Araa Al Jaramani*

Protecting the Syrian Family: Community Reconstruction and the Unseen Consequences of War**

نقد مؤسسات الإعمار المجتمعي ومنظماته: العواقب غير المرئية للحرب، الأسرة السورية نموذجًا

Abstract: Since the outbreak of the Syrian revolution in 2011, international and local organizations have played an active role in responding to civilians' needs. However, their activities have largely ignored the importance of safeguarding the Syrian family system. This study demonstrates how these organizations have disregarded the impact of the protracted war on new family dynamics, particularly the shifting gender roles and the evolving approaches to child-rearing during wartime. Compounding this oversight is the fact that international organizations dominate humanitarian efforts in Syria, often operating according to their own agendas. This raises critical questions about the extent to which these organizations understand the Syria's diverse family and societal contexts, and whether they recognize the importance of supporting the Syrian family structure.

Keywords: Syria; Gender; Family System; Post-Conflict Society; International Organizations.

الملخص: منذ اندلاع الثورة في سورية في عام 2011، نشطت المنظمات الدولية والمحلية في الاستجابة لاحتياجات المدنيين، لكنّ أنشطتها تجاهلت في معظمها ما يستوجبه الحفاظ على دينامية منظومة الأسرة السورية. كشفت الدراسة عن تجاهل المنظمات لأثر الحرب وطول سنواتها في الديناميكيات الجديدة المؤثرة في هذه المنظومة، وبخاصة التحول في أدوار الرجال والنساء التقليدية وفي تنشئة الأطفال. وفي هذا الوضع، ومع تصدّر المنظمات الدولية مشهد العمل الإنساني في سورية، وتحركها وفق أجنداتها الخاصة، برز السؤال عن مدى استيعابها للسياقات الأسرية والمجتمعية المتنوعة في سورية، ومدى إدراكها أهمية الاشتغال بدعم منظومة الأسرة السورية.

كلمات مفتاحية: سورية؛ الجندر؛ منظومة الأسرة؛ مجتمع ما بعد الصراع؛ المنظمات الدولية.

* A Dutch-Syrian researcher, currently holds a postdoctoral research position at Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Email: araa.aljaramani@ru.nl

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Introduction

The war in Syria has brought about profound changes to the structure of the Syrian family. It has resulted in the loss of the primary breadwinner for nearly 200,000 families and the displacement of approximately 6.8 million people within Syria, in addition to 5.5 million who have sought refuge in neighbouring countries and beyond. These transformations, compounded by harsh economic conditions, have led to the weakening and, in some cases, disintegration of family ties, with the share of female-headed households rising to 22% and child labour rates exceeding 80% in some areas.[1]

In this context, international organizations operating in Syria have undertaken extensive humanitarian interventions. However, their effectiveness in supporting families and their alignment with Syrian cultural and social specificities remain highly debateable. Many of these organizations have continued to focus on emergency aid, without adequately addressing the need to restore family structures and equip them to meet ongoing challenges.[2] This necessitates the reshaping of family relationships and structures to capitalize on positive traditional values and transform the experiences of war into opportunities for constructive change. It also calls for Arab actors to adopt a more systematic approach to the production of knowledge that can inform the development of effective policies to support the family system in societies affected by war and disaster.

When demonstrations broke out in Syria in March 2011, many Syrians believed that positive political change was on the horizon – change that could pave the way for future generations to live in a state free of corruption, where equal opportunity would be available to all.[3] However, the protracted conflict and its evolution into a proxy war forced Syrian families to make difficult and often painful choices. From the outset, political divisions emerged, even within families, pitting regime loyalists against opposition supporters. Such rifts quickly entangled with moral judgments and the delegitimization of opposing views. Negative phenomena also surfaced, such as regime loyalists deeming it acceptable to report their own family members to the intelligence agencies for expressing support for the opposition, or to denounce neighbours or friends who had participated in demonstrations.[4]

The escalation of violence in areas that supported the revolutionary movement led to mass displacement, as large numbers of their residents were forced to seek refuge in regions not subject to regime bombardment. These dynamics of displacement have decisively reshaped the social and economic landscape, particularly through the emergence of relief groups, which gradually evolved into more organized humanitarian organizations. As protests spread across Syria, a new form of civil society activism emerged in the form of coordination committees,[5] which played a pivotal role in organizing and sustaining the popular movement.

