescent Boy, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*"Depriving girls of their shares of assistance [is a common problem]." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Tweina)*

50 Needed documentation to access assistance and services indicated by women and girls in FGDs: identity papers/family book; marriage, divorce, birth, or death certificates; registration, camp entry paper/displacement card, assistance card, and disability card.

51 Syria Direct. "After the Earthquake, a Wave of Gender-Based Violence in Syria." 2023: 8.

Access barriers and GBV risks related to the interventions of each sector are described below (and include the cross-cutting barriers and risks described in the previous section, which apply across sectors).

## Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA)

### Access Barriers and GBV Risks for Women and Girls

1. Gaps in awareness-raising efforts on the equitable distribution and allocation of resources, decision-making within the household, and GBV—particularly efforts targeting men and boys—contribute to the heightened risks of IPV/domestic and family violence, including economic abuse that deprives women and girls of cash assistance
2. There are heightened risks of economic abuse and exploitation of at-risk women and girls, particularly widowed and divorced women and girls, through which they are deprived of cash assistance by family and community members, with limited mitigation and monitoring measures in place

### Quotes

*"We are displaced and there is no party that provides us with any financial assistance. We need many of life's necessities, such as clothes and food, due to the high cost of living." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Tweina)*

*"We need financial support beyond bread and water, because this would help somewhat in reducing the cost of living on families that suffer from poverty and families where there are widows, divorced women, and disabled people." (Adolescent Boy, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)*

*"We need cash assistance." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Tweina)*

*"We ask for cash support for small projects and a car to facilitate access to all centres. (Woman Caregiver, Idlib, Ariha)*

*"Parents must be financially supported in order to address child labour. [It is important] to raise their awareness of the risks and impacts of early marriage... and to teach professional skills to youth in case they leave their education." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Jarablus)*

*"In general, women still do not have the ability [to control money]. We've heard many cases where women are registered for aid, but their husbands take it, and they get nothing in return." (GBV Expert, north-west Syria)*

*"[There is a need for the] integration of cash and livelihood assistance for GBV survivors: in the framework of case management, survivors should be given the opportunity to prevent further exposure to GBV risks. For this reason, case management should be paired with livelihood opportunities, vocational training, and cash assistance, to mitigate the consequences of economic dependency and vulnerability." (WoS GBV SC. "GBVIMS+ Data Gathering Organizations Survey Findings about the GBV Trends in north-west Syria after the Earthquake." 2023: 5)*

## Livelihoods

### Access Barriers and GBV Risks for Women and Girls

1. Limited availability of livelihood and business development programming targeting vulnerable women and older adolescent girls
2. Limited impact of vocational courses when not paired with CVA or when equipment is not provided after the courses
3. Greater numbers of girls engaged in child labour, including its worst forms, in which they face high levels of sexual and physical violence and exploitation
4. Coercion into sexual acts in order to be paid, to avoid being fired, or to receive a promotion
5. Withholding of wages, paying low wages, and requiring long working hours in poor, hazardous conditions
6. Limited targeting and adaptation of livelihood programme modalities for women and older adolescent girls, despite heightened barriers to decent employment opportunities and widespread labour and sexual exploitation of working women and girls:
  - Limited access to and availability of safe and fair job opportunities, combined with limited economic capacities of women and girls, due to local gender norms; restricted mobility related to risks of sexual violence, family restrictions, and lack of transport; and limited access to skill-building opportunities
  - Difficulties for women and girls to refuse unsafe or unfair income-generating opportunities, due to limited job opportunities and their inability to meet basic needs
7. Lack of awareness-raising efforts linking livelihood programming to GBV programming, available GBV services, and the rights of women and girls
8. Lack of linkages to livelihood support for referrals of GBV survivors, as well as a lack of inclusion of at-risk women and girls and GBV survivors in livelihood eligibility criteria

### Quotes

*"Harassment happens to female students, especially when they are on their way to school or whenever they are looking for a job." (Woman, Aleppo, Jebel Saman)*

*"Although awareness has increased, violence is still increasing due to the lack of job opportunities, and so spreading awareness against violence has become less efficient, and employers are exploiting the fact that there are no job opportunities." (Woman, Aleppo, Jebel Saman)*

*"There are GBV concerns and risks during distribution and livelihood activities." (GBV Expert, north-east Syria)*

*"I have heard about livelihood programmes... and it is very important to encourage women to learn different professions and work in these professions in their homes." (Man, As-Sweida, Salkhad)*

*"[There is a need for] improving job opportunities for girls in the camp." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Areesheh)*

*"My daughter took a sewing course, but I don't have a sewing machine for her to work and assist us financially." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Areesheh)*

*"Due to the economic burden, I hope that there will be jobs for men to reduce the psychological pressure on us, because the tension and negative pressure are transmitted to us." (Adolescent Girl, Rural Damascus, Duma)*

*"There are insufficient livelihoods opportunities and MPCA providers, and those who are present lack a gender-transformative let alone gender-responsive approach. Many of the opportunities that exist are targeted toward heads of households, which means that programming is often designed to meet the needs of male heads of households... More often than not, GBV survivors are not explicitly included in the eligibility criteria for MPCA and livelihoods programming. In addition, many survivors lack documentation to access MPCA and livelihoods programming." (CARE, WRC, & SRD. "No One Has Power Over Me: The Impact of Integrating Cash Assistance into GBV Response in Northwestern Syria." 2022: 20)*

## WASH

### Access Barriers and GBV Risks for Women and Girls

1. Lack of availability and distance to WASH facilities and the lack of gender segregation, lighting, locks, and other safety measures increase the risks of sexual violence, preventing safe access to WASH facilities—especially in camps and schools:
  - Incidents and risks of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape are frequently reported in association with latrines, bathing facilities, waterpoints, and water distribution centres
2. Conditions and high costs of water distribution pose challenges for women and girls, who bear the brunt of domestic and caretaking responsibilities (e.g. for children and family members who are sick or who have disabilities), with households facing increased risks of water contamination
  - The quantity of distributed water is not sufficient to cover the needs of older persons, PwDs, and children, leading to heightened domestic burden and risks of exploitation faced by women and girls in caretaking roles
3. Disputes at water distribution points and laundry facilities have created unsafe conditions and a hostile environment for women, girls, and other vulnerable groups, affecting their access to these facilities:
  - Crowding, fighting, and loitering by men and youth around water points and distribution centres deter women and girls from being able to access these services and facilities, and increase their risks
4. Lack of adaptation of WASH facilities and water distribution modalities pose access barriers for women, girls, and other vulnerable groups and increase their risks of exploitation:
  - Un-adapted structures and remote locations of latrines, bathing facilities, and waterpoints—paired with inaccessible road conditions, due to poor infrastructure, terrain, and weather conditions, especially in winter—make it difficult for women, girls, and vulnerable groups to reach water points or access to water and hygiene material distributions
5. Insufficient distributions of menstrual hygiene and dignity kits, despite the great needs of women and girls

### Quotes

*“Women and girls need support with hygiene baskets that meet the needs of women.” (Adolescent Boy, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)*

*“There is difficulty in obtaining sufficient quantities of water, which causes people to form queues, and fights occur between women, men, boys, and children and they may harm each other... that happened yesterday.” (Man, Al-Hasakeh, Tel Tamer)*

*“Young men stand next to water tanks and prevent girls from coming to fill water for fear of harassment, which prevents girls from getting water while young men get it. Men have priority in distributions to receive ice and water.” (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hole)*

*“There is harassment in the bathrooms due to lack of lighting. One day at two in the morning, while I was going to the bathroom, someone who was hiding in there tried to touch my body and harass me; I could not see him in the darkness, but I escaped.” (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Tweina)*

*“Mixed bathrooms are located far from the tents. In some camps, bathrooms are very far from the tents, and girls and women are forced to go out there alone, where they might be exposed to abuse. Bathrooms are poorly lit. Unfortunately, sometimes the lights in the bathrooms go out, and it takes a long time to repair them, which causes many problems. If I were in this situation, I wouldn’t go or send my daughters there.” (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*“There is violence in the shared camps in bathrooms and laundries, especially for women and girls, as they find it difficult to use these facilities.” (Man, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*“There is harassment in schools (child to child); I heard that children are exposed to harassment in bathrooms.” (Woman, Rural Damascus, Harasta)*

## Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM)

### Access Barriers and GBV Risks for Women and Girls

1. Poor camp conditions and infrastructure increase GBV risks for women and girls, including IPV/domestic and family violence, sexual violence, restricted movement, and negative coping mechanisms, such as child and forced marriage:
  - The remote location of most camps—together with the lack of lighting (along roads and in WASH facilities), poor roads, and inaccessible transportation in camps—create access barriers and heightened sexual violence risks for women and girls attempting to reach services, resulting in increased mobility restrictions
  - Crowded camp layout, close proximity of tents, and mixed gender cohabitation situations in camps and collective shelters contribute to stricter control over women and girls' behaviour, placing additional restrictions on their freedom of expression and movement and limiting their access to education, work, and other assistance and services
  - In many areas of camps, there are a lack of dedicated spaces allocated for women and girls
2. Lack of availability of safe housing and limited shelter assistance increase risks of sexual violence, IPV/domestic and family violence, movement restrictions, and other forms of GBV:
  - Women and girls feel insecure in tents, as it is not possible to lock or secure them and they are often in close proximity to neighbours
  - Lack of privacy, safety, and protection from the weather, due to the poor quality of tents and lack of replacement tents
  - Small living spaces with no private spaces for women and girls
  - The need to purchase expensive tents and winterisation supplies at personal expenses have increased the risks of sexual exploitation and SEA for women and girls
3. Limited awareness-raising and prevention efforts to address risks of sexual exploitation related to shelter, eviction, and HLP concerns for women and girls, including insufficient awareness efforts targeting camp managers, landlords, and men and boys:
  - Insufficient training of CCCM staff, including community delegates and volunteers, on GBV risk mitigation, PSEA, and safe referrals
  - Gaps in sexual exploitation awareness-raising for landlords

### Quotes

*"The rate of violence in large camps is high, due to overcrowding, mixing, the large number of organisations operating there, the large number of displaced people, and the diversity of their origins, customs, and traditions." (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*"Violence increases in camps, especially in areas where assistance is distributed." (Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Ariha)*

*"[There are factors that increase violence] such as the surrounding conditions in the camp; for example, during the gathering [of people] to transport water from tanks to tents." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tweina)*

*"The camp situation does not help them. They suffer a lot to get an assistance, to get to the market, because the camp does not have paved roads, nor drainage or suitable bathrooms." (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*"Women have reported incidents of violence and manipulation by camp administrators." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hole)*

*"When assistances arrive, the camp official exploits us and does not distribute fairly to all, and people do not file a complaint for fear that the camp will be deprived of aid." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Afrin)*

*"Women in camps may be subjected to sexual or material exploitation and often it is from the camp administration; this exploitation can be sexual or they will ask for a share of the assistance. Often, the beneficiaries are extorted by employees and there are cases of corruption... For some beneficiaries, they may give up part of their aid in order to receive any of it." (Man, Idlib, Ariha)*

*"We noticed reports of cases [of GBV], including harassment, inside the camps, perpetrated by service providers, volunteers, or those responsible for aid." (GBV Expert, north-east Syria)*

## Shelter

### Access Barriers and GBV Risks for Women and Girls

1. Poor conditions and infrastructure of collective shelters following the earthquakes have increased GBV risks for women and girls, including IPV/domestic and family violence, sexual violence, restricted movement, and negative coping mechanisms, such as child and forced marriage:
  - Limited GBV and PSEA mitigation measures, particularly in collective shelters, including lack of proper lighting in shared bathrooms and public spaces, lack of gender-segregated and lockable toilets, lack of privacy partitions in tents, etc.
  - In many areas of collective shelters, there are a lack of dedicated spaces for women and girls
2. Unavailability of safe housing and limited shelter assistance increase risks of sexual violence, IPV/domestic and family violence, movement restrictions, and other forms of GBV:
  - Movement restrictions and lack of housing options force women and girls to settle for unsafe and uninhabitable shelter, especially following displacement from earthquakes and hostilities (e.g. in fields and abandoned buildings, or returning to damaged homes)
  - Lack of available shelter and limited financial resources frequently force multiple families to live together
  - Small living spaces often lack private spaces for women and girls
3. Lack of shelter assistance modalities targeting at-risk women and girls:
  - Gaps in targeted support for women and girls with heightened risks, such as widowed and divorced women and girls, separated girls and their caregivers, women and girls with disabilities, older women, and displaced women and girls
  - Inadequate shelter conditions, especially for older persons and PwDs
  - Insufficient support provided to displaced women and girls and their families, who lost all their household possessions in the earthquake
4. Limited awareness and prevention efforts addressing the heightened risks of sexual exploitation related to shelter, eviction, and HLP concerns for women and girls—particularly efforts targeting landlords and men and boys:
  - Some landlords have taken advantage of the housing crisis to raise rents, evict tenants, and sexually exploit female tenants who have very limited income-generating opportunities and economic capacities
  - Widowed and divorced women and girls, older women, and women and girls with disabilities are at a particularly heightened risk of eviction and the denial of HLP rights by family members
  - Insufficient training of shelter staff, including community delegates and volunteers on GBV risk mitigation, PSEA, and safe referrals
  - Gaps in sexual exploitation awareness-raising programmes targeting landlords

### Quotes

*"There is no organisation that provides tents or insulators or builds houses, and we have been buying insulators and tents for more than 10 years. I need to replace the insulators once a year and I need a large amount of money to do it, or rainwater will leak into the tent like it did last year." (Older Woman, Idlib, Dana)*

*"They told me to pay for them to put up windows and doors for my house, but until now they haven't. I use blankets to cover the windows and the door." (Older Woman, Dar'a, Dar'a)*

*"The camp does not receive any distributions, no monthly parcel, no hygiene kits, no new tents, which are worn out because they are four years old." (Adolescent Boy, Aleppo, Atareb)*

