Turning the tide

Syrian women's rights organizations
on the transitional justice map

A mapping and capacity/needs assessment of Syrian women-led
and feminist organizations working on gender and transitional
justice in Syria and in neighboring countries

Turning the tide

Navigating social and political repression to advocate for gender justice is a skill that women activists and groups in Syria have honed over many years. Despite decades of repressive environment for political organizing, activists and women-led groups campaigned for citizenship rights and changes to laws on honor killing and created coalitions across political and religious lines to press the government to ratify CEDAW and act on women's rights and violence against women in Syria. When protests started in 2011, women played important leadership roles. As the uprising turned into an armed conflict, the spaces for women's political participation were again marginalized. Yet women continue to play important roles both locally and internationally, supporting victims and advocating for the rights of women and communities. They continue to do this work despite their marginalization from political processes and civil society forums in which the issues they are directly engaged in are discussed. Their voices are often tokenized and their experience and insights pushed to the margins.

Discussions on the scope and modalities for justice, and transitional justice, in Syria have been the subject of debate and deliberation since the start of the protests. These discussions have often focused on traditional top down approaches to transitional justice and were based on gender-blind analysis of violations and the experience of harm. Women have largely been absent from these discussions and plans as subjects and authors. When included, it is either to discuss the issue of sexual violence or, often, as the 'victim' on stage to tell their testimonies. Yet women-led groups have valuable insights into the violations on women and communities, as well as their impact that must be built on and accounted for. In their daily interactions with victims and survivors, they have nuanced and critical insights into the scope and mechanisms that could provide justice to them. While transition and national mechanisms for transitional justice seem far away, measures to bring justice and accountability for human rights violations against Syrians continue. In order for these mechanisms to bear fruit and have a transformative impact, the phenomenal work and insights of women-led organisations must be brought to light and centered as the justice processes are being designed and implemented.

In 2019, Dawlaty and WILPF initiated a project on gender-sensitive transitional justice, in partnership with a group of women-led organizations. The project aims to provide gender-sensitive knowledge and analysis on transitional justice developed by those directly engaging on these issues with communities. It also aims to build the capacity and provide opportunities for women community leaders to advocate for gender sensitive and victim centered justice. This mapping is the first step in that process. The mapping analyses the context within which women-led organizations operate across Syria, and provides an overview of the way in which they advocate for gender justice in these contexts, as well as the challenges they face and their capacity needs.

Since the interviews for this report were first conducted, the world has been turned upside down due to the COVID19 crisis. The pandemic, and the response of communities and governments to it, will lead to many changes in how women-led organizations in Syria operate, what support they get and what they focus on. New challenges have been added to the context and capacity gaps already identified in this mapping. However, this report continues to be an important tool to document the efforts of women-led groups to achieve justice and it serves as a baseline to help actors and decision makers to further their efforts to support, include and engage with women-led groups seeking transformative and gender-sensitive justice. It has been an honour to witness and document the strengths of women-led groups, their versatility, creativity and ability to act as advocates for women and justice despite layers of repressive social, political and economic systems and a universal failure to stop the systematic violations against civilians in Syria. And while the world is focused on fighting the COVID19 pandemic, efforts to bring justice and accountability for Syrians continue, and we too will continue to work with our partners so these efforts are gender-sensitive and include women's voices at all levels.

Women's International League
for Peace and Freedom

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Research Teams
The following team members consented to their names being mentioned.
The names of those who preferred otherwise were omitted for their safety.

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Organizations
Organization names have been anonymised for safety and security reasons.
Reference is made to where organizations are based or operate rather than their names.

List of documents and graphs

Acronyms

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DV	Domestic Violence
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IIIM	International Impartial and Independent Mechanism
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NAP	National Action Plan
NES	North and East Syria
AANES	The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
PGNs	Practical Gender Needs
PSL	Personal Status Laws
RCA	Regime-Controlled Area
SGNs	Strategic Gender Needs
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UPP	Un Ponte Per
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

Key research terms

Capacity building: For the purpose of this research, the concept of "capacity building" is approached as an ongoing process or course of action aimed at building on the capacities of Syrian women-led and feminist organizations to achieve their mission effectively and sustainably. More specifically, it is tailored to enabling these organizations to address the major challenges facing them at the level of general political context, as well as at the institutional and local levels. The capacity-building process focuses on supporting the competencies of organizations by providing them with the most needed and relevant support tools and resources to lead inclusive, gender-sensitive and community-led advocacy efforts related to gender and/or transitional justice

Transitional justice: WILPF and Dawlaty envision transitional justice as a plethora of mechanisms and tools that seeks to bring justice to post-conflict Syria. Both organizations emphasize their understanding of transitional justice as a context-specific process that aims at a holistic understanding of what justice means for Syrians and how it can be pursued. Within this understanding, novel approaches to transitional justice are encouraged which are sensitive to the context and the gender-specific identification of harms to reach a fair and equitable transition process.

Gender: By gender, we refer to the set of imposed personal characteristics and roles of women and men in a given society, and how compliance with these characteristics and roles enhances social acceptance within a rigid gender binary (woman/man) which often does not recognize the notion of gender fluidity. These characteristics and roles are imposed, reinforced and re-categorized by a set of societal expectations stemming from the value systems, norms and traditions of different societies.

Gender and power dynamics in the private sphere: These refer to the understanding of gender relations between and among women and men within the private sphere, as defined by societies and their cultural and religious frameworks. Gender relations are influenced by imbalanced power dynamics, which in turn are a result of many overlapping factors, most notably male privilege.

Male privilege: This term refers to a set of social, cultural, political and economic privileges enjoyed by men, especially those whose personal characteristics and roles match a "male standard" in line with societal expectations. Several legal, social, religious, cultural, societal and familial factors overlap in the perpetuation of this male privilege, thus giving men in some (or most) communities an advantage over women, and in turn impacting the gender balance and its power dynamics.

Normalization of violence: This is the host of attitudes and behaviors by women and men, in some societies and cultures, which consider domestic or gender-based violence to be normal and therefore "acceptable", hence obviating the need to report or address it.

Gender analysis: This is the set of tools and frameworks applied in the context of planning and development of intervention programs. Gender analysis starts with a gender-sensitive

needs assessment of women, men, boys and girls as part of gender-sensitive context analysis. This is usually followed by the design of gender-targeted interventions whose goals, objectives, outputs, and activities are based on the analysis of existing gender roles and relations in specific societies. Furthermore, gender analysis could be conducted (and should be reflected) at all levels of planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and financial allocation of program interventions.

Gender roles: Gender roles encompass a range of behaviors, activities, values, and attitudes that are generally considered by societies to be acceptable, appropriate or desirable for women and men, respectively, based on their actual or perceived gender. It is the understanding of how, in certain societies, reproductive roles (which entail housework and/or care for the elderly, the sick, and children) are almost always assigned to women or associated with them, while productive roles (income-generating activities) are associated with men or assigned to men.

Intersectionality: This is a subsect of feminist theory which identifies how different aspects of social and political discrimination overlap with gender. It is the study of how interlocking systems of power impact those who are most marginalized in society, thus exacerbating gender discrimination. Intersectionality is an analytic framework that attempts to understand how the intersection or overlap of gender, age, social status, disability or functional difficulty, nationality and sexual identity, affect access to, or control over, resources, gender and power dynamics, and the enjoyment of gender equality and gender justice.

Advocacy: A set of efforts, approaches and mechanisms that aim to bring about a certain policy change or achieve justice by mobilizing support for one party or more who have decided to make a desired change or impact. To serve the purposes of this mapping/research, the focus will be on participatory advocacy approaches that promote community mobilization and participants and/or women survivors at the center of advocacy efforts.

Feminist Peace: The concept of feminist peace means to look at approaches of peace from a feminist perspective, which are broader than the narrow approach that considers peace to be the absence of violence and war. Feminist peace examines the linkages between violence and war, on the one hand, and the socio-economic and cultural structures that produce and reinforce this violence through promoting imbalanced gender relationships and power dynamics, on the other. In other words, feminist peace is both an intellectual and action-oriented approach that takes into account the comprehensive analysis of causes and forms of structural violence at the social, economic, cultural and environmental levels, and applying tools and mechanisms to bring about sustainable peace. For more information on the theoretical and academic background of the evolution of the concept of feminist peace, see the following link:

https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/What-Is-Feminist-Peace-by-Catia-Confortini-.pdf

The feminization of poverty: There are many adopted definitions for the concept of the "feminization of poverty", although the definition adopted in the context of this research is the broader approach to poverty from a comprehensive gender lens. The concept does not only concern the disparity in wages among and between women and men, or among heads of households. It is not limited to the high rate of poverty among women from around the world compared to men. Feminization of poverty means the examination of poverty from a comprehensive gender perspective, taking into consideration several factors such as political economy, social exclusion, gender imbalances, and deprivation of opportunities, abilities and personal competencies of women.[1]

Embedded Feminism: The concept of "embedded feminism" or the "instrumentalization of women's rights" refers to attempts by some regimes or governments to exploit women's discourse or women's rights to legitimize certain practices that serve their political agendas. There are many examples of this phenomenon. However, the term was created by gender researcher Krista Hunt in her analysis of the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, and the exploitation of women's rights by the US government to justify the War on Terror.

Practical Gender Needs (PGN): This term refers to the set of needs of different groups of women and men resulting from traditional gender roles that they normalize according to societal expectations, needs which they consider to be essential and must be met in the short term.

Strategic Gender Needs (SGN): These are the long-term needs that can, if addressed, improve the positions and status of women (and some groups of men) in a given society, thus toppling the structural obstacles that impede equality and gender justice. These include the status of women and men, and the balance in power dynamics among them in a given society. They also include mechanisms of decision-making positions and control over resources. Strategic gender needs are essential to achieve gender equality and justice, by challenging and changing stereotypical gender roles imposed by society. These needs often cover issues of control, power and status.

Gender equality: This means equal, inclusive and comprehensive access (by women and men) to rights, opportunities, benefits and resources of social and economic value at all levels of private and public life.

Gender justice: This notion refers to fair and equitable access by all groups of women and men to rights, opportunities, benefits and resources based on their gender needs (both practical and strategic). This would mean equal, and possibly different, treatment based on their gendered set of needs. Applying gender justice requires the redistribution of resources and balances of power to achieve gender equality.

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1. Chant, S, Rethinking the "Feminization of Poverty" in relation to aggregate gender indices, London School of Economics, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/2869/1/Re-thinking_the_feminisation_of_poverty_%28LSERO%29.pdf

Introduction

Syria stands at the cusp of a transitional phase with national, regional and international discussions taking place on the possibility of political transition. These discussions have addressed issues related to constitutional reform, reconstruction, early recovery and ensuring safe, voluntary and sustainable return of refugees and displaced women. However, political transition in Syria requires a set of mechanisms to ensure sustainable and feminist peace.[2] Hence, gender-sensitive transitional justice mechanisms are key to ensure breaking the cycle of violence, combating the impunity of perpetrators and criminals, and strengthening accountability to ensure the restoration of the dignity of victims and survivors of violence and establishing the foundations for political and institutional reform governed by the rule of law.

Transitional justice mechanisms are essential for strengthening the responsiveness and accountability of regimes and institutions inside Syria in accordance with international law, and international humanitarian law, for all committed violations. Therefore, any application of these mechanisms will neither be effective nor sustainable unless they address the devastating effects and consequences of such violations on the status and dignity of women, men, families and communities. For these mechanisms to be effective and sustainable, they should take into account the gendered impact of conflict and cost of violence as well as the transformation of gender dynamics and its impact on social and economic structures.

Dawlaty and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) seek to influence the international discourse on the conflict and transitional justice mechanisms pertaining to the political process in Syria through the project entitled "Towards gender-sensitive and victim-centered justice in Syria." To this end, the two organizations seek to provide a framework of gender-sensitive, feminist knowledge about committed abuses and violations, by identifying and analyzing the harm done to women. These knowledge frameworks will contribute to the development of bottom-up, community-led and survivor-centered advocacy efforts with gender-sensitive approaches, based on the needs and priorities of victims and survivors.

To fulfill this vision, the two organizations considered the necessity of mapping Syrian women-led and feminist organizations, which focus on gender and justice issues (both gender and/or transitional justice) within Syria and in neighboring countries, especially those led by women or in which women make up a large proportion of the organization's boards of directors, working on one or more of the following areas:

- Promoting women's political and/or civil participation and engagement
- Women's empowerment and capacity building
- Advocacy or policy work on issues related to governance and the political regime in Syria
- Democratic transition in post-conflict Syria

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2. Catia Confortini, What Is Feminist Peace?
   https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/What-Is-Feminist-Peace-by-Catia-Confortini-.pdf

- Different, alternative and culturally sensitive approaches to transitional justice mechanisms and tools, where such tools or mechanisms are gender-sensitive where possible
- Community mobilization to engage members of local communities in specific transitional justice issues

As such, over the course of February and March of 2019, some of the women-led and feminist organizations working in Syria, Turkey and Lebanon were identified and invited to take part in this mapping exercise, by responding to a set of questions aimed at assessing their capacities, competencies and institutional needs. The main objective of this report is to map the contextual and organizational challenges facing women-led and feminist organizations working inside Syria and neighbouring countries on gender-sensitive transitional justice issues. Moreover, the report identifies organizations' needs and capacities both in terms of advocacy and gender mainstreaming in policies and programs.

Executive summary

In a quest to map and mobilize Syrian women-led and feminist organizations working inside Syria and in neighboring countries on gender and justice related issues, Dawlaty and WILPF are seeking to influence advocacy efforts through bringing forth gender-sensitive grassroots models that adopt survivor-centered and rights-based approaches. These gender-sensitive advocacy efforts will contribute to providing a framework of first-hand accounts of feminist knowledge concerning violations in Syria by identifying and analyzing the harm inflicted on women, in addition to strengthening accountability and justice strategies, including transitional justice.

To this end, in February and March of 2019, Dawlaty and WILPF identified women-led and feminist organizations working on one or more issues related to gender and/or transitional justice,[3] inside Syria or in Turkey or Lebanon. These organizations were then invited to take part in a mapping and capacity/needs assessment exercise. The main objective of this report is to map the contextual and organizational challenges facing women-led and feminist organizations working inside Syria and neighbouring countries on gender-sensitive transitional justice issues. Moreover, the report identifies organizations' needs and capacities both in terms of advocacy and gender mainstreaming in policies and programs.

In the context of assessing and analyzing the capacities and needs of organizations, a complex research methodology (quantitative and qualitative) was applied to map and assess the contexts in which the organizations operate, and the multifaceted challenges or opportunities these contexts present. Furthermore, this methodology was applied to assess the organizational capacities of the targeted organizations, and their respective capacity-building needs. To this end, a research tool (Annex 1) was developed to analyze the general context, the challenges it poses and the opportunities it presents at the national, institutional and local levels. This research tool was also used to analyze the organizational and operational capacities, expertise and needs of participant organizations.

This report, therefore, provides a feminist analysis of the challenges imposed by the general context, most notably those imposed by the institutional, societal, cultural and public security factors that affect the operation of these organizations or impede their progress towards achieving their mission and vision. The report also highlights the intersection of organizational competencies and institutional capacities with the organizational needs in harnessing gender-sensitive advocacy tools while addressing transitional justice mechanisms and mainstreaming gender through these efforts.

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3. Promoting women's political and/or civil participation and engagement, and/or women's empowerment and capacity building and/or advocacy or policy work on issues related to governance and the political regime in Syria, democratic transition in post-conflict Syria, and/or different alternative and culturally sensitive approaches of transitional justice mechanisms and tools, where such tools or mechanisms are gender sensitive if possible and/or Community mobilization to engage members of local societies in specific issues of transitional justice.

Accordingly, this report is divided into four sections and two annexes as follows:

Section 1:   The political and legal context, and its impact on women's rights in Syria
Section 2:   Challenges that hinder the work of Syrian women-led and feminist organizations
Section 3:   Advocacy and networking efforts: Competencies and institutional needs
Section 4:   Mainstreaming gender in the work of organizations: Competencies and institutional needs
Annexes: Statistical report on the profiles of organizations and organizational and administrative infrastructure of organizations

Main conclusions

1.   Exclusionary and misogynistic political, security, legal and patriarchal context

Despite the fundamental differences in the overall political atmosphere prevailing in each part of Syria, due to territorial control shaped by political alignments and ideological references, the oppressive tools used against women are almost identical throughout the country. Whether under the control of the Syrian regime or in the zones of control of de facto authorities, women are bearing the brunt of the conflict due to overlapping factors that systematically exclude them, leaving them exposed to all forms of violence across all regions in Syria. The main challenges that women face are as follows:

- Limited political and societal participation of women, and the absence of empowerment opportunities at all levels;
- Women, young and old, as well as girls, are exposed to all forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, spousal violence, economic violence (denial of education, early marriage and denial of employment), psychological violence, restriction of women's freedom and mobility, as well as confining them within the private space, in addition to militarization;
- Limited economic opportunities for women, as well as the poor living conditions and increased poverty (feminization of poverty) as a result of marginalization, and deprivation of resources;
- Limited access to justice through formal judicial channels such as courts due to corruption, partiality, and favoritism in the judiciary system, especially in cases that fall within the scope of personal status. Women's access to informal justice channels is also limited due to social stigma as well as social and cultural pressures on abused women or survivors of domestic or sexual violence, restricting their ability to report violence.

At the heart of these challenges is the interplay of political, security, cultural and economic factors prevailing in the practices and political agendas of governing

institutions in different regions of Syria. There exists a causality between these factors, and the politically sanctioned patriarchy that is perpetuated by religious and cultural ideals, as well as militarism.All of these factors combined impose layers of additional challenges on women and girls, which are reflected in their limited access to, and control over, resources; the inferior and oppressive attitudes towards women; their status and issues; in addition to the traditional societal and gender expectations of women and their roles.

2. The existence and sustainability of women-led and feminist organizations is at stake: Challenging operational context due to political, administrative, security and funding factors

Syrian women-led and feminist organizations working on issues of women's empowerment, and gender and/or transitional justice in Syria and neighboring countries (Turkey and Lebanon) face several challenges threatening their existence and sustainability. The overlapping legal, administrative, and cultural (patriarchal) factors, combined with the scarcity of funding opportunities, impose further marginalization and threaten the sustainability of their work. These challenges are as follows:

- Jeopardized status of women-led and feminist organizations due to restrictions on NGO registration by both the regime and the de facto authorities, thus affecting the economic security of employees and the sustainability of organizations.
- Compromised and unsustainable funding streams due to the conditionality, bureaucracy, and inflexibility of donors regarding the registration status of organizations. Moreover, some donor organizations have ties or alignments with political parties, and others impose their agenda on the organizations with no consideration to or sensitivity towards the socio-cultural and political contexts or the needs of communities.
- Restricted and limited mobility of women in the communities, due to the patriarchal and traditional attitudes that exert social control over women. This has a tremendously negative impact on the mobilization of women-led and feminist organizations who face challenges in their mobilization and outreach efforts. Another set of challenges lies in the normalization of Domestic Violence (DV) or Gender-Based Violence (GBV) that limit women's ability to report such incidents.

The organizations operating inside Syria face additional challenges, most notably the proliferation of weapons and armed groups, and the intelligence-based nature of administrative institutions. These challenges are as follows:

- The political (and at times security) intervention in the organizations' work and the need for approval by the authorities to implement activities;
- The proliferation of arms and militarization, which affects the work of organizations in the governorates of Damascus, Idlib, Aleppo and al-Hasakah;

- Limited mobility, travel restrictions and mobility constraints across governorates, and the difficulty in securing transportation and lack of transportation means (which affects the implementation of activities and mobilizing women at the community level).

Syrian women-led and feminist organizations face additional obstacles that impede their work. These include the community's lack of confidence in women and gender-related issues, and limitations in accessing and sustaining resources (funds and capacity building). Women activists are also threatened and harassed, and some women-led and feminist organizations are excluded from the civil space. Moreover, the feminist discourse and agenda are at stake due to a possible shift in feminist demands due to war and conflict.

3. Feminist strategies in shifting the power structures

In facing this multitude of challenges, women-led and feminist organizations are developing organic strategies and methods with modest resources to re-shift the balance of power, and ensure and maintain their position within the public map. Despite the obstacles they face, women-led and feminist organizations are showing unprecedented levels of determination and perseverance. These strategies include the following:

- Circumventing the political and security systems in areas controlled by the regime to ensure the sustainability of their intervention frameworks;
- Strengthening community ties and networking frameworks with other organizations as well as community members and social incubators to get social legitimacy;
- Relying on voluntary work and the organization's resources to ensure the continuity and sustainability of interventions;
- Targeting flexible donors that share a similar vision.

4. The capacities and competences of organizations pertaining to advocacy, transitional justice, and gender mainstreaming

- The organizations work intuitively and organically on mainstreaming gender at many levels of their work, and they apply advocacy skills at different levels without necessarily acquiring the overall conceptual or theoretical frameworks;
- The organizations carry out community-led advocacy efforts spontaneously (particularly through establishing networking channels, monitoring stakeholders and decision makers' local policies, and mobilizing different segments of the communities);
- Most organizations seek to implement gender mainstreaming tools throughout their intervention levels in an organic, responsive and accountable way.

General Recommendations

1. Broadening networking channels and strengthening existing ones among women-led and feminist organizations operating inside Syria and in neighboring countries, to promote solidarity and create feminist support networks for these organizations (to share experiences and mobilize resources, etc...);
2. Institutionalizing the organizations' competencies on gender-sensitive advocacy and gender mainstreaming skills;
3. Capitalizing on organizations' existing capacities and competences, through enhancing cross-regional, participatory and collective advocacy work on gender-sensitive transitional justice to complement their existing community-led efforts, and to create organic feminist learning processes.

Mapping methodology, tools and limitations

To achieve the desired results of the mapping, a participatory approach was adopted, while using a mixed research methodology (both quantitative and qualitative), to map and assess the organizations' external and internal operating environments and to capture the main challenges and opportunities, as well as the institutional competencies and training needs related to the project.

The tool used in the monitoring context

A research tool (Annex 1) was developed which is divided into four sections (Chart 1):

- **Section 1: Profiling the organizations**
  This section covers the general information about the organizations, their scope of intervention, geographical coverage, as well as the target groups and intervention strategies, especially on issues of transitional justice.
- **Section 2: The general context (challenges and opportunities)**
  This section covers the external environment in which organizations operate, and the challenges, risks and opportunities this external environment imposes or presents at the national, institutional and local levels.
- **Section 3: The institutional capacities and competencies of the organizations**
  This section covers the organizations' capacities and competencies in addressing and mitigating the imposed challenges and risks at different levels, while focusing on the most significant strong points, as well as the institutional needs to ensure effectiveness and sustainability of interventions.
- **Section 4: The organizational and operational structures of organizations**
  This section assesses the development and implementation of gender-sensitive and gender-driven organizational and operational structures
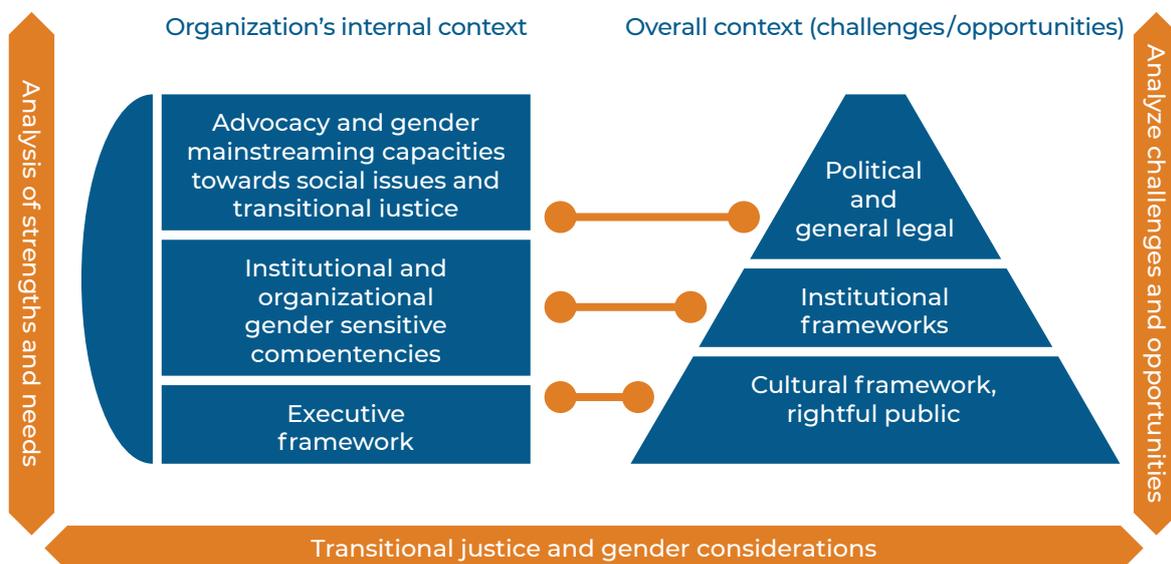

Chart 1: Theoretical approach adopted in the development of the research tool

This tool is based on an Incremental Capacity Building Approach which, unlike Gap Analysis Approach, involves targeted stakeholders in a participatory self-assessment process. This tool aims at assessing and evaluating institutional capacities while allowing the organizations to define what they consider to be important for their context, and thus identify the most critical needs that will help them realize their missions.