These committees facilitated the movement of protesters by identifying safe routes for demonstrations to avoid sniper fire and issuing warnings about the movements of security forces. They also documented areas targeted by bombardment, recording the number of dead, detained, and missing persons. Over time, this activity, which had begun online and through social media, evolved into a more organized

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[1] S. Devadas, I. Elbadawi & N. V. Loayza, "Growth in Syria: Losses from the War and Potential Recovery in the Aftermath," *Middle East Development Journal*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2021), pp. 215-244.

[2] P. Acharya & A. Banerjee, "International Organizations in Syria: Combating the Socio-Legal Issues," *Supremo Amicus*, vol. 24 (2021), p. 1098.

[3] Mahdi Karimi & Seyed Masoud Mousavi Shafaee, "Poor Governance and Civil War in Syria," *Türkiye Ortadoğu Çalışmaları Dergisi*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2018), pp. 49-71.

[4] The researcher knows of a teacher who informed the regime's Military Intelligence agency that she had seen a group of her students participating in the demonstrations, which led to their arrest and the death of some under torture. After the teacher received three warnings from the armed opposition, the students' relatives took their vengeance against her. Such social fissures have been repeated in many ways across the country, along with the rise of categorizations: *shabbīḥ* (regime-linked mercenaries), loyalist, *mundass* (infiltrator), opposition, armed popular committees, revolution hotbeds, and pro-regime areas.

[5] Azmi Bishara, *Syria 2011-2013: Revolution and Tyranny before the Mayhem* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2022).

system on the ground, where responding to the needs of the displaced had become an urgent priority. This included establishing shelters and providing food, medicine, blankets, clothing, and other essential items. As the flow of financial and relief aid into Syria increased, the need arose to restructure these initiatives and transfer them to local organizations, whether licensed or unlicensed, in order to facilitate the reception and management of international support, particularly European funding, which requires clear institutional frameworks.[6]

However, support from international organizations for initiatives to provide relief to displaced Syrians has not altered the fact that displacement is a form of family and societal fragmentation. As the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has noted, "due to the unprecedented violence in Syria, many families have lost their customary head of household, usually a male figure".[7] As a result, women and children now constitute a significantly a larger proportion of the displaced population than they did in the general pre-war population. This shift has exposed displaced families to unfamiliar economic challenges, forcing women to live and work in unsafe environments while also facing heightened vulnerability to social discrimination.[8]

Despite the abundance of research addressing various aspects of the Syrian conflict, the conditions of the Syrian family and the broader societal system, – and how they have been affected by the war – remain largely overlooked. Even feminist scholarship, which has critically examined the legal and societal systems that discriminate against women, has rarely addressed the impacts of injustices women endure within their own family structures. In short, academic research has continued to neglect the profound damage the conflict has inflicted on the structure of the Syrian family unit. This study addresses issues of safety and survival for Syrian families in areas affected by war and disaster, as well as the institutional strategies and approaches relevant to their support.

This study addresses two main questions. The first concerns Syrian families – whose members have experienced war, displacement, and their aftermath – require enhanced support within the framework of structural family values that reflect the traditions of Syrian society. This question is premised on the idea that a coherent system of values can assist societies in overcoming the psychological and behavioural repercussions of war. The second question examines the extent to which the initiatives of international donor organizations meet the needs of the Syrian family system and align with its cultural and societal contexts.

Methodology

This study examines quantitative and qualitative data[9] collected from a broad sample of Syrian society. A total of 1,210 questionnaires were were administered across various regions in northeastern, northwestern, and southern Syria, which were under the control of different *de facto* authorities until the fall of the Assad regime. These questionnaires focused on Syrian women and the extent to which war and violence have affected them as key members of their families. The analysis explored patterns of change in women's social and economic roles, as well as the impact of displacement and armed conflict on family stability.