*"There are humanitarian assistances and services, but it is not free, and the people suffer because they cannot afford them due to high prices for things like water, food, admission to private hospitals, access to shelter, and private education, and this contributes to the spread of exploitation." (Woman, Idlib, Jisr-Ash-Shugur)*

*"Overcrowding and more than one family living in one tent or small house makes women lose privacy and causes psychological and physical violence, such as beatings and other forms." (Woman, Idlib, Dana)*

*"There is shelter, but all shelter projects are small spaces that are not suitable for families." (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Aleppo, Jarablus)*



## Food Security

### Access Barriers and GBV Risks for Women and Girls

1. Distance, presence of mix-gendered crowds, and set-up of food distribution points increases the risks of sexual violence against women and girls while at, or while travelling to and from, distribution points
2. Reduction in food availability, coupled with increasing food prices, have exacerbated women's and girls' exposure to GBV risks, and have contributed to an uptick in dangerous coping strategies, with growing reports of survival sex linked to food needs:
  - Suspension of food parcels and/or insufficient frequency of distributions has been reported across many locations, placing increased pressures on households to meet their food needs and exacerbating tensions and IPV/domestic and family violence
  - Inadequate quantities of food basket provisions for the number of household members have increased the perception that vulnerable members of the household are a "burden," increasing the adoption of negative coping mechanisms, such as child and forced marriage, child labour, and school drop-outs among adolescent girls
  - Sexual exploitation of women and girls, SEA, and survival sex are reported to be significantly increasing in direct relation to the inability of households to provide food for their families
3. Lack of adapted food distribution modalities has increased access barriers of women and girls and heightened their risks of GBV:
  - Long distances to food distribution points, long wait times, and difficulties to carry or transport in-kind food assistance have negatively impacted safe access for female heads of households, widowed and divorced women and girls, persons with disabilities, and older persons
  - Limited tailoring of modalities designed to target and address the nutritional needs of pregnant and lactating women (with specific attention to pregnant adolescent girls and young mothers), PwDs, and older persons, with reports of food items and quantities not being suitable for persons with specific needs
  - Food insecurity among female heads of households and their families and the gender gap for women and girls in meeting their nutritional needs is a growing concern, especially for widowed and divorced women and girls, unaccompanied and separated girls, older women, and women and girls with disabilities
  - Poor quality of and less relevant types of food items contribute to reselling of assistance by households, heightening associated risks
4. Lack of awareness-raising on equitable distribution of resources and GBV integrated into nutrition and food programming, in order to mitigate harmful gender norms that affect the ability of women and girls to safely access and benefit from food assistance (e.g. prioritisation in some households of men and boys eating first and receiving larger portions)

### Quotes

*"[We deal with verbal harassment] in the street, markets, near water tanks, and when receiving food assistance." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tweina)*

*"There is a registration centre for food parcels here, but we can't register due to overcrowding." (Older Woman, Lattakia, Lattakia)*

*"Women go at three o'clock in the morning for bread, and there is psychological violence at the places where bread is sold. Violence increases in the places where bread is distributed and in the surrounding area." (Older Woman, Rural Damascus, Kafr Batna)*

*"There are assistance parcels, but people are humiliated and forced to wait under the sun; they fight and quarrel. People who need the food parcels don't take them, while people who are not in need receive them instead." (Adolescent Girl, Lattakia, Lattakia)*

*"If you have support, you take food. There are three widows who haven't received any assistance and the distributions are not fair [to them]." (Woman, Aleppo, Atareb)*

*"Some people are deprived of access to services like the distribution of food parcels, bread, or gas, because they do not have identification papers for them and their children." (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*"Once, a person blackmailed the widows in this area and asked them to go with him to get the food basket and no one dared to speak about it for fear of their reputation and to avoid problems, and the women cannot report, fearing scandal." (Woman, Idlib, Ariha)*

*"There have been many cases [of SEA] due to injustice in the distribution of foodstuffs and women's needs, their fear of not ensuring confidentiality, their lack of trust in complaint mechanisms, the failure of authorities to respond to complaints, and women's lack of awareness of complaint mechanisms." (Man, Aleppo, Jarablus)*

## Nutrition

### Access Barriers and GBV Risks for Women and Girls

1. Limited availability of nutrition activities and spaces has affected the nutritional outcomes for pregnant and lactating women and girls and their children, and has reduced the availability of entry points for accessing other services through referrals (e.g. health care, GBV)
2. Growing nutrition needs of households have increased the exposure of women and girls to GBV in households and communities, with limited adaptations of food security and nutrition programming modalities designed to support GBV risk-mitigation efforts, tackling nutrition-related drivers of child and forced marriage, child labour, IPV/domestic and family violence, sexual exploitation, SEA, and survival sex:
  - Families are resorting to child marriage and having girls drop-out of school, due to the inability to provide food, and are turning to forced marriage more broadly, especially of divorced and widowed women and girls, in an effort to reduce the 'burden' placed on the household
  - Heightened risks of sexual exploitation, SEA, and survival sex have been linked to growing food and nutrition needs in communities
  - Women experiencing IPV were reported to be less likely to initiate breastfeeding early or practice exclusive breastfeeding
3. Lack of clear messages to the population within food and nutrition programming that link GBV with malnutrition, especially in relation to adolescent pregnancies resulting from child marriage:
  - Traditionally, families often tend to prioritise the nutrition of men and boys
4. Gaps in referrals between nutrition and GBV partners, despite nutrition staff frequently coming across child marriage and other GBV cases

### Quotes

*"The lack of items in the food parcel has an impact on the girls' nutrition patterns. Priority in food is for the father and brother (your brother works and gets tired and has priority in eating)." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Areesheh)*

*"All participants have said that the aid provided is not suitable for all groups: whether it is water, foodstuffs, or hygiene materials, it is not suitable for the situation of the elderly, pregnant women, and the disabled." (Older Woman, Idlib, Dana)*

*"Nutrition partners come across GBV survivors often, especially early marriage survivors, and they are not sufficiently informed and trained on how to refer cases to GBV services and provide PFA." (WoS GBV AoR. "Tipsheet: Sector GBV Risks Mitigation Mainstreaming Priorities and Commitments: Nutrition." 2023: 1)*

*"Women and girls may not have the freedom to access distribution points and nutrition support, especially if there is no man to accompany them, or if staff are not women." (Ibid.)*

*"When adolescence and pregnancy overlap, nutrition needs increase dramatically. When these needs aren't met, it is more likely to result in malnutrition and severe health complications for both mother and child." (Ibid.)*

*"Women who experience intimate partner violence are less likely to practice exclusive breastfeeding or to engage in early initiation of breastfeeding." (Ibid.)*

*"In certain locations, nutrition partners face challenges in finding [confidential, safe mother/baby areas] to conduct breastfeeding information sessions, including one-on-one breastfeeding support." (Ibid.)*

*"Non-inclusion of GBV topics in nutrition awareness-raising activities, despite the tight link between the two sectors." (Ibid: 2)*

## Non-food Item (NFI) Distribution

### Access Barriers and GBV Risks for Women and Girls

1. With households facing challenges in purchasing necessary items due to increasing prices and limited job opportunities, the reduction and infrequency in the provision of NFI materials has increased the vulnerabilities of women and girls, exposing them to higher risks of sexual exploitation, IPV/domestic and family violence, and negative coping mechanisms such as child and forced marriages, child labour, and survival sex. Concerning gaps in NFI provisions include minimal winterisation in terms of heating/insulation materials, blankets, and winter-appropriate clothes, particularly in collective settlements and camps
2. Lack of organisation and crowd control at NFI distribution points, with mixed gender lines and overcrowding further limiting the access of women and girls and increasing their risks of sexual violence
3. Absence of female staff at NFI distribution points, coupled with the presence of untrained volunteers and committee members, exacerbating women's and girls' exposure to SEA and other forms of GBV
4. Lack of targeted NFI assistance addressing the specific needs of at-risk women and girls, including adolescent girls, older women, or women and girls with disabilities

### Quotes

*"Unfortunately, there is no relief assistance or hygiene kits, although all the girls need it." (Woman, As-Sweida, Salkhad)*

*"There is no non-food aid, especially for women, girls, and children." (Woman, Aleppo, Jarablus)*

*"We hope to receive a basket for women on a monthly basis." (Woman, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)*

*"As for water, food parcels, and dignity kits, they do not provide them to us and we do not hear about them." (Older Woman, Aleppo, Jarablus)*

*"This year, no heating materials were distributed, as they distributed heating material vouchers to very few people. I, along with many other women, did not receive any. As for hygiene materials, for the elderly, they were not given a financial aid for cleaning materials, and the amount of water or food given was not increased." (Older Woman, Idlib, Dana)*

*"They don't take our opinion on hygiene materials and heating materials, and not even about the food basket." (Older Woman, Idlib, Dana)*

*"There are children who work and study at the same time, and children who leave school to work, and of course this is due to the bad financial situation. There are parents who were obliged to drop their children out of school because they cannot buy stationery or school uniforms: if he cannot feed his children, how can he buy these things?" (Woman, Rural Damascus, Madaya)*

## Health

### Access Barriers and GBV Risks for Women and Girls

1. Lack of availability and distance to health facilities poses challenges for women's and girls' safe access to health, including to sexual and reproductive health and medical care for survivors:
  - Lack of availability of specific medical services, equipment (e.g. diagnostic tests, ambulances), and medicine makes it difficult for persons to meet their medical needs and often necessitates visits to multiple health facilities, increasing risks for women and girls
  - Long distances to and from facilities; long wait times, often requiring individuals to arrive early or stay late in the dark; overcrowding; and mixed gender lines at health facilities have increased access barriers and risks of sexual harassment, SEA, and other forms of GBV
  - Growing movement restrictions and the need for women and girls to be accompanied outside the home, due to insecurity and social norms, have limited their ability to access health services safely and confidentially, limiting disclosure of and support for GBV and sexual and reproductive health needs

2. Lack of availability of family planning centres, women's hospitals, and paediatric facilities have limited women's and girls' access to sexual and reproductive health and GBV services, and to health services more broadly, impacting their ability to meet their health needs and the health needs of their children, and for GBV survivors to access necessary medical care:
  - Suspensions and closures of family planning centres, women's hospitals/clinics, paediatric facilities, and mobile teams have increased access barriers and risks for women and girls, who must now travel further to seek medical care and are thus exposed to greater risks, both on the way to health facilities and in mixed-gender facility areas, with heightened restrictions imposed by families
  - Reduced entry points for GBV survivors to access services and support
  - Limited access to Clinical Management of Rape (CMR) services have further exposed GBV survivors to life-threatening and long-term consequences, including risks of STIs and unwanted pregnancies, which could then lead to school drop-out, forced marriage, economic dependency, and social stigma, among other consequences
3. High costs of treatments and medicines, increasing GBV risks for women and girls:
  - Households taking out loans to pay for medical expenses have increased the risks of sexual exploitation of women and girls and negative coping mechanisms, especially among widowed and divorced women and girls and female heads of households
  - Caretaking responsibilities for sick persons, PwDs, and older persons fall primarily on women and girls, increasing their burden and risks
4. Overcrowded and un-adapted health facilities increase access barriers and GBV risks for women, girls, and vulnerable groups, including limited accessibility for women and girls with disabilities and older women
5. Limited awareness among GBV survivors of how to access CMR/medical care, as well as survivor-blaming attitudes among medical staff and a lack of confidentiality, pose access barriers and risks for GBV survivors:
  - Gaps in referral pathways between GBV case management and CMR/health service providers, with limited awareness of available CMR providers
  - Medical services for GBV survivors are not always provided in a confidential and non-stigmatising way
6. The insufficient distribution of information and messaging that addresses harmful gender norms within community health programming undermines efforts to promote the rights of women and girls to access healthcare. This lack of awareness contributes to the stigmatization of GBV survivors, limiting their access to medical care, and diminishes public understanding of the available GBV services:
  - Judgment and stigma by communities, especially for older, widowed, and divorced women and adolescent girls seeking access to sexual and reproductive health services, as well as for women and girls seeking testing and treatment for STIs
  - Denial of access to health care and neglect of health needs have been reported by some women and girls, with access restricted by their husbands and families, including following incidents of physical or sexual violence; the denial of access to health care has also been reported by widowed and divorced women and girls, women and girls with disabilities, older women, and separated girls
  - Risks of violence by husbands/families in response to women and girls who access health services (e.g. if women and girls are attended to by male doctors or seek medical care following incidents of GBV)
7. Barriers for some women working in the provision of medical services, due to gender norms and the associated 'shame' of being among men and working late hours, leading to stigma and GBV risks for female health care providers:
  - In turn, the limited availability of female staff is affecting women's and girls' access to health care

## Quotes

*"There is difficulty of movement and thus difficulty in reaching health and service centres." (Woman, Ar-Raqqqa, Ar-Raqqqa)*

*"Violence also occurs inside health centres during the registration, in the waiting queue." (Woman, Aleppo, Atareb)*

*"There are safety concerns that prevent women's and girls' access to services and distributions, such as overcrowding at relief distribution points and health centres, where many visitors are received, which causes overcrowding." (Man, Idlib, Jisr-Ash-Shugur)*

*"If girls go out alone, they may be subjected to harassment in health facilities." (Older Woman, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)*

*"Some area points are considered unsafe, e.g. some distribution points, health clinics, and WASH facilities. Women have reported being abused sexually or have been asked for sexual favours at these points." (GBV Expert, north-east Syria)*

*"In terms of safe access, I want to emphasise the issue of harassment and exploitation that women face in order to receive assistance. The timing of aid plays a role: women often arrive very early to register for certain services, and sometimes they have to wait in the dark, which exposes them to harassment. This isn't limited to in-kind assistance, but also when they seek health care services and others." (GBV Expert, Syria GoS areas).*