Selection criteria

The organizations that met the below criteria were invited to take part in this mapping exercise:

1. Civil or non-governmental organizations, grassroot initiatives, or community-led campaigns;
2. Syrian organizations or initiatives operating inside Syria and in neighboring countries;
3. Women-led/driven and feminist NGOs and CSOs, and
4. Organizations working on one or more of the following areas:
   - Political and/or civic participation
   - Women's empowerment, community mobilization and/or capacity-building
   - Advocacy or policy work on issues related to governance in Syria
   - Democratic transition in post-conflict Syria
   - Different, alternative and culturally sensitive approaches of transitional justice mechanisms and tools, provided that such tools or mechanisms are gender sensitive if possible

Areas covered by the research

The research included organizations operating in Syria, Turkey and Lebanon in the following governorates or regions:

Syria
- Governorates of Damascus and As-Sweida (Shahba)
- Governorate of Idlib (villages and towns of Ma'rat al-Nu'man: Hasa and Saraqeb; Kafranbel, Dar Azza, Jabal Al-Zawiyyah, Al-Dibit)
- Governorate of Aleppo (villages and towns of the western and eastern Aleppo countryside: Al-Ibizmo, Kafrtaal, Atareb, Kafr-nuran, Souran, Afrin, Sharan, A'zaz, Al-Bab)
- Governorate of al-Hasakah (Qamishli, Dirik, Amouda, Ain Issa) and Raqqa (Tabqah)

Turkey (Gaziantep and Istanbul)

Lebanon (Bekaa, Beirut and Mount Lebanon)

A total of 65 organizations (Annex 2) participated in this mapping, of which 71.7% operate inside of Syria, 20% in Turkey and 8.3% in Lebanon.

Limitations of the mapping

This mapping research covers 65 Syrian women-led and feminist organizations and networks operating inside Syria or in Turkey and Lebanon. Although some of the organizations do not meet all the criteria (i.e. they do not define themselves as women-led or feminist organizations, or are not headed by women), none of the organizations were excluded in the mapping as they work on issues that fall within the scope of the project.

The main limitations of this report are as follows:
- The report falls short of providing an individual analysis of organizations pertaining to their institutional capacities and competencies and their capacity-building needs;
- Despite the in-depth analysis provided on gender mainstreaming in organizations' intervention frameworks, the report falls short of providing the same in-depth analysis of gender mainstreaming in the overall organizational structures pertaining to adopting gender-sensitive policies and procedures;
- The report does not present a comparative classification of organizations' capacities or competencies, especially in advocacy efforts and approaches on transitional justice issues. Given the rapidly changing context and the varying capacities of organizations, the report made sure to shed light on the strengths of organizations and thus the complementarity of their scope of work and intervention strategies.

Syria 71.7%   Turkey 20%   Lebanon 8.3%
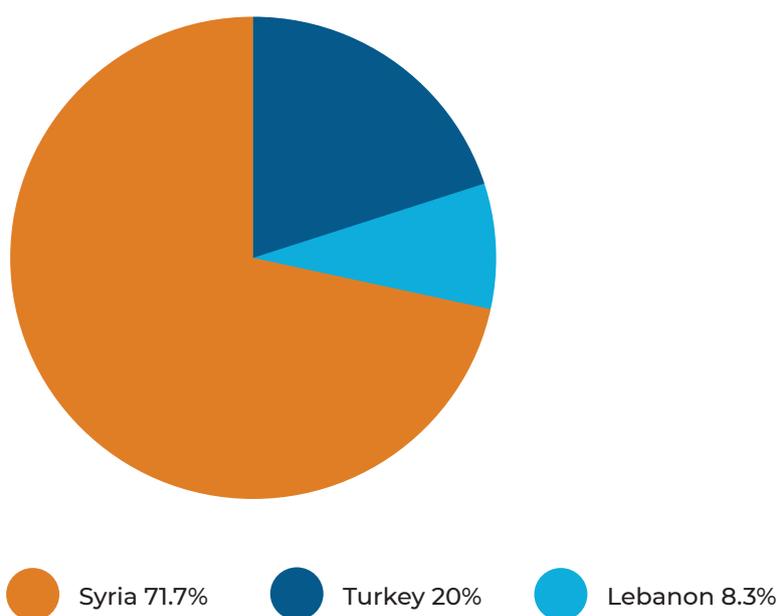
Figure 1: Organizations by country.
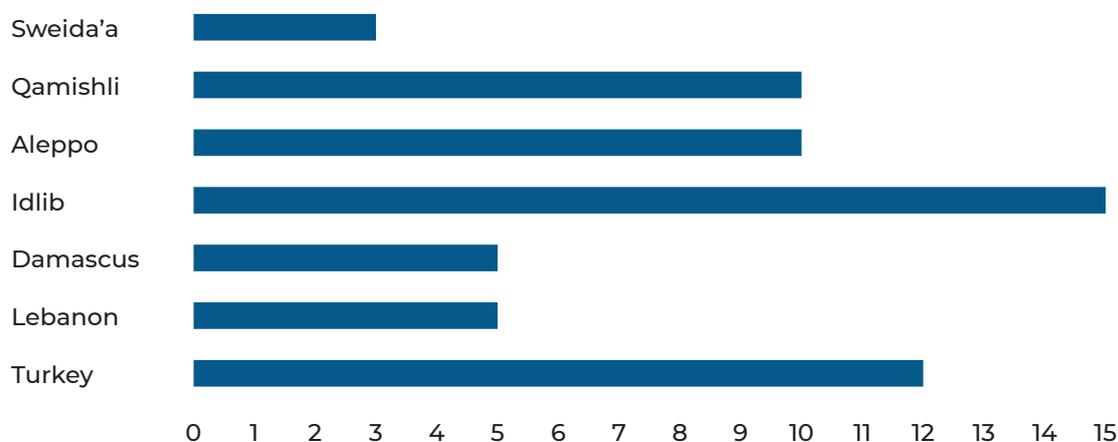
Figure 2: Organizations by governorate.

Main Challenges

1. The limited timeframe posed a challenge on the project team namely in identifying and recruiting field researchers, a process that required more time than previously anticipated. Moreover, the limited timeframe affected the responsiveness of some organizations, especially since the interviews took place around International Women's Day, where many organizations were busy organizing and participating in several events marking this occasion.
2. Many organizations indicated that the complex research tool addressed some concepts that are not necessarily applicable, particularly for grassroots or emerging organizations. This created difficulties and resulted in some questions being left unanswered. The field research team also noted that some interviews required two hours to complete, and were therefore conducted over two stages;
3. Some organizations declined to participate without providing reasons, and others (in Idlib and Lebanon) did not answer certain questions, especially those dealing with challenges related to the legal and administrative general context for reasons they refused to disclose;
4. Some organizations considered that the research tool inquired into private organizational issues, such as annual budgets and/or financial strategies;
5. The inability to include countries and regions (such as Jordan and/or Europe) where organizations that meet the research and project criteria may be based;
6. The research team could not complete some of the forms which required more than one meeting due to the organizations' inability to allocate sufficient time for multiple interviews.

Section 1

General climate for women's rights in Syria during the transitional phase

The situation of women's human rights were mapped in different regions inside Syria as well as in neighbouring countries. This section sheds light on the status of women's rights in both private and public spheres.
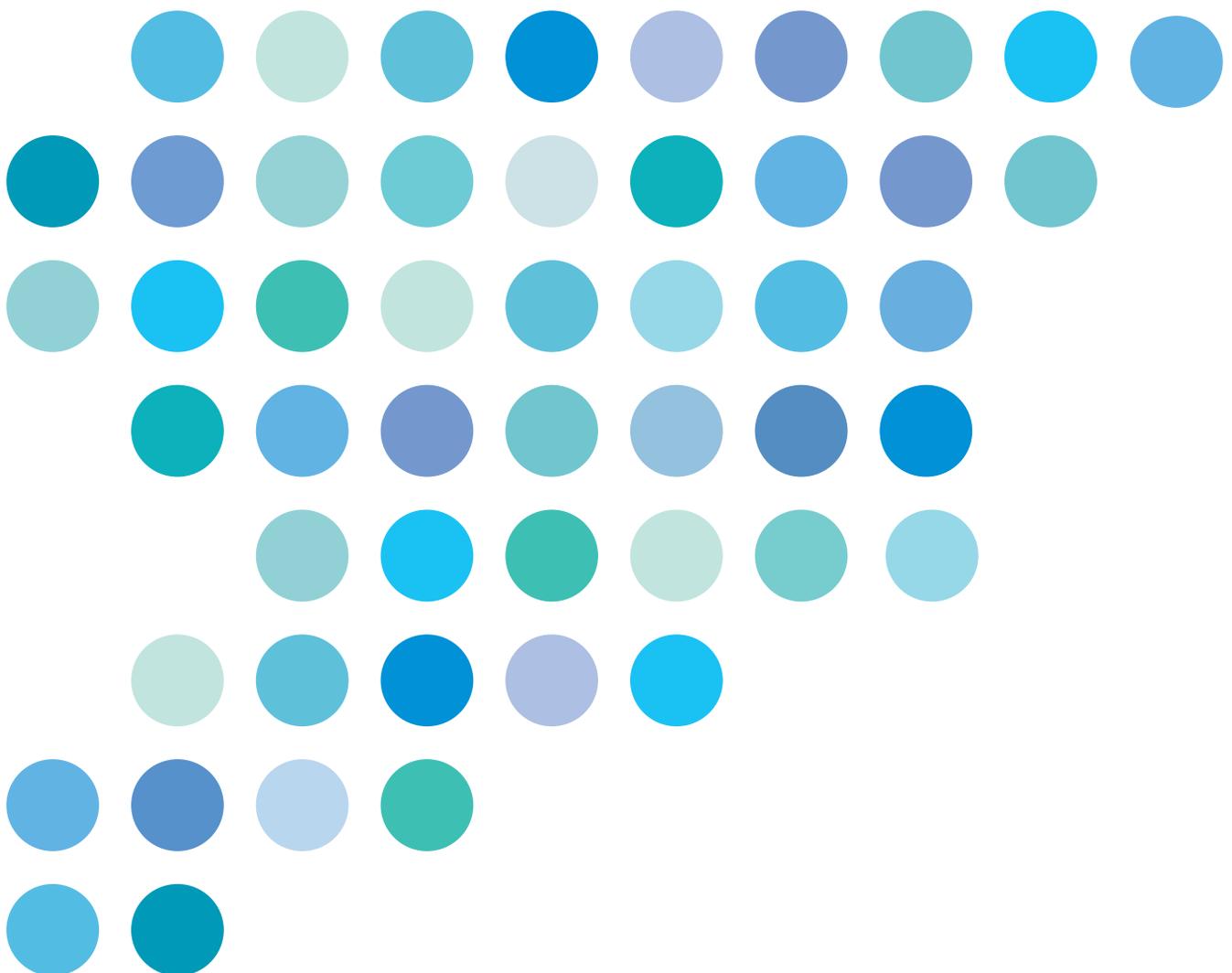
The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES): Gender discrimination and exclusion of women on the rise, despite official efforts

Participating organizations from al-Hasakah pointed to inconsistencies between official efforts which purport to address women's rights at the political, legal and administrative levels, and the reality on the ground. These contradictions are reflected in the Administration's promotion of women's rights in political participation, and its pledge to tackle gender-based violence, where much progress is still needed to realize these aims. They are also reflected in the various challenges posed to women-led and feminist organizations operating in the area.

Since its announcement in 2014, AANES issued an official decision to promote women's political participation through the representation of women in all district committees by 40%, or granting them the right to vote or run for all positions, and the establishment of "co-chairpersonship" across all official institutions.[4] However, the realities on the ground fall short of enabling women's full and comprehensive political participation, due to the limited opportunities and lack of political and economic empowerment. According to an organization based in Al-Hasakah, "the existing laws are supportive of women; the Administration issued substantial laws to promote women's participation across all levels such as co-chairpersonship, women's committees, and female judges and lawyers." Similarly, another organisation based in Al-Hasakah noted that, "the Administration has a profound role in promoting and protecting women's rights." However, there remain some disparities and limited opportunities for women's participation and political and economic empowerment, as two organisations based in Al-Hasakah agreed on "the difficulty of women's access to key decision-making positions." A further two organisations based in the areas referenced "challenges pertaining to women's participation at decision-making levels," while another noted "the lack of opportunities for the economic empowerment of women."

This inconsistency between the Administration's rhetoric on women's rights is also reflected in addressing GBV-related issues and the protection of women from all forms of violence. AANES issued a legal framework for protection to combat a patriarchal mentality, as "a duty of every individual in Administration areas",[5] as well as the law on equality between men and women. Yet the organizations agreed that, despite the general legal and institutional environment that is relatively accepting of women, they still face many challenges in the private sphere. Women face all forms of gender-based violence (psychological, economic, domestic, spousal and sexual violence). Moreover, girls are denied their education as a result of early marriage, not to mention the legal discrimination against women regarding personal status issues (divorce, custody and polygamy). An organisation active in Ain Issa - al-Hasakah, attributed the issues faced by women to the "societal norms and traditions, and domestic, marital and sexual violence and (other challenges) pertaining to personal status."

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4. Imad Talaty, "A new personality for women under the rule of NES," AFN News, https://bit.ly/2OpXXEo (Last accessed March 29, 2019).
5. Autonomous Administration, "Women's' rules in Al-Jazeera province," Autonomous Administration (Rojava) website, http://bit.ly/2P2ykJV (Last accessed April 9, 2019).

In their analysis of the root causes of this discrepancy between official rhetoric about gender equality and the actually existing discriminatory environment against women, the organizations pointed to the absence of national official gender-sensitive frameworks, such as national plans and strategies on women's empowerment and gender equality. As an organization based in Al-Hasakah noted: "There are no national plans, but there are programs on gender justice and violence against women." A network in Al-Hasakah addressed the impact of socio-cultural factors such as social norms and traditions that continue to be obstacles to the conception or application of policies promoting women's rights. This is in addition to challenges faced by women who have experienced forced displacement, such as the separation of families, exposure to sexual harassment and violence, and denial of education. The network thus summarized the challenges hindering the application of most policies supporting women's rights as "the lack of societal awareness, forced displacement, sexual harassment, denial of education and poor economic conditions."

The organizations agreed that societal views which are degrading to women, and which perceive them as inferior to men, result from the patriarchal mentality that finds root in, and is affected by, religious norms and traditions. This in turn limits women's access to active participation in decision-making in both the public and the private spheres.

Concerning the impact of disparity within the political and administrative environment on the work and operation of women-led and feminist organizations, two organizations pointed to the fundamental challenge of being denied official registration by the de facto authorities, which thus affects their legitimacy. The women at the helm of the one organisation based in Al-Hasakah said that "we cannot participate with CSOs in the region because of our lack of official licenses," while the women in another organization reported that they "suffer from a lack of resources that would help us get official licensing of our work."

Although none of the organizations addressed challenges imposed by these authorities at the level of intervention in defining the scope of their work, some media reports[6] highlighted the restricting work environment, and lack of freedom to operate, that organizations face in the region east of the Euphrates (NES) due to the direct controls imposed by governance authorities. This has led many organizations to dissolve due to their inability to implement their projects and programs under such pressures and security constraints.

6.   Kader Ahmed, The Syrian Voice, 4th of July, 2017, http://syrianvoice.org/archives/2812 (Last accessed April 9, 2019)

Regime-Controlled Areas: Security, Political and Administrative Constraints

One organization, which requested anonymity, provided a critical overall analysis of the general and legal context in regime-controlled areas. The organization indicated that the regime is instrumentalizing women's rights rhetoric for political ends, and to cultivate an improved image towards western states. This is the case as the regime fails to enact any profound change with regards to legal and socio-cultural contexts. The regime, according to this organization, uses the societal context to justify the lack of progress in women's rights, as they argue, "the nature of Syrian society and its limited awareness, is unable to accept these changes that could impact its Arab and Islamic identity." Therefore, the regime declines to introduce serious legal reforms under the pretext that conservative Syrian society will not accept them, and any proposed reforms are carried out superficially for mere international political considerations. According to this same organization, the latest amendments to personal status laws are "nothing but a media stunt or a propaganda effort; therefore, these amendments remain formalistic and fail to address the core of discriminatory laws."

On the compliance with commitments as per international conventions and UN Security Council resolutions, the organization pointed out that the regime purposely voided many texts of their substance by putting reservations on many articles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), or failing to abide by its obligations (as per different UNSC resolutions) regarding protecting women in times of conflict and promoting their effective political participation in decision-making positions. According to this organization, the regime uses the conservative nature of Syrian society as a pretext to reject such obligations, claiming that "these agreements violate Islamic law, while [the regime] did not and will not show seriousness in implementing international conventions and resolutions on women's rights, as after nineteen years since the adoption of UN resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, the Syrian government still has not taken any serious step towards adopting a National Action Plan despite all the advocacy campaigns carried out by feminist movements and CSOs in this regards, especially considering women and girls bear the brunt of violence and are subjected to various kinds of grave violations."

As for the role and effectiveness of official governmental institutions, some organizations[7] operating in regime-controlled areas, which prefer to remain anonymous, in addition to three other organizations based outside of Syria, pointed to a total absence of official institutions entrusted with the development of national strategies or plans to elevate the status of women. One unnamed organization noted "a lack of national policies, where the nature of the regime itself prevents such policies from seeing the light of day."

In this context, two organisations stated that the General Women's Union of Syria, which previously played this role in terms of submitting national reports to the CEDAW

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7. Some organizations (three anonymous organizations) refused to answer all the questions related to evaluating the general legal and policy context in Damascus.

Committee, implementing the Beijing strategies and filing national reports on the reality and status of women, was dissolved by legislative decree No. 16 in 2017. [8] The regime subsequently entrusted the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor with the functions of the Women's Union. As such, there is no longer a national women's apparatus within the government in Syria. Accordingly, the official roles and responsibilities concerning women's rights at the political and institutional levels remain unclear, according to the anonymous organization.

As for the roles of these governmental institutions, both organisations indicated that they are ineffective and play no positive role, due to their affiliation with the Syrian regime whose policies are exclusionary by default. The two organizations also indicated that any "reform" efforts by the regime are nothing but "optics" where the participation of women in politics is facilitated only insofar as it serves the regime's interests, as did the amendment of the personal status law enacted earlier this year.[9, 10] An anonymous organization reported that "the Ministry of Local Administration does not have the required quota of women candidates in elections, and there are no women's programs in government institutions." Furthermore, another organisation based in a regime-held area said: "The percentage of women's participation in parliament is 12%, which has been fixed and recurrent quota since the nineties. Therefore, women's participation is often pro-forma. These women are not the decision-makers, nor do they hold any power. Meanwhile, for the first time, Syria witnessed a consensus by two-thirds of its parliament to dismiss its female president."

On the legal status of women in Syria, three organizations, referenced the significant legal violations and the inaction of legislative institutions which promote pro-forma participation of women. One anonymous organization noted that "there are no gender-sensitive laws, and violations are numerous; Syrian law is gender-blind." Another organization suggested that "laws, even if not discriminatory, are devoid of any support for gender policies to empower women," asserting that, "governmental institutions play a negative role because they perpetuate a nominal role for women's participation. Therefore, there are no formal channels or institutions that would develop the legal structure."

Regarding the challenges facing the work of Syrian organizations, an organisation referenced the severe restrictions these women-led and feminist organizations face, which are imposed by the regime and its administrative and security apparatuses.

8. SANA, "President Assad issues decree annulling Law No. 33 of 1975 regarding the creation of General Women's Union", April 23, 2017, https://sana.sy/?p=543253 (Last accessed visited April 9, 2019).
9. SANA, "President Assad issues decree amending Personal Status Law adopted under Decree No. 59 of 1953 and its Amendments," February 10, 2019, https://sana.sy/?p=892746 (Last accessed on April 9, 2019).
10. On February 5, 2019, the People's Assembly of Syria approved amendments to more than 60 articles of the Personal Status Law issued by Legislative Decree No. 59 of 1953. The most significant modifications to the Law pertain to the right of each spouse to include her or his own conditions in the marriage contract, provided that these terms do not violate Sharia (Islamic law) and Syrian law. (Id. art. 14(1)).) For more information: https://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/syria-womens-rights-in-light-of-new-amendments-to-syrian-personal-status-law/

Among these challenges is the difficulty of obtaining registration, or the refusal to register organizations that may carry the terms of "empowerment" or "women" in their name. This, in addition to restricting any work on women's empowerment, or imposing impediments such as the need for prior approval by 'Syria Trust for Development' headed by Asmaa Al-Assad —the regime's first lady, for all activities carried out by the organizations. In this regard, an organization noted that, "Syria Trust is the one obtaining funding and approval for all activities."

In this context, one anonymous organization indicated that the Syrian government has restricted the liberties and freedom of organizations and imposed restrictions on those who did not obtain official authorization in order to operate. The organization explained that the Syrian government, "through its security apparatus, confiscated the achievements of the Syrian CSOs, whereby it imposed restrictions on unauthorized organizations as well as sanctions on activists by preventing them from leaving the country. It also carried out security checks to subject organizations to security controls."

On the challenges facing women in regime-controlled areas in general, some organizations highlighted the difficulties and challenges faced by women in accessing justice through the courts. In this context, Urnammu, a non-governmental organization founded by human rights defenders, referred to the corruption of the justice system as well as women's lack of confidence to report violations while seeking justice, namely in cases of divorce or sexual assault. An organisation indicated that "the judiciary in this region (as in all regions of Syria) has not been successful in dealing with these violations for political, cultural, institutional, religious and patriarchal reasons."

Moreover, women in regime-controlled areas suffer from poor living conditions, or what can be considered the feminization of poverty. As one anonymous organization said, "As a result of the husband's absence, women suffer from many legal, social and economic problems in many areas. These challenges include (lack of) registration of children, poor living conditions and the difficulty of obtaining basic services such as the lack of baby formula." Another organization suggested that, "women are suffering from lack of political, social, educational and economic empowerment opportunities." And another organization noted that, "Young women have to work to assist their families, because of the deteriorating situation which deprives them of the opportunity to complete their education."

Governorate of Sweida

In a critical feminist analysis of the status of women and the general societal context and its impact on organizations' work, Syrian civil society organizations (CSOs) participating in the Sweida region, all of whom preferred to remain anonymous, pointed out to hidden forms of violence against women that still exist in the area. They indicated that [despite the relative socio-cultural openness] women still suffer from systematic violations and

discriminatory practices which, according to an anonymous organization, "are being obscured, extenuated and normalized, including symbolic or psychological violence which is considered a normalized practice. Additionally, there are structural challenges due to the nature of the regime that tends to compromise women's rights to buy the loyalty and allegiance of political Islam in return."

The work environment for CSOs in the governorate of Sweida is less restricted compared to other areas controlled by the regime. Non-governmental organizations have worked within the past five years with a relative degree of freedom which, according to one organization, contributed to "breaking part of the systemic barriers and women, especially young women, became more empowered to speak up and voice their needs and demands. This has mainly resulted from a series of discussions and dialogue sessions organized by these organizations. The organizations encourage women and girls to speak up about the harm inflicted upon them by the system, and the violations they face to eventually report such violations."

As for the status of women in the governorate, the organizations referred to obstacles hindering women's political participation in the public sphere, as a result of the limited resources, the pro-forma political participation in political parties and official institutions (both executive and legislative), in addition to the increasing burden on women as a result of their participation in the labor force without necessarily reflecting on the equal distribution of roles in the private sphere. The organizations also referred to the "glass ceiling" experienced by women in the work sector, as well as the difficulty of career advancement and limited employment opportunities. According to one organization that opted to remain anonymous, "Political participation is only a symbolic participation, especially at the level of political parties, civic engagement and in the public sector and state institutions; we lack qualified women leaders who are able to lead their institutions, organizations, parties and even private and medium enterprises. Moreover, there is a challenge in investing in young feminists, due to lack of experience, knowledge, and interest as well as due to limited opportunities, which is perpetuated by inferior and degrading societal views of women due to norms and traditions."

In the private sphere, women suffer from all forms of violence, such as early and forced marriage, poor levels of safety, legal discrimination under the pretext of personal status law, which, according to one anonymous organization, "deprives women of inheritance, and excludes of Druze from certain articles which constitute a flagrant violation, such as forcefully returning divorced women to their husbands." Another organization suggested that, "through a rights-based initiative launched by our organization, we learned that women in the private sphere are exposed to various forms of domestic violence. We know this from first-hand accounts of women who seek legal assistance, and from the cases and legal consultations that are presented to us on a daily basis. We still lack the culture of reporting and disclosing incidents of violence, especially marital violence and sexual violence by the husband, or the harassments by men in the family."

Areas Controlled by De Facto Authorities: Social Chaos and Multi-Faceted Gender Challenges

The areas outside the regime's control, at the time of conducting the mapping were the governorates of Idlib and the western countryside of Aleppo and Hama, were controlled by the Salvation Government which was imposed as a de facto authority in late 2017. According to an organization in Aleppo suburbs, "There is no effective role for [the Salvation Government], and it does not have legitimacy being a nascent structure."

In addition to its control over all vital facilities and official institutions and sectors (judiciary, security and police, and financial/banking system) in the governorate of Idlib, these de facto authorities shut down all universities such as the faculties of Aleppo University and the International University in Ma'arat al-Nu'man. The Salvation Government sought to tighten it control over citizens, especially women, when it began issuing circulars requiring widows to live with a male relative (such as a brother, son or father), in addition to orders requiring female university students to "strictly adhere to the obligation of dressing modestly as appropriate to Shari'a, and not wearing shoes with high heels, or makeup and cosmetics." [11]

In light of these administrative restrictions and the systemic alienation of women and human rights restrictions, women-led and feminist organizations working in the villages and towns of Idlib and Aleppo shed light on the increased deterioration of women's rights at all levels due to the interplay of several factors. These include the proliferation of militarization and the culturally patriarchal setting which affected and continues to affect women at the legal, cultural, social, livelihood and economic levels. This in turn has affected the frameworks of intervention and work of organizations in the governorate. An organisation noted that, "those who hold power are the biggest challenge to women's participation, such as armed factions in areas beyond the regime's control."