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[6] M. Alkhalil et al., "An Analysis of Humanitarian and Health Aid Harmonisation over a Decade (2011-2019) of the Syrian Conflict," *BMJ Global Health*, vol. 9, no. 10 (2024).

[7] "Syrian Women-Headed Households: Hoping to Survive and Move on," UNFPA, *ReliefWeb* (2013), accessed on 12/11/2023, at: https://bit.ly/42YZlGc

[8] N. Gabiam, "When 'Humanitarianism' Becomes 'Development': The Politics of International Aid in Syria's Palestinian Refugee Camps," *American Anthropologist*, vol. 114, no. 1 (2012), pp. 95-107.

[9] *Violence Against Women and Girls in Syria: Laws, Knowledge, Awareness, Attitudes* (Paris: EuroMed Feminist Initiative, 2023).

Table (1): Quantitative Sample

Region, divided by *de facto* lines of control (prior to 8 December 2024)	Provinces	Sample Size	Margin of Error
Northeastern Syria	Hasaka, Deir Ezzor, Qamishli	404	±4.88%
Northwestern Syria	Aleppo, Latakia, Idlib, Hama	404	±4.88%
Southern Syria	Damascus region, Daraa, Suwayda	404	±4.88%

The author conducted 12 in-depth interviews with Syrians working in various fields, including the NGO sector, civil society, human rights, and academia. The interviews complement the survey data by providing a comparison between field oobservations and the perceptions of activists. As shown in the appendix, the qualitative sample included participants from across Syria and with diverse professional backgrounds, providing a comprehensive view of Syrian social reality in the shadow of the conflict. The interviews addressed topics including the impact of violence and displacement on families, the responses of international and local organizations to these challenges, and the potential for rebuilding family structures in the post-conflict phase.

The process of data collection entailed several challenges, most notably the difficulty of reaching some participants due to the security situation. This necessitated conducting repeated workshops to familiarize survey collectors with ethical research codes of conduct and including considerations related to data security and the safety of survey respondents, while simultaneously ensuring objectivity. The study employed the Kobo Toolbox data collection platform alongside paper questionnaires and adopted precise criteria for selecting the sample from areas under the control of various actors. Data specialists verified the data through multiple comparisons and detailed analyses of the results.

The Crisis of the Syrian Family and Its Transforming Roles

The immense suffering inflicted on the Syrian family due to the war has precipitated significant transformations in the societal structure of the Syrian family,[10] highlighting the importance of rebuilding social ties and restructuring the family to adapt to new reality.[11] The extensive literature on the family, which examines traditional family structure and the centrality of childbearing and domestic responsibilities in women's lives, provides a framework for understanding how post-war changes in Syria have impacted family dynamics. These changes reflect a tension between traditional notions of familial roles and the new responsibilities imposed by the exigencies of the war – challenges that are shaping long-standing family norms and giving rise to new, and in some cases unfamiliar, normative values and judgments.

Research indicates that a combination of three factors have imposed a new reality on Syrian women, placing them in the role of primary caregiver for an estimated one-third of families in Syria.[12] These factors are the departure of men through emigration, combat, death, or arrest; widespread displacement, which has compelled women to assume the role of breadwinner and enter the labour market; and deteriorating economic conditions. A 2017 World Bank report[13] indicated that the value of the Syrian pound plummeted

[10] Moosa Elayah & Fatima Al Majdhoub, "Framing Conflict in the Middle East: Yemen and Syria in European Media," in: *Europe and the MENA Region: Media Reporting, Humanitarianism, Conflict Resolution, and Peacebuilding* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2022), pp. 173-199.

[11] Heba Batainah & Michael De Percy, "Women, Peace and Security: What Can Participation mean for Syrian Women?" *Report*, Australian Civil-Military Centre (October 2021).

[12] "Syrian Women-Headed Households."

[13] World Bank Group, "The Toll of War: The Economic and Social Consequences of the Conflict in Syria," *Report*, 10/7/2017, accessed on 10/10/2023, at: https://bit.ly/41mSRzT

to its lowest level in history over the course of the conflict, rendering Syria one of the poorest countries in the Middle East and Africa. This situation has given rise to new patterns of livelihood previously unfamiliar to most Syrians, including illegal economic activities such as drug trafficking.