*"Even health staff partners exhibit victim-blaming attitudes, which hinders support for survivors seeking services and makes it less safe for women and girls." (GBV Expert, north-east Syria)*

*"Access to medical care for women and girls has been severely impacted by the earthquake, including much-needed sexual and reproductive health services. This is compounded by persisting health system bottlenecks such as limited female staff... and gender norms frequently limiting women and girls' movements outside the home, lack of transportation to and from facilities, and increasing inability to afford healthcare." (Whole of Syria GBV AoR. "Tipsheet: Sector GBV Risks Mitigation Mainstreaming Priorities and Commitments: Health." 2023: 1)*

## Education

### Access Barriers and GBV Risks for Women and Girls

1. Gaps in support to parents/caregivers of at-risk adolescent girls to address the denial of education and mitigate access barriers, particularly at the secondary level:
  - Limited strategies to address drop-out rates due to child marriage and child labour, as well as child recruitment of girls in certain areas (north-east Syria)
  - Adolescent girls are at a high risk of being denied education by their families, due to fears of sexual violence and kidnapping, concerns about mixed-gender schools, lack of financial means, and prioritisation of boys for educational opportunities, with displaced, married, and unaccompanied and separated girls identified to be at a particularly heightened risk
  - Reduced distributions of school kits and high costs of accessing schools combine with other access barriers to increase drop-out rates among girls
2. Limited integrated approaches between education and CVA and livelihood programming providers, in order to target and support parents/caregivers of at-risk adolescent girls and to address financial constraints
3. Lack of adapted facilities in schools, including the lack of locks and supervision of bathrooms, increasing incidents of sexual violence and access barriers:
  - Lack of GBV risk-mitigation strategies to address the high rates of sexual violence and bullying taking place in schools, and school bathrooms more specifically, as well as online, at the hands of other students, teachers, and adolescent boys and young men loitering around schools
  - Lack of inclusive school facilities and teaching methodologies that address the specific needs of at-risk girls with compounded access barriers, including girls with disabilities and displaced, unaccompanied, and separated girls (e.g. remedial learning support to bridge gaps in years of schooling)

4. Insufficient availability of schools and quality of education, with large distance of and overcrowding of schools increasing access barriers and sexual violence risks for girls:
  - Challenges to address distances and travel needed to reach schools, crowding, and limited staffing and oversight in schools, with parents' and caregivers' perception of minimal benefits versus risks serving as a further deterrent for them to send adolescent girls to schools:
    - The insufficient number of school buildings and staff shortages were worsened by damage to buildings from the conflict and earthquakes, further increasing risks to girls, due to overcrowded, mixed-gender settings in educational facilities
    - Low salaries and lack of capacity of teachers, lack of monitoring in schools, and inability to provide certifications for students have been reported in some locations as further barriers to parents allowing girls to pursue education
  - Lack of transportation support for at-risk adolescent girls to facilitate their access to (secondary) schools and exams
5. Need to address harmful gender social norms underlying barriers and GBV risks for girls in accessing education:
  - Greater need for awareness-raising in schools, and through educational programmes with parents/caregivers of adolescent girls, on the importance of education and the dangers of child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, child labour, bullying, sexual harassment, and discrimination
  - Lack of compulsory education and enforcement by authorities was identified as facilitating the denial of education by parents/caregivers and limiting girls' access to school, particularly in light of increasing constraints in the Syrian context

## Quotes

*"There are girls who are deprived of work and school, especially in the village, for example, due to transportation expenses; if the situation of the parents is poor, they like to educate boys more than girls." (Adolescent Girl, As-Sweida, As-Sweida)*

*"There are mixed schools for boys and girls, which causes parents to fear sending their daughters, for fear that their daughters would be exposed to harassment, exploitation, and violence." (Adolescent Boy, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*"Violence of all kinds exists, such as the marriage of minors and the deprivation of girls of their right to education, especially in these situations where they need to travel to other towns in order to complete their education and take exams." (Man, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*"I feel very sad that I was not able to continue my education because of the far distance of school. I had to leave school because of my father's fear of me going out alone to school." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Afrin)*

*"Girls are deprived of education because of the difficulty of accessing schools and the overcrowding in the camp's schools, and we do not have the financial ability to pay for private schools." (Woman, Idlib, Dana)*

*"One of the girls recounted an incident where a girl walking alone to an institute in a neighbouring village was harassed by a group of young men in a private car. This harassment stemmed from a lack of reliable transportation; when transportation is available, it often comes with exorbitantly high fares. Additionally, the camp's distance from the village and the absence of a nearby secondary education center further restrict access to education." (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*"There are parents who take their girls out of school at early age because they can't afford to buy school supplies." (Woman, Homs, Homs)*

*Especially after the earthquake, there has been a lot of deprivation of education among girls due to protection concerns. Parents have developed the idea that schools are unsafe due to sexual harassment." (GBV Expert, Syria GoS areas).*

## Protection and Child Protection

### Access Barriers and GBV Risks for Women and Girls

1. Lack of centres, activities, and services for youth, contributing to increased risks of GBV for women and girls:
  - Limited availability of youth centres and recreational and PSS activities for boys, leaving adolescent boys and youth with nothing to do as a result of limited job opportunities and a lack of positive outlets, particularly in camps
  - Stigma associated with seeking MHPSS services and limited availability, signifying that the MHPSS needs of men and boys largely go unaddressed
  - Gaps in GBV awareness-raising targeting men and boys within protection, youth, and MHPSS spaces
2. Steep barriers reported for women and girls who wish to seek legal recourse and/or divorce for GBV:
  - Risks of stigma, retaliation, and so-called 'honour' killing for GBV survivors who disclose and seek legal recourse, as well as the potential loss of inheritance and child custody
  - Limited availability of legal services and assistance, especially for women and girls and GBV survivors, with legal support often unable to address the subsequent GBV risks they face
  - In one area, restrictions by authorities require women and girls to be accompanied by a man in order to access the courts, posing further access barriers for women and girls and deterring GBV survivors, and especially domestic violence survivors, from coming forward (north-west Syria)
  - Reports of harassment, mistreatment, and dismissal of GBV survivors by judiciary and law enforcement authorities, as well as the reported impunity of perpetrators, leading to further harm
  - Limited awareness-raising on women's legal rights, especially efforts targeting men and boys
3. Limited availability of civil documentation support, with female heads of households and their children and UASC at a higher risk of not having or facing difficulties in obtaining missing civil documentation:
  - Distance to civil documentation offices; reports of harassment, threats, and exploitation by authorities; and associated costs create barriers for women and girls seeking to obtain civil documentation
  - Increasing prices for civil documentation identity cards have been reported in one area
  - Reliance on verbal/unregistered contracts for marriage, leading to protection risks for women and girls and their children, due to not having registered marriage contracts and birth certificates for children
  - Lack of civil documentation, posing barriers for the access of women and girls to humanitarian assistance and services, as well as further restrictions on their movement and increased GBV risks
4. Limited availability of legal assistance for women and girls on issues of inheritance, HLP, and child custody:
  - Widowed and divorced women and girls and older women face a high risk of eviction, often being pushed out of their homes or having to return to their family home, where they face abuse, coercion to remarry in order to alleviate some of the financial 'burden' on the household, and loss of child custody upon divorce or remarriage
  - Lack of having somewhere else to go was identified by women and girls as a key deterrent for disclosing GBV, particularly for IPV/domestic and family violence, along with the potential denial of child custody
  - Gaps in collaboration between GBV and protection programming, in order to support and accompany women and girls who have been denied inheritance and child custody as a consequence of divorce or loss of the husband
5. Lack of mitigation measures to reduce the risk of child labour and child recruitment and the engagement of unaccompanied, separated, and vulnerable girls in dangerous work:

- Limited care arrangements, services, and support for children who are unaccompanied and separated, engaged in child labour, or recruited by factions; there are some examples of orphanages, but these are mostly privately or publicly operated
- Children who are unaccompanied, separated, engaged in child labour, or recruited by factions are largely excluded from existing protection and child protection activities

6. In general, there is a lack of inclusive spaces and targeted measures to facilitate access to protection and child protection centres and services for women and girls with disabilities, older women, and women and girls with mobility constraints

For further information regarding denial of inheritance and HLP, see also: *Denial of Resources, Services, Opportunities, and Rights*. For information regarding barriers to legal recourse, see also: *GBV Services*.

## Quotes

*"Our camp has nothing at all, no protection centres or other facilities... even a food basket or a hygiene basket we did not receive for three years now." (Woman, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)*

*"There are no centres in [the region] for youth. There was [an initiative] where we made life skills courses, and created a space. Now, the educational courses and recreational activities and child-friendly spaces are closed and there are only summer clubs, and their cost is high." (Adolescent Boy, Dar'a, Dar'a)*

*"There are no places [for protection], or we don't know of such places that protect us, because parents don't want us to get to such places and ask for protection." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tel Tamer)*

*"There are protection centres as a space for peace, but there are no spaces that are child-friendly, or spaces friendly to adolescent girls to help develop their skills, or spaces for women." (Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Ariha)*

*"There are many groups, especially adolescent girls, who cannot reach protection centres due to customs and traditions that prevent girls from leaving the house alone." (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*"There are safety issues in accessing services like women's protective services and child protection services, due to the fear of kidnapping and harassment [when travelling long distances to the centres]. These reasons prevent some parents from allowing women, girls, and boys to participate in activities." (Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Dana)*

*"People with special needs cannot reach the protection centres due to the lack of private means of transportation for them; there are no places designated for these people. We know that poverty prevails in [the] neighbourhoods, which prevents some women and girls from accessing the centres, due to transportation fares and long distances that women are forced to travel." (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*"There are some groups in the community that do not have knowledge of the available services, such as protection and legal services." (Man, Idlib, Jisr-Ash-Shugur)*

*"Bullying and control by surrounding people prevent access to protection centres." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Jarablus)*

*"Some protection centres in the area have male employees, which is a very sensitive point in the community. In [the agency] in particular, the beneficiaries feel safe, because even the guards are females, and when the transportation service is available, there is a female facilitator with the driver." (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*









4

**Recommendations**

## 4. Recommendations

### Overall Recommendations

1. Increase the geographical reach and coverage of WGSS and other female-only spaces, including through the provision of transportation support, especially for at-risk and hard-to-reach women and girls.
2. Expand the quality, availability and accessibility of specialised GBV services, such as GBV case management and psychosocial support, medical care for survivors of sexual violence, legal counselling, and CVA.
3. Increase availability and safe access to quality education for adolescent girls, together with the provision of learning and educational opportunities for women.
4. Expand support for income-generating activities for women and older adolescent girls and promote their economic empowerment.
5. Improve women's and girls' safe access to humanitarian assistance and services, operationalising context-relevant and endorsed GBV and SEA risk-mitigation measures within humanitarian-sector interventions.
6. Identify and invest in effective, innovative, and context-appropriate GBV awareness-raising and social and behavioural change approaches, in order to address harmful gender norms that act as drivers of GBV, with a focus on targeting men and boys, parents/caregivers, and community leaders.
7. Strengthen the consultation and participation of women and girls at different levels, facilitating their direct participation in informing humanitarian programming, their increased access to feedback and response mechanisms, and the support of women-led initiatives, committees, and associations.
8. Promote and support the enactment of gender-responsive laws, policies, and national frameworks that address GBV and gender inequality, in alignment with international commitments.
9. Continue to consult with women and girls, wider communities, and local actors to validate findings and build on <i>Voices from Syria 2024</i>

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 localised programmatic consultations to take place with women and girls, in order to adapt recommendations to each area and population group.

*"[We need] to give women a role in making decisions and to have a place in the community; I don't want anyone to say to me, 'you are a girl, you cannot.'" (Adolescent Girl, As-Sweida, As-Sweida)*

*"[We need to] achieve equality between women and men... to have the same rights." (Adolescent Girl, As-Sweida, As-Sweida)*

*"If I could change something, I would change society's view on the inferiority of women and girls." (Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Dana)*

**1. Increase the geographical reach and coverage of WGSS and other female-only spaces, including through the provision of transportation support, especially for at-risk and hard-to-reach women and girls: [sector tags: GBV]**

Recommendations and Desired Changes	Voices of Women and Girls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Map available WGSS and identify gaps in geographic coverage and barriers for specific groups of women and girls to access safe spaces</li> <li>▪ Expand the number of dedicated WGSS, particularly in areas that are remote, hard to reach, and without existing safe spaces</li> <li>▪ Provide transportation support, accompaniment, and childcare for women and girls, to enhance access to WGSS</li> <li>▪ Expand GBV mobile teams, outreach activities, and home visits; integrate GBV messaging within multisectoral mobile teams</li> <li>▪ Offer activities in parallel for adolescent girls and their mothers and organise activities with families and communities to build trust and facilitate girls' access to safe spaces</li> <li>▪ Conduct structured skill-building sessions and support groups with adolescent girls and women's support groups*</li> <li>▪ Adapt WGSS to be inclusive of women and girls with disabilities and older women</li> <li>▪ Document the reduction in safe spaces and the impact on women and girls and on the provision of GBV services</li> </ul>	<p><i>"There must be more than one centre within a village that serves all the people of the area." (Woman, Aleppo, Atareb)</i></p> <p><i>"Community centres are missing in the camp and we need them to reduce violence between men and women." (Adolescent Boy, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)</i></p> <p><i>"[We would like to have] centres for teenage girls that offer vocational courses, including sewing, hairdressing, computer skills, and others, in addition to providing transportation and a safe space for them." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Areesheh)</i></p> <p><i>"Girls [need] support programs that suit girls, to develop their educational skills, empower them in decision-making, and raise awareness of various areas of life, under the supervision of specialists." (Adolescent Boy, Idlib, Jisr-Ash-Shugur)</i></p> <p><i>"[We need] to spread more teams in the community to hold awareness sessions on how to deal with these groups. To provide transportation and allocate a small amount of money to facilitate transportation and ensure their safety when coming to the centres." (Adolescent Girl with Disability or Caregiver, Ar-Raqqa)</i></p> <p><i>"Home visits are suitable for us because when we attend sessions with our parents, it becomes easier for parents to allow their girls to come to the centre, and the transportation service and the presence of a female employee with the driver makes the parents feel comfortable. The presence of female employees increases the opportunity for girls to obtain approval from parents to visit the centres." (Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)</i></p> <p><i>"I see that transportation makes us safer and it helps us to access [the centres]." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Jarablus)</i></p> <p><i>"There should be a means of transportation for elderly women, widows and divorced women to and from protection centres to maintain their personal safety." (Older Woman, Idlib, Dana)</i></p>

\*See also: Recommendation 4 and 6 regarding provision of GBV services, and GBV awareness-raising activities.