The organizations pointed to the total absence of official institutions that attempt to facilitate the application of women's rights, for example through fostering networks or the development of local plans to improve the status of women. These institutions, according to participating organizations, are either non-existent or politically affiliated. In case there are any, they would be ineffective or their role would be limited to the provision of services. An organisation based in Idlib noted that, "We have a memorandum of understanding with the local council, which only participates in some awareness-raising sessions to distribute tokens of participation." Another organisation based in Idlib noted: "These institutions do not achieve the vision required for women's participation. There is no real guarantee for the political participation of women, but we are continuing to pursue this aim." An organisation based in Saraqeb, noted, "There is no effective role for these institutions. The region is governed by a single court, the Shari'a Court." An organisation with a center in Idlib reported that they "had a very difficult experience in involving women in local councils and the electoral process in Syria, although areas

11.   Khatib, Hussein, "The Salvation Government A Government for The Government-less: How It Controlled Idlib?", Noon Post, https://www.noonpost.com/content/26891 (Last accessed March 29, 2019).

beyond regime control tried to present an ideal model, so far women have only had stereotypical roles." An organisation in western Aleppo reported that, "mostly, they [institutions] are service-based, facilitating the implementation of the projects through memoranda of understanding with NGOs." Women's groups in Atareb and Azzaz echoed this sentiment,"the role of the Council is limited to providing services and does not, due to its political and administrative role and affiliation, guarantee the political rights of women."

Concerning the effects of this complex reality on the work of organizations, some organizations pointed to the prevailing social chaos, which calls for even more rigorous effort from organizations in the absence of any supportive legal or regulatory frameworks. As an organisation based in Hass, Idlib explained: "We live in social chaos, organize ourselves and devote our work to achieve our goals. We cannot work with national organizations given the fact that the region does not belong to any state and does not qualify as a state, so our work is primarily confined to the local level."

Among the challenges facing women in the Idlib governorate, the organizations pointed to the paucity of women's involvement in politics, and the feminization of poverty[12] due to poor economic empowerment opportunities, poor economic and living conditions for women and families, gaps in girls' education as well as the vulnerability of female heads of households after the absence, disappearance, arrest or death of their husbands. In their analysis of the underlying causes, the organizations pointed to overlapping factors in the overall general context where cultural restrictions are exacerbated by, and result from, legal, religious, patriarchal and military factors. One anonymous organization active in Idlib suggested that, "the main challenges are insecurity, instability, fear of the unknown, and the exploitation of women." In addition, as stressed by another organization, "the difficulties faced by women due to the loss of the breadwinner (the husband) should be highlighted." As an organisation based in Saraqeb, Idlib summarized: "The obstacles are too many, including the scarcity of families' financial resources. Some families would educate boys and leave girls without education. Therefore, women need education so they can practice some work without being exploited; women also need work opportunities, but the lack of free centers, on top of their unpaid work in the agriculture sector or as caregivers (raising and taking care of their younger brothers and sisters), also impede their empowerment."

In the private sphere, women suffer from a number of challenges, notably domestic violence, early marriage and polygamy, as well as the violation of their rights under personal status laws (custody and divorce and forced abandonment of their rights). Moreover, women lack access to reproductive rights and sexual health, or the control over decisions of pregnancy and childbirth. The normalization of violence and non-reporting of incidents of GBV are also among the many serious challenges faced by women in

12.   See the definition of key research terms on page 8 of this report.

these areas. Such challenges are exacerbated by the absence of women's shelters, and the limited access to justice whether through formal channels (courts), or informal ones (local mediation). Women's access to formal justice channels is compromised due to politicization of the judiciary. As for informal channels, women still face stigma should they pursue their rights, namely in issues relating to divorce or reporting of domestic or sexual violence. As an anonymous organization, operating in Idlib, said: "Women are exposed to domestic violence and early marriage; they do not report violence as a result of social norms, and are sometimes forced to stay with the husband despite requests for divorce, out of fear of social norms and tradition." An organization in Kafranbel, Idlib argued: "The main challenge is physical violence. According to society, the husband has "the right" to beat and verbally abuse his wife. Since we are in a male-dominated society, women cannot submit a complaint to court due to societal views, which renders them vulnerable to an abusive and degrading attitude from law enforcement institutions. Moreover, the courts do not do justice to women in case they requested a divorce or separation in case the husband married another woman. In such cases, women must waive all their rights to get the divorce documents, as the divorce rate increases due to early marriage."

In Aleppo (Western and Eastern countryside), women face the same set of challenges as in the public sphere in the governorate of Idlib, due to the prevalence of militarization and a patriarchal mentality. Women in Aleppo have limited employment opportunities, and their political participation is minimal. As an organization said, "Women's participation in the political sphere or in decision-making positions is limited because of the patriarchal society." An organisation in Aleppo reported: "The lack of opportunities for women to work in public life, especially in the political sphere, where women don't meaningfully participate even when they hold official positions. Women's access to resources is limited, and even if they have such access, they will be unable to use it because of their lack of financial autonomy or adequate expertise." An organisation in Aleppo's Eastern countryside suggested that, "there is a significant lack of opportunities and resources to empower women allowing them to hold managerial and political positions, in addition to the lack of societal support for them." An Afrin-based organization attributed the lack of women's participation in the public sphere to "the intensive proliferation of weapons and armed groups in the street, which impedes work and drives fear and anxiety."

As for challenges facing women in Aleppo in the private sphere, organizations pointed to women's exposure to domestic violence, restrictions on women's mobility and freedom, forced early marriage, denial of education opportunities for girls and young women, and lack of equitable distribution of household tasks and roles among women and men. Moreover, women are denied their legal rights under the personal status laws which deprive them of inheritance and property. They also face administrative complexities imposed by the Salvation Government, such as difficulty obtaining documents from the regime's official departments, such as marriage certificates, birth registration, and travel documents. An organisation based in western Aleppo countryside suggested that "the

challenges are numerous. Women face spousal and domestic violence, the prohibition from work opportunities or from completing their education or exercising their rights, such as the right to visit their parents." An association based in Azaz noted "the absence of education opportunities for women, forced or early marriage, which limits their role, the lack of men's involvement in housework, which take up women's time, preventing them from pursuing any productive role due to the difficulty in meeting long working hours." One anonymous organization in Idlib reported that, "There are serious problems and challenges with personal status documents (marriage certificates, family records, identity cards and passports), in addition to depriving women of their right to inheritance and education, as well as imposing early marriage." Another organisation in Azaz concluded, "In the private sphere, women suffer from the restrictions imposed on them and the violence to which they are subjected. What is worse is that women think men have the right to do so because of their superiority to women; in addition to early marriage, family disintegration and domestic violence which are among the key challenges. The reason for these obstacles is the imposed societal and socio-cultural norms on women, the lack of community awareness of the importance of women's roles and its impact on the society in terms of public life."

Syrian Women Refugees in Turkey and Lebanon: Multifaceted Challenges

Organizations operating in Turkey and Lebanon who participated in the mapping exercise pointed to a number of challenges faced by refugee and forcibly displaced women – in both the public and private spheres.

On the obstacles faced by women in the public sphere, the organizations pointed to a number of challenges, most notably:

1. The stereotypical portrayal of refugee women in the media and public opinion as victims, saying, "women are considered to be among the most vulnerable groups."

2. Significant and compounded challenges due to political, security, and economic factors, which affect the livelihoods and living conditions of women, and aggravated forms of poverty and marginalization (especially single women, women with disabilities, and/or single mothers). These challenges limit women's access to resources (such as education and employment opportunities). They are also aggravated by unstable security, political, economic and administrative conditions, which in return impose restrictions on freedom of mobility or renewal of residencies. These combined factors force families to return to Syria under unstable circumstances. An organisation in Turkey indicated that, "women are suffering from extreme poverty because of being displaced multiple times." One anonymous organization based in Lebanon suggested that, "as long as the war continues, the obstacles facing women (laws, social norms and conflict conditions) will remain and persist." An organization in Lebanon noted that "some families have forcibly returned to Syria due to their inability to renew their residency permits in Lebanon."

3. Burdens endured by women due to shifts in gender roles. As a result of conflict, displacement, and the absence of men as the main breadwinners, women were forced to assume multiple gender roles compared to the situation before 2011. It is worth noting, however, that women are assuming productive roles in the informal economic sphere, which limits the scope of women's economic empowerment. As an anonymous organization operating in Turkey explains: "The war has forced women to have a larger role, as a result of losing the breadwinner, making life more difficult for them. Women are now responsible for household work and children's upbringing. Some women may be injured, or have functional difficulties which make it more difficult for them to assume multiple roles inside and outside the house to support their families." An organisation in Lebanon noted that, "women heads of households do not have empowerment opportunities, face difficulty finding employment opportunities and are subjected to a lot of harassment in the workplace."

As for the challenges facing women in the private sphere, the organizations pointed out the psychological burdens endured by women due to assuming multiple gender roles, amid the absence of support and empowerment opportunities. Moreover, the

organizations reported increased rates of divorce and forced and early marriages, from ages 13 to 16, and the prevalence of domestic and spousal violence, and the non-disclosure or non-reporting of incidents of violence inflicted on women. According to a Syrian CSO based in Turkey, "Women suffer from oppression and injustice. Working women face double burdens of working in and outside the home, which leads to problems such as violence and divorce." One anonymous organization in Turkey said, "Women have now become breadwinners for poor families under poor circumstances." A network in Turkey attributed challenges in the private sphere to "the non-reporting of incidents of violence, divorce and early marriage." A Lebanon-based organisation noted "...domestic violence is one of the biggest challenges now. Regarding early marriage, the age of the girl whose parents seek to marry has risen from 13 to 16 years."

The greatest concern expressed by some organizations is whether women who were forcibly displaced to other countries can maintain some of the gains from their economic participation, such as feeling independent or economically empowered in case they return to Syria. As an organisation in Lebanon explained: "There are disparities in the opportunities for empowerment and awareness among those in and outside Syria. Will women be forced to assume the same traditional roles when returning to Syria, or will they transfer these acquired skills to other women?" Similarly, another organisation in Lebanon said: "There is fear of women losing some of their gains when returning to Syria, as well as submitting to male authority in their regions in Syria."

Racist and xenophobic attitudes and practices of the Lebanese government in dealing with the refugee issue are evident, where some organizations pointed to the indifference of official law enforcement institutions towards reports submitted by organizations about violations against refugee women in host communities. These organizations noted that there seems to be a political decision to obstruct any efforts to empower refugee women in Lebanon. An organisation based in Lebanon, said, "...official institutions do not care about that. We frequently send reports on monitoring violations among refugees and host communities or the violation by the security forces against the refugees, but we have not received any reactions." While another also explained: "Official institutions are hindering the economic empowerment of women (and men); it is not permissible to improve the living situation more than what is allowed by the state."

The Most Important Findings:

In light of the serious, multifaceted obstacles faced by women and girls inside Syria and neighboring countries due to legal, political, security, military, administrative, cultural and socio-economic factors, the most prominent overlapping challenges are as follows:

- Limited political and societal participation of women and the absence of all empowerment opportunities at all levels;

- Women and girls are exposed to all forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, spousal violence, economic violence (early marriage, denial of education and employment), psychological violence (restricting women's freedom and mobility, as well as confining them within the private space) in addition to militarization.

- Limited economic opportunities for women, as well as poor living conditions and increased poverty (feminization of poverty) as a result of marginalization, and a deprivation of resources.

- Challenges that limit women's access to justice through formal judicial channels, such as courts, due to corruption, partiality, and favoritism of the judiciary system – especially in cases that fall within the scope of personal status issues. Women's access to informal justice channels is also limited due to social stigma and social and cultural pressures on abused women or survivors of domestic or sexual violence, limiting their ability to report violence.

Conclusion

Despite the differences in the political atmosphere in regions of Syria due to various administrations and authorities, political alignments, systems of government, and religious affiliations, the tools of oppression against women are almost identical.

At the root of women's suffering, marginalization and oppression, lies a triad of factors; namely the patriarchal mentality, the alienating political atmosphere, and the militarization and proliferation of weapons and armed groups. The multifaceted overlapping challenges facing women could be summarized as follows:

- The feminization of poverty and the socio-economic marginalization of women as a result of concomitant factors. These include multiple experiences of displacement due to conflict, the unstable security situation, the scarcity of opportunities for economic empowerment and education for women and girls, and the loss of the breadwinner.

- Instrumentalization of women's rights and feminist rhetoric in all regions within Syria, which is utilized as political 'optics' to give a false impression that women's rights and gender equality are a priority, in order to maintain power and cultivate relations with Western powers, for political or economic gain.

- The surging patriarchal backlash, under the guise of religion, militarization or political considerations, to systematically reinforce the socio-economic exclusion of women and increase their vulnerability to violence and marginalization to preserve male privilege, especially in the face of the gradual positive shift in existing norms and traditions towards women's rights and/or gender roles.

Section 2

Syrian women-led and feminist organizations are in dire straits
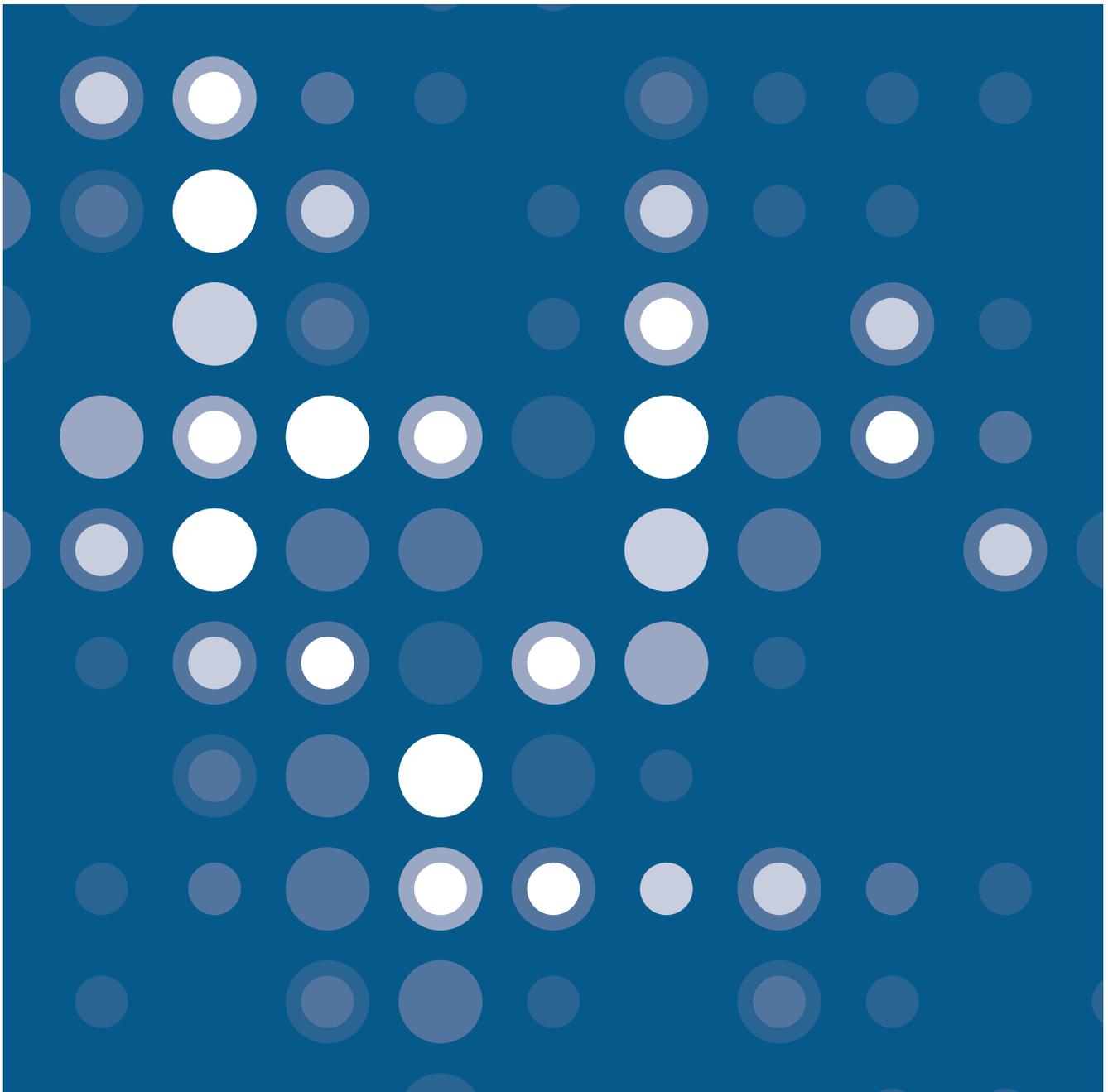
A.   Common contextual challenges

All organizations who took part in the mapping unanimously agreed that the challenging legal and administrative context imposes serious impediments that threaten the very existence and sustainability of CSOs. These impediments include the denial of official registration which affects the legitimacy of their work, and the subsequently undermined financial sustainability. This financial insecurity emerges as one of the main donor requirements is that organizations possess work authorizations, a registration number, and valid bank accounts, all of which are not possible without official registration. Therefore, these impediments undermine organizations' ability to achieve their mission and threaten the sustainability of their intervention frameworks.

Legal and administrative hurdles facing women-led and feminist organizations in Syria and in neighboring countries

The main challenges facing women-led and feminist organizations of legal and administrative nature are as follows:

1.   Failure to obtain registration in Syria and in neighboring countries

While more than half of the organizations that took part in the mapping exercise are officially registered or have given notice of establishment to the authorities (see Annex 1 on the profile of organizations), most organizations agreed that lack of access to registration by the regime and the AANES in Syria, as well as in neighboring countries, is the biggest challenge that severely impedes their work. The denial of registration threatens their legitimacy and limits their ability to play an active role in the civil space. This in turn affects the organizations' sustainability and efficiency in implementing their programs, as well as their access to support and funding.

Organizations pointed to the limitations of the current NGO Law in Syria. As one anonymous organization explained: "The main challenge is registration, as the organization does not wish to obtain authorization under the current NGO Law. Our organization does not consider itself a charitable association or a company but prefers to work within the existing arrangements until the law is amended to include civil activity."

According to an organisation in Qamishli, "The most prominent challenges are the lack of legitimacy of our work and the inability to participate with other CSOs in the region because of our lack of registration." Similarly, another organisation based in Qamishli, said, "The lack of authorization by the regime limits women's participation in other governorates." An organization that opted to remain anonymous said: "One of the obstacles that we usually face is the absence of legal authorization in Syria and not having a bank account, which deprives us of many funding opportunities and access to donors."

An organisation in Azaz concluded that, "the main challenge is that the legitimacy of the work and the chance of getting approval prior to implementing activities depends on public communication."

2. Threatened economic security of employees while the organizations' sustainability is at stake

All the organizations working in Syria and neighboring countries (Turkey and Lebanon) unanimously agreed that the denial of work permits or renewal of the residencies for employees threatens not only the sustainability of organizations and their existence, but also compromises the economic security of the team (in terms of registration and social security).

One organization based in Turkey, which preferred to remain anonymous, said, "the renewal of residencies and lack of work permits are the biggest challenges for us," while another also based in Turkey, noted that, "the most prominent challenge of the laws in Turkey is not to grant authorizations for organizations." This was echoed by many other Turkey registered or operating organizations.

One anonymous organization active in Lebanon said, "It took us three attempts to register the association to no avail," while another Lebanon-based organisation explained, "One of the most important challenges is obtaining work permits and residencies for our employees in Lebanon, and this plays a major role in influencing the mobility of the team."

An organisation in Lebanon said, "the main challenge is the laws and policies regulating residency and labor in Lebanon, which affect both beneficiaries and employees."

Organizations operating inside Syria explained: "For us, the challenge is not being able to provide social security to employees in general." An anonymous organization working in Idlib noted, "we are burdened by our inability to register employees in social security." An organisation operating in Ain Issa, noted that "international organizations only support organizations authorized by the Syrian government."

3. Difficulty in opening bank accounts and transferring funds

"Sustainability is linked to funding, funding is linked to registration, and registration in turn is linked to the availability of funding."

Syrian organizations who took part in the mapping exercise pointed to this paradoxical situation regarding the difficulty of transferring and receiving funds as a result of their lack of registration. The majority of the organizations agreed

that the lack of registration directly affects the inability to open bank accounts, which in turn, threatens the sustainability of these organizations. One anonymous organization explained that: "One of the obstacles we usually face is the absence of legal authorization inside Syria as well as not being able to open a bank account, which deprives us of many opportunities, grants and access to donors."

Another organisation also based in Lebanon, said, "although the organization is registered as a Lebanese organization, I, as a Syrian, cannot receive wires from the bank."

An organisation in Aleppo explained: "We are faced by serious challenges in transferring funds and grants, as well as the lack of financial support." This was echoed by organizations in Idlib and Azaz.

Meanwhile, an organisation in Lebanon said, "we receive bank transfers from some organizations in cash, and we always need to be covered by an authorized organization"

It is to be noted that some organizations indicated that registering and obtaining a work permit by the relevant authorities is an additional challenge, because it is costly and there is lack of relevant support structures. According to an organisation in Turkey, "We have not been able to get more than one project because we are not authorized in Turkey. We are a voluntary organization and have no supporting body."

An organization operating in Idlib, speaking anonymously, said: "We were left out of the funding map because we do not have an authorization, which forced us to cancel the project. Furthermore, when we tried to register, we could not obtain one due to its high cost and lack of facilities," while another, also working in Idlib, said, "We did not receive funding or register the office for financial reasons."

Conditionality, bureaucracy and donor inflexibility

Many organizations agreed that access to funding, and its sustainability, are one of the most significant challenges they face as a result of a combination of factors, most notably the inability to obtain registration. The main factors and challenges related to the difficulty of obtaining funding are:

1. Rigidity and bureaucracy of donors' policies

Some of the organizations, particularly in Idlib and Sweida, indicated that donor requirements for funding are exclusionary, and their financial policies are rigid,

especially regarding financial reporting. Some financial conditions do not necessarily apply as organizations work within unstable and changing contexts especially inside Syria. An organisation in Qamishli said, "We face the difficulty of securing invoices to the donor because the community is folksy, and they do not have bills for everything."

Several organizations also pointed to the exclusivity of funding to projects and activities, and not giving attention to operational costs, which poses a major challenge to the sustainability of the organizations' offices, teams, equipment and tools. An organisation captured the frustration of several organizations operating in Idlib with the "inflexibility in covering operational costs, and the rigidity of bureaucratic requirements," while another noted the "difficulty of obtaining funding, as our organization is registered in Canada, while donors prefer organizations that are registered in the Middle East."

In addition to the challenge of obtaining a registration number, and its implication on limiting funding opportunities, there are some political and security challenges that impose a precarious reality which does not encourage donors to support the implementation of programs inside Syria. This might indicate that donors' political considerations and risk aversion has a negative impact on civil society organizations, as one anonymous organization based in Turkey said: "The proliferation of weapons and armed groups discourages donors from working inside Syria."

Another explained: "Funding is very much linked to the overall political situation. Once a faction takes control, the funding stops, although it must continue so that the political factions do not take control over our work and attract young people to join them. By stopping funding, donor organizations are indirectly working in favor of the factions who are against the organizations' and women's work." Another organization that opted to remain anonymous said, "donor organizations consider all those working in regime-controlled areas to be loyal to the regime."

An anonymous organization noted that the organizations operating in areas controlled by the regime face an additional challenge in obtaining funding because the "pumping" or channeling of funds must be done through a mediating entity. "One of the main obstacles facing organizations in areas controlled by the Syrian government is obtaining funding directly without a mediator, not to mention stereotyping them for operating in areas under regime control," the organization said.

2.   Conditional funding and unreasonably prohibitive funding conditions

Some organizations indicated that the conditionality of funding and impossibility of certain conditions would inhibit the organizations' ability to mobilize or sustain funding.

In this regard, some organizations have encountered obstacles, most notably:

- **Donor intervention in the organizations' policy and imposing their agenda**
  A network in Qamishli said, "Funding should not be conditional, and the donors' agenda should not be imposed on the association."

  An organisation based in Turkey, explained: "Funding is conditional and sometimes the donors have their own agendas. We have a clear vision, and it is difficult to tailor our work based on the donor's agendas; some donors prefer to support projects in Turkey rather than in Aleppo, although work permits are difficult to acquire in Turkey."

  An organization working in Qamishli, noted the "intervention in the organization's policy and the impossible conditions," and another also based in Qamishli reported "delay in funding and imposition of the donor's agenda."

- **Some donor organizations have political alignments**
  An organisation in Turkey said: "The conditions are really unfair to Syrian refugees. Integrating politics into humanitarian response constitutes a serious and unfair challenge to response work," and one anonymous organization noted "the politicization of funding for organizations working inside Syria." An organisation based in Raqqa reported the "non-funding of organizations in areas controlled by the regime, except those authorized by [the regime]."

- **Lack of consideration to the field needs or the cultural and social context**
  One anonymous organization working in Aleppo said: "Some donors require prohibitive conditions such as reaching a large number of women from local community or covering a large geographical scope with limited funding, as well as requiring access to information that could violate the women's confidentiality and privacy."

  An organization in Lebanon explained: "They offer us grants, but ones which are unsuitable to the cultural context, which prompts us to discard them."

- **Rigorous conditions for obtaining funding**
  An Idlib-based CSO explained that, "Our main challenge is covering the operational cost as well as the rigid and inflexible bureaucratic procedures, in addition to many requirements that prevent us from achieving them."