The first factor, the declining number of men in Syria, has had a significant impact on family dynamics and the overall balance of Syrian society. The *Financial Times* reported in 2019[14] that the number of men in Syria was declining due to the war. Citing UN estimates, the report noted that women in Syria had become the primary breadwinners for many families, reflecting a shift of gender roles that was unfamiliar to Syria's traditional society.

Historical experience demonstrate that wars often catalyze social transformations. Including shifts in gender roles and the expansion of women's rights. Progressive and feminist scholars have long argued that the aftermath of World War II prompted many European women to enter the workforce, significantly contributing to post-war economic recovery. This period saw women taking on roles traditionally reserved for men, such as policing and neighbourhood protection,[15] while also leveraging domestic skills to establish small enterprises – including bakeries and restaurants – to generate income for their families. These developments highlight the dual burden women carried, balancing new economic responsibilities with their ongoing caregiving roles.

But to what extent are the experience of women in Germany after World War II applicable to circumstances of Syrian women? What evidence indicates that Syrian women's entry into the labour market could yield gains in rights and freedoms comparable to those achieved by German women? Moreover, can the evolution of gender roles associated with Syrian women's labour market participation be understood without addressing the conceptual structure of the family? Finally, can we ignore the consequences for family balance when traditional gender divisions, deeply embedded in the fabric of Arab society, are broken?[16]

Indeed, the outcomes of women's labour often diverge significantly from those of men. For men, employment outside the home is framed as a natural extension of citizenship, granting access to political decision-making arenas. By contrast, women's participation in the workforce typically remains driven by necessity rather than by transformative change in the prevailing patriarchal order, which continues to enforce a division of roles between men and women.[17]

One interviewee, a university professor, said that before the war, it was rare to see a single woman working as a waitress in a restaurant or café in Syria. However, since the war, such scenes have become common, with girls and women even working at petrol stations or as truck drivers. In other words, Syrian women are now employed in occupations that were once strictly reserved for men in Syrian society. That said, testimonies indicate that women who assumed the role of primary breadwinner throughout the conflict have done so within a system ill-equipped to support their participation in the labour market, particularly in terms of providing the basic services necessary for survival.[18]

A second factor shaping the evolution of family dynamics is the phenomenon of displacement, which has profoundly disrupted the traditional role and status of women as mothers, daughters, sisters, and

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[14] Chloe Cornish, "Shortage of Men Sees more Syrian Women Enter Workforce in Damascus," *The Financial Times*, 25/1/2019, accessed on 6/2/2024, at: https://shorturl.at/anDE3

[15] Hester Vaizey, "Empowerment or Endurance? War Wives' Experiences of Independence During and after the Second World War in Germany 1939-1948," *German History*, vol. 29, no. 1 (2011).

[16] Fawzi Saleh al-Sharif & Ilham Omran al-Azabi, "al-Tanshiʾa al-Ijtimāʿiyya fī al-Usra al-ʿArabiyya fī Ẓill Taḍārub Adwār al-Marʾa al-ʿĀmila," *Al-Qurtas Journal*, vol. 9, no. 9 (2020).

[17] Mokhtar al-Haras, *Al-Marʾa wa-Ṣunʿ al-Qarār fī al-Maghrib* (Beirut: Edition Majd, 2008).

[18] Ashley Bandura & Mercedes Blackwood, "Women's Role in Achieving Sustainable Peace in Syria, A Policy Brief in the U.S. Civil Society Working Group on Women," U.S. CSWG, *Policy Brief*, 22/5/2018, accessed on 12/11/2023, at: https://bit.ly/4k5dqrJ

wives within Syrian society. Under pre-war familial and societal norms, women were protected within an environment governed by the authority of a father or husband, who ultimately held the reins of power. This hierarchical structure was reinforced both by cultural expectations of Syrian society and the provisions of personal status law, which positioned the extended kinship network as the primary protectors of women.