## 2. Expand the quality, availability and accessibility of specialised GBV services, such as GBV case management and psychosocial support, medical care for survivors of sexual violence, legal counselling, and CVA: [sector tags: GBV, Health, Protection, CVA, Livelihoods, MHPSS]

Recommendations and Desired Changes	Voices of Women and Girls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recruit and build capacities of additional GBV case managers</li> <li>▪ Increase availability of GBV case management embedded within WGSS, health facilities, schools, and mobile teams, ensuring safe, private, and confidential provision of services</li> <li>▪ Map and increase availability of medical care for GBV survivors, ensuring availability of clinical care for survivors of sexual assault and rape in each area</li> <li>▪ Combine GBV case management with CVA support for at-risk women and girls and GBV survivors</li> <li>▪ Expand legal counselling and civil registration assistance for women and girls and GBV survivors, identifying targeted approaches for common legal issues (HLP, child custody)</li> <li>▪ Increase information dissemination about available GBV services with communities and service providers</li> <li>▪ Strengthen GBV referral pathways across humanitarian sectors</li> <li>▪ Identify targeted approaches to address new and growing GBV trends</li> <li>▪ Expand specialised services and entry points for male survivors and persons with diverse SOGIESC</li> <li>▪ Explore possible collaboration and strategies to advocate for more safe shelters for GBV survivors</li> </ul>	<p><i>"Increase the number of child-friendly centres, youth empowerment centres, women's empowerment centres and clinics due to the small number of centres in the camp; the centres are too few to cover the entire area of the camp." (Adolescent Boy, Idlib, Dana)</i></p> <p><i>"Therefore, if nearby centres or transportation are available, we can arrive." (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)</i></p> <p><i>"It is important to have close people who can provide help, psychological support, and counselling on violence topics that adolescent girls may be exposed to." (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)</i></p> <p><i>"Providing a child-friendly space, shelters, case management, safety and stability services, securing documents for them, vocational and education [support], and following up their education." (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)</i></p> <p><i>"Widows, divorcees, and adolescent girls [can be better supported] by allocating special places for women to receive services, adhering to confidentiality while providing these services, and providing services in safe places where they are not exposed to any type of violence." (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)</i></p> <p><i>"Many girls are divorced at a young age or their husbands died... they may need a lawyer who protects their rights and sometimes they need a sweet word from a psychological support staff, like here in the centre. I am very happy when I come to the centre." (Adolescent Girl, As-Sweida, As-Sweida)</i></p> <p><i>"We hope that, in the event of a rape incident, there will be special centres that help the victim and provide her with psychological support, so that she can start a new life, and the family must be by her side and support her." (Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Ariha)</i></p> <p><i>"There should be another shelter... women reported that there were incidents within the shelters as well. These stories were mentioned by the workers as 'harassment and rape,' meaning there must be more control of these shelters." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hole)</i></p>

### 3. Increase availability and safe access to quality education for adolescent girls, together with the provision of learning and educational opportunities for women: [sector tags: Education, Child Protection, CVA, Livelihoods, WASH, GBV]

Recommendations and Desired Changes	Voices of Women and Girls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Raise awareness on and design initiatives to address sexual violence, bullying, and discrimination in schools</li> <li>▪ Conduct regular safety audits in schools to identify and design strategies for addressing GBV risks</li> <li>▪ Facilitate transportation and accompaniment to support adolescent girls' access to schools</li> <li>▪ Increase awareness-raising efforts among adolescent girls and their parents/caregivers on the importance of education and the risks of child marriage, early pregnancy, and child labour</li> <li>▪ Provide CVA and livelihood support to parents/caregivers of at-risk adolescent girls, including the provision of school kits and supplies</li> <li>▪ Support literacy, numeracy, and remedial courses for adolescent girls and women</li> <li>▪ Embed GBV and child protection case managers and MHPSS staff within schools</li> <li>▪ Conduct further training of teachers on PFA, GBV basic response, child protection, and inclusion</li> <li>▪ Integrate feedback and response mechanisms into schools</li> </ul>	<p><i>"Fear [prevents] girls from going outside the camp because there are cases of kidnapping and verbal abuse from some young men in the streets, so many girls are deprived of education, and we hope that some organisations will provide transportation, especially for girls." (Man, Aleppo, Afrin)</i></p> <p><i>"[Girls need] free courses that support their studies, because there are no good teachers in the camp (mathematics, English). Targeting illiterate girls... more literacy courses and more supported and advanced lessons should be provided." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Areeshah)</i></p> <p><i>"[The situation can be improved by] opening schools for secondary stage and empowering adolescents in professions they like." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Areeshah)</i></p> <p><i>"The only way to reduce exposure to violence is to raise awareness, by educating parents about the role of girls in society and the need to send their daughters to school. There's a big problem for schools, and they send their daughters to work in agriculture and help with expenses." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tel Tamar)</i></p> <p><i>"The best change would be to bring back schools and education because ever since education stopped, early marriage has increased and become normal. Unfortunately, there is no one that is playing an active role to fix this, and it is all just talk and awareness sessions, and what we need are strict laws and financial support for education." (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)</i></p> <p><i>"[We can improve the situation] by educating both parents, supporting them financially, and providing them with assistance to enable them to educate us and not deprive us of our most basic rights." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Al Bab)</i></p> <p><i>"[There is a] need to support the education of adolescent girls and provide courses, because parents' first reason to not allow us to receive an education is the lack of money, which forces girls to think about running away and marrying at any opportunity, due to the many burdens and domestic pressures." (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)</i></p> <p><i>"[It is important] to increase educational awareness services and to monitor schools, due to the low salaries of teachers and high rates of school violence that occur." (Adolescent Boy, Idlib, Ariha)</i></p>

#### 4. Expand support for income-generating activities for women and older adolescent girls and promote their economic empowerment: [sector tags: CVA, Livelihoods, GBV]

Recommendations and Desired Changes	Voices of Women and Girls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increase vocational courses for women and older adolescent girls – and parents/caregivers of adolescent girls – in especially for home-based income-generation opportunities</li> <li>▪ Pair vocational courses with the provision of equipment and cash, and provide financial/digital literacy and business development support to help women and girls – and parents/caregivers of adolescent girls – start income-generating projects or find decent work</li> <li>▪ Conduct localised labour and market assessments from a gender-oriented lens, and facilitate the connections of women and older adolescent girls with market and employment opportunities</li> <li>▪ Accompany vocational and business development courses with awareness-raising sessions for women, men, and older adolescent girls and boys, in order to increase social acceptance of the expanded economic role of women and girls and to promote women’s and girls’ participation in decision-making and control over resources</li> <li>▪ Conduct awareness-raising sessions on sexual harassment and exploitation in the workplace, as well as trainings of employers</li> <li>▪ Foster networks of female entrepreneurs and support peer exchanges, identifying strategies and opportunities</li> </ul>	<p><i>“When a woman learns a profession, she becomes a community on her own.” (Woman, Dar’a, Hrak)</i></p> <p><i>“There must be multiple centres within the village and there should be support for women and girls to master a profession in order to provide their personal needs.” (Woman, Aleppo, Atareb)</i></p> <p><i>“Training the girls with professions to work so they do not go out for daily labour that exposes them to exploitation and harassment.” (Older Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Tweina)</i></p> <p><i>“We wish that we would be provided with a project for empowerment where we can learn a vocation that can benefit us financially; most of our problems would be solved.” (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Areesheh)</i></p> <p><i>“If I could change something, I would integrate vocational education into schools, because I love it and I have mastered it.” (Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Dana)</i></p> <p><i>“We need centres that provide life skills, such as computer courses, sewing, beautification, knitting, and nursing courses. And women need to be provided equipment at the end of the course that enables them to create their own project, so that they do not resort to working for anyone and expose themselves to ill-treatment, humiliation, and exploitation—and so they do not have to travel to other governorates to work on agricultural land under the sun.” (Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)</i></p> <p><i>“Provide financial support and employment opportunities for caregivers to ease the pressures on girls.” (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tel Tamer)</i></p> <p><i>“To prevent this violence, it is possible to secure a small project for one of the parents to support the family. If work is available to one of the parents, it can reduce the risks for them to a large extent.” (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)</i></p>



## 5. Improve women's and girls' safe access to humanitarian assistance and services, operationalising context-relevant and endorsed GBV and SEA risk-mitigation measures within humanitarian-sector interventions [sector tags: GBV, WASH, CCCM, Shelter, Health, Food, Nutrition, NFIs, CVA, Livelihoods, Education]

### Recommendations and Desired Changes

### Voices of Women and Girls

- Increase direct consultation with women and girls, in order to identify access barriers and safety concerns and inform sectoral programme modalities
- Strengthen GBV and SEA risk mitigation across sectors, investing in female distribution staff, monitoring, and capacity-building, including of non-traditional actors engaged in the provision of assistance and services
- Based on the WoS GBV AoR Sector Tipsheets and Voices from Syria 2024, co-develop and roll out sector-specific action plans to operationalise recommendations
- Ensure gender-separate lines, crowd control, supervision, and the presence of GBV and protection staff at distribution points
- Invest in lighting, infrastructure, and transportation, particularly in camps and remote areas, in order to facilitate women's and girls' access to assistance and services
- Adapt distribution and service modalities to reduce access barriers for women and girls and mitigate GBV risks
- Increase targeted assistance and services for at-risk women and girls within humanitarian programmes
- Ensure regular distributions of dignity, sanitary, and hygiene materials to at-risk women and girls
- Pair humanitarian assistance with the dissemination of information on GBV services and SEA, including how to report GBV/SEA
- Diversify service information dissemination and feedback and response mechanisms through both in-person outreach and online modalities, to ensure that these sources and mechanisms are accessible to women and girls and vulnerable groups
- Strengthen coordination between GBV and other sectors to analyse existing barriers and safety risks for women and girls to access and benefit from assistance and services and identify tailored measures to address
- Increase trainings on GBV risk mitigation, referral pathways, and PSEA with humanitarian personnel – including non-traditional actors – and support the mainstreaming of capacity-building at GBV focal points within sectors/agencies

*"The place must be safe, accessible, and monitored. There is no assistance in the area, but the place must be easily accessible to all, and supervised to protect female beneficiaries." (Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"People with disabilities, adolescent girls, and widows are more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. The distribution places can be safer if they are in public places and women work in them and transportation is available." (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"We can reduce cases of violence by distributing police patrols in crowded places, separating distribution points for men and females, separating men's and women's bathrooms and lighting them with electricity in camps, and increasing the presence of community committees within the camps, to inform the competent authorities to intervene." (Man, Aleppo, Jarablus)*

*"For distribution to happen in a safe way, it is possible to involve women in the distribution process, organise the queue, and choose a safe and accessible place." (Adolescent Boy, Idlib, Jisr-Ash-Shugur)*

*"There are some suggestions to make distribution safer and more credible, that distribution is done by the organisation itself and not by anyone, and that the targeted people are registered through home visits and the distribution is done by delivering the service to the home, and there should be monitoring after it, to ensure the success of the service. These ideas will make people get the assistance they deserve without any fraud." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hassakeh)*

*"Distributions should be in a safe place divided for men, women, the elderly and PWDs. Giving priority in distributions to vulnerable groups." (Adolescent Girl with Disability, Ar-Raqqa, Thawrah)*

*"In large camps, women may be unable to go out at night to use shared bathrooms, due to lack of lighting and fear of kidnapping, assault, or harassment, so they must have facilities specifically for them." (Man, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"[The situation could be improved by] providing the safe distribution of aid and special dignity baskets for girls." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Areesheh)*

*"More ways to access services: increasing focused campaigns, increasing community awareness of complaints services, having a fixed complaints officer to improve the service and enhance trust." (Man, Al-Hasakeh, Tweina)*

*"The problem is that reporting needs a phone, and the majority do not have one, and there is no internet in the camp. If there were complaint boxes distributed in the camp, it would be better." (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*"Increase awareness-raising sessions among beneficiaries regarding the sexual abuse and exploitation [of women and girls] by humanitarian service providers." (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

**6. Identify and invest in effective, innovative, and context-appropriate GBV awareness-raising and social and behavioural change approaches, in order to address harmful gender norms that act as drivers of GBV, with a focus on targeting men and boys, parents/caregivers, and community leaders: [sector tags: GBV]**