- **Reliance of funding on personal connections**
  An anonymous organization based in Turkey noted that, "funding often depends on personal relations rather than on the quality of projects," while another in Lebanon said, "we suffer from considerable competition to obtain grants."

3. **Lack of technical expertise in mobilizing and managing funds**

Some organizations indicated that the lack of institutional and technical skills and expertise in mobilizing funds or diversifying the sources of funding, building relations with donors, or writing financial reports are but some of the challenges hindering the access to financial support. According to these organizations, donors prefer to work with organizations with institutionalized financial frameworks and advanced levels of expertise in the mobilization of funds.

In this regard, an organisation based in Turkey, said: "Honestly, we know that donors always prefer to work with big organizations with strong financial expertise. However, our organization has a big role on the ground and is very influential but does not have the great financial expertise to be put on the donors' map." Another organisation also based in Turkey, noted that, "Donors must consider building the financial capacity of organizations."

A CSO in Idlib said: "Our evaluation indicates that we are capable of receiving funds, but according to donors, we don't have the capacity to manage funds as per their rigid requirements," while another indicated that, "The main challenge is the lack of a financial strategy. Since the beginning of the revolution, there has been a large dependence on one donor. The fact that organizations don't diversify their funding sources is in itself a challenge that threatens their economic security and sustainability. Cutting the funding for one organization has a negative impact on other organizations."

An organisation in Aleppo explained that "to us, the main challenge is the poor experience in writing project proposals," and another said, "We need to strengthen institutional skills in networking, mobilization of funds, project proposals and writing of reports."

4. **Operational cost of organizations is overlooked by donors**

Most of the organizations agreed that overlooking operational cost in approved budgets would threaten the stability of the organization at several levels. It would change the course of action by disrupting the implementation of action plans. It would also lead to increased turnover among the team, who will be looking for paid jobs elsewhere. Some organizations have indicated that although most of the team members are volunteers, however, operational costs remain essential for the sustainability of the organization.

An organization in Idlib also pointed out "the lack of [coverage for] operational costs changes the overall course of the organization's work, as well as the set action-plans." An organisation operating in Idlib echoed the concerns of organizations in

Lebanon and Turkey, stating , "we are facing a challenge due to the lack of access to flexible donors who would cover the operational cost," and another, also in Idlib, said, "Yes, we face many challenges, while the main one is the discontinuation of funding. Additionally, there is no organization that covers operational costs. Even unpaid voluntary work requires operational costs."

An additional Idlib-based CSO said, "Lack of funding leads to undermining sustainability and eventually staff turnover."

Patriarchy and its impact on the work of Syrian women-led and feminist organizations

1.   Community mobilization and women community participation are in peril

The general legal, political, cultural, and social/socio-economic context in which the organizations operate (see the first section of the report) poses serious challenges to women at grassroots levels, and subsequently affects the work of organizations namely community mobilization and fostering women participation.

Most organizations indicated that some women do not respond to invitations to participate in community activities due to men and communities being reluctant and preventing women from taking part in such events. This, in turn, restricts women's freedom of mobility. This community resistance due to the patriarchal and conservative nature of the communities, affects women's participation, who eventually drop out of programs due to family and community pressures.

An organization in Al-Hasakah said: "We face the challenge of women not attending the activities," while an organization in Qamishli suggested that "tribal norms and traditions are considered an obstacle, but we challenge all circumstances to target the widest possible segment of women." One organization that preferred to remain anonymous, based in Turkey, explained that: "During the implementation of projects, women may drop-out because of pressure from their husbands or parents."

An organization based in Turkey concluded: "There are many norms and traditions that are obstructive to our work. There is a strong stereotyping of women, where their role is limited to raising children. In case women work, they would work merely as teachers or nurses."

Another organisation based in Turkey noted that, "in Syria, freedom of mobility is very limited due to the societal customs," and an anonymous organization, also based in Turkey, said: "The main challenge is the patriarchal authority and men's refusal of projects targeting women; for example, women are prevented

by husbands and fathers from taking part in psychological support activities for survivors of detention."

2. Normalization and underreporting of gender-based violence hamper the work of women's NGOs

Organizations indicated that normalization of violence or under-reporting cases or incidents of domestic and/or SGBV may be grounded in women's internalization of patriarchal, sexist and misogynist perceptions towards women, their roles and their abilities. Women tend to internalize the socio-cultural conceptions and their associated conceptions of gender-based violence. These internalized gender perceptions towards women hamper the work of women's organizations by inhibiting the women they target and curtailing their willingness to engage in the programming.

This observation is made, not to in any way blame women on this unconscious compliance with existing social constructs, but to understand how patriarchal influences could be underhanded and insidious. As a CSO working in Idlib explains: "Many women have creative abilities. However, the depression they feel since their displacement has paralyzed their thinking and movement, and left them dissatisfied with their realities, resulting in reduced confidence in their own potential. We also face women's ignorance of their rights and roles, in addition to the lack of confidence in themselves and their potentials. We sometimes find that some women, although not illiterate, shudder when signing their names."

Similarly an organization based in Turkey, said: "Women, unfortunately, think they have no role or purpose. Women have a wrong image of themselves, and there is a stereotype of women's work being irrelevant. Women's weak ability to claim their rights, as well as their lack of awareness of these rights."

An organization based in Lebanon pointed out that the intersectional influence of gender and age concerning how social change could be more accepted among younger generations.

3. Gender stereotyping of women hinders political participation

Within the same patriarchal cultural context, women are seen as mere caregivers confined to the private sphere. This widespread stereotypical image or perception towards women limits their political and societal participation, thus affecting the work of organizations in mobilizing women, and in influencing and shifting social structures on the longer run. According to a CSO in Atareb, "There is difficulty in attracting women and convincing them with our work or making them participate in our activities, especially those focusing on political and legal education."

On the other hand, an Idlib-based CSO indicated that, "Women's political empowerment is a major challenge. We face criticism and sometimes ridicule from the communities. Women fear from taking part in these activities as a result of the continued marginalization of women, as politics is considered a man's domain."

A CSO in Atareb said, "Women are denied decision-making positions. Women in this field are labelled with inappropriate words; there is a stereotypical image of their role, which is limited to education or nursing. There is communities' denial or lack of faith in women's capabilities to take the responsibilities assigned to them, in addition to describing them as incompetent and inexperienced."

Moreover, one anonymous organization said, "Women's involvement in politics is relatively new and we are working to create feminist leaders and break the prevailing stereotypes."

4. Women are unable to work outside the home for long or late hours

By stereotyping the gender roles and imposing the traditional roles on them, women are confined within the private sphere and thus their mobility is limited within certain times. According to an organization in Qamishli: "Women do not work outside the house for long or late hours as a result of patriarchal mentality."

Another organization working in Idlib, said: "Society is mostly patriarchal and prefers that men work rather than women; from this point of view, men have to work outside the house and women's work has to be limited to household chores."

B. Context-specific challenges within Syria

In addition to the various common challenges facing Syrian women-led and feminist organizations, there is an additional set of context-specific challenges facing organizations operating inside Syria. These challenges are reflected in a rapidly changing, unstable and insecure environment due to continuous bombing or disconnect between areas, and transportation difficulties. This affects and limits the mobility of team members and beneficiaries alike, especially in the Idlib governorate. The main context-specific challenges facing organizations are as follows:

Interference with the organizations' work and the need for local authorities' approval

The organizations working inside of Syria (Damascus Governorate, East Euphrates, Idlib and Aleppo) pointed to the need for official and local authorities' approval (the regime, NES and de facto authorities) for any activities carried out by them. Sometimes these departments or authorities interfere with the organizations' work and disturb it by not granting approval or legitimacy (such as the areas controlled by the regime). Organizations in areas controlled by the regime indicated severe restrictions imposed on women-led and feminist organizations, with sanctions on activists preventing them from leaving the country, as well as "conducting security checks to put the work of organizations under security controls," according to one organization that opted to remain anonymous.

Furthermore, an organisation reported that, "the registration of any initiative as a feminist organization is prohibited," while an organization in Qamishli said, "We face rejections on certain activities by the NES authorities."

On the other hand, a Syrian CSO active in the western countryside of Aleppo, said: "Some entities oppose our work and we require permissions to implement some activities." An organization in Atareb said: "We suffer from the control by the Salvation Government, and the inability to register the organization and transfer or receive grants."

A Syrian CSO working in Idlib, reported that: "We have difficulties in registering the organization with the current official bodies. Once we register, they will directly intervene in our work or take a percentage of the resources, so we are only satisfied with our grassroots legitimacy as well as working independently from the current official bodies."

An organization Idlib, suggested that, "the political factions consider our work unsuitable for them," while another said that the "Syria Trust is tasked [by the Syrian Regime] with obtaining funding and approvals for all activities."

The proliferation of weapons and armed groups

The organizations operating inside Syria indicated that the proliferation of militarization, armament as well as the continuous shelling pose threats to the work, stability and the

very existence of their organizations. What exacerbates the situation and compounds the challenges is the intelligence-based nature of the administrative bodies who closely monitor the work of organizations. A team in Idlib concluded that: "Yes, there are challenges, the most important of which is the unstable security situation and the continued shelling and displacement."

The effects and consequences of the unstable security situation due to the proliferation of armaments are as follows:

- Some organizations were forced to shut down their centers and/or disrupt their intervention programs "due to the security situation and the bombardment, we have been forced to close the centers," according to an organization. An anonymous organization also explained: "The security and legal situation is our biggest challenge because we have centers inside of Syria. For example, since mid-March, we closed our centers because of the bombing."

- The lack of safety for some organizations. According to an organisation authorized in Turkey: "We suffer from the security situation and the lack of safety and legitimacy of the work."

- Restrictions on freedom of mobility for employees and participants: "The security situation imposes mobility difficulties due to the high cost of fuel," according to a CSO in western Aleppo.

Moreover, some organizations indicated that the intelligence and security method in dealing with organizations, especially in Damascus and Sweida, creates an unhealthy environment of constant fear that threatens the existence and security of those organizations. As one anonymous organization explained, "We suffer from security forces hunting down the activists, tracking the financial transfer of activists, and promoting accusations against women."

In a related context, an anonymous organization referred to the political alignments and affiliations of some civil society organizations in Syria, a situation that imposes serious threats and disperses any cumulative work efforts, "the division of Syrian civil society along political lines would affect civil work efforts and the issues we struggle to address."

Limited Mobility

Syrian women-led and feminist organizations face some additional challenges related to limited mobility due to the dominance of patriarchal, and sometimes tribal, mentality in some communities inside of Syria. In addition to this patriarchal mentality (as covered earlier), the organizations pointed to the rapidly changing political context (at the national, regional and international levels) and to the unstable security situation, which

poses further restrictions on the freedom of mobility, most notably:

- Difficult and limited geographic mobility across governorates for both team members and participants: Some of the organizations operating inside of Syria, or those running their projects from their offices in Turkey have pointed to many obstacles the team has been facing with regards to commuting across regions. These impediments have directly affected the team and participants, either as a result of constant bombardment or because of the prevailing patriarchal mentality. An organisation in Lebanon indicated that the movement of refugees in Lebanon is limited due to racism and xenophobic attitudes imposed by both governmental and local authorities through imposing a curfew on refugees during specific hours.

- Dispersion of the movement of women, and the difficulty of cross-country travel due to polarizing nationalist policies which ban Syrians from obtaining travel documents/visas: Two organizations pointed to the difficulties faced by their members in obtaining a visa, which created an obstacle for them to convene, as the members are dispersed in several countries.

- The difficulty of securing transport means and lack of transportation: The high prices of fuel inside Syria and the taxation on means of transportation by the de facto authorities, pose additional challenges that hinder the mobility of teams and participants. The organizations operating in the governorates of Idlib, either directly or through their offices in Turkey, have pointed to the downsizing of grassroots mobilization efforts due to the lack of transportation, or lack of private transport means owned by the organization.

  According to one organization, "We have difficulties in securing long-distance transportation." Another noted that, "the organization does not have transportation means, and this impedes the access to women participants from local community," while a third explained that "mobility is limited due to the lack of financial support. We cannot move freely. We do not have social insurance."

C.   Additional challenges facing women' rights organizations

Some organizations referred to an additional set of challenges that they face as women-led and feminist organizations. The main challenges are as follows:

1.   Double the effort, less credit

A number of women-led and feminist organizations brought up the challenges of distrust and discredit they face from local communities and local institutions and authorities. Women-led and feminist organizations face constant resistance and suspicion from local communities, despite these CSO's efforts to improve the status of women. Furthermore, the sexism and war against women's issues can lead to assaults on organizations, for example, a Turkey-based organization faced a cyber attack to sabotage their work.

An organization working in Idlib, noted "the lack of faith in our ability to make a radical change and to push women's issues forward." Similarly, another organization explained: "We are certainly facing challenges as a women's rights organization; society has not yet accepted that women are decision-makers and that they have the ability to hold and manage higher positions."

According to an organization in Idlib: "The fact that our society is patriarchal, makes us face several challenges. The lack of trust in our work, the inferior view 'towards women's work and the diminution of its importance prevent the organization from taking space or establish relevance within society."

- **Difficulty of access to resources (training and funding opportunities)**
  One of the serious challenges is not giving priority to women's rights and gender equality issues, which are often left out of the funding map. Moreover, women-led and feminist organizations have limited (if any) access to resources, especially funding and training, and they face travel restrictions that prevent participation in regional and international events. According to an anonymous organization in Turkey, "there is a big difference between supporting women's projects and relief support."

  On the other hand, an organisation in Atareb explained: "As a women's organization, we face the lack of funding, and lack of opportunities to take part in specialized training and workshops, which is usually held outside of Syria. This poses another layer for the problem, which is our inability to travel due to the recent travel bans on Syrians as well as the lack of passports."

  An organization in Idlib reported "the inability to push towards a certain feminist agenda despite the creative ideas," and another also based in Idlib noted, "We suffer from limited work and limited access to target groups, due to the lack of capacity building opportunities for members as they are all volunteers."

- **Harassment of Women Activists**

  Some organizations indicated that women activists working in the organizations are afraid of being threatened or harassed in some areas, particularly in Idlib and Aleppo. According to an organization, "In Ma'aret Hurmah, women are always afraid of being threatened or harassed, so for logistical reasons, men are preferred to work in the field," and another reported, "We are oppressed from all sides because we are working in the field of transitional justice. We are being excluded or banned, so we work in secret."

- **The exclusion of some women-led and feminist organizations from the civil space**

  Some organizations indicated that some networks or organizations, particularly in Idlib and Sweida, have been excluded from the civil landscape because they are feminist organizations or because they work on women's rights or gender issues.

  In this context, two organizations pointed out that they were alienated, as some organizations do not coordinate with them or invite them to take part in community-based activities. One organization based in Idlib noted: "Some organizations and donors do not work with women's associations or institutions. Others only work with the local councils, despite the fact that our work is documented, which is more effective than the chaotic and boring routine work of the councils." Another organization, also in Idlib, indicated that, "women's participation in national events is not based on effectiveness, at the level of our organization as well as others."

  In Sweida, an anonymous organization indicated its continued attempt to join some national and regional networks to no avail. The reason, according to this organization, is that: "These networks are governed by political interests and they target the gender-sensitive organizations in our regions to exclude them as long as they are not affiliated with them. These organizations and networks support unidentified civil teams who do not work on gender issues and provide them with facilities and support, in addition to nominating their leadership to attend conferences and workshops related to gender and political empowerment all the while excluding the gender-based organizations."

2. Transforming or undermining feminist agendas

Four organizations highlighted some of the political challenges affecting the Syrian feminist agenda. One of the four organizations pointed out the fear of undermining the feminist agenda, by narrowing down the feminist demands from equal participation and citizenship rights, to focus on mere services provision. According to that organization: "The feminist movement within Syria and in neighboring countries faces serious challenges, due to the reshuffling of feminist priorities and

demands due to conflict. Service provision issues are replacing those of women's citizenship and leadership." In a related context, another of the four referred to the challenge of "not considering women's issues as a priority in times of war and conflict, due to the traditional rhetoric of 'the voice of the weapon is stronger... This is not your time."

Another challenge, which the one of the organizations pointed out, is the political status-quo and failure to reach political transition, which would possibly affect the vision and work of women-led and feminist organizations in the future. As the organization explains: "The biggest concern is not reaching a political transition. This means that repression and dictatorship will stay in place, and we will not be able to implement any projects inside Syria. How will we work on a gender-sensitive election law when elections are rigged per se?"

Among the many challenges affecting the feminist agenda, an anonymous organization pointed out to the belief among many civil society organizations and activists that gender equality will prevail as a "natural" outcome of the political transition. As the organization concludes: "Many political and even civil movements do not look at gender justice issues as a priority at the current stage, and they suppose that the comprehensive political solution will guarantee the rights of all. This is what concerns us in the first place where the feminist issue is excluded for the sake of politics and patriarchal interests. For that, gender justice should be present in every aspect related to the fate and future of Syrians."

3. Perseverance despite challenges – strategies to shift the balance in power structures

In confronting the multifaceted and overlapping sets of challenges at the legal, institutional, administrative, financial and cultural/patriarchal levels, women-led and feminist organizations have created ways and mechanisms to ensure and maintain their existence and sustainability, while suggesting alternative work methods that circumvent the norm and, to a lesser extent, restore or re-shift the balance of power. Among these mechanisms are:

- **Circumventing the political-security system in the areas controlled by the regime**
  An anonymous organization referred to changing their strategy to protect their gains and achievements over the years. As they explain: "We have obtained another work authorization/registration as a civil company under a different name to embrace our work, and to protect it from government violations. The organization has also stopped publishing news and updates about its activities, limiting it to one-time publication as an annual report documenting the work of the organization, to ensure that our projects will not be obstructed by any security party."

- **Networking and strengthening community ties and local support systems**
  The lack of official recognition and legitimization has hindered some organizations from obtaining alternative legitimacy for their work. Some organizations have sought to strengthen ties and relations with other organizations within a framework of women's solidarity to reduce expenses, as well as gaining community legitimacy from the grassroots.

  According to an organization based in Qamishli: "We find it very difficult. However, we have solutions, such as access to people who have the ability to persuade and gain the trust of the beneficiaries."

  One organization that opted to remain anonymous noted that, "We carry out activities either within the headquarters or in coordination with other entities authorized for external activities to reduce expenses."

  Moreover, an organization based in Lebanon, said, "we use several women's centers for our activities because we lack our own designated locations," and a person from an anonymous organization said, "I rely on the Syrian social fabric that surrounds and trusts me as the director of an association, in providing assistance and charity to the center."

  An organization based in Qamishli, explained "we have a social support system for the organization as well as good relations with religious leaders."

  One anonymous organization concluded: "We have created our balance, understanding and relations in the region to work within a margin of freedom, which allows us to implement our projects and reach the targeted groups with the utmost freedom."

  As part of their efforts to gain this community buy-in and the social support systems, organizations made sure to apply a do-no-harm approach, to reduce any community resistance and ensure that they are not excluded by local communities. an organization said, "We have not suffered from any harassment because we work along the lines and limits of norms and traditions of our society."

  A team based in Idlib indicated that: "We educate the community about the importance of women's work, but within the lines of existing norms and traditions of our society; we do not step outside the existing norms."

  One anonymous organization, based in Turkey, noted that: "Survivors of sexual violence and harassment find it difficult to report or build trust with their communities; so we resorted to general training courses to gain their trust, and to help them in a more specialized way and in compliance with standard operational procedures."

- **Self-financing and reliance on the organization's resources, as well as volunteering**
  Due to the lack of funding and its opportunities, organizations have resorted to strategies to reduce expenditures such as working from home, mobilizing self-financing from members, raising charity funds, or depending on volunteers, as well as working within local networking and partnership frameworks. An organization based in Qamishli, said, "We are dealing with these challenges with existing capabilities and self-financing," and another one, also working in Qamishli, reported that, "We work at and from our homes or in authorized organizations and seek to network with them."

  An organization in Idlib said, "We are addressing these challenges by mobilizing membership contributions to carry out the activities." According to Kafranbel-based CSO, "We are facing this challenge through membership contributions and networking with organizations. We work voluntarily without any financial support, and if we need resources, we collect donations."

- **Targeting donors with flexibility and a shared vision and agenda**
  Some organizations indicated that they seek to target donors with flexible terms and/or a shared feminist vision, while other organizations use an intermediary to manage the funding. According to one organization: "We will not apply for any funding other than the Euro-Mediterranean Feminist Initiative, until we obtain our formal authorization. With then, there are no conditions, acquiescence or impositions."

  One anonymous organization reported that, "All the funding we receive is usually through an intermediary channel (regional or national organization authorized outside of Syria) that channels the funding and provide guarantees to the donor," while an organization in Lebanon, said, "We work with the donors whose vision is consistent with ours without interfering in the way we work."

- **Willingness of organizations to develop their own institutional capacities**
  Some organizations have indicated that they are seeking to develop their own capacities and institutionalize their intervention frameworks as a step towards getting the needed support. An organization based in Lebanon, noted that, "We are seeking to develop the projects' section so that it is ready for any grant or bid," and another based in Turkey indicated that, "We have been institutionalizing the organization's strategic policy frameworks for about a year."

D.   Available opportunities

In the face of the convoluted and overlapping threats and challenges, the organizations pointed to some opportunities which could be capitalized on in promoting feminist issues in Syria. The key opportunities are as follows:

1. **Women's voices are on the rise in Syria**
   Most of the organizations agreed that the shift in gender roles that resulted from the crisis would be a turning point in empowering women and advocating for their issues at the current and future stage. According to one organization, speaking anonymously, "The shift in gender roles as a result of the crisis may be seen as an opportunity, but it makes the women carry additional burdens besides the ones they already have." Two organization agreed that "changing gender roles are an opportunity to capitalize on," and another suggested that, "the positive thing that we see is women's increased will and desire to participate in awareness sessions about their rights."

   Some organizations also noted that efforts of women's empowerment, albeit slow and gradual, will bear fruit at later stages. According to one organization: "Syrian women emerged to the labor market as a result of need rather than conviction. However, when they recognized the importance of empowerment, they now insist on maintaining this role." Moreover, another suggested that: "The opportunities, in our opinion, are the women's belief in their rights, and in attending meetings and debates as well as demanding several additional sessions to deliver their voice and demands to decision-makers." Similarly, it was noted, "Women's participation in constitution-making, in addition to their gradual awareness of their rights."

2. **The cumulative work of women-led and feminist organizations and women's perseverance:**
   One organization emphasized some more opportunities that can be capitalized upon in Idlib and its surrounding villages. The organization explains that, compared to the last decade, women are now more sensitized about their roles and rights, and the feminist persistence on changing the current reality is worth highlighting. "What motivates us is the change we see; we are talking about rural areas and a conservative society, but women are becoming stronger day by day, despite the extremist religious and political groups," the organization said.

3. **International Recognition of Western Kurdistan women**
   Organizations from al-Hasakah indicated that they have opportunities due to the international recognition of women in Western Kurdistan (Rojava) as well as the opportunities that it may provide. An organization in the area pointed to "the laws of the NES which advocate for women." Jiyan organization, working in al-Hasakah, suggested that, "the NES policy on the advocacy of women working for their empowerment economically, in addition to its openness compared with the past few years."

E.   Institutional capacity-building needs

- Strengthening networking frameworks among women-led and feminist organizations and women's activists inside Syria and abroad, and creating feminist spaces to come up with a comprehensive, inclusive and pluralistic feminist agenda.

- Ensuring long-term flexible funding to guarantee the stability and sustainability of Syrian women-led and feminist organizations and their intervention frameworks.

Conclusion

Syrian women-led and feminist organizations working on the issues of women's empowerment, gender equality, and gender/transitional justice within Syria and in neighboring countries (Turkey and Lebanon) face a number of multifaceted challenges. These challenges consist of overlapping political, security/military, legal, administrative, cultural (patriarchal), and financial factors that threaten organizations' very existence and sustainability.

The organizations working inside of Syria face an additional set of challenges imposed by several security, military and administrative factors. The lack of funding is possibly one of the major challenges threatening the work and sustainability of women-led and feminist organizations.

In addressing these challenges, women-led and feminist organizations are resorting to local, grass-roots and community-led strategies with simple, local resources to shift the balance of power structures and ensure their presence within the overall funding and civil society map with determination and perseverance.

Networking and creating a feminist space among organizations, both inside Syria and abroad, would be a basic requirement for organizations as this contributes to strengthening resilience, providing support, mobilizing resources and sharing of experiences and expertise.