In response to a survey question about whether abused women in Syria seek help (and from whom) when they experience violence, more than half of the total sample (56%) said that women subjected to violence do not seek help, of whom 78% would turn to relatives for support. This suggests that displacement to areas where women do not have relatives would increase their vulnerability and the risk of experiencing violence, particularly in the absence of intervention by the law, police, or state institutions. This was politically motivated, justified by a desire to avoid disrupting the deeply rooted patriarchy attached to the Assad regime or acknowledging that women's affairs are extensions of Syria's conservative society.

Within this legal and societal context, displaced women become vulnerable to harassment and sexual exploitation simply to secure necessities. Perpetrators may even be part of the relief distribution system under government supervision. In this regard, an activist from Suwayda recounted incidents of harassment and extortion of displaced women by aid workers:

> Displaced women are often viewed as weaker and lacking protection, even from service providers, including Red Cross personnel. For example, gas merchants affiliated to the Syrian regime, exploit the needs of displaced women. We have documented cases of them harassing displaced women. They know that these women have no one to protect them.[19]

An activist working for a licensed organization in Damascus described the situation in similar terms: "Displaced women are exploited in some locations because they are not from the area and cannot speak out when they are subjected to violence".[20]

Displaced women face widespread discrimination, whether in queues at bakeries and aid distribution centres or when searching for jobs to support their children. Most of these women had never previously worked and had no experience in the labour market, yet they suddenly found themselves thrust into an unfamiliar social environment and an unjust, discriminatory economic dynamic. Labour laws in Syria were not designed to support women's employment, particularly in the private sector. This gap was exploited by employers, who hired many displaced women in factories or farms for low wages, without offering compensation for work-related injuries or retirement benefits. As a result, women were left vulnerable to the whims of their employers, who held unchecked power to set wages and terminate employment without accountability. Some displaced women faced multiple layers of discrimination in the labour market and hiring processes on the basis of gender, ethnicity, and class. In this context, one activist recalled witnessing ethnic discrimination against her Kurdish colleagues solely because of their ethnicity, leading to their exclusion from work: "My Kurdish colleagues are rejected by some employers simply because of their Kurdish background".[21]

Families being forced to flee at short notice have often left displaced women without official identification documents, making it difficult for them to register their children in schools, record births and deaths, or distribute inheritances. Divorce procedures are also complicated by documentation challenges and lack of coordination between various Syrian areas. For example, the failure to transfer a divorce certificate registered in northwestern Syria to government-controlled areas meant that, under Syrian law, a woman would remain legally married. This legal limbo could prevent her from obtaining official government

[19] Expert No. 8, author interview (remote), southern Syria, 16/1/2024.
[20] Expert No. 10, author interview (remote), southern Syria, 13/1/2024.
[21] Expert No. 9, author interview (remote), northwestern Syria, 17/1/2024.

records should she remarry and have more children. Moreover, a lawyer working in Damascus spoke about the forced marriage of women during the war and their exposure to sexual violence, saying: "All of these displaced women are vulnerable to discrimination and sexual violence, including early marriage and possibly forced sex trafficking. This threatens the security and stability of the family, whose female members are also vulnerable to pornography".[22]

The loss of family and community support when a woman is displaced is a fundamental factor in the disruption of the Syrian family structure. This underscores the responsibility of the state, law, and institutions to play an active role in protecting families and women. Relying on society alone to safeguard women has proven ineffective, in times of war and stability alike. This also applies when women enter the workforce as employers exploit women's circumstances, a situation made worse by the state's failure to enforce legal protections within the private sector, particularly concerning minimum wages, health insurance, and working hours.[23]

The third factor is that of poverty and economic decline, which has had grave consequences no less harmful than displacement. It has driven many to seek livelihoods through illicit activities previously unfamiliar to Syrians, such as drug and arms trafficking. A significant number of young men and women have become involved in drug distribution and consumption. This trend has been one driver behind recurring demonstrations in Suwayda since 17 August 2023. Protestors have demanded the expulsion of drug dealers from the area, raising banners that denounce the sale and consumption of drugs as a violation of the province's values and assault on