Recommendations and Desired Changes	Voices of Women and Girls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Adapt and expand GBV awareness-raising materials developed and designed for the Syria context, and support their uptake and safe implementation</li> <li>▪ 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</li> <li>▪ Target parents/caregivers and wider families of women and girls for GBV awareness-raising</li> <li>▪ Conduct structured parenting sessions with parents/caregivers in parallel to skill-building for adolescent girls</li> <li>▪ Adapt specific programme tracks to engage adolescent boys, young men, and men more broadly in accountable practices for addressing GBV</li> <li>▪ Engage community and religious leaders as allies in raising awareness on GBV within communities</li> <li>▪ Expand the use of social media and audiovisual materials for awareness-raising and conduct targeted campaigns on priority GBV topics, developed together with communities</li> <li>▪ Integrate GBV and gender equality messaging within sectoral awareness-raising and programme materials, e.g. on equitable decision-making and access to resources (food, cash, etc.) within the household</li> <li>▪ Support women- and girl-led initiatives to raise awareness on GBV in their communities</li> <li>▪ Invest further in GBV prevention efforts tackling underlying gender norms and root causes of GBV</li> </ul>	<p><i>"They need awareness and empowerment sessions on the issues of violence and its effects." (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)</i></p> <p><i>"If there are awareness teams focused on violence, and these teams reach the largest number of camps, that can reduce the phenomena of violence." (Woman, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)</i></p> <p><i>"[The situation can be improved by] changing customs and traditions in the community, through group sessions on the rights of women and children and how to preserve them, and by spreading awareness... about the importance of equality between males and females, through the establishment of protection centres that provide special sessions on women's rights and the importance of equality between males and females." (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)</i></p> <p><i>"[We need] to raise their awareness of the risks and impacts of early marriage." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Jarablus)</i></p> <p><i>"I would change some traditions, such as early marriage, by raising awareness and equally educating both parents." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Al Bab)</i></p> <p><i>"Educate female and male students about the dangers of the internet, so that girls do not fall into dangers and are not exposed to violence from their parents." (Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Ariha)</i></p> <p><i>"The girls demanded that sessions be held, raising awareness for parents to discuss their children's rights (freedom of education and of movement). [We need] increasing awareness of men and parents to support girls." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Areesheh)</i></p> <p><i>"More attention should be paid to spreading awareness among children and adolescents, including awareness about harassment, and we should encourage them to come forward and talk about any incidents that happen to them. Such awareness should also include their parents and not just the children." (Woman, Aleppo, Jebel Saman)</i></p> <p><i>"If men had sessions like the ones we had, I expect matters would change for the better." (Woman, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)</i></p> <p><i>"Organisations must target men with awareness, as women are largely targeted, but men are not, and as long as there is no awareness among men, violence will not change." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh)</i></p> <p><i>"We are benefitting from the awareness sessions for us, but for men there is no awareness or training at all. There should be sessions for men as well. They might not come at first, but perhaps if there were professional or vocational courses included, that might encourage them to come. We are aware but men are still not aware. They think that it is all empty talk, but if they attend sessions and receive the information like we did, then they would change their minds... They get the basket, but they don't have services related to violence where they can become educated, so that they stop thinking that what we say is worthless. If a chess club or a backgammon club opens, that would attract them, and then they can be given awareness sessions." (Older Woman, Dar'a, Dar'a)</i></p> <p><i>"There are protection centres in the neighbourhoods...that provide psychological support and awareness sessions about women's rights, children's rights, and how to claim and preserve rights. However, they are insufficient... and do not meet the purpose of being able to influence and change behaviours that must be worked on." (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)</i></p>

**7. Strengthen the consultation and participation of women and girls at different levels, facilitating their direct participation in informing humanitarian programming, their increased access to feedback and response mechanisms, and the support of women-led initiatives, committees, and associations: [sector tags: GBV, Humanitarian Sectors]**

Recommendations and Desired Changes	Voices of Women and Girls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct an updated mapping of women-led initiatives, committees, networks, and grassroots associations across all regions of Syria, including those that developed in response to the earthquake</li> <li>Provide capacity-building and financial support to existing women's committees, networks, associations, and local organisations addressing GBV</li> <li>Support the establishment of dedicated women's committees in camps and areas in which there are not existing structures,<sup>1</sup> and facilitate linkages with various sectors to inform humanitarian programming</li> <li>Promote the inclusion and meaningful participation of women and girls within existing community structures</li> <li>Provide platforms for and elevate the voices of women and girls with policy- and decision-makers at the national level</li> </ul>	<p><i>"We were not consulted when designing any programmes, though we were very willing to learn professions that would provide us with descent financial support in the future." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Al Bab)</i></p> <p><i>"We have not seen anyone asking what we want and what we need, we hear suddenly after a year there is a centre that provides this assistance." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Hassakeh)</i></p> <p><i>"I think a renewed survey of the area [is necessary], through which new cases of the elderly, the disabled, widows, orphans, and divorced people can be identified, in order to detect more cases, and thus serve them." (Older Woman, Aleppo, Al Bab)</i></p> <p><i>"Prioritise vulnerable women, especially people with disabilities and patients, before starting project design." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Jarablus)</i></p> <p><i>"We can raise awareness about these services and for each service they may allocate number of a person we can communicate with, and this person is ready to talk to any ordinary citizen and hear his concerns. This way people can simply go and be encouraged." (Woman, Damascus, Damascus)</i></p>

**8. Promote and support the enactment of gender-responsive laws, policies, and national frameworks addressing GBV and gender inequality, in alignment with international commitments: [sector tags: GBV]**

Recommendations and Desired Changes	Voices of Women and Girls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trace pathways for legal recourse/access to justice for GBV survivors and document case studies of legal support in different regions of Syria, especially for emerging and growing types of GBV (e.g. tech-facilitated GBV, child custody, IHL, etc.)</li> <li>Engage GBV actors, women-focused CBOs, and women's rights networks in the design and roll-out of advocacy strategies for legislative/policy reform on GBV, to enhance the protection of survivors and hold perpetrators accountable</li> </ul>	<p><i>"There are centres for children and women but there is no law that supports us." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Jarablus)</i></p> <p><i>"[We need] awareness about the necessity of education, safe spaces, and strict laws that punish parents or those who employ children." (Woman with Disability or Caregiver, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)</i></p> <p><i>"The safety of adolescents is achieved by enacting a law that prevents early marriage and makes education compulsory for children, boys, and girls up to the age of 18." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Jarablus)</i></p> <p><i>"[The situation would be improved by] imposing a law that protects her right to education and asking for her opinion before marriage." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Jarablus)</i></p> <p><i>"[We need] strict laws limiting violence against women." (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)</i></p> <p><i>"There must be a law, even if the aggressor is from her family, without remaining silent for fear of scandal." (Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)</i></p> <p><i>"[We need] the existence of legal monitoring to punish cases of harassment and kidnapping." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Atareb)</i></p> <p><i>"There should be legal accountability for everyone who harasses others." (Adolescent Girl, Hama, Hama)</i></p>

<sup>1</sup> Women's committees are recognized as an important vehicle supporting women and girls' participation, including: as a platform to inform humanitarian programming; assisting with information dissemination and outreach to women and girls about services and activities; and supporting GBV referral pathways and FCRM.

**9. Continue to consult with women and girls, wider communities, and local actors in order to validate the findings and build on Voices from Syria 2024: [sector tags: GBV]****Recommendations and Desired Changes**

- Disseminate and validate the main takeaways from Voices from Syria 2024 with women and girls, wider communities, and humanitarian-sector actors
- Support more targeted investigations in emerging or gap areas identified within this report, in order to better understand GBV trends and design effective approaches for GBV prevention and response
- Reflect on the limitations and lessons learned from Voices from Syria 2024, in order to inform next year's exercise (See also: *Annex 1: Approach and Methodology.*)

See also: *GBV Advocacy Brief* for targeted recommendations by GBV sector, other humanitarian sectors, and policymakers and donors.

## Hopes and Dreams of Women and Girls

The following quotes illustrate some of the hopes and dreams of girls and women in Syria.

### **Freedom of Movement, Safety, Return Home**

*"I hope more safety is there and that girls can have freedom... so we can regain our rights and go out." (Adolescent Girl, Rural Damascus Duma)*

*"I wish I could change everything, the tent, the area... the financial situation of my family." (Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Jisr Ash-Shuqur)*

*"We hope that the problems in Syria will be solved and that we will feel safe, and all girls will get their rights to education and safety." (Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)*

*"I wish they would stop distinguishing between girls and boys and that we can go back to our homes and that the displacement were over." (Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)*

*"[I wish to] start a new beginning as life continues and we can change the bad thoughts in our community." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Afrin)*

*"[I wish for] safety... then safety." (Adolescent Girl, Dar'a, Dar'a)*

### **Access to Education and Professional Opportunities**

*"[I wish we could find] solutions for girls' education, because it has become a dream for us to complete our education." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tel Tamer)*

*"Education is essential in order to guarantee our rights and change our situation and community."*

*(Adolescent Girl, Rural Damascus, Sahnaya)*

*"Providing job opportunities for women is the only solution to the problem of women, but now women do not participate in any plans or decisions." (Woman, Al-Hasakeh, Tel Tamer)*

*"[We wish to complete] education and professional training in order to have a good life." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tel Tamer)*

*"I think that by allowing girls to learn, they would certainly be able to make a big change in community." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"I wish I could go back and complete my education, and this is the thing I wish for the most." (Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)*

### **Increase Self-confidence and Skills and Being Able to Support Themselves**

*"My participation in the Sun Girls programme increased my self-confidence; I propose a similar project for young people, it actually helped put an end to my violence." (Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Deir-Ez-Zor)*

*"Be strong and achieve things for myself." (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Areesheh)*

*"We can work and depend on ourselves so that we are not dependent on anyone." (Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Deir-Ez-Zor)*

### **Changes in Relationships with Parents**

*"Changing our parents' mindset." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Jarablus)*

*"Parents should be a shelter and an open door for their daughter to tell them about anything she faces." (Adolescent Girl, Homs, Tall Kalakh)*

*"Parents must raise girls and boys the same, with no discrimination between them, so that there is equality between genders in the future." (Adolescent Girl, As-Sweida, As-Sweida)*

*"Change the perception of parents who prefer boys to girls." (Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Deir-Ez-Zor)*

### **End Gender Discrimination and Realise the Freedom and Rights of Women and Girls**

*"Educate girls to defend their rights." (Adolescent Girl, As-Sweida, As-Sweida)*

*"Change must come from within us, by going to school collectively, defending our rights, and participating in determining our fate." (Adolescent Girl, Der-Ez-Zor, Kesrah)*

*"The most important thing is to end the discrimination between male and female, and not to differentiate between them and [to guarantee] equality between them." (Adolescent Girl with Disability, Ar-Raqqa, Thawrah)*

*"Women are half of society and their role in decision-making is one half and the other half is for men." (Woman, Aleppo, Jarablus)*

### **Changes in Gender Norms and Roles**

*"I would change girls' roles; for example, giving girls more space for work and education." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Al Bab)*

*"The change that I wish for is that people become aware and see strength as a positive thing and not negative, because it is not the fault of the girl to be strong." (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)*

*"[We need to raise the] community's awareness, so that gossip and 'nonsense talk' would stop. I would teach parents to trust their children and not to believe any word that is said about them." (Adolescent Girl, Homs, Al-Qusayr)*

*"I hope that the community's perception of girls outside the centre would change... I hope that young people's perception of themselves will change by increasing their self-confidence... and I desire for more education by spreading awareness and education, and that education is available to all." (Adolescent Girl, Rural Damascus, Duma)*

*"Change the prevalent mentality here, which is you are a girl and all your actions are wrong." (Adolescent Girl, Homs, Tall Kalakh)*

*"To give women a role in making decisions and to have a place in the community; I don't want anyone to say to me, 'you are a girl, you cannot.'" (Adolescent Girl, As-Sweida, As-Sweida)*

*"[We need to] change customs and traditions that allow boys to do more things than girls, such as going out as he wants." (Adolescent Girl, As-Sweida, As-Sweida)*

*"[We can] achieve change by eliminating the disparity between male and female and achieving equality and non-discrimination between them... Equality between boys and girls in everything. Women must have a role like men." (Adolescent Girl, As-Sweida, As-Sweida)*

### **Changes in Laws and Structures toward Equality**

*"I would like to work on a law that protects against harm, promotes a sense of security, and holds the abuser accountable." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Jarablus)*

*"Women must hold important positions." (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Jarablus)*

### **Reduce and Eliminate Gender-based Violence**

*"We want women to no longer be subjected to violence by men, because [of the prevailing attitude that] 'I am a man I can beat you, and because I am your husband, I can beat you.'"* (Woman, Rural Damascus, Madaya)

*"Prevent early marriage. I wish I could use all my energy to help girls not to be victims of early marriage."* (Adolescent Girl, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa)

*"I wish all customs and traditions would change, especially early marriage. I hope early marriage ceases to exist. We want to live our childhood and achieve our dreams."* (Adolescent Girl, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin)

### **Play a Role in Supporting Other Women and Girls and Catalysing Change in Their Communities**

*"I wish to spread awareness and teach girls like me how to be strong and deal with situations and be able to gain their family's trust."* (Adolescent Girl, Hama, Hama)

*"Girls and boys can help prevent violence by rejecting it and helping to spread awareness in the community and seek equality."* (Adolescent Girl, Al-Hasakeh, Tweina)

*"I would change some misconceptions by raising awareness about the importance of education, and the importance of trusting girls, taking their opinions, and involving them in decision-making."* (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Al Bab)

*"Engaging in community initiatives. Teaching girls what I learn. I can be involved in educating other girls about the role we can play in society."* (Adolescent Girl, Deir-Ez-Zor, Deir-Ez-Zor)

*"We have a key role in this change, we must seek to change the community, as we are the future generation. Our role is essential; we must change our community for the better."* (Adolescent Girl, Aleppo, Atareb)







5

# Governorate Analysis

## 5. Governorate Analysis

The tables that follow summarise the forms of GBV, risk factors, and coping strategies raised by women and girls in FGDs in each governorate of Syria.

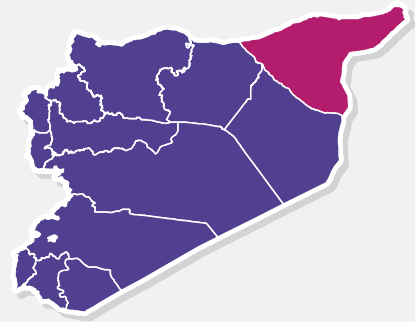
It is important to note that even if a type of GBV is not specifically mentioned, it does not indicate that it is not taking place. Due to limitations in the number of FGDs and the time available to conduct them, as well as the subjective nature of the exercise, the findings below are non-exhaustive. For governorates with a limited number of FGDs conducted, the data significance for disaggregated, governorate-level analysis may be low.