Section 3

Gender-sensitive advocacy and networking on transitional justice issues: Institutional capacities, challenges and needs
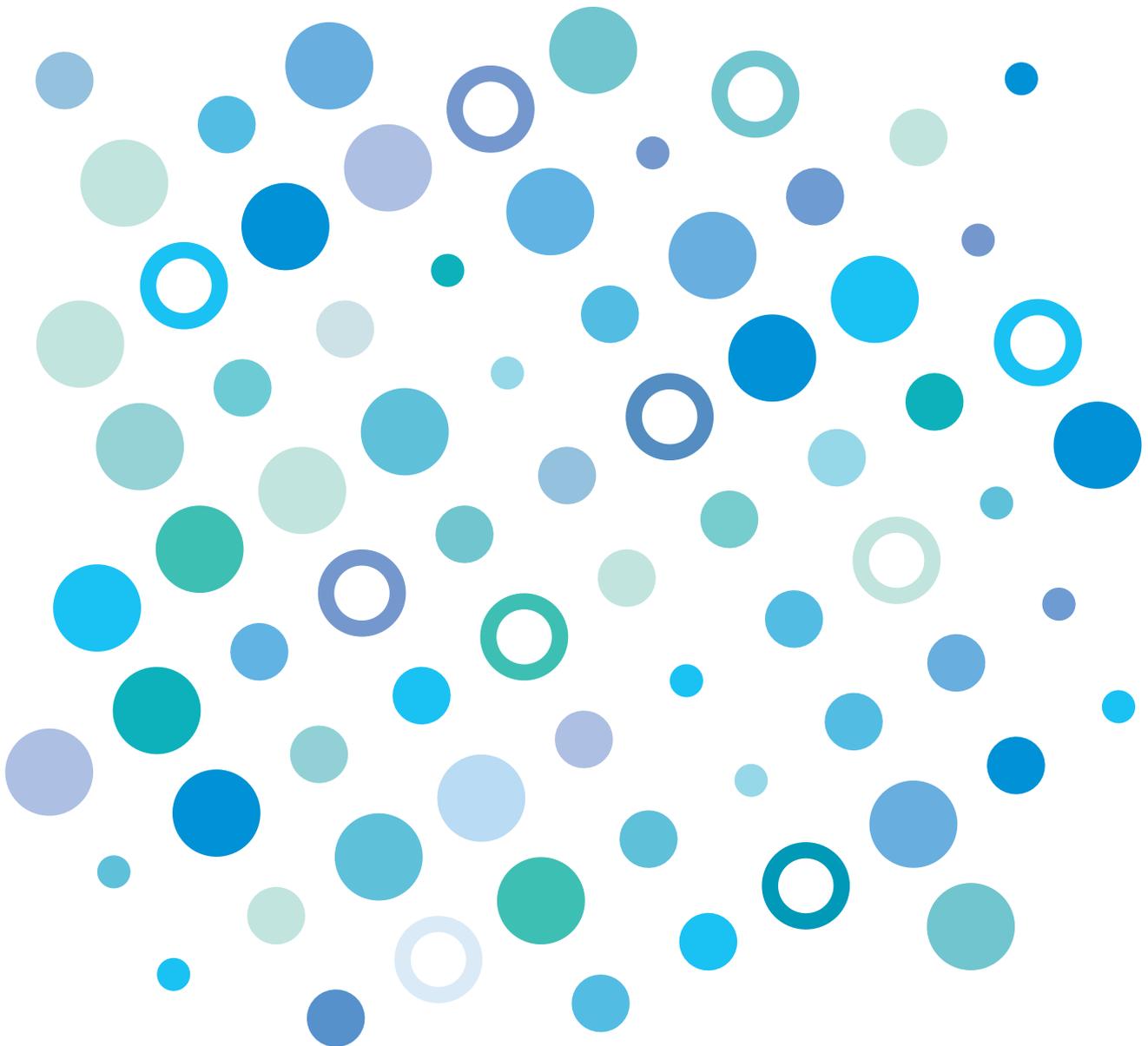
A. What do we need to change? The organizations' issues and levels of operations

In their institutional and strategic response to the set of challenges facing Syrian women inside Syria and in neighboring countries, (please see Section 1), women-led and feminist organizations devise plans, programs, projects and activities that fall within the following intervention framework.

Promoting women's empowerment and political participation in decision-making positions through affirmative measures

1. Advocacy in national and international decision-making frameworks

   Promoting women's political participation through advocacy at the international level:

   - *"Enhancing women's political participation and the implementation of UNSCR 1325."*
   - *"Promoting women's participation in decision-making positions and in the ongoing peace negotiations in Syria through the Syrian Committee."*
   - *"Supporting the right of women to run for high-profile leadership positions, and advocate for equitable and inclusive electoral conditions."*
   - *"Contributing to the preparation of shadow reports on forms of violence as part of transitional justice mechanisms (reparations, documents and proof of ownership), and women's political participation at all levels (government, parliament and municipal councils)."*

   Promoting women's political participation in decision-making positions at local and national levels:

   - *"Involving women in decision-making positions at the community level and developing policies to ensure women's effective participation."*
   - *"Promoting women's role in advisory and local councils."*
   - *"Promoting women's quota in the transitional government and all committees or bodies emanating from it"*
   - *"Activating women's participation in the local councils, despite the challenges and the political interference in the work of the councils"*
   - *"Including an office for women in the local councils, to ensure gender sensitive service provision and distribution (women sometimes feel ashamed or confused when communicating with the all-male council members. We also carried a message from the widowed women and delivered it to the dignitaries who held a meeting with members of the local council, resulting in the approval of a legal office directed by a woman."*
   - *"Enacting laws supporting women–and achieving women's quotas."*
   - *"Strengthening the representation of women in all positions and supporting a temporary quota."*

2.   **Empowering women through training sessions and workshops to enhance their access to knowledge and skills**

- *"Women have the right to work and to hold positions and voice their demands, to become effective in decision-making positions."*
- *"Enhancing women's participation in decision-making."*
- *"We seek to enhance the participation of women in administration, councils and institutions, through the training and capacity-building of women"*
- *"Training women for each decision-making position."*
- *"Supporting and training women to participate in decision-making positions."*
- *"Political and economic empowerment for women and community mobilization."*
- *"Involving women in the context of promoting peace and decision-making through empowerment and training courses."*

Legal reform (personal status and citizenship laws, early marriage and Association Act)

I.   **Penal Code and the abolition of femicide**

- *"Abolishing femicide or so-called honor crimes"*
- *"Reforming the penal code with regard to honor crimes and marrying off the victims of rape to the perpetrator."*

2.   **Personal Status Laws**

- *"Amending the personal status laws for women in Syria."*
- *"Working on issues related to inheritance, custody and arbitrary divorce."*
- *"Laws on the registration of children."*
- *"Custody."*
- *"Amending the personal status law (travel, divorce and custody) so that Syrian women could have custody, in addition to laws guaranteeing their right to property."*
- *"Amending all discriminatory laws and policies, especially the personal status law."*
- *"Issues of inheritance as part of the personal status code."*
- *"Amending the personal status laws, and abolishing Islamic Shari'a as the source of legislation."*
- *"Enacting the Civil Marriage Law."*
- *"Women's inheritance rights, real equality between women and men."*

3.   **Raising the minimum age of marriage**

- *"Adopting a law to raise the minimum age of marriage."*
- *"Abolishing early marriage through raising awareness and addressing reproductive health and rights for women."*

- *"Enacting laws on early marriage and compulsory education, and enabling women to claim their rights such as completion of education, choice of spouse and work and other decisions."*

4. Citizenship Law

- *"Women's right to grant their nationality to their families.*

5. Law of Local Administration and Associations Act

- *"Local Administration's Law of Associations."*
- *"Law of Associations."*

6. Labor Laws

- *"Removing discriminatory articles in the labor law, especially regarding maternity leave."*
- *"We are working through advocacy to have a fair labor law to allow Syrians (including women) to work in Lebanon within their competencies, in addition to supporting the Residence Act."*

Gender equality and addressing gender-based violence

I. Economic and social empowerment and raising awareness on women's rights

- *"Capacity-building for women to change their social and political status and applying gender justice in all spheres of life."*
- *"Empowering women, especially economically, and enhancing their participation in all levels of society."*
- *"Holding sessions on awareness to change patriarchal mindsets, achieving equality between men and women, as well as raising women's awareness about their rights."*
- *"Holding training workshops and campaigns on mobilization and advocacy, in addition to raising awareness on women's rights."*
- *"Conducting sessions with women on reproductive and sexual health and rights, addressing issues of political participation, gender-based violence, gender roles, crimes of trafficking, the rights of wives of detainees and missing persons and the impact of the siege on women (economically–psychologically and socially)."*
- *"Conducting panel discussions and training workshops regarding gender-based violence."*
- *"Implementing awareness campaigns on women's rights."*
- *"Awareness sessions on family and sexual violence and early marriage."*
- *"Sessions on violence against women."*

- *"Empowerment sessions for women from different segments [of society], while addressing issues related to transitional justice."*
- *"Before the Salvation Government took control, we were carrying out awareness campaigns aimed at empowering women politically and informing them of their rights and duties."*
- *"Advocacy campaigns on issues related to gender-based violence, early marriage and denial of education."*

2. Child Labor

- *"Addressing the issue of child labor, early and forced marriage, and gender-based violence."*
- *"Raising awareness on the issue of child labor and implementing activities during the 16-day campaign of activism against gender-based violence."*

3. Education

- *"Raising awareness of women's rights, especially the right to education."*

Constitutional Reform

- *"We aim for a constitution that explicitly mentions women's rights and sets rules and penalties for violating women's rights."*
- *"We participate in the drafting of the constitutional principles regarding gender justice and the most important social rights, in addition to establishing an appropriate environment for the implementation of the constitution."*
- *"We work on a gendered constitution."*
- *"We are working on the issue of reforming the Syrian constitution with regards to women's issues in personal status laws, such as inheritance, the right to grant citizenship, custody and divorce."*
- *"Working on constitutional principles to draft a gender-sensitive constitution and issue several documents such as 1) the constitution from a gendered lens, and 2) the constitution, in a gender-sensitive language."*

Transitional Justice

1. Community education and mobilization

- *"We are working on changing the community's perceptions of transitional justice. We are also trying to influence the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions on transitional periods and ensure they include gender-sensitive transitional justice because we can neither change Turkish law nor Syrian law."*

- *"We implemented an initiative through a network in Amouda to address issues of inheritance, and another one through Aman Network regarding the release of detainees and those kidnapped by military factions."*

2.   Documentation of violations

- *"Documenting gender-based violations during or after the release of detainees in order to ensure gender-sensitive transitional justice mechanisms."*
- *"We are working on justice in its broader notion, such as conducting questionnaires or amending parts of the constitution, conducting research and preparing legal reports."*
- *"We are working on documenting stories on transitional justice mechanisms and including the role of women in fact-finding missions."*

3.   Monitoring the needs of victims and providing services

- *"We do not work on policies and laws. However, we work to ensure that women enjoy their rights and dignities, as well as changing societal attitudes towards survivors of sexual violence and rape, or detention in general. We also work on women empowerment to influence their decision-making roles in the society in general." (Anonymous organization in Turkey)*
- *"We hold discussions with women (dialogue sessions and then training workshops to produce a local figure on women's participation in transitional justice mechanisms) and to show truth, accountability, reparations and compensation to victims."*
- *"We work with women during conflict, especially single mothers, in addition to providing support to protect women from violence and support their independence."*
- *"We provide psychological support to women detainees and document the damage and harm inflicted upon them."*
- *"We are monitoring the shifts in views and perceptions of gender among women in the transitional stages and the possibility of developing them in the next phase."*
- *"We seek to give women the right to register their children without impediments in case of the absence of the husband, as well as their right to grant citizenship to their children and to obtain registration documents for real estate or marital papers through focused discussions with women working in the legal field outside of Syria."*

B.   Advocacy programs on gender and/or transitional justice: Competencies, challenges and institutional needs

Organizations' advocacy competencies and capacities (strengths)

When asked about their strengths in advocacy efforts, most organizations highlighted community mobilization or networking. However, when regarding the responses of organizations to different points in the questionnaire and through their areas of intervention, it is evident that women-led and feminist organizations spontaneously employ a number of tools (which may fall within the scope of advocacy) to ensure the effectiveness of their intervention frameworks. The analysis below shows that some organizations have experience and expertise in deploying and managing different tools of advocacy, to achieve their mission.

1. **Stakeholder mapping and analysis / Networking with policymakers to influence a policy issue**

    The responses of the organizations indicated that most of them have informally conducted stakeholder mapping and analysis. Albeit limited to the local contexts, the efforts of these organizations were viable in influencing decision-makers.

    Local level:
    - Local councils and authorities (17 orgs)
    - CSOs who share similar vision (5 orgs) and Political parties (1 org.)
    - Active women members in civil and/or political bodies and representatives of the local councils (6 orgs)
    - Syrian Women's Council (1 org)
    - Community leaders, key actors, religious leaders, law enforcement institutions, and influential figures in families and communities (11 orgs)
    - Legal bodies, courts and judges (2 orgs)

    The national and international levels:
    - Negotiating committees and women activists (3 orgs)
    - Political parties in Syria (the government and political opposition) (1org)
    - International organizations and the United Nations (6 orgs)
    - International justice court and transitional justice platforms (1 org)

2. **Community and grassroots mobilization for women**

    Most, if not all, of the organizations indicated that they have expertise in the fields of communication and networking, have substantial outreach skills and geographical coverage, and enjoy a good reputation and community trust.

3. **Building alliances, networking and collaborating in campaigns on transitional justice**

    Some organizations indicated that they led or took part in campaigns on transitional justice issues. (The list is not exhaustive or comprehensive of all campaigning frameworks.)

Forced displacement and the return of refugees and displaced people

- *"We are members of a coalition comprised of twenty organizations working together on the issue of forced displacement and the return of refugees."*
- *"We target embassies and civil society organizations in Syria. Our campaign on voluntary and safe repatriation to Al-Zabadani was widely disseminated."*

Guaranteeing the neutrality of civilians and condemning acts of violence committed against them

- *"We have already participated in an advocacy campaign with several organizations and issued a statement to guarantee the neutrality of civilians while condemning acts of violence committed against them or against humanitarian organizations."*

Advocating for detainees, especially women detainees

- *"We participated in advocacy campaigns on the issue of women detainees."*
- *"We participated in advocacy campaigns, and petition signing to demand the release of women detainees."*
- *"We organized solidarity vigils on International Women's Day."*
- *"We participated in a campaign about the release of detainees by taking part in public sit-ins in the city of Azaz."*
- *"We work with families of the disappeared through awareness-raising campaigns."*

Influencing international platforms on the rights of Syrian women

- *"We have campaigning and lobbying expertise and have succeeded in influencing decision-makers through dialogue sessions before the Geneva and Brussels meetings. We do so in a participatory manner."*

Sexual and gender-based violence and women's rights issues

- *"We have the expertise and are specialized in working with survivors of violence at the levels of advocacy efforts."*
- *"We have undertaken advocacy efforts by partnering with civic committees and local councils, and we have organized seminars, training and professional courses to empower women economically and socially."*
- *"We are working on fostering networking among all segments of the society as well as mobilizing and advocating for women's issues. We have institutional expertise and reach out to external expertise when necessary."*
- *"We work on issues of mobilization and advocacy in order to achieve gains for*

women and draw public attention to their rights. We target local councils, the competent authorities and religious leaders. For example, we have mobilized and advocated for ending early and forced marriages."

- *"We work with some CSOs in the region coordinating on women's issues."*
- *"We engage with the three organisations to strengthen the concept of civil and collective action and coordinated efforts."*

4. Producing knowledge, research and studies supporting advocacy efforts

Less than half of the organizations indicated that they are keen to conduct studies, research, community-led assessments or opinion polls before starting to advocate on certain issues, to make sure these advocacy issues are community-led and reflect the voices, demands and experiences of women as well as affected segments in the communities. Examples of research and documentation conducted by women-led and feminist organizations are as follows:

- A statistical study in Idlib about the needs of women who are relatives of detained men.
- A statistical study on displaced women inside Syria.
- A situational study on child labor.
  "Before we started the child labor campaign, we visited schools and collected detailed information about drop-out children, then we visited their houses to learn about the conditions of these children and found that they worked in harmful conditions. One of the fourth-grade classes in Ibn Hayyan School has eight children working in harmful conditions after school to help to support their families, so we launched a campaign to limit the problem of child labor."
- Collecting data on education.
  "We collected data pertaining to the education sector before launching our awareness-raising campaign on social media titled 'The teachers are candles, don't blow them out.' We mapped the number of women who have post-graduate degrees in comparison to their male counterparts."
- A situational analysis/needs assessment on the challenges and needs of integrating women survivors of detention in their communities.
  "We conducted research on the integration problems faced by women survivors of detention, to assess and respond to their most important needs."
- A statistical study on women victims/survivors of domestic violence, femicide, and polygamous marriages.
- Surveys on women with special needs or functional difficulties.
- Mapping of the most discriminatory laws against women.
- Documenting gender-based violations.
- Policy Papers on forced displacement, repatriation of refugees, as well as their protection.

- Collecting testimonies, and writing position papers.
- Simple research papers on changing the gender roles among displaced women as a result of the conflict and the impact of norms and traditions on their integration.

Challenges of planning and implementing advocacy interventions

The organizations faced some challenges in achieving effective advocacy efforts or creating and maintaining a certain momentum. The main challenges as highlighted by the women-led and feminist organizations are as follows:

Absence of political will and lack of due diligence

The organizations, especially those working inside Syria, noted that maintaining networking and coordination efforts with influential stakeholders and decision-makers was challenging. That was particularly the case for organizations working in areas controlled by the regime due to the tight security grip over the work of organizations. In addition, organizations sensed the lack of due diligence, and sometimes absence of political will to enshrine women's rights, elevate their status or promote their rights – specifically in areas controlled by the Salvation Government or by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES).

Two anonymous organizations indicated that, "There is an absence of the notion of a state in the political sense. Instead, we are dealing with a security and intelligence regime." Another also noted that, "the Syrian government does not accept any civil activities about gender or women's rights."

One organization suggested that, "these parties are not serious about women's participation," while another noted, "it is not possible to get access to decision-makers because it is ineffective, and some of them are inactive in this field while others are dismissive."

According to an organization, "the challenges are the lack of attention towards women regarding their rights and duties."

One organization reported that, "after the Salvation Government took over, it became somewhat difficult, because this government did not wish to involve women in the political field."

Finally, a CSO noted that, "These segments want to keep their positions, we may demand something that conflicts with their interests, even if it is in the interest of the whole country."

The intangible and indirect impact of advocacy efforts

Some organizations pointed out that a lack of awareness among communities on the importance or effectiveness of advocacy work renders such efforts less appealing. These communities may need to sense a direct and tangible outcome of the civil societies' work, which therefore reduce their trust in advocacy strategies.

According to an organization, "People's lack of knowledge about the importance of advocacy, in addition to the lack of confidence in the outcome of the campaigns, is preventing us from mobilizing communities to achieve the desired results."

Another organization indicated that, "there are problems because advocacy efforts are not well-presented or not enough to achieve the desired change."

Similarly, one anonymous organization working in Aleppo said: "The difficulty of accepting less tangible ways of work, especially among communities that became used to direct assistance and relief aid. Consequently, communities are not responsive nor interested in taking part in the mobilization and awareness-raising activities. Additionally, it requires patience because it sought to change the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors."

Other organizations pointed to the poor confidence of survivors of violence in the work of such organizations due similar strategies, saying, "It is always about documentation or training."

The difficulty of community mobilization due to patriarchal mentality, in addition to security and political instability

Some organizations, particularly in Idlib and Aleppo, indicated that restrictions on freedom of mobility and transportation, and the proliferation of arms, reduces the impact of advocacy efforts due to the difficulty in accessing communities to implement community mobilization activities.

According to one organization: "The barrier we face is the difficulty accessing certain areas and rallying supporters, for, as you know, the more people an advocacy campaign reaches, the more positive results we get."

Another also noted that, "we face challenges of accessing communities, especially by means of transportation or travel," while an Aleppo-based CSO concluded, "There is no sense of stability in the region in general."

Furthermore, patriarchal culture poses an additional obstacle to organizations' advocacy efforts. According to an anonymous organization working in Idlib, "the reason for the

absence of the women's quota is that women are considered second-class citizens," and another reported that, "one of the main challenges is the patriarchal mentality of the community."

An organization based in Al-Hasakah suggested that, "patriarchal mentality is the main challenge," which was reiterated by another Al-Hasakah based organization who named obstacles to work being, "norms and traditions, as well as the patriarchal mentality."

Limited access to tangible (physical and financial) and intangible (human, social and political) resources

Most organizations indicated that limited access to both tangible and intangible resources posed obstacles, not only facing the implementation of advocacy programs but to the sustainability of the organization's overall programming as well. According to an organization based in Turkey, "The inability to work full-time, in addition to the lack of funding. We are volunteers, and there is not enough time for us to work; we didn't get training nor financial resources." Similarly another organization noted: "The lack of skills or access to regional and global networks and platforms where international policies are made is the main obstacle, in addition to the difficulty of mobility and the need for a visa."

C. Networking: Importance of networking and most prominent shortcomings and challenges

Networking opportunities offered by the networks
- Knowledge sharing and exchanging visions and experiences with regards to women's rights.
- Collective lobbying efforts that would be more effective in addressing decision-makers.
- Coordinated and concerted efforts to increase the effectiveness and impact of relief or advocacy interventions, as well as monitoring the gender-related violations and the production of research and reports.
- Consolidating the foundations of feminist work and feminist agenda and the formation of women's lobbies to promote the status of women and their rights

Networking is fundamental in documentation and monitoring of violations related to transitional justice. As one organization said: "It is considered fundamental in light of the ongoing international obscurity of brutal crimes against citizens, which brings together the facts and brings forward lawsuits against criminals in order not to allow them to go unpunished. Networking is also important in monitoring and documenting cases affected by the war, detainees, those disappeared in prisons as well as violations against women, children and detainees."

Similarly, another said: "The importance of these networks is that part of our work monitors violations, the existence of these networks contribute by collecting these violations and taking action systemically in this regard."

Challenges and shortcomings of networks
- Lack of participatory teamwork culture.
- The difficulty of communication among dispersed network members, and limiting communication channels to social media means.
- The inability to disclose the affiliation of organizations to networks due to the control of the opposition factions over civil work.
- Membership in networks often relies on personal connections. Moreover, networking efforts don't always guarantee synergies, where duplication of efforts could occur due to lack of coordination.
- The lack of real representation of women on the ground
- Network effectiveness (due to bureaucracy)
- Non-inclusiveness of some networks, and excluding some organizations as non-feminist organizations

Institutional needs in advocacy on transitional justice issues
1. The concept of transitional justice and its mechanisms:
- Training on the concepts, mechanisms and tools of transitional justice. (21 orgs)
- Training on citizenship and civil peace. (1 org)
- Special training on gender-sensitive constitution, negotiation skills and human rights training. (1 org)
- Training on the principle of separation of powers in areas beyond the control of the regime. (1 org)

- Training packages on all human rights issues for women (5 orgs).
- Specialized advocacy mechanisms on transitional justice e.g. special advocacy for the Human Rights Council) (1 org) or specialized human rights support, what frameworks can deliver justice to survivors? (1 org)
- The need to institutionalize organizational capacities to stop the reliance on external experts. (9 orgs)
- Training on monitoring human rights violations for women. (2 orgs)

2. Networking
- The need to foster cross-regional networking efforts. (2 orgs)
- The need to strengthen coordination efforts and expand them to include relevant civil society organizations and to join women's rights networks at the local and international levels. (7 orgs)

3. Stakeholder mapping and analysis and building alliances
- The need to strengthen the capacities to identify and map decision-makers and stakeholders as well as identify the platforms of the international community, particularly to advocate for transitional justice. (17 orgs)
- Expertise on how to target and influence decision-makers. (2 orgs)
- The need for technical expertise in building alliances. (12 orgs)

4. Training for advocacy and gender-sensitive campaign management
- The need to strengthen the capacity of the organizations with regards to advocacy mechanisms and tools to stop relying on external experts. (18 orgs)
- Strengthening the capacity of organizations in campaign management. (4 orgs)
- Promoting the capacity of organizations to implement gender-sensitive advocacy mechanisms to address cultural norms and traditions while reducing community resistance. (9 orgs)

5. Financial support
- Enhancing the capacity of organizations to reach feminist donors with flexible, long-term and sustainable funding. (All organizations unanimously)

6. Gender analysis of conflict
- The need for knowledge and skill in this field. (28 orgs)

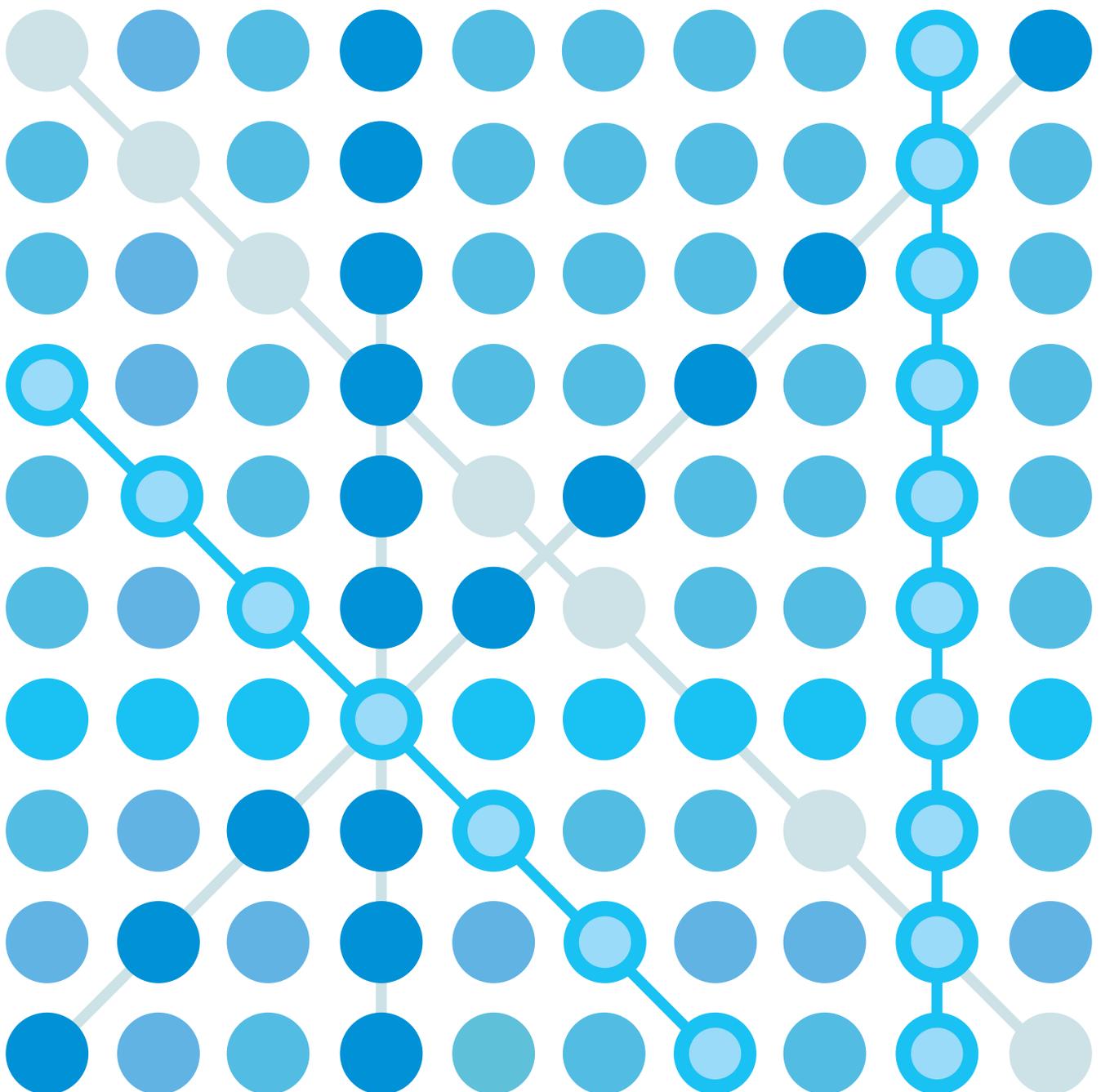## 7. Communication and negotiation skills
- Communication skills on how to influence women, communities and decision-makers. (3 orgs)

8. Other institutional needs
- Project Management, Monitoring and Evaluation. (2 orgs)
- Tools on dialogue and peace-building. (2 orgs)

Section 4

Mainstreaming gender in transitional justice issues

How organizations ensure gender-sensitive programming

When asked how they mainstream gender in the context of their intervention frameworks, most responses by the organizations reflected a broad and generalized understanding of the concept. One organization suggested that, "Our work focuses on gender issues and we are working intensively to reach our goals within this context."