Primary data for the governorate analysis was limited to community and expert FGDs this year, due to limitations in available data sources. Additional sources of primary data - particularly quantitative data - that could provide more of a snapshot at the governorate level and triangulate trends were absent (see also Annex: Approach and Methodology). For these reasons, the data below should be interpreted and extrapolated with caution.<sup>1</sup>

For more information on the GBV types, risk factors, and coping strategies referenced below, see also Findings.

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<sup>1</sup> Femicide/so-called 'honor' crimes were not listed separately to IPV/domestic and family violence, as it is understood that they are under-reported.



## Al-Hasakeh

### Types of GBV

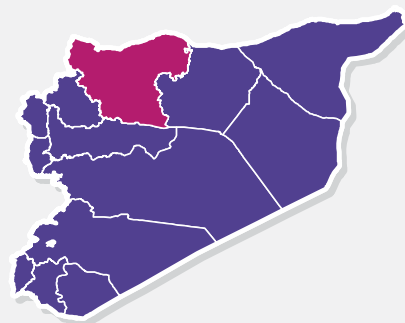
- Physical and psychological violence
- Sexual violence including sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape, sexual exploitation, sexual exploitation and abuse, and sex work
- Denial of resources, services, opportunities, and rights, including restricted movement and freedom of expression; denial of education and work; economic abuse and deprivation of salary and assistance; and denial of inheritance and child custody
- Kidnapping
- Intimate partner violence/domestic and family violence
- Child and forced marriage and divorce/remarriage/abandonment
- Forced recruitment of girls in armed groups
- Tech-facilitated GBV
- Bullying, stigma, neglect, and discrimination

### GBV Risk Factors

- Displacement and camps
- Insecurity
- Poverty/inability to secure basic needs, lack of decent work opportunities, and poor living conditions/extended families living together
- Crowded places
- Lack of lighting mainly in camps and remote areas and regular access to electricity at home
- High-risk types of work, including child labour
- Misuse of social media
- Drugs and alcohol
- Social norms

### GBV Coping Strategies

- Staying silent and isolation/avoidance
- Going to family home or seeking support from someone in the family or a friend/neighbour
- Turning to women's home and local authorities
- Seeking services (e.g. GBV, PSS, protection, and medical)
- Negative coping mechanisms, e.g. running away and joining armed groups, child and forced marriage, using violence against their children



## Aleppo

### Types of GBV

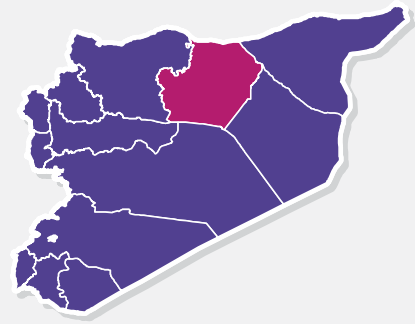
- Physical and psychological violence
- Sexual violence including sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape, sexual exploitation, sexual exploitation and abuse, and sex work
- Denial of resources, services, opportunities, and rights, including restricted movement and freedom of expression; denial of education and work; economic abuse; and denial of inheritance and child custody
- Kidnapping
- Intimate partner violence/domestic and family violence
- Child and forced marriage and divorce/remarriage/abandonment
- Tech-facilitated GBV
- Bullying, stigma, neglect, and discrimination

### GBV Risk Factors

- Displacement and camps
- Earthquakes
- Insecurity and hostilities; spread of weapons
- Poverty/inability to secure basic needs, lack of decent work opportunities, and poor living conditions/extended families living together
- Crowded places
- Lack of lighting in camps and remote areas and regular access to electricity at home
- High-risk types of work, including child labour
- Misuse of social media
- Drugs and alcohol
- Social norms

### GBV Coping Strategies

- Staying silent and isolation/avoidance
- Going to family home or seeking support from someone in the family or a friend/neighbour
- Seeking comfort in other sources, e.g. music, walks, hobby, prayer, social visits
- Defending oneself
- Divorce
- Turning to community leaders, authorities, and courts
- Seeking services (e.g. GBV, PSS, protection, and medical)
- Negative coping mechanisms, e.g. child and forced marriage, high-risk use of social media, running away, using violence against their children



## Ar-Raqqa

### Types of GBV

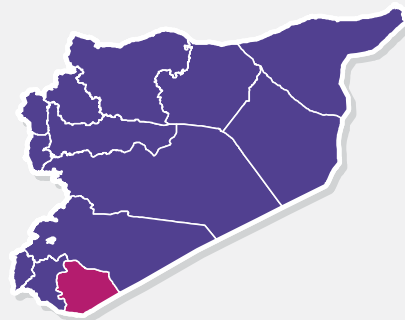
- Physical and psychological violence
- Sexual violence including sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape, sexual exploitation, sex trafficking, and sexual exploitation and abuse
- Denial of resources, services, opportunities, and rights, including restricted movement and freedom of expression; denial of education and work; economic abuse; and denial of inheritance
- Kidnapping
- Intimate partner violence/domestic and family violence
- Child and forced marriage and divorce/remarriage/abandonment
- Tech-facilitated GBV
- Bullying, stigma, neglect, and discrimination

### GBV Risk Factors

- Displacement and camps
- Earthquakes
- Insecurity and hostilities; spread of weapons
- Poverty/inability to secure basic needs, lack of decent work opportunities, and poor living conditions/extended families living together
- Crowded places
- Lack of lighting in camps and remote areas and regular access to electricity at home
- High-risk types of work, including child labour
- Misuse of social media
- Drugs and alcohol
- Social norms

### GBV Coping Strategies

- Staying silent and isolation/avoidance
- Going to family home or seeking support from someone in the family or a friend/neighbour
- Seeking comfort in other sources, e.g. music, walks, hobby, prayer, social visits
- Defending self and safety planning
- Divorce
- Turning to women's council and local authorities
- Seeking services (e.g. GBV, PSS, protection, and medical)
- Negative coping mechanisms, e.g. child and forced marriage, running away, using violence against their children



## As-Sweida

### Types of GBV

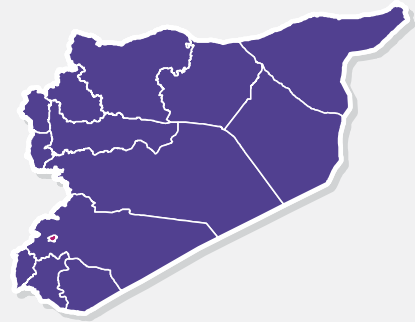
- Physical and psychological violence
- Sexual violence including sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, and sexual exploitation and abuse
- Denial of resources, services, opportunities, and rights, including restricted movement and freedom of expression; denial of education and work; economic abuse
- Kidnapping
- Intimate partner violence/domestic and family violence
- Tech-facilitated GBV
- Bullying, stigma, neglect, and discrimination

### GBV Risk Factors

- Insecurity and hostilities; spread of weapons
- Poverty/inability to secure basic needs, lack of decent work opportunities, and poor living conditions/extended families living together
- Crowded places
- Lack of lighting in remote areas and regular access to electricity at home
- High-risk types of work, including child labour
- Social media
- Drugs and alcohol
- Social norms

### GBV Coping Strategies

- Staying silent
- Seeking support from someone in the family or a friend/neighbour
- Turning to courts
- Seeking services (e.g. GBV, PSS, protection, and medical)



## Damascus

### Types of GBV

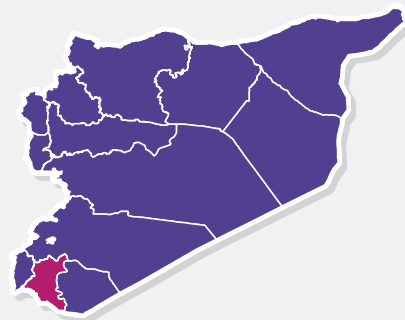
- Physical and psychological violence
- Sexual violence, including sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape, and sex work
- Denial of resources, services, opportunities, and rights, including restricted movement and freedom of expression; denial of education and work; economic abuse and denial of salary; and denial of inheritance
- Kidnapping
- Intimate partner violence/domestic and family violence
- Tech-facilitated GBV
- Bullying, stigma, neglect, and discrimination

### GBV Risk Factors

- Displacement and camps
- Poverty/inability to secure basic needs, lack of decent work opportunities, and poor living conditions/extended families living together
- Lack of lighting in remote areas and regular access to electricity at home
- High-risk types of work, including child labour
- Misuse of social media
- Drugs and alcohol
- Social norms

### GBV Coping Strategies

- Staying silent and isolation/avoidance
- Seeking support from someone in the family or a friend/neighbour
- Defending self
- Divorce
- Negative coping mechanisms, e.g. child and forced marriage, school drop-out



## Dar'a

### Types of GBV

- Physical and psychological violence
- Sexual violence, including sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape, sexual exploitation, and sexual exploitation and abuse
- Denial of resources, services, opportunities, and rights, including restricted movement and freedom of expression; denial of education and work; economic abuse; deprivation of salary; and denial of inheritance and child custody
- Kidnapping
- intimate partner violence/domestic and family violence
- Child and forced marriage and divorce/remarriage/abandonment
- Tech-facilitated GBV
- Bullying, stigma, neglect, and discrimination

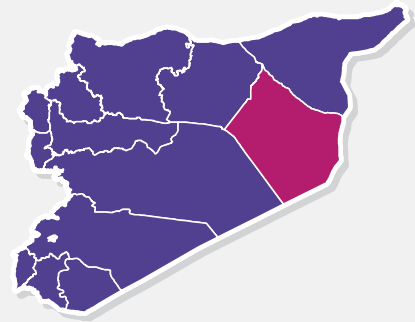
### GBV Risk Factors

- Displacement and camps
- Insecurity and hostilities; spread of weapons
- Poverty/inability to secure basic needs and lack of decent work opportunities,
- Lack of lighting mainly in remote areas and regular access to electricity at home
- High-risk types of work, including child labour
- Misuse of social media
- Drugs and alcohol
- Social norms

### GBV Coping Strategies

- Staying silent and isolation/avoidance
- Going to family home or seeking support from someone in the family or a friend/neighbour
- Seeking comfort in other sources, e.g. music, walks, hobby, prayer, social visits
- Defending self and safety planning
- Divorce
- Seeking services (e.g. PSS, protection)
- Negative coping mechanisms, e.g. child and forced marriage, running away, using violence against their children





## Deir Ez-Zor

### Types of GBV

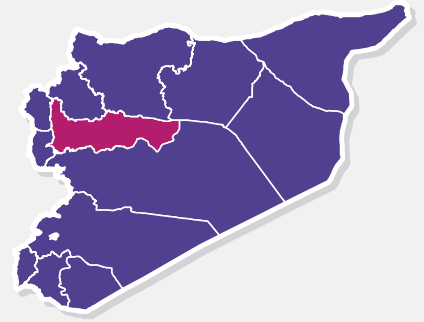
- Physical and psychological violence
- Sexual violence, including sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape, sexual exploitation, and sexual exploitation and abuse
- Denial of resources, services, opportunities, and rights, including restricted movement and freedom of expression; denial of education and work; economic abuse; and denial of inheritance and child custody
- Kidnapping
- Intimate partner violence/domestic and family violence
- Child and forced marriage and divorce/remarriage/abandonment
- Tech-facilitated GBV
- Bullying, stigma, neglect, and discrimination

### GBV Risk Factors

- Displacement and camps
- Earthquakes
- Insecurity and hostilities; spread of weapons
- Poverty/inability to secure basic needs, lack of decent work opportunities, and poor living conditions/extended families living together
- Crowded places
- Lack of lighting mainly in camps and remote areas and regular access to electricity at home
- High-risk types of work, including child labour
- Misuse of social media
- Drugs and alcohol
- Social norms

### GBV Coping Strategies

- Staying silent and isolation/avoidance
- Going to family home or seeking support from someone in the family or a friend/neighbour
- Defending self and safety planning
- Divorce
- Turning to community leaders and authorities or women's homes
- Seeking services (e.g. women and girls safe spaces, GBV, PSS, Protection)



## Hama

### Types of GBV

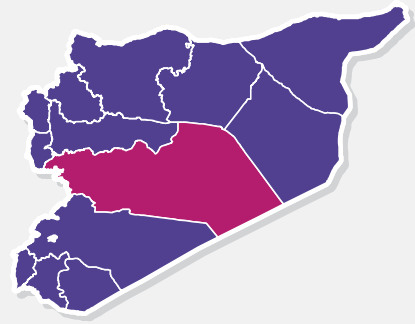
- Physical and psychological violence
- Sexual violence, including sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, and sexual exploitation and abuse
- Denial of resources, services, opportunities, and rights, including restricted movement and freedom of expression; denial of education
- Kidnapping
- Intimate partner violence/domestic and family violence
- Child and forced marriage
- Tech-facilitated GBV
- Bullying, stigma, neglect, and discrimination

### GBV Risk Factors

- Lack of decent work opportunities and poor living conditions/extended families living together
- Crowded places
- Lack of lighting mainly in remote areas and regular access to electricity at home
- High-risk types of work, including child labour
- Misuse of social media
- Social norms

### GBV Coping Strategies

- Staying silent
- Seeking support from someone in the family or a friend/neighbour
- Turning to authorities



## Homs

### Types of GBV

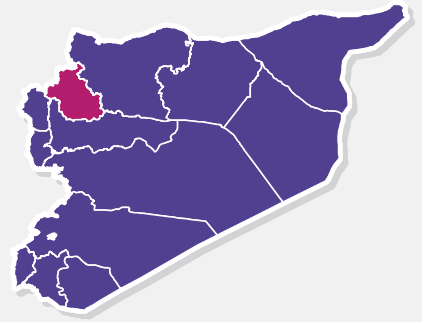
- Physical and psychological violence
- Sexual violence, including sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape, and sexual exploitation
- Denial of resources, services, opportunities, and rights, including restricted movement and freedom of expression; denial of education and work
- Kidnapping
- Intimate partner violence/domestic and family violence
- Child and forced marriage
- Bullying, stigma, neglect, and discrimination

### GBV Risk Factors

- Displacement
- Lack of decent work opportunities and poor living conditions/extended families living together
- High-risk types of work, including child labour
- Drugs and alcohol
- Social norms

### GBV Coping Strategies

- Staying silent and isolation/avoidance
- Seeking support from someone in the family or a friend/neighbour
- Defending oneself
- Divorce
- Turning to authorities
- Seeking services (e.g. PSS)



## Idlib

### Types of GBV

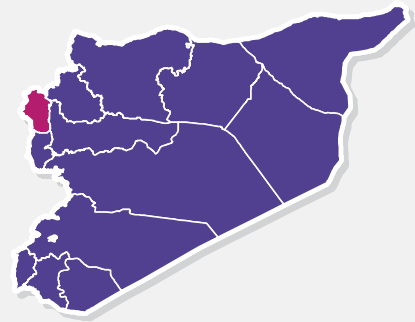
- Physical and psychological violence
- Sexual violence, including sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape, sexual exploitation, sexual exploitation and abuse, and sex work
- Denial of resources, services, opportunities, and rights, including restricted movement and freedom of expression; denial of education and work; economic abuse and deprivation of salary; and denial of inheritance and child custody
- Kidnapping
- Intimate partner violence/domestic and family violence
- Child and forced marriage and divorce/remarriage/abandonment
- Tech-facilitated GBV
- Bullying, stigma, neglect, and discrimination

### GBV Risk Factors

- Displacement and camps
- Earthquakes
- Insecurity and hostilities; spread of weapons
- Disease outbreaks
- Poverty/inability to secure basic needs, lack of decent work opportunities, and poor living conditions/extended families living together
- Crowded places
- Lack of lighting in camps and remote areas and regular access to electricity at home
- High-risk types of work, including child labour
- Misuse of social media
- Drugs and alcohol
- Social norms

### GBV Coping Strategies

- Staying silent and isolation/avoidance
- Going to family home or seeking support from someone in the family or a friend/neighbour
- Seeking comfort in other sources, e.g. hobby, prayer, read, social visits
- Divorce
- Turning to community leaders, authorities, and courts
- Seeking services (e.g. women and girls safe spaces, GBV, PSS, Protection, and medical)
- Negative coping mechanisms, e.g. child and forced marriage, high-risk use of social media, running away, using violence against their children



## Latakia

### Types of GBV

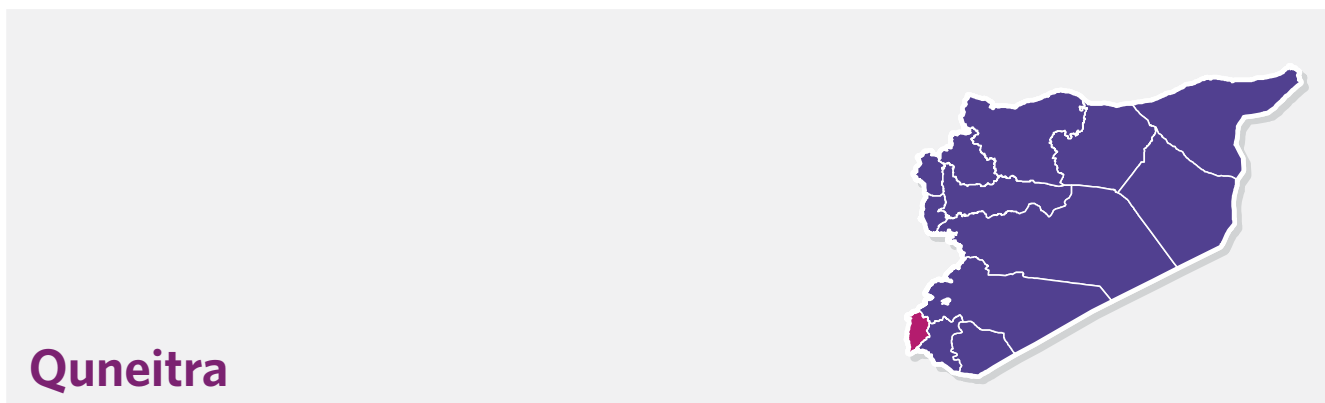
- Physical and psychological violence
- Sexual violence, including sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape, sexual exploitation, sexual exploitation and abuse, and sex work
- Denial of resources, services, opportunities, and rights, including restricted movement and freedom of expression; denial of education and work; economic abuse; and denial of inheritance and HLP
- Kidnapping
- Intimate partner violence/domestic and family violence
- Child and forced marriage and divorce/remarriage/abandonment
- Tech-facilitated GBV
- Bullying, stigma, neglect, and discrimination

### GBV Risk Factors

- Displacement and camps
- Earthquakes
- Insecurity and hostilities; spread of weapons
- Poverty/inability to secure basic needs, lack of decent work opportunities, and poor living conditions/extended families living together
- Crowded places
- Lack of lighting in remote areas and regular access to electricity at home
- High-risk types of work, including child labour
- Misuse of social media
- Drugs and alcohol
- Social norms

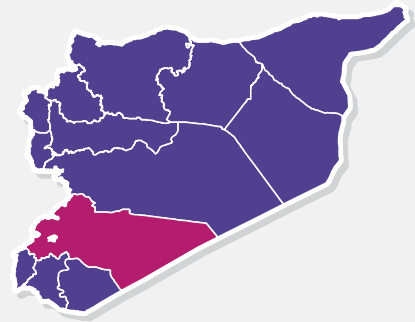
### GBV Coping Strategies

- Staying silent and isolation/avoidance
- Seeking support from someone in the family or a friend/neighbour
- Seeking comfort in other sources
- Seeking services (e.g. women and girls safe spaces, GBV)



## Quneitra

No primary data from consultation with women and girls and communities was available for Quneitra.



## Rural Damascus

### Types of GBV

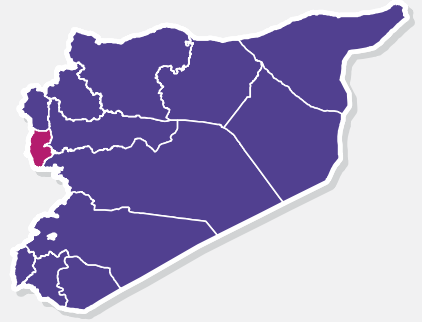
- Physical and psychological violence
- Sexual violence, including sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape, sexual exploitation, sexual exploitation and abuse, and sex work
- Denial of resources, services, opportunities, and rights, including restricted movement and freedom of expression; denial of education and work; economic abuse and deprivation of salary; and denial of inheritance and child custody
- Kidnapping
- Intimate partner violence/domestic and family violence
- Child and forced marriage and divorce/remarriage/abandonment
- Tech-facilitated GBV
- Bullying, stigma, neglect, and discrimination

### GBV Risk Factors

- Displacement and camps
- Insecurity and hostilities
- Poverty/inability to secure basic needs, lack of decent work opportunities, and poor living conditions/extended families living together
- Crowded places
- Lack of lighting in remote areas and regular access to electricity at home
- High-risk types of work, including child labour
- Misuse of social media
- Drugs and alcohol
- Social norms

### GBV Coping Strategies

- Staying silent and isolation/avoidance
- Seeking support from someone in the family or a friend/neighbour
- Seeking services (e.g. GBV, PSS, Protection, and medical)
- Negative coping mechanisms, e.g. child and forced marriage, school drop-out



## Tartous

### Types of GBV

- Physical and psychological violence
- Sexual violence, including sexual harassment and sexual assault
- Denial of resources, services, opportunities, and rights, including restricted movement and freedom of expression
- Intimate partner violence/domestic and family violence
- Child and forced marriage
- Bullying, stigma, neglect, and discrimination

### GBV Risk Factors

- Poverty/inability to secure basic needs and lack of decent work opportunities
- Crowded places
- Lack of lighting mainly in remote areas and regular access to electricity at home
- High-risk types of work, including child labour
- Social norms

### GBV Coping Strategies

- Staying silent and isolation/avoidance
- Seeking support from someone in the family or a friend/neighbour
- Seeking services (e.g. women and girls safe spaces, PSS)









6

**Annex**

## 6. Annex

### Annex 1: Voices from Syria 2024 Approach and Methodology

#### Feminist Approach and Key Principles

The annual *Voices from Syria* report brings to the fore the voices of crisis-affected women and girls in Syria regarding the risks of 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 past nine years, in order to amplify the lived experiences of women and girls in Syria as experts of their own lives. This qualitative focus provides a nuanced and holistic perspective on violence against women and girls in the WoS. Prioritising and amplifying the narratives of women and girls is based on the feminist understanding that their experiences and perspectives are vital knowledge to inform humanitarian programming. It recognises 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.

Furthermore, as an intersectional feminist approach to research, Voices from Syria highlights the intersections of vulnerable and stigmatised 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, socio-economic status, displacement status, ability, marital status, and diverse SOGIESC are interconnected.

The commitment to centre on 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 2024 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 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 incredible resilience and hopes for the future.

#### Four Key Principles for Voices from Syria 2024

##### 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, socio-economic 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 marginalised groups.

##### Contextualisation and Localisation:

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 recognises 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 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. Direct consultation with women, girls, men, and boys and GBV experts in the WoS took place through the HNO. The Voices from Syria 2024 methodology was developed and adapted through an iterative process over the years. There were several rounds of feedback and revision to refine the 2024 data collection tools, findings, and recommendations.

The dissemination of findings and recommendations from Voices from Syria 2024 to communities, GBV actors, and humanitarian sectors is recommended for validation to close the feedback loop. Consultations with women and girls by agencies supporting GBV and wider humanitarian programmes to inform programming should continue.

## Data Collection and Analysis: Data Sources and Methodologies

The *Voices from Syria 2024* report presents findings and recommendations based on analysis of data collected in the framework of the 2024 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO).

### Sources of Data

The report is based on the following sources of quantitative and qualitative data:

#### 6.1 Data Sources for Voices from Syria 2024

##### 1. **134 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with women, girls, boys, and men**, disaggregated by gender and age:

- Adolescent Girls (between 11 and 19 years of age)
- Adolescent Boys (between 15 and 19 years of age)
- Women (between 19 and 59 years of age)
- Men (between 19 and 59 years of age)
- Older Women (age 60 and above)

Certain FGDs were conducted specifically with women and girls with disabilities and/or their caregivers.

The composition of FGDs varied depending on the location, with participants from one or more of the following population groups:<sup>1</sup>

- IDPs, both more recently displaced persons and those living under protracted displacement
- Returnees
- Refugees
- Host communities

##### 2. **Six FGDs with GBV experts** working in the Syrian humanitarian response

##### 3. **Secondary literature** from the Syrian crisis response, including relevant studies and tools:

- Assessment reports on gender and GBV-related topics, including on the post-earthquake situation
- Programme data collected through 4Ws<sup>2</sup>
- GBV Information Management System (GBVIMS) quarterly reports (Türkiye Cross-Border Hub GBV SC<sup>3</sup>)
- WoS GBV AoR tools, including the sector tipsheets developed in 2023

There were less sources of data available in 2023 relative to previous years, with limited quantitative data in particular. The annual Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA) had been used as a source to triangulate data in previous Voices from Syria reports. However, the 2023 MSNA did not cover all Syria response hubs and had limited data that could be extracted pertaining to GBV and the situation of women and girls. Thus, it was determined to not include the MSNA as a source within Voices from Syria 2024.

### FGDs with Communities

FGDs to consult with women and girls, as well as men and boys, were conducted by GBV and other protection actors in Syria between August and October 2023.<sup>4</sup> FGDs were organised across all three hubs and 13 of the 14 governorates of Syria. FGDs were conducted by a trained facilitator and supported by a notetaker, both of the same gender as the

<sup>1</sup> In some cases, FGDs were composed of only one population group, while in other cases, groups were mixed.

<sup>2</sup> Who Does What, Where, When.

<sup>3</sup> The first two quarters of 2023 were available for the GBVIMS+ analysis (Turkey Cross-Border).

<sup>4</sup> For the current exercise in 2023, FGDs were conducted by a total of 29 partners.

FGD participants. Discussions were facilitated using a tested qualitative questionnaire. The FGD tool is updated annually by the WoS GBV coordinators in partnership with the Protection Cluster coordinators (Protection, Child Protection, and Mine Action). Notes for each FGD were taken in Arabic and subsequently translated into English. All facilitators were trained in ethical research best practices for GBV, including survivor-centred and do-no-harm principles. This includes strict anonymity and protection of data during collection, analysis, and storage. The use of GBV and protection staff as facilitators ensured that standards of safety, dignity, and confidentiality were upheld during data collection. Access to follow-up care and support was facilitated for any FGD participants who may have required it.

## Data Collection and Analysis: Limitations and Lessons Learned

Collecting information in humanitarian contexts is an important but difficult task, especially when researching sensitive topics like gender norms and GBV. 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 to others. 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. Participants' relationships with organisations and facilitators may have also negatively or positively informed the data collected. 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 judgment by facilitators or other participants, or concerns that confidentiality would be broken. The time allowed for FGDs may have also been insufficient to break the ice and build trust with participants. Other challenges to carrying out the FGDs could include finding a proper confidential space to conduct discussions, especially in camps and informal settlements. 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 localised understandings of concepts.

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 toward women and girls already engaged in GBV and women empowerment programming and in closer proximity to centres. 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. The following sections further detail some of the identified limitations, challenges, and lessons learned in data collection and analysis approaches for this year's report.