However, during the focus group sessions, it was discovered that a large number, if not most of the organizations, implement gender-targeted actions spontaneously and with high feminist sensitivity to the diversity of the experiences, needs, and demands of the targeted groups.

The gender analysis information collected by the organizations (as reflected in the previous section on research), led to gender-sensitive programming, as reflected in the following actions:

1.   Collating and commissioning targeted research (as reflected in the previous section of this report);

2.   Addressing practical barriers experienced in accessing resources, services and opportunities through formulating projects to address the structural and systematic challenges facing the advancement of women's rights. According to an organization t, "Gender activities are provided by members of the institution in each office and they are free and voluntary. Our offices prepare meetings and mobilize women to raise awareness about a particular idea." Another said: "Targeting women directly and working on empowering them, " is an essential part of their work. On the other hand, an organization in Idlib said, "We are working on this through dialogue and awareness sessions, in addition to site visits because it is one of the most important goals of our organization and to achieve our mission."

3.   Conducting gender needs assessment to assess the gendered needs and priorities of womenOne organization reported that, "We mainstream gender in all programs by taking into account the needs and requirements of women."

4.   Specific targeting of innovative or strategic initiatives. By taking into account women's mobility restrictions, taking into consideration gender segregation of roles and the gendered nature of time and space, organizations have addressed the existing imbalance of power dynamics by designing context-specific interventions that take into account the prevailing norms and traditions while addressing them indirectly through a non-confrontational approach. One anonymous organization said, "we work with men in the communities, even though it is hard."

5.   Addressing ideological barriers. This is specifically implemented by obtaining buy-in and support from local communities, whilst ensuring an inclusive approach, trust-building intervention frameworks and the confidentiality and anonymity of women

within the local communities. An organization indicated that, "We are working to change the social reality," while another said, "We offer all the work which women need, in our opinion, in the total absence of official institutions playing this role."

6. Building the capacity of participants and staff to mainstream gender equality in their work. Organizations indicated that they target and include all groups of women, and consider the diverse experiences of women, in integrating the affected women in society and fostering multi-sectoral referral pathways. A CSO in Idlib indicated that, "Women are involved in everything... We do this through training and workshops." An organization in Turkey summarized: "We are interested in gender mainstreaming through our policies and programs. For example, we had an employee who had not completed her education, so we offered her an education opportunity and she is still a part of the team."

7. Ensuring accountability towards women in local communities through assessing their satisfaction, taking their recommendations and feedback to adjust future intervention frameworks based on the women's needs. According to two Lebanon based organizations, "Sometimes we modify the activities in the middle of the project based on observations or participants' feedback." As another explained, "After we started the sewing courses, women were demanding a nursing course because they were in urgent need to learn emergency medical procedures. We communicated with several parties for a long time without response or funding. We made donations from the staff to buy the required equipment for nursing and we asked a doctor in a nearby hospital to provide us with a skilled nurse. We implemented the course without any external support."

Challenges of gender mainstreaming in projects and programs

Women-led and feminist organizations unanimously agreed on a set of challenges pertaining to gender mainstreaming. These challenges are as follows:

1. Community resistance on issues relating to gender equality or women empowerment.

2. Lack of funding or expertise and technical skills to implement gender mainstreaming tools ;

3. The difficulty of mobilizing young and adult men due to patriarchal and at times misogynist attitudes ;

4. Focusing efforts on addressing Practical Gender Needs (PGNs) in terms of provision of services and relief aids at the expense of women empowerment namely in the light of the current living conditions;

5. Lack of trust from women in local communities towards the work of some organizations due to the formers' poor experiences with them ;

6. Normalization of violence among some groups of women .

Needs of organizations

The main institutional needs pertaining to gender mainstreaming, as identified by the participaing women-led and feminist organizations, are as follows:

- **Institutionalize gender mainstreaming mechanisms in programming**

    According to an organization, "We do not have a direct gender mainstreaming strategy right now, but we are targeting these women to engage and involve them in our activities, which may indirectly mitigate the violence they are exposed to. Regarding women, who do not have a voice, we seek to provide them with job and empowerment opportunities." A team based in Western AleppoThe noted, "We do not have these features due to the need for funding and lack of support." One anonymous organization working in Aleppo suggested "training all humanitarian workers to mainstream gender and protection considerations to ensure the effectiveness of activities," while a Lebanon-based organization affirmed that, "Gender mainstreaming is important for the organization at the level of planning, and implementation of the project."

- **Strategic planning, project management and developing gender-sensitive financial and budgeting strategies**

    Most organizations indicated their need to develop such strategies.

Conclusion

- Most organizations seek to apply some aspects of community-led gender mainstreaming mechanisms during project planning, and/or implementation and/or evaluation in a spontaneous and organic way and within available resources.

- The gender-mainstreaming skill map showcases the complementarity of efforts among organizations, which led to a full mosaic picture of community-led efforts in ensuring gender-sensitive and gender-targeted programming. However, there still are some disparities among organizations, or within the same organization, in not applying full-fledged and comprehensive gender mainstreaming mechanisms.

- Organizations expressed the need for technical skills in applying full-fledged and comprehensive gender mainstreaming mechanisms throughout their work intervention frameworks, and at all levels.

Conclusions and recommendations

Despite differing contexts in various regions of Syria, according to territorial control, political alignments, systems of governance and ideological affiliation, the tools of oppression used against women by both the regimes and the de facto authorities are almost identical. Social and economic structures perpetuate the culture of discrimination and exclusion of women, which in turn generates common suffering among different groups of women.

The root cause of the exasperation of women's suffering in Syria is to the interplay of political, security, economic and military factors prevalent in the political agendas of governing institutions in different regions.
These factors in turn exist within a wider context of misogynistic patriarchy, politically sanctioned patriarchy, and conservative socio-political dimensions prevalent in communities – albeit in some more than others.
Furthermore, militarization and insecurity pose additional sets of challenges facing women and girls, leading to further oppression and marginalization.
This context in Syria limits women's access to resources, imposes further limitations and control over women, and reinforces traditional societal and gender roles.
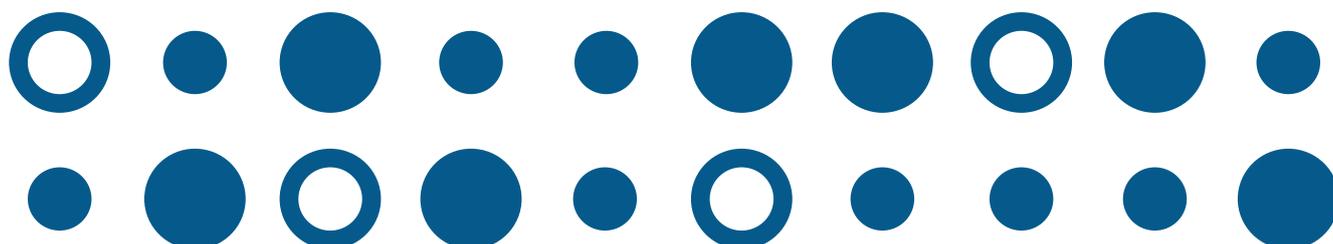
Main Conclusions

Feminization of poverty: the gendered cost of war

The precarious security situation, exclusionary socio-economic structures, administrative restrictions and the gendered impact of conflict and multiple/forced displacements, have restricted women's enjoyment of rights or access to resources and opportunities related to education, employment and empowerment. This limited access to rights and opportunities was exacerbated by the loss of the breadwinner (injuries, disappearance, or death) which further drives women into poverty.

This marginalization of women is evident in areas outside the regime's control, where women and girls are subjected to harassment at all levels as a result of the Salvation Government's policies. Women's rights, their status and their needs are disregarded due to several overlapping factors most notably the political, ideological, patriarchal and security factors which aggravate and worsen the situation of women at all levels, affecting their legal, cultural, social, living and economic conditions.

This is also the case in the areas controlled by the regime, where women suffer from poverty due to poor living conditions, affecting single mothers and their children in particular. These living conditions are aggravated by the lack of political, economic and social empowerment opportunities and increased levels of domestic and gender-based violence.

Refugee women, in both Lebanon and Turkey, face similar multifaceted challenges which are in turn worsened by restrictions on freedom of mobility and difficulties in renewing residency permits, forcing refugees into unsafe repatriation under unstable conditions.

Instrumentalization of women's rights for political and economic gains

Behind the instrumentalization of women's rights rhetoric by all political forces in Syria, there are no serious attempts to achieve social justice for women, thus compromising opportunities for real or radical change at the levels of policy and legislation.

In areas controlled by the regime, some amendments have been made to laws – especially personal status laws. However, these amendments were perfunctory, stemming from a desire to improve the regime's image to the international community. This use of superficial reforms has also occurred in areas outside the regime's control, both in Idlib and Aleppo, where addressing women's political participation is often a mere tool to achieve political goals.

Similarly, in the areas under the NES, some reforms and laws were made regarding political participation or protection of women from violence. However, these reforms fell short of adopting a holistic approach to ridding the laws of discriminatory provisions, while gradually influencing prevailing norms and traditions by addressing them.

Backlash from the politically sanctioned patriarchy

Women in Syria have always lived in a conservative society with traditional customs and norms. However the patriarchal nature of these norms and traditions has intensified during the conflict. Religious, military and at times political contexts have been used as excuses to maintain socio-economic structures that systematically exclude women, thus increasing their exposure to marginalization and all forms of violence. This patriarchal backlash is intensified to maintain male privileges and gains, especially in the face of the gradual and positive transformation in existing norms and traditions towards women's rights and/or roles.

The most prominent aspect of women's suffering due to this patriarchal backlash is the exclusion of women from the public sphere by systematically limiting their political and societal participation, and the absence of opportunities for their empowerment as well as limiting their access to resources.

Moreover, women are becoming more prone and vulnerable to all forms of gender-based violence. This includes spousal and domestic violence, economic violence in the form of denial of education or employment opportunities, limited control over resources and early marriage, as well as psychological violence and limiting women's mobility and confining them to the private sphere.

Furthermore, women face restricted access to justice through official channels of judicial institutions and courts, due to corruption, nepotism, and bias. This is notable in dealing with cases that fall within the scope of domestic and sexual violence, personal status, inheritance and property rights, and the right to grant citizenship. Women's access to justice is also compromised through informal channels, due to the stigmatization (as a form of social control), of women who are/were victims or survivors of domestic violence, or silencing women and thus limiting their ability to report violence or receive necessary services, support and assistance.

In this context, women in areas controlled by the regime suffer from the dominance of patriarchal norms and traditions, which intersect with a political and security context to compromise women's rights and impedes their access to justice.

In the governorate of Sweida, despite relatively open-minded cultural attitudes, women and girls suffer from limitations and restrictions resulting in a number of discriminatory practices and violations, which are obscured, unrecognized or normalized. This may also be the case in areas controlled by the NES, where women, despite relative openness in those areas, suffer from tribal and patriarchal norms and traditions, which continue to hinder implementing a holistic approach to influence change at all levels.

These overlapping factors create a disabling environment, which imposes further challenges on women-led and feminist organizations. These challenges are as follows.

The existence and sustainability of women-led and feminist organizations is at stake: Challenging operational contexts due to political, administrative, security and funding factors

Women-led and feminist organizations working on women's empowerment, gender and/or transitional justice in Syria and neighboring countries (Turkey and Lebanon) face a number of challenges threatening their existence and sustainability. The overlapping legal, administrative, and cultural (patriarchal) factors, combined with the scarcity of funding opportunities impose further exclusion and threaten the continuation of their work. These challenges are as follows:

- Jeopardized status of women-led and feminist organizations due to restrictions on NGO registration from both the regime and the de facto authorities, thus affecting the economic security of employees and the sustainability of organizations.

- Compromised and unsustainable funding channels, due to conditionality, bureaucracy, and inflexibility of donors regarding the registration status of organizations. Moreover, some donor organizations have ties or alignments with political parties, and others impose their agendas on the organizations with no consideration or sensitivity towards socio-cultural and political contexts, or the needs of communities.

- Restricted and limited mobility of women within communities, due to the patriarchal and traditional mentality that exert social control over women. This has a substantial negative impact on the mobilization work of women-led and feminist organizations, who face challenges in their mobilization and outreach activities. Another set of challenges lies in the normalization of Domestic Violence (DV) and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) that limit women's ability to report such incidents.

Organizations operating within Syria face additional challenges, most notably the proliferation of arms and armed groups, and the intelligence-based nature of governance institutions. These challenges are as follows:

- The political (and at times security) intervention in the organizations' work and the need for authorities' approval to implement activities.

- The proliferation of arms and militarization affecting the work of organizations in the governorates of Damascus, Idlib, Aleppo and al-Hasakah.

- Limited mobility, restrictions on travel, mobility constraints across governorates, difficulty in securing transportation and the lack of means of transportation (which affects the implementation of activities and mobilizing women beneficiaries).

Syrian women-led and feminist organizations face additional obstacles. These include the community's lack of confidence in women's and gender-related issues, and limitations on access and sustainability of resources (funding and capacity building). Women activists are threatened and harassed, and some women-led and feminist organizations are excluded from the civil space. Moreover, the feminist discourse and agenda are at stake due to a possible shift in women's demands due to war and conflict.

Feminist strategies in shifting the power structure

In addressing the multifaceted set of challenges, women-led and feminist organizations are developing organic strategies and methods with modest resources to shift the balance of power and to ensure and maintain their position within the public map. Women-led and feminist organizations are demonstrating unprecedented levels of determination and perseverance in overcoming obstacles to their work. The strategies they utilize include the following:

- Circumventing the political and security systems in areas controlled by the regime to ensure the sustainability of their intervention frameworks;

- Strengthening community ties and networking frameworks with other organizations as well as community members and social incubators to get social legitimacy.

- Relying on voluntary work and the organizations' resources to ensure the continuity and sustainability of the work interventions.

- Targeting flexible donors who share a similar vision.

Opportunities

Amid this bleak picture, there remain some positive opportunities and glimmers of hope. The shift in gender perceptions among women towards their roles, and the amplification of their voices, came as a cumulative process of shifts in gender roles. This shift in gender perception is reflected in increased awareness among women, and in their persistence to maintain the gains they have made through demanding continued empowerment and awareness opportunities.

This gender awareness among women at the community level is echoed by another set of opportunities at the regional and international levels, to mobilize and advocate for women's rights and gender-sensitive transitional justice.

In turn, a prominent question remains as to whether women who have been able to challenge stereotypical gender norms and expectations can maintain some of these gains upon returning to Syria. This is yet to be explored.

Concluding remarks: Civic and feminist action a gateway for political change in Syria

Syrian women rights' and feminist organizations were established in response to a dire need to explore the harsh realities of conflict, besiegement, displacement and systemic exclusion and isolation practiced by the regime against the Syrian people in general, and against women in particular. The absence of active feminist movements or frameworks in some regions (such as Aleppo and Idlib) was an additional motivation to establish these organizations.

Some organizations (especially in Turkey, Lebanon, Idlib and Aleppo) have sought to respond to the current shocking realities by providing services and empowerment opportunities (i.e. awareness raising activities, psychosocial support, employment opportunities, and counselling and empowerment services) to women affected by the conflict and forced displacement (survivors of violence, detainees, single-heads of households, displaced and refugees). Other organizations (particularly in Qamishli, Sweida, Damascus and Aleppo) have sought to build feminist movements dedicated to ensuring women's rights to political and economic participation during the transitional period.

The establishment of Syrian women's rights organizations aimed to organically bring about transformative changes which impact the realities, roles and rights of women. These organizations, despite the multifaceted challenges, resorted to local strategies with modest resources, and at times used innovative strategies to circumvent and shift the power structures, and in turn ensure and maintain their positions in the public sphere with unprecedented determination.

The tenacious and responsive efforts of the women-led and feminist organizations are the main reasons behind preserving their viability and continuity – despite the challenges. Their participatory, rights-based and community-led approaches enabled them to spontaneously conduct contextual analysis, and gender-sensitive intervention frameworks to address the systematic discrimination against women during this transitional phase, while acknowledging the intersectionality and diversity of women's experiences, needs and priorities. Syrian women-led and feminist organizations might not possess the skill to present their plans, activity log and achievements in a language and style that is appealing to donors. However, what they do possess is far more important; the keys to impact and change socio-cultural patterns and bring about gender justice.

Recommendations

In addition to the capacity building needs expressed by the organizations, as listed in sections 3 and 4, the following set of recommendations could be highlighted:

1. Broadening networking channels and strengthening existing ones among women-led and feminist organizations operating inside Syria and in neighboring countries, in order to promote solidarity and to create feminist support networks for these organizations. This encourages such organizations to share experiences and mobilize resources, etc;

2. Securing long-term funding and feminist support to ensure the stability and sustainability of organizations' work;

3. Institutionalizing organizational competencies on gender-sensitive advocacy and gender mainstreaming skills;

4. Capitalizing on organizations' existing capacities and competencies through enhancing cross-regional, participatory and collective advocacy work on gender-sensitive transitional justice to complement their existing community-led efforts, and to create organic feminist learning processes.
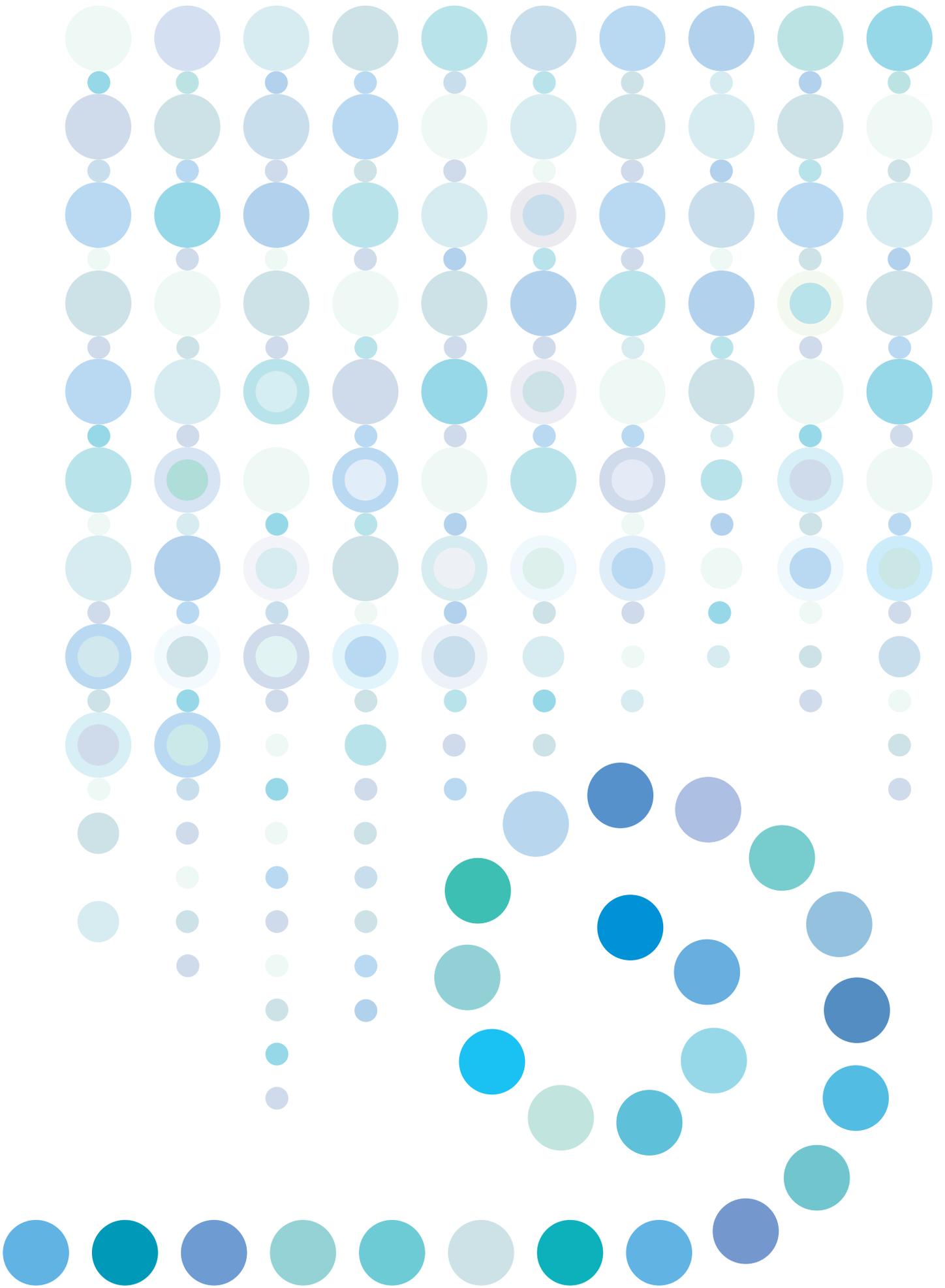
Annex 1
Mapping tool

Survey and assessment of capacity and training needs of feminist, women's or women-led organizations working on transitional and/or gender justice issues from a gender perspective (draft)

The notes in red are intended for researchers to assist them during the interview.

Researcher name: _____

Date: _____

Name of organization/association/initiative: _____

Region/province/country: _____

Introduction — *An introduction by the researcher herself/himself and the goal of the project*

First, we would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in the research/survey conducted by Dawlaty in cooperation and partnership with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). We would also like to thank you for taking the time to fill in this form. I would like to start by introducing myself.
I (the researcher identifies herself/himself)

During this session, we will complete a questionnaire aimed at surveying feminist or women's civil society organizations, initiatives, and organizations working on transitional justice or gender justice issues, and mainly targeting women (or men) affected by conflict.

This form comes within the context of a program implemented by Dawlaty in partnership with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), which aims to mobilize Syrian women-led institutions focused on gender and justice issues (gender and/or transitional justice).

By mobilizing these organizations, Dawlaty and WILPF aim to influence international discourse on the conflict and transitional justice processes, by providing efforts and operational models that focus on victims and survivors, and take into account gender standards and considerations. While the efforts by Dawlaty and WILPF seek to identify these organizations, learn from their expertise and identify their approaches, we are also offering future support to strengthen the organizational capacities of the organizations in question.

It is worth mentioning that participation in this survey and capacity assessment is voluntary, so you can decide whether or not to take part, and you can also request to end the session at any moment, or opt not to answer any of the questions asked.

We stress, however, that your answers will remain confidential and will only be used for research purposes. The data you provide will be collected and analyzed in the context of a report, and some of your opinions can be quoted anonymously to ensure confidentiality and privacy. We also wish to emphasize that we hope to know your opinions and learn from your experiences and from the important observations you will provide over the course of the session.

Please let us know whether your organization wishes to withhold its name during the context of the report for reasons of community safety:

Do you consent for your organization's name to be mentioned within the final report: ☐

You do not approve that your organization's name be mentioned within the final report: ☐

The session is expected to last around two hours.

Any questions before we start?

1. **General information about women-led organizations**

▫ Organization name _____

▫ Name of responsible person _____

▫ Name of person interviewed _____

▫ The job title of the person interviewed _____

▫ Organization telephone number _____

▫ Organization e-mail _____

▫ Organization website _____

▫ Does the organization consider itself a women's or feminist organization? _____

▫ Do women make up a large proportion of its constituent body? _____

▫ Does the organization work on gender and/or transitional justice issues?
What are examples of these issues? _____

▫ Does the organization consider itself small or medium-sized? And why? _____

▫ Type of organization
(The form uses the term 'organization' in the context of the questions for the purpose of brevity)

☐ Feminist initiative
☐ Civil society
☐ Non-profit organization
☐ Feminist network
☐ Civic company
☐ Women's movement
☐ Other, please specify: _____

▫ Founding date _____

▫ The organization is registered ☐ Yes
☐ No

▫ Location (country) of registration _____ ▫ Registration date _____

▫ What are the direct reasons that led to the decision to found the organization?

_____

▫ Geographical scope of organization activity
(please indicate the country and population of target areas) _____

▫ Who are the beneficiaries of your organization's intervention frameworks?

For example: battered women, people with special needs,
wives of missing persons, elderly women, etc. or children, girls, etc.

Please select all that apply and list the specific sub-categories
within each category.

☐ Women:
☐ Young men:
☐ Young women:
☐ Girls:
☐ Boys:
☐ Men:

□ Who are the target groups of your organization's intervention frameworks?

☐ Politicians
☐ Religious leaders
☐ Municipalities, local government bodies
☐ Civil organizations and bodies
☐ Local networks
☐ Members of the local community
☐ Other, please specify: _____

Why were these categories targeted? What is their role in the issue you are working on?

_____

□ What issue(s) does your organization address within the scope of transitional justice?
Please list all the topics and give examples of each theme and how efforts are dedicated to targeting women in each theme.

☐ Political empowerment of women.
(Can you give examples? How is women's political empowerment implemented? How is it related to the transitional period?)

☐ Economic empowerment of women.
(Why? How do you view it as linked to the transitional period?)

☐ Community mobilization **(Why? What is its purpose?)**

☐ Domestic violence and/or sexual violence against women

☐ The issue of detainees, abductees, and forcibly disappeared persons

☐ Truth-seeking and fact-finding. **(What are some examples?)**

☐ Personal status
(Inheritance, right to grant citizenship, registration of marriage, divorce, births, polygamy)

☐ Constitutional amendment

☐ Women or men affected by war **(Can you give examples?)**

☐ Proprietary rights

☐ Documentation

☐ Other? Please specify. _____

□ What is your organization's vision _____

□ What is your organization's mission? _____

□ What are the strategic objectives of your organization? _____

□ How does your organization work on gender equality? _____

□ How does your organization work to achieve gender justice? _____

□ Is it possible to mention the themes, programs and activities within each of the following levels of the organization?

☐ Provision of aid/services
☐ Awareness and capacity-building
☐ Women's empowerment
☐ Men's participation
☐ Advocacy and policy contexts
☐ Other, please specify: _____

◻ Can you determine the level of operation of your organization and the model of its activities or programs related to transitional justice?

☐ Local area
☐ National
☐ Regional
☐ International

◻ What is the range of your organization's annual budget?

☐ Between $10,000 and $50,000 per year
☐ Between $50,000 and $100,000 per year
☐ Between $100,000 and $200,000 per year
☐ Between $200,000 and $300,000 per year
☐ Between $300,000 and $500,000 per year
☐ More than $500,000 per year (please specify) _____

2. Analysis of the external environment and its impact (challenges and opportunities)

■ The general context governing the work of organizations

◻ What are the general challenges facing your organization?
Why are they considered challenges?
How do you meet these challenges?

◻ What constraints (or opportunities) are imposed by the current legal or political context in the country/area in which your projects and programs are implemented?
(Probe: limited mobility, legality of work, access to resources, transfer and receipt of funds and grants, registration of employees in social security. Ask the organization about how and why.)

◻ Does the country in which your programs are implemented have national policies or strategies on gender or women's rights?
(Probe: national plan or strategy to promote women's political participation / national plan or strategy to eliminate violence against women / national plan or strategy for gender equality / national efforts to achieve gender justice.)

If such general plans do not exist, what do you think are the challenges to their enactment?

◻ What laws or policies do you wish your organization to influence, change or enforce, particularly with regard to transitional justice projects that are sensitive to women's or gender issues?

◻ What is your opinion or the role of official institutions (executive, legislative, administrative, judicial) in the country/area where you implement programs and projects in ensuring women's rights? (Probe: no role or non- involvement, service role, active role.) Can you explain?

◻ Are there opportunities or constraints posed by these official frameworks (national or local) on your scope of work?
Is your organization or other civil society organizations involved in national dialogues and consultations on women's rights?

◻ Are there other specific opportunities within the general context regarding the general issue you are working on?

■ Institutional context

◻ Are you leading or are you part of national, regional or international networks addressing women's rights or gender?
(Probe: grassroots women's frameworks, local support networks - both formal and informal)
How important do you think these networks are? Can these networks be named?

□ Is your organization part of a human rights networks that is not necessarily a feminist or women's network? **What are these networks?**

How important are these networks? What opportunities do you offer?

What is the function of these networks?
(Probe: monitoring violations, shadow reporting, monitoring and accountability of governing bodies and institutions, etc.)

If present, what is your assessment of the effectiveness of these networks and frameworks? **(Are there specific challenges?)**

□ What is your assessment of the conditions or requirements for funding, sustainability and renewal of contract by donors?

Are there any challenges to your organization's work? Why? **(Probe: absence of support for operational costs, rigid bureaucratic channels, excessive requirements, etc.)**

□ Are you part of international networks or working groups on gender?
Can they be mentioned?

What do you think is the importance of these networks / working groups? What support or opportunities do they offer to you?

What is your assessment of the effectiveness of these networks and frameworks? (Are there specific challenges?) What is your role in these working groups or networks?

□ Do feminist and women's organizations have a better space and conditions of work for their staff (compared to non- feminist organizations)? How and why?

□ Are there particular challenges facing your organization being a feminist or women's organization compared to other organizations (human rights / youth organizations not led by women)? **(Probe challenges: access to decision-makers, pushing for a specific agenda, influencing funding strategies, etc.)**

■ **Field, cultural and social context**

□ What are the most prominent social and gender norms **(stereotypes about women's roles and rights)** prevalent in the country in which you carry out activities? How do they affect the context of your work?

□ What are the obstacles and challenges women face in the community (public sphere)? **(Probe: promoting political participation, economic empowerment, transitional justice.)**

What about the private sphere (household)? **(Domestic: domestic and spousal violence, personal status - divorce, custody, polygamy, sexual violence, non-reporting of violence, early marriage, etc.)**

What is the reason for these obstacles?

□ What are the obstacles or challenges facing women in Syria's transitional period that your organization is working on? **Can you mention the reasons and give an elaborate explanation?**

3. **Analysis of the internal environment of the organization and monitoring competencies, capacities and training needs (relevant to advocacy and gender mainstreaming)**

■ **At the level of the context of public intervention**

□ Has your organization faced challenges in implementing activities or obtaining funding because of its registration or lack thereof? Can you explain?

- Who are the decision-makers you target in your work on transitional justice or women's empowerment?

  What are the challenges facing you to access decision- makers or those influencing national policies? Why?

  Are there specific institutional needs in this context (mapping and monitoring stakeholder or decision and their impact?)

- What is your analysis of problems and shortcomings in public policy issues (with regard to transitional justice efforts from a gender perspective) in order to conduct informed advocacy campaigns?

  Does your organization have in-house capacities or does it outsource experts?

  Are there specific institutional needs in terms of monitoring and analysis of political shortcomings?

- Have you or your organization conducted research or studies or collected data, testimonials or political papers to influence the issues? Can you explain?

- Has your organization conducted a general gender analysis of the impact of the conflict or transition on women and men in order to formulate a strategic intervention plan on the issue of gender justice on which you work? Why?

  Are there institutional needs relating to gender analysis tools?

- Does your organization have an annual or five-year strategic plan for women's empowerment? Can you give examples?

- Are the strategic objectives in the plan measurable? Are there financial resources specifically allocated to it?

  Are there specific institutional needs in the formulation of the plan or strategic objectives?

- Who are the most influential actors in the issue you are working on relating to transitional justice (i.e. who has the key actors for change)?

  Did the organization conduct a power mapping and analysis to determine who has the keys to change? (Example: religious bodies, community activities, etc.)

  How does your organization use this tool to implement its advocacy plan?
  Are there specific institutional needs in this regard?

- What are your main strengths in advocacy?

- What are the main things (competencies) that you feel you require (skills, networks, etc.) to strengthen your organization's advocacy capacity?

■ Capacities, competencies and institutional needs

- Can you mention the main issues and training needs (topics or skills) that the organization requires in implementing transitional justice programs?

- How does the organization observe gender issues in its policies?
  What about its programs?

- What challenges does the organization face in the gender perspective of its programs and policies?

- How do it see gender mainstreaming training as essential in its work to achieve its mission and vision?

- To what extent is advocacy essential to the organization?

- What issues has the organization advocated and how?

- What challenges has the organization faced in advocacy efforts at the international and local levels?

- What are the organization's training needs in this area?

- Does the organization have experience or expertise in networking and building strategic partnerships?

  Can you give examples of where these partnerships are being built? What is the function of these partnerships?

- Are there challenges facing sustaining networking efforts? Who makes decisions, and how are they made, within the organization regarding identifying, building and sustaining these partnerships? Why?

  Are there specific institutional needs in this context?

- Does the organization have a funding strategy?

  Does it have sufficient capacity to mobilize funding? (Writing project proposals, draking budgets, meeting donor requirements.)

  Who conducts these steps?

  Does the organization have income-generating activities (donations, etc.) that can cover the operational expenses of the organization?

- Has the organization allocated a specific budget for advocacy and campaigning efforts? Can it mobilize resources in this regard?

- Has the organization allocated a specific budget for gender analysis? Is it easy to obtain funding to cover these activities?

- Does the organization allocate a specific budget for gender intervention activities? (example: incentives for women, transportation, contract with specialists to work with children in the cases of women with children) to ensure, for example, women's participation?

  Are there specific institutional needs in this context?

- Does the organization coordinate with other organizations to increase the effectiveness of interventions and reduce expenses? Can you explain?

- Can you give examples of the institutional culture prevalent in the organization?

  Is institutional culture based on diversity, tolerance of the other and gender sensitivity? **(Example: diversity of roles away from social and gender stereotyping)** Can you give examples?

  Are there specific institutional needs in this context?

- What is the organization's employment policy? How are team members hired? According to what considerations? How are women recruited in the team?

  How does the organization address the different needs and competencies of women in the team? What about young men?

  How are roles and tasks in the organization distributed among women and men? What are the duties and responsibilities of women compared to those of men?

■ **Capacity and competencies at the operational-field level**

❑ Can you give examples of the main challenges related to access and work with beneficiary groups? How are these challenges addressed?

❑ Does the organization work to link the objectives of empowerment or service delivery to advocacy efforts? How?

❑ How does the organization identify and contact the beneficiary groups of women (recognizing that their experiences vary) who will be served by the organization's efforts?

❑ What forms of intervention does the organization have to reach affected women (stakeholders), especially as they are invisible to society (bamered women, former detainees, women survivors of conflict, widows, etc.)?

❑ How does the organization observe the dynamics of family relationships or women's roles during program design and implementation? (example: women with children, women with mobility restrictions, etc.)

❑ How does the organization engage with target communities in its advocacy efforts to obtain recommendations and formulate action plans that ensure the needs and priorities of these groups?

   Are there specific needs in this context?

❑ What means do you use in interventions with, for example, women who normalize violence and consider it casual?

❑ How does the organization take gender sensitivity considerations during the intervention without causing any harm or abuse in the communities? (Can you give examples? Eg. The organization has a strict do no harm policy even if it is at the expense of successful execution of the activity.)

   How does the organization take gender considerations into account when implementing sensitive activities such as support sessions, etc.?

❑ How does the organization assess the satisfaction of beneficiaries with regard to services or intervention frameworks? Are there tools or reports on this? Please explain.

❑ How does the organization improve and adapt intervention frameworks based on beneficiary assessment?

❑ In the context of the foregoing, is it possible to elaborate on the most important themes on which the organization is interested in developing its institutional capacity, in terms of advocacy and gender mainstreaming?

4. **Infrastructure (organizational and operational structures of the organization and its gender responsiveness)**

■ **Human resources of the organization from a gender perspective**

❑ What is the total number of constituent body members? The number of women in the constituent body versus the number of men?

❑ How many members of the constituent body are women under the age of 30?

   How many members of the constituent body are men under the age of 30?

◻ The gender of the director of the organization? Age of the director?

◻ Does the organization have a board of trustees? ☐ Yes ☐ No

◻ What is the total number of members of the board of directors / board of trustees?

    The number of women in the board versus the number of men?

    What is the function and role of the board?

◻ Does the organization have an administrative committee or an administrative body?

◻ What is the total number of members of the administrative committee / administrative body?

◻ The number of women in the administrative body versus the number of men

    The number of members of the administrative body under the age of 30 years? Women and men?

◻ What is the total number of the organization's staff?

◻ How many women versus men in the organization's staff?

    How many women versus men in the organization team have fixed contracts?

    What is the role of women and men who have fixed contracts within the organization?

    Can you give examples of the role and tasks of the contracted team (example: hourly or weekly)?

◻ Number of women versus men in:

    Finance management   Women _____ Men _____

    Personnel management   Women _____ Men _____

    Organization management   Women _____ Men _____

    Project management   Women _____ Men _____

    Logistics team   Women _____ Men _____

    Technical team (media, technology)
                           Women _____ Men _____

    Thematic technical team (gender, gender justice, political affairs, etc.)

                           Women _____ Men _____

    Field intervention team (community mobilization, social assistance and psychosocial support)

                           Women _____ Men _____

    Does the organization have an administrative structure document?

◻ What is the gender of the organization director / officer at the following levels:

Finance management   _____

Personnel management   _____

Organization management   _____

Project management   _____

Logistics team   _____

Technical team (media, technology)   _____

Technical team – consultants
(gender, gender justice, political affairs, etc.)   _____

Field intervention team
(community mobilization, social assistance and psychosocial support)   _____

Can you give examples on career promotion in the organization over the past two years?
(Probe: women vs. men)

■ **Institutional policies and procedures**

◻ Does the organization have a strategic plan (example: five-year plan)? Can you mention the most prominent features, for example, its strategic objectives? Duration? Is the plan in a place accessible to all?

◻ Has the team been involved in putting forward the plan? Can you specify the administrative levels involved in that?

◻ Does the organization have a gender-sensitive internal system?
Can you specify it?
For researchers only: Maternity leave? Paternity leave? Working from Home?

◻ Does the organization have gender policies? Can you specify? For researchers only: Such as policies to address sexual harassment in the workplace, policies that note the glass ceiling in career advancement, caregiving for children or taking into consideration the multiple roles of women, etc.

◻ Does the organization have a code of conduct? Does it contain gender-sensitive measures? Can you specify?
For researchers only: Examples are gendered language, right to privacy, right to compensation, lack of uneven gender dynamics, etc.

◻ Does the organization have internal systems and policies to regulate the work of the organization and the team? Can they be enumerated?
For researchers only: Examples are procurement policy, financial policy, team security, travel, etc.

◻ Does the organization have beneficiary protection systems and policies, and are staff trained on them periodically?
Can you mention the most important contents?
For researchers only: In relation to media, etc.

◻ Does the organization have an internal policy for financial procedures?

❑ Does the organization have a policy on what should be documented and how to conduct documentation?

❑ Does the organization have a data authentication policy?

Do you consider that documentation policy is sensitive to gender-based violence issues? Can you give examples?

For researchers only: (Probe: ensuring confidentiality, privacy, informed consent, etc.)

❑ Does the organization have a risk analysis and response policy in the event of any external risk that may threaten the loss or damage of files and documentation?

❑ Have (fixed and contracted) team members been briefed on all policies and trained (or) introduced to them? Are new staff trained and familiarized with them?

❑ How is the implementation of policies monitored?

What actions would the organization take if any of these policies are violated?

Does the organization have a policy with clear procedures for responding to complaints (by staff, beneficiaries, partners, etc.)?

Has the organization encountered any problems in this regard?

■ **Decision-making in the organization**

❑ Who makes the decision within the organization about organization strategies?

☐ Chief executive officer
☐ Board of trustees
☐ Program coordinators and program managers
☐ Staff
☐ Other _____

Can you mention how the decision is made?

❑ Who makes decisions within the organization about the annual plan to be implemented?

☐ Chief executive officer
☐ Board of trustees
☐ Program coordinators and program managers
☐ Staff
☐ Other _____

Can you mention how the decision is made?

❑ Who makes the decision within the organization about the type of projects and activities to be implemented?

☐ Chief executive officer
☐ Board of trustees
☐ Program coordinators and program managers
☐ Staff
☐ Other _____

Can you mention how the decision is made?

◻ Who makes the decision within the organization about how to address field risks or challenges during project implementation?

☐ Chief executive officer
☐ Board of trustees
☐ Program coordinators and program managers
☐ Staff
☐ Other _____

Can you mention how the decision is made?

◻ Who makes the decision within the organization about how to work with target groups (outreach, confidence building, etc.)?

☐ Chief executive officer
☐ Board of trustees
☐ Program coordinators and program managers
☐ Staff
☐ Other _____

Can you mention how the decision is made?

◻ Who makes the decision within the organization about recruitment and hiring?

☐ Chief executive officer
☐ Board of trustees
☐ Program coordinators and program managers
☐ Staff
☐ Other _____

Can you mention how the decision is made?

◻ What are the organization's decision-making mechanisms? (Example: participatory, guidance and support, conducting periodic reviews and evaluation of decisions)

◻ The organization has the ability to delegate tasks and responsibilities according to the scope of expertise and interest, and according to the capacities, capabilities and competencies.

☐ Yes
☐ No

◻ The organization has a transparent culture and mechanisms for communication with management/leaders about any issues.

☐ Yes
☐ No

◻ Is the team involved in decision-making?
Probe: Gender-sensitive decision-making mechanisms (Participatory, gender-sensitive mechanisms decision-making and contents for staff, beneficiaries, etc.)

■ **The notes in red are intended for researchers to assist them during the interview.**

Annex 2
Overview of participating organizations

Background of the organizations that participated in the research

Sixty-seven organizations participated in the research, of which 71.7% were in Syria and 60% legally registered (Figure 3). Among registered associations, the majority (37%) are registered in Syria, followed by Turkey (22%) and Lebanon (11%). 12% of these associations registered in other countries (Figure 4). The largest percentage of these associations (34%) is considered a non-profit organization (Figure 5).

- Yes 60%
- No 37%
- No answer 3%
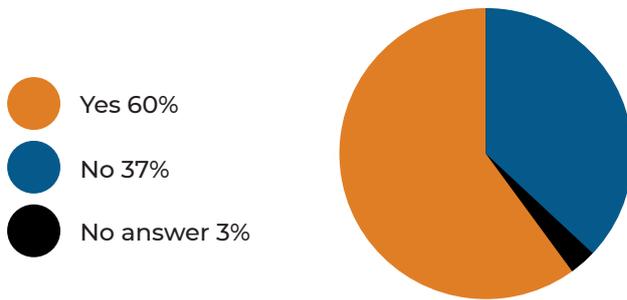
Figure 3: Percentage of registered organizations.
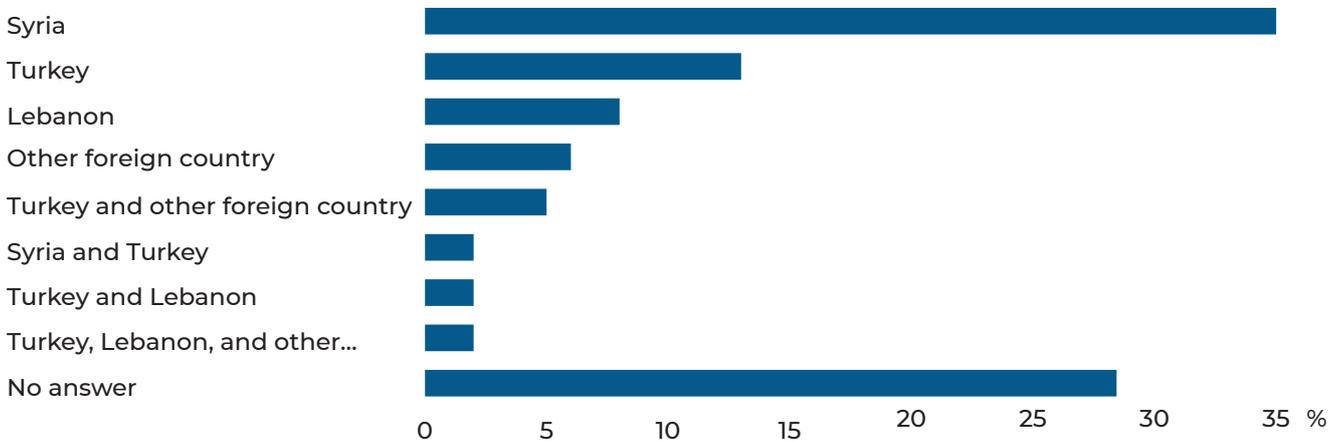
Figure 4: Organizations by place of registration

How Do Organizations Define Themselves?

The majority of the participating organizations (60%) consider themselves women-led and feminist organizations and 65% work on gender and/or transitional justice issues (Figure 6). Most of these organizations (88%) were established after 2011, while 5% were established prior to 1995 (Figure 7).

Feminist network...	(21)
Civil society	(11)
Feminist initiative	(7)
Feminist movement	(6)
Civil women's association	(5)
Non-profit women's org.	(3)
Feminist network	(2)
Initiative	(2)
Human rights network	(1)
Civilian political movement	(1)
Civil rights center	(1)
No answer	(4)
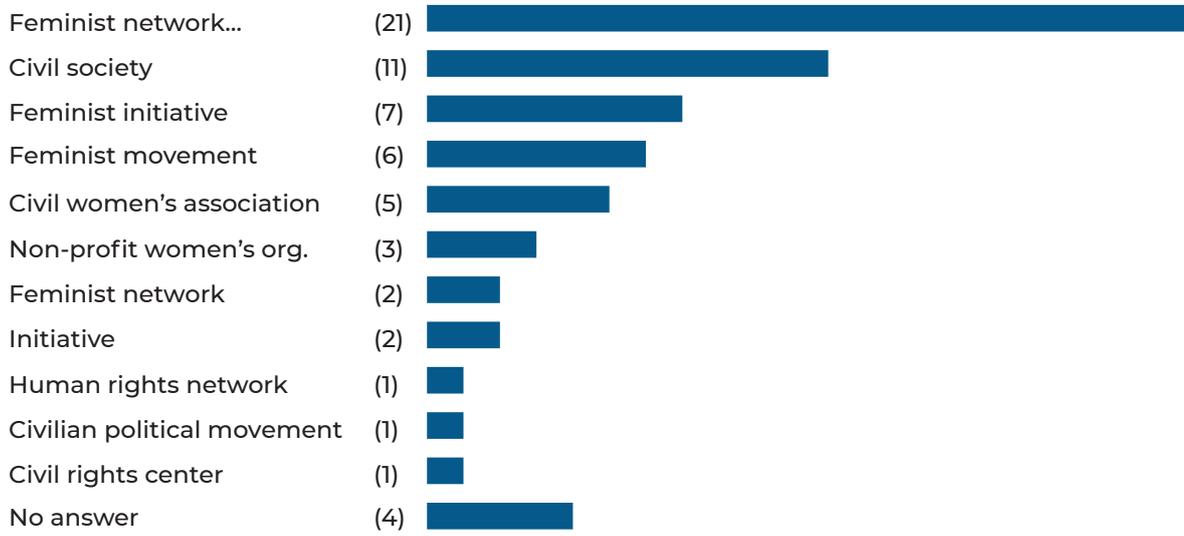
Figure 5: How organizations define themselves

● Does the organization consider itself a women's and feminist organization?

● Does the organization work on gender and/or transitional justice issues?

| | Yes: | 60% | 65% | No: | 17% | 4% | No answer: | 23% | 31% |
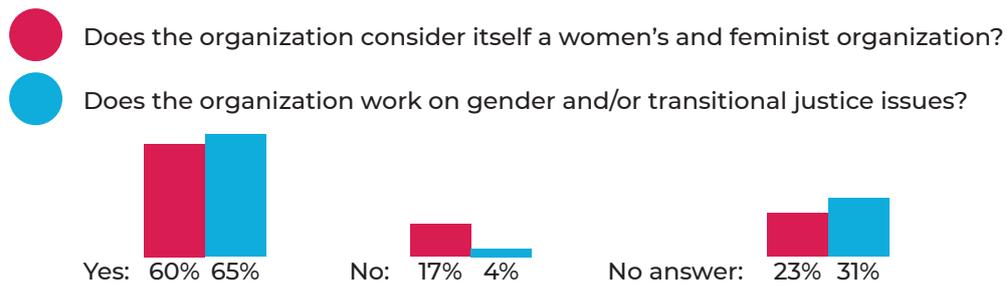
Figure 6: The issues women-led and feminist organizations work on

1993	1%
1994	3%
2006	1%
2011	5%
2012	17%
2013	8%
2014	12%
2015	5%
2016	14%
2017	11%
2018	14%
2019	3%
No answer	6%

Figure 7: The year in which organizations were founded

The organizations' geographical scope

The geographical scope of the work of 69% of these organizations is one or more areas inside Syria, such as Qamishli, al-Hasakah, Aleppo, Idlib, Kafrnabal, Damascus, Sweida, Homs, Tartous, among others (Figure 8).

One or more countries other than Syria	31%
All Syria	2%
Liberated Syria	3%
Eight regions in Syria	2%
Seven regions in Syria	3%
Six regions in Syria	5%
Five regions in Syria	3%
Four regions in Syria	7%
Three regions in Syria	8%
Two regions in Syria	8%
One region in Syria	28%
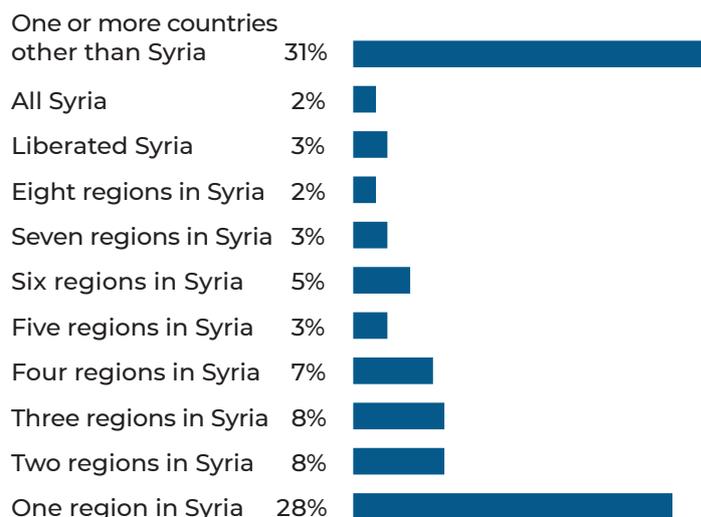
Figure 8: The geographical scope of the organizations' work

Beneficiaries and levels of strategic intervention

The majority of the targeted groups in the intervention frameworks are women (86.88%) (Figure 9a, 9b), and the majority of the targeted groups are members of the local community (60.0%) (Figure 10). The greatest proportion of the strategic intervention levels of organizations is in awareness-raising, capacity building and women's empowerment (45%) (Figure 11). 56% of organizations work at local and regional field levels (Figure 12).

- Women only 7%
- Women in addition to others 80%
- Categories other than women 13%
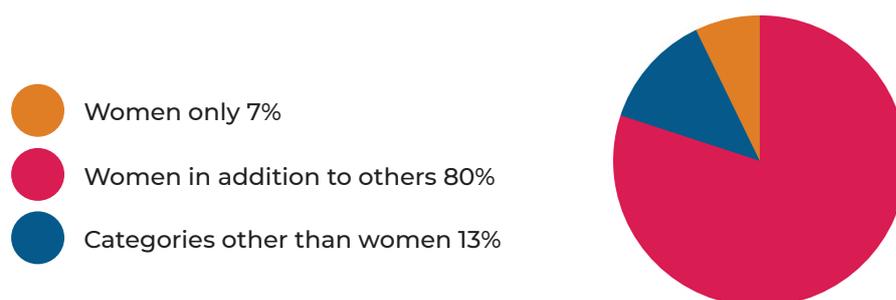
Figure 9A: Beneficiaries of intervention frameworks

All categories	26%	
Women, young women, men, children	16%	
Women, young women, children	15%	
Young women, men, young men	12%	
Women, young women, young men, men	8%	
Women	7%	
Women, children	6%	
Women, men	2%	
Women, young women, men	2%	
Women, young women, men, children	2%	
Women, men, young men	2%	
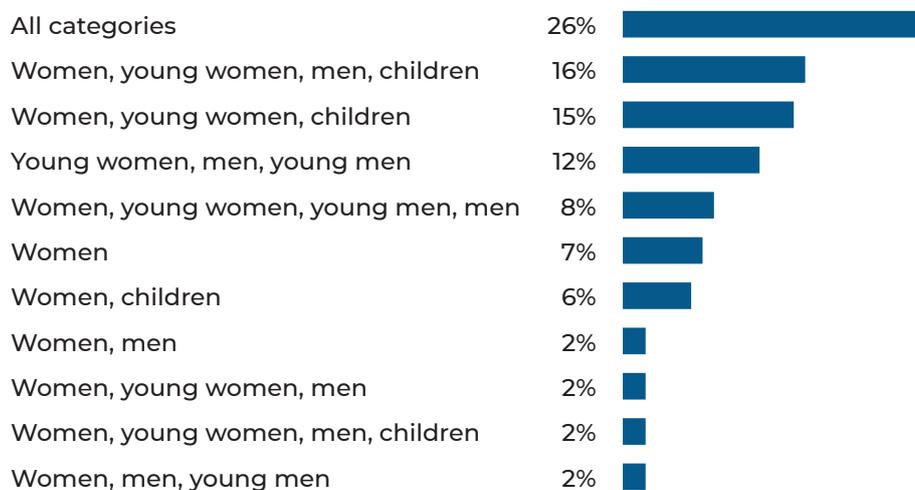
Figure 9b: Detailed beneficiaries according to the organizations

Members of the local community	60%	
Civic organizations	57%	
Local networks	42%	
Municipalities	37%	
Politicians	30%	
Clerics	11%	
All categories	15%	
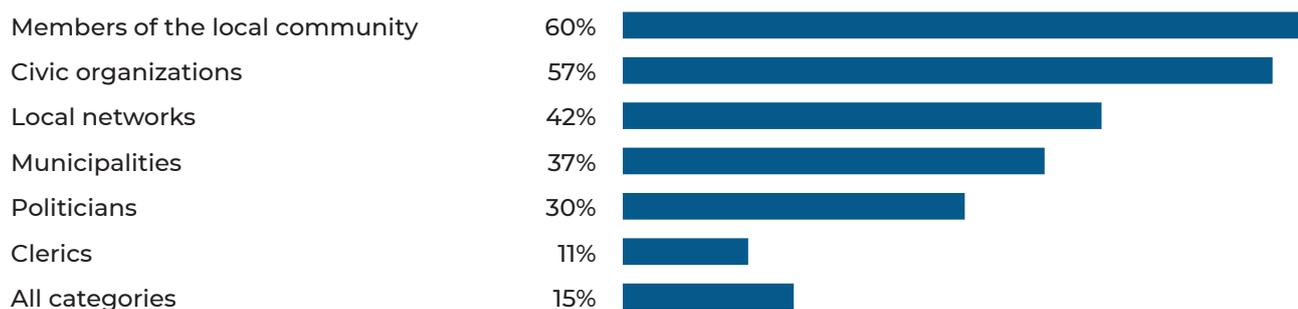
Figure 10: Targeted groups in intervention frameworks

Empowering women	45%	
Awareness and capacity building	45%	
Advocacy and political	35%	
Engaging men	26%	
Provide aid	8%	
All interventions	38%	
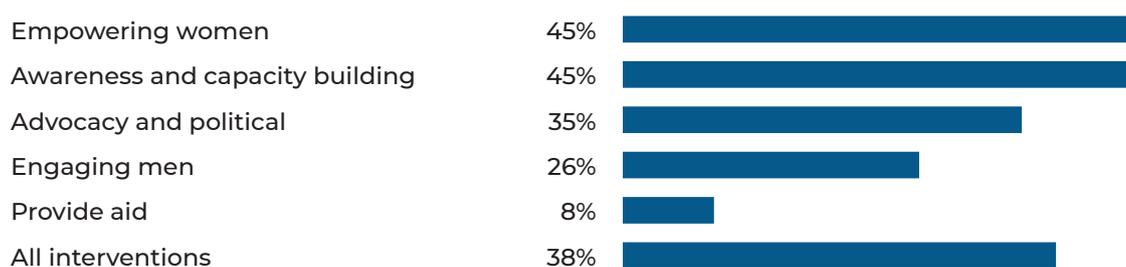
Figure 11: Levels of strategic intervention

International	21%	
Regional	8%	
National	15%	
Zonal field	16%	
Provincial	6%	
Local	34%	
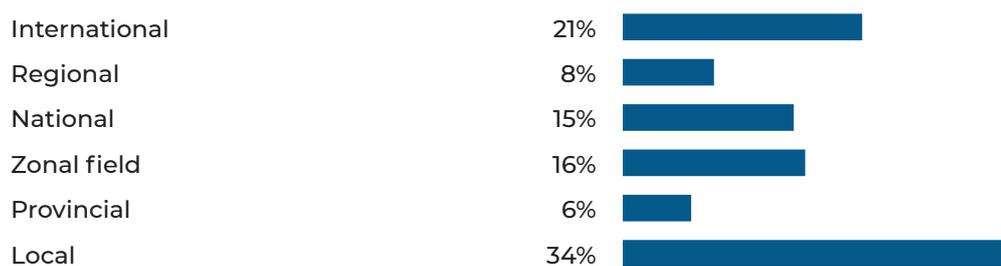
Figure 12: The Organization's level of work

Size of Organizations

In size, most organizations range from small (35%) to medium (32%).

56% of organizations have a professional staff of 25 or less, while 10% have more than 100 employees (Figure 13). About half of the associations (45%) have an annual budget of less than $ 50,000 (Figure 14).

Small	35%	
Medium	32%	
Big	3%	

Figure 13: Organization size

25 or less:	56%
More than 25:	16%
50 to 100:	18%
More than 100:	10%
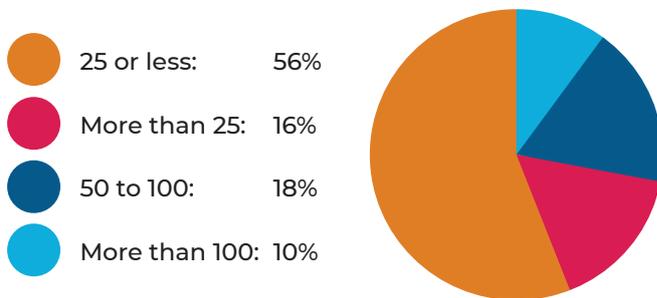
Figure 14: Team size (employees or volunteers)

Less than $10,000	12%	
$10,000–50,000	32%	
$50,000–100,000	8%	
$100,000–200,000	9%	
$200,000–300,000	2%	
Over $300,000	9%	
No mention of amount / self-financing	28%	

Figure 15: Annual budget

Annex 3
Infrastructure of organizations

Women's participation in organization and managing

The constituent body of 40% of the organizations is composed of women only and all members of the Board of Directors in 41% of the organizations are women. For the majority of organizations (86.12%), women constitute half or more of their total work team, and 30% of them are women only (Figure 16). The largest p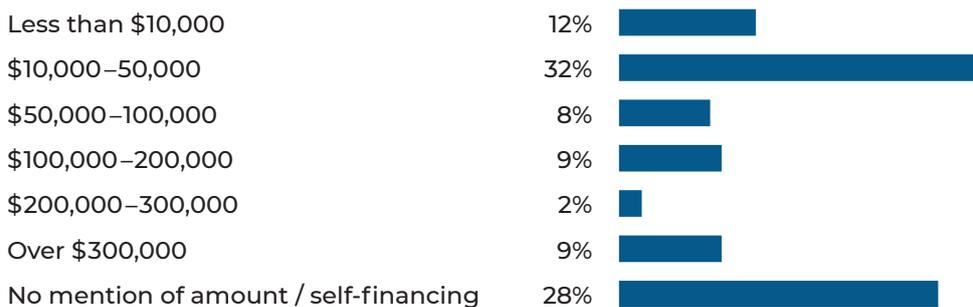roportion of organizations (74%) are women (Figure 17). The average age of managers is 39 years (± 8 years) and the ages range between 25 and 61 years. Divisions which are led by women make up the largest percentage (56% HR and 50% financial management) (Figure 18).

Percentage of women in constituent bodies

0–19% women	2%
20–49% women	12%
50–74% women	32%
75–99% women	14%
100% women	40%
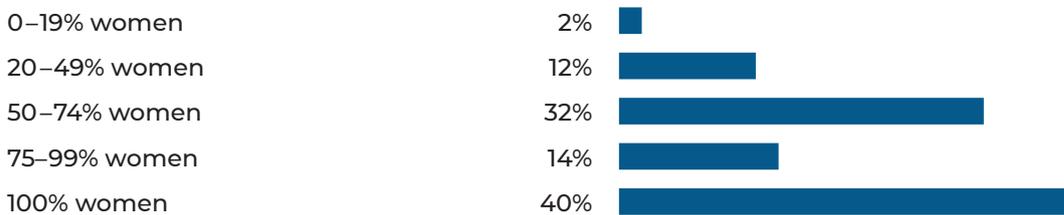
Percentage of women in the board of directors

0–19% women	3%
20–49% women	17%
50–74% women	29%
75–99% women	10%
100% women	41%
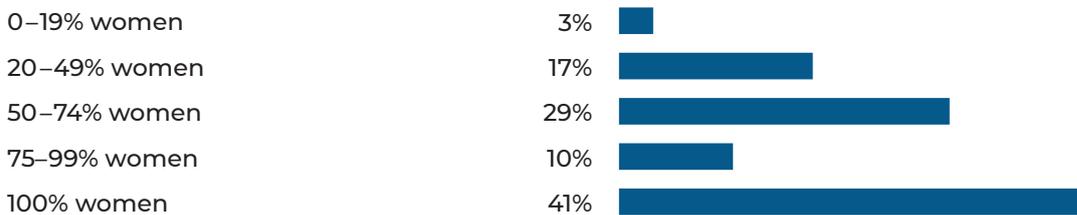
Percentage in the total organization staff

0–19% women	2%
20–49% women	12%
50–74% women	37%
75–99% women	19%
100% women	30%
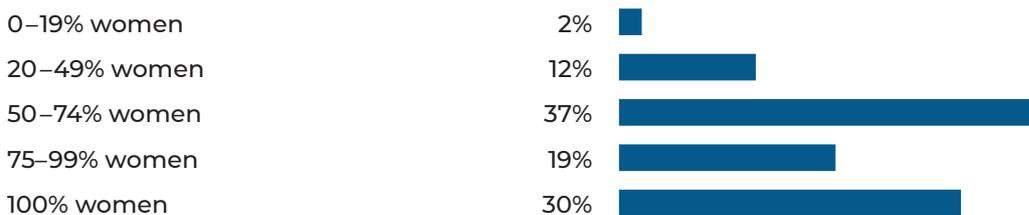
Figure 16: Percentage of women employees

Women 74%

Men 26%
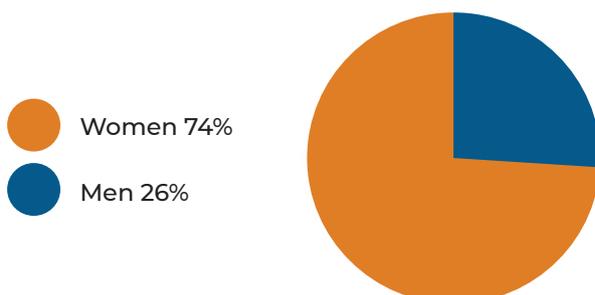
Figure 17: Gender of director

Policies and institutional procedures

Almost half of the organizations (46.15%) have a strategic work plan (63%) of which the team took part in developing. Of these organizations (21%) have a one-year plan, and (14%) have a plan for one or three years (Figure 19). Most organizations have different institutional procedures and policies in varying degrees (Figure 20). The implementation and application of the above mentioned policies are monitored through monitoring, evaluation, follow-up and reporting (49%) (Figure 19). 63% of organizations adopt a participatory decision-making mechanism (Figure 21).

The responses differed in terms of who makes the decision within the organization regarding the annual plan to be implemented so that the largest percentage (29%) was for the Executive Director individually (Figure 22).

Section	Woman	Man	Woman and man	No answer
Field intervention team	48%	3%	13%	36%
Thematic technical team (gender, political affairs etc.)	46%	3%	2%	49%
Technical team (media, technology)	40%	20%	38%	2%
Logistics team	35%	36%		29%
Project management	46%	11%	8%	35%
Organization management	48%	17%	1%	34%
Human resources	55%	16%		29%
Financial management	50%	20%		30%

Figure 18: Gender of heads of sections

● Does the organization have a strategic plan?

● Were the staff involved in its development?

Yes	63%	
	46%	
No	27%	
	39%	
No answer	10%	
	15%	
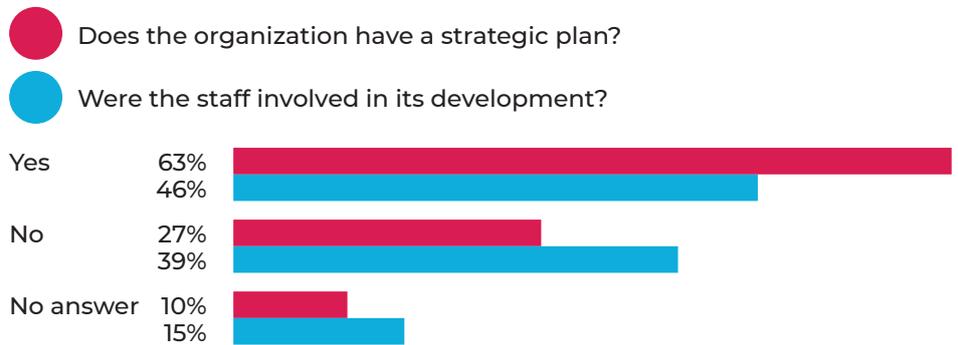
Figure 19: The organization's strategic plan, and participation of the work team in its development

Did the team know all the policies, and were they trained, or are they familiar with them?
65% yes

Does the org. have a risk analysis and response policy in the event of any external risk?
65% yes

Do you consider the documentation policy to be sensitive to GBV issues?
20% yes

Does the organization have a data documentation policy?
27% yes

Does the organization have a policy on what to document and how to do it?
82% yes

Does the organization have an internal policy for financial procedures?
75% yes

Does the org. have beneficiaries' protection systems and policies? Are staff trained in them?
65% yes

Does the org. have internal systems and policies for the organization's and team's work systems?
77% yes

Do they contain gender sensitive procedures?
26% yes

Does the organization have a code of conduct?
38% yes

Does the organization have a gender policy?
52% yes

Does the organization have a gender sensitive internal system?
57% yes

● Yes   ● No   ● No answer

Figure 20: Institutional policies and procedures

How is the application of policies monitored?

Monitoring and evaluation, follow-up and reports	49%	
Responsible administrators	15%	
Transparency	6%	
Complaints system	3%	
No monitoring	9%	
No answer	17%	
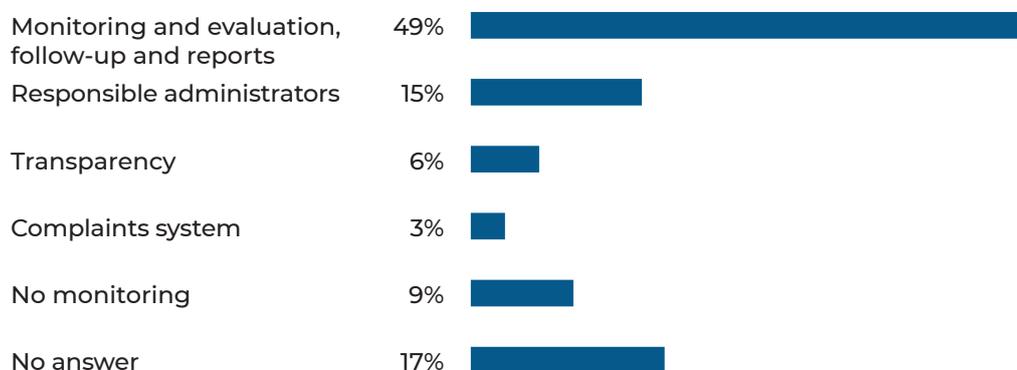
Figure 21: Monitoring the application of policies

What are the organization's decision-making mechanisms?

Participatory	42%	
Participatory and guiding	11%	
Board vote	11%	
Participatory, monitoring and evaluation	6%	
Supportive	6%	
Supportive participatory	3%	
Directive	2%	
Monitoring and evaluation	2%	
No answer	17%	

Figure 22: Decision-making mechanisms

Who makes decisions about annual plans and their implementation?

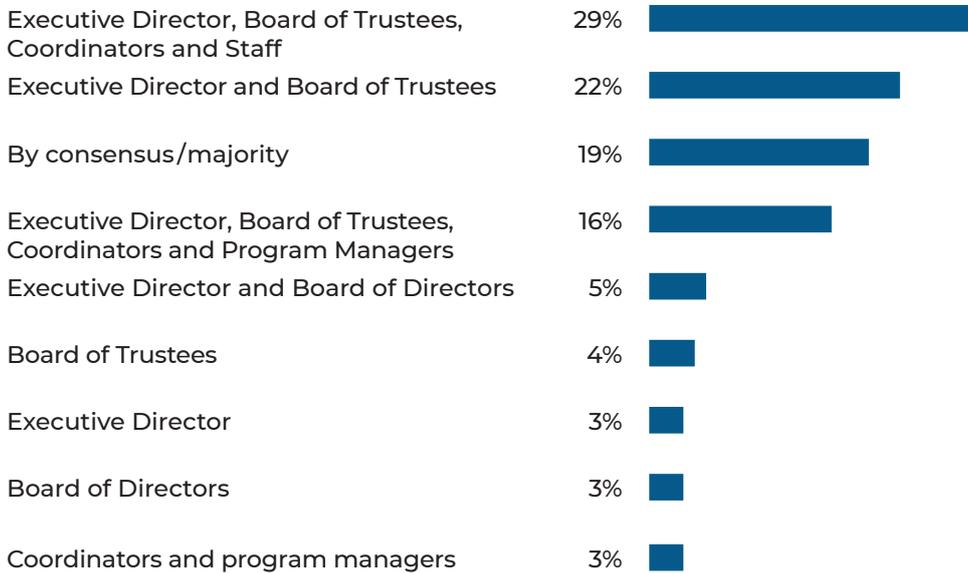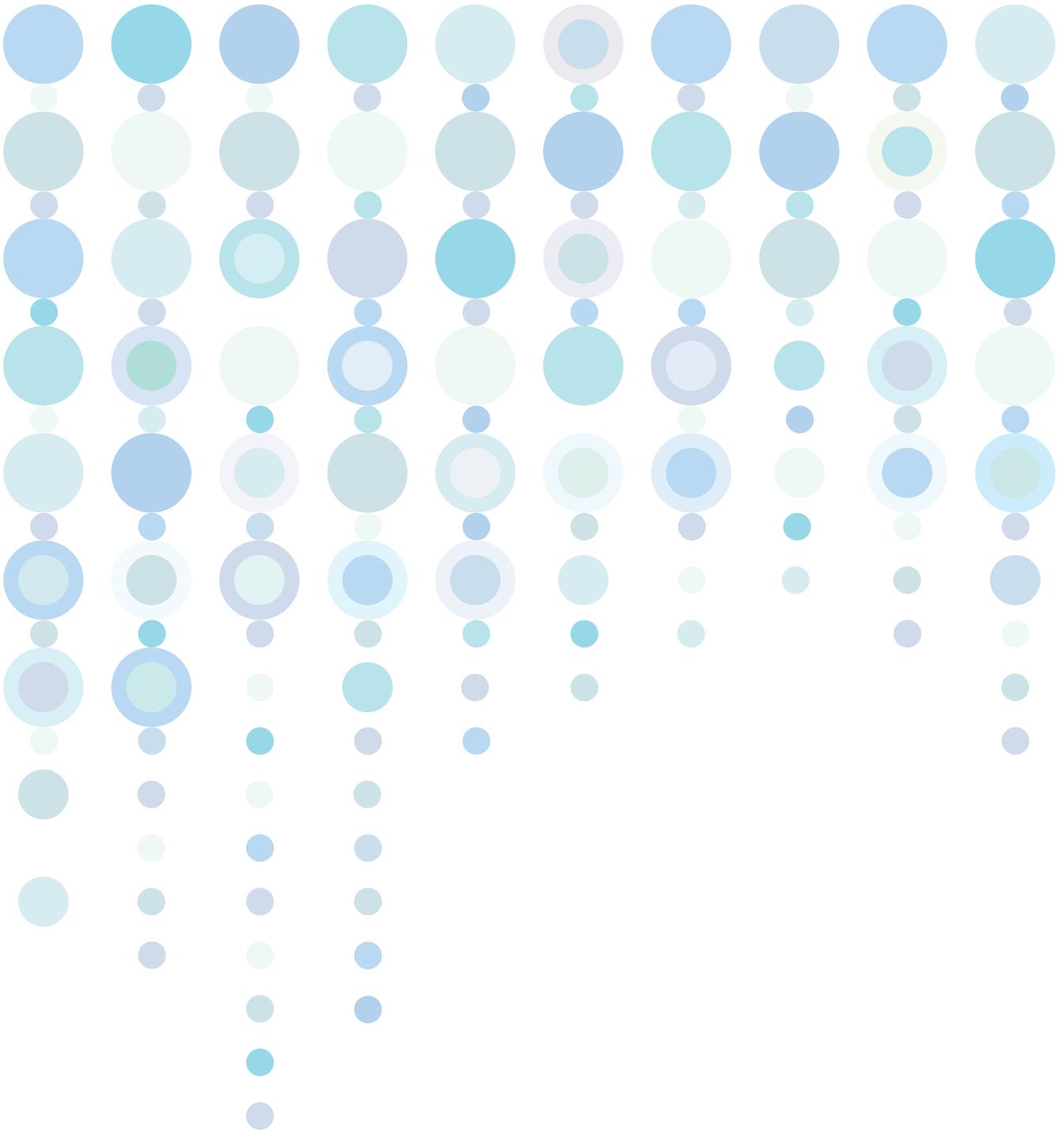|	
Executive Director, Board of Trustees, Coordinators and Staff	29%
Executive Director and Board of Trustees	22%
By consensus/majority	19%
Executive Director, Board of Trustees, Coordinators and Program Managers	16%
Executive Director and Board of Directors	5%
Board of Trustees	4%
Executive Director	3%
Board of Directors	3%
Coordinators and program managers	3%

Figure 23: Making decisions about annual plans

Digital analysis restrictions

The organizations did not adhere to the options specified in the form. In addition to not answering some of the questions.

Restrictions of communicating with associations

86% of the organizations mentioned their phone number, 77% stated their email addresses, only 15% reported their website while 34% relied on the Facebook page instead of the website.

Turning the tide
Syrian women's rights organizations
on the transitional justice map

2020

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR
PEACE & FREEDOM