### Areas for Further Exploration in Data Collection and Analysis

Certain marginalised groups were identified as facing greater barriers to taking part in FGDs. The specific perspectives for the following population groups were not captured to a significant extent within available data, and therefore, their voices are less represented within Voices from Syria 2024:

- **Diverse SOGIESC persons:** There was limited mention of persons with diverse SOGIESC within secondary data. While acknowledging the importance of a do-no-harm approach to avoid further stigmatising and contributing to risks faced by this group within the Syrian context, it will be critical in the next Voices from Syria to explore approaches for engaging their voices and better understanding their intersectional experiences of GBV. For instance, consultations could take place with associations supporting LGBTQIA+ persons, together with identification of additional resources and information related to SOGIESC in the context.
- **Widow and internment camps:** FGDs were not conducted in nor included identified participants from widow camps in north-west Syria, and there were a limited number of resources that spoke to the situation for women and children residing there. Therefore, it was not possible to extract a nuanced analysis regarding specificities of GBV trends and risks within widow camps. To a lesser extent, there were also limitations in the available data on women and girls in internment camps in north-east Syria, affecting the ability to draw conclusions related to GBV trends present there.
- **Pregnant and lactating women and girls:** There were not separate FGDs organised with pregnant and lactating women and girls, and there were only limited mentions within the FGDs and secondary data of their specific experiences and GBV risks.
- **Younger adolescent girls:** Most FGDs were conducted with primarily older adolescents (14 or 15 years of age and above). When younger adolescents were included in FGDs, they were within wider groups of adolescents, rather than separate discussions with younger adolescent girls and boys. This limited the ability to draw out specific findings related to differences in experiences, risks, and types of violence experienced by younger adolescent girls.
- **Population type:** FGDs included persons from different types of displacement status (e.g. returnees, recent IDPs, IDPs in protracted displacement, returnees, refugees, and host community). There were participants from specific vulnerable profiles of women and girls (e.g. widowed and divorced women and girls). However, as groups of participants tended to be mixed, there were limitations to the amount of disaggregated analysis that could take place to extract specific findings for each group.
- **Ethnic and religious minorities:** Related to the above, there was a limited understanding of the specific experiences of

women and girls from minority groups, and whether/how their minority status interacts with gender to increase their risks of GBV.

- **Other stakeholders:** GBV coordinators indicated the importance of consulting as well with frontline staff directly engaged in providing GBV services (e.g. GBV case managers, midwives), as well as soliciting feedback from other humanitarian sectors on GBV. While FGDs with GBV experts included staff working in the context, there was limited consultation with community-based associations supporting women and girls and other marginalized groups).

As *Voices from Syria* is a broad exercise, there was not always sufficient time in FGDs to systematically delve deeply into each type of GBV and how it takes place, or to fully unpack areas of inquiry. Areas identified for further exploration include emerging and growing forms of GBV (e.g. child and forced marriage, tech-facilitated GBV, kidnapping, and denial of child custody and HLP); barriers for women and girls seeking to access GBV programmes and humanitarian services and assistance; barriers to accessing civil documentation and linkages with GBV; and the hopes, dreams, and recommendations of women and girls.

### Challenges and Limitations in Data Collection and Analysis

Specific challenges, limitations, and lessons learned from the process of data collection and analysis for *Voices from Syria 2024* were identified through consultations with the GBV WoS coordinators and previous consultants.

#### 6.2 Identified Challenges and Limitations for *Voices from Syria 2024*

Data Collection Tools and Approaches	Data Analysis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Limited access to certain areas within Syria to reach communities for consultation</li> <li>▪ Limited time for planning, training, and conducting FGDs</li> <li>▪ Insufficient number of available and limited training of FGD facilitators and note-takers</li> <li>▪ Complex compounded questions within the FGD data collection tools</li> <li>▪ Limited time for each FGD to allow for probing and follow-up questions</li> <li>▪ Varying data quality: certain FGD notes included less availability and clarity of data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Need for further alignment between research questions, data collection tools, and analytical framework; prioritization of needed data to answer research questions</li> <li>▪ Limited availability of quantitative data for triangulation and integration within the report</li> <li>▪ Limited time and insufficient capacity allocated for data tracking and analysis; adaptation of analysis framework and system tools; report preparation; and feedback and revision cycles</li> <li>▪ Capacity-ineffective length of coding tree; high volume of analytical categories</li> <li>▪ Technical limitations in merging MAXQDA files for multiple analysts; application freezes</li> <li>▪ Limited data visualisation and design support in parallel with content development</li> </ul>

An internal *Voices from Syria 2024* Lessons Learned document was prepared regarding limitations and learning from this year to inform the following year’s exercise.

## Annex 2: Acronyms

<b>AoR</b>	Area of Responsibility
<b>CCCM</b>	Camp Coordination and Camp Management
<b>CFM</b>	Child and Forced Marriage
<b>CMR</b>	Clinical Management of Rape
<b>CVA</b>	Cash and Voucher Assistance
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>FSA</b>	Food Security and Agriculture
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based Violence
<b>GBVIMS</b>	Gender-based Violence Information Management System
<b>GoS</b>	Government of Syria
<b>HLP</b>	Housing, Land, and Property
<b>HNO</b>	Humanitarian Needs Overview
<b>IASC</b>	Inter-agency Standing Committee
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person
<b>IPV</b>	Intimate Partner Violence
<b>LGBTQIA+</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual+ Persons
<b>MHM</b>	Menstrual Health and Hygiene (Management)
<b>MHPSS</b>	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
<b>MSNA</b>	Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment
<b>NES</b>	north-east Syria
<b>NWS</b>	north-west Syria
<b>NFIs</b>	Non-Food Items
<b>OCHA</b>	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>PFA</b>	Psychological First Aid
<b>PSEA</b>	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
<b>PSS</b>	Psychosocial Support
<b>PwD</b>	Person with Disabilities
<b>SBC(C)</b>	Social and Behavioural Change (Communication)
<b>SEA</b>	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse



<b>SOGIESC</b>	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics
<b>SRH(R)</b>	Sexual and Reproductive Health (and Rights)
<b>SYR</b>	Syria (under Government of Syria control)
<b>TXB</b>	Türkiye Cross-Border
<b>UASC</b>	Unaccompanied and Separated Children
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>WASH</b>	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
<b>WGSS</b>	Women and Girl Safe Spaces
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation
<b>WoS</b>	Whole of Syria

## Annex 3: Terminology

### Key Definitions on Gender and GBV

#### Abduction/Kidnapping

Abduction is a criminal taking away a person by persuasion, by fraud, or by open force or violence. It is the unlawful interference with a family relationship, such as the taking of a child from its parent, irrespective of whether the person abducted consents or not. Kidnapping is the taking away of a person by force, threat, or deceit, with intent to cause him or her to be detained against his or her will. Kidnapping may be done for ransom or for political or other purposes.<sup>5</sup>

#### 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.<sup>6</sup>

#### Child or Minor

Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as "every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier"<sup>7</sup>. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, the monitoring body for the Convention, has encouraged States to review the age of majority if it is set below 18 and to increase the level of protection for all children under 18. Minors are considered unable to evaluate and understand the consequences of their choices and give informed consent, such as for marriage.<sup>8</sup>

#### 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

<sup>5</sup> US Legal. "Kidnapping v. Abduction."

<sup>6</sup> GBV AoR. "The Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Programming." 2019: Standard 6.

<sup>7</sup> UN. "Convention on the Rights of the Child." 1989.

<sup>8</sup> IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 4.

dangerous and harmful to children and interferes with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work. In its most extreme forms, child labour involves children being enslaved, separated from their families, exposed to serious hazards and illnesses and/or left to fend for themselves on the streets of large cities, often at a very early age. Whether or not particular forms of 'work' can be called 'child labour' depends on the child's age, the type and hours of work performed, the conditions under which it is performed, and the objectives pursued by individual countries.<sup>9</sup>

### 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.<sup>10</sup>

### Confidentiality

A GBV guiding principle associated with survivor-centred service delivery. Maintaining confidentiality requires that service providers protect information gathered about clients and agree only to share information about a client's case with their explicit consent. All written information is kept in locked files and only non-identifying information is written down on case files. Maintaining confidentiality about abuse means service providers never discuss case details with family or friends or with colleagues whose knowledge of the abuse is deemed unnecessary. There are limits to confidentiality while working with children, in contexts with mandatory reporting, in case of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse perpetrated by humanitarian workers, or with clients who express intent to harm themselves or someone else.<sup>11</sup>

### 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.<sup>12</sup>

### 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 deprived from receiving an inheritance, earnings forcibly taken by an intimate partner or family member, a woman prevented from using contraceptives, a girl restricted from attending school, etc. Economic abuse is included in this category. Some acts of confinement may also fall under this category.<sup>13</sup>

### 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 including restrictions imposed by families on the movement, attire and dress, and ability to work or go to school for women and girls. Denial of Rights includes Denial of Resources, Opportunities, or Services as part of a wider category.

### Disability

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.<sup>14</sup>

9 ILO. "What Is Child Labor?"; IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 4.

10 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 3.

11 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 4.

12 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 4.

13 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 3.

14 UN. "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities." 2006.

## 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 gender-based violence that takes place within the home or family between intimate partners as well as between other family members.<sup>15</sup> 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' (IPV).

## 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.<sup>16</sup>

## 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, destruction of cherished things, etc.<sup>17</sup>

## 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 maledomination.<sup>18</sup>

## 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 her or his 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.<sup>19</sup> See also 'Child Marriage.'

## 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 socio-cultural context.<sup>20</sup>

15 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 3.

16 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 3.

17 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 3.

18 IMC & IRC. "Women and Girls Safe Spaces: A Toolkit for Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings." 2020: 11; IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 4.

19 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 3.

20 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 4.

## Gender-based Violence

An umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e., gender) differences between males and females. The term 'gender-based violence' is primarily used to underscore the fact that structural, gender-based power differentials between males and females around the world place females at risk for multiple forms of violence. As agreed in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), this includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. The term is also used by some actors to describe some forms of sexual violence against males and /or targeted violence against individuals or groups with diverse SOGIESC, in these cases when referencing violence related to gender-inequitable norms of masculinity and/or norms of gender identity.<sup>21</sup>

## Gender Equality

This refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality

does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities, and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs, and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognising the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for – and indicator of – sustainable people-centred development.<sup>22</sup>

## Gender Expression

It refers to external manifestations of gender, expressed through one's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behaviour, voice, or body characteristics.<sup>23</sup>

## 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.<sup>24</sup>

## Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

'Intimate partner violence' applies specifically to violence occurring between intimate partners (married, cohabiting, boyfriend/girlfriend, or other close relationships) and is defined by WHO 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 toward an intimate partner (ex- or current) where the abuser exerts power and control over the victim. 'Domestic violence' is a term sometimes used to refer to IPV, though it refers more widely to violence that takes place within the home or between family-members. See also 'Family Violence and Domestic Violence.'<sup>25</sup>

## 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.

21 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 3.

22 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 4.

23 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 2.

24 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 4.

25 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 3.

## Perpetrator

Person, group, or institution that directly inflicts or otherwise supports violence or other abuse inflicted on another against his/her will.<sup>26</sup>

## 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.<sup>27</sup>

## 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)<sup>28</sup>, PSEA relates specifically to the responsibilities of humanitarian, development, and peacekeeping actors to prevent incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by United Nations, NGO, and inter-governmental (IGO) 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.<sup>29</sup>

## 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.<sup>30</sup> 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. In some cases, additional specialized MHPSS services may be needed for GBV survivors. It is important that PSS for women and girls is informed by an understanding of their experiences of violence and discrimination.<sup>31</sup>

## 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.<sup>32</sup>

## 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, messages, etc.) 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.<sup>33</sup>

## 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.<sup>34</sup>

26 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 4.

27 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 3.

28 UNSG's Bulletin. "Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse." 2003.

29 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 4.

30 IASC. "Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings." 2007.

31 GBV AoR. "The Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Programming." 2019: Standard 5.

32 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 3.

33 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 3.

34 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015:

## Sexual Exploitation

The term 'sexual exploitation' means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. Some types of forced and/or coerced prostitution can fall under this category.<sup>35</sup>

## Sexual Favour

The term 'sexual favour' or simply 'favour' refers to acts of sexual exploitation and abuse, and specifically demands for sex acts in exchange for something, such as money or humanitarian assistance.

## Sexual Harassment

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.<sup>36</sup>

## Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC)

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

## Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic a person's sexuality, using coercion, threats of harm or physical force, by any person regardless of relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work." Sexual violence takes many forms, including rape, sexual slavery and/or trafficking, forced pregnancy, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and/or abuse, and forced abortion.<sup>37</sup>

## 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.<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup>

## Survivor/Victim

A survivor, or victim, is a person who has experienced gender-based violence. The term recognises that a violation against one's human rights has occurred. The terms 'victim' and 'survivor' can be used interchangeably. 'Victim' is a term often used in the legal and medical sectors. 'Survivor' is the term generally preferred in the psychological and social support sectors because it implies resilience.<sup>40</sup>

## Technology-facilitated GBV

The use of technology, digital tools, and online platforms to perpetuate gender-based violence, especially against women and girls as well as against persons with diverse SOGIESC. It includes already existing forms of GBV such as sexual

Annex 3.

35 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 3.

36 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 3.

37 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 3.

38 UNAIDS. "HIV and Sex Work." 2021.

39 UNPFA. "Survival Strategies that Put Women at Risk."

40 IASC. "Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery." 2015: Annex 4.

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. Tech-facilitated violence interacts with offline forms of GBV, sometimes leading to the furthering of physical forms of sexual violence and vice versa.

### Trafficking in Persons

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, 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.<sup>41</sup>

### 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.’<sup>42</sup>

### 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 wellbeing, and more fully realise their rights.<sup>43</sup>

41 IASC. “Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery.” 2015: Annex 3.

42 IASC. “Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery.” 2015: Annex 4.

43 IMC & IRC. “Women and Girls Safe Spaces: A Toolkit for Advancing Women’s and Girls’ Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings.” 2020: 26.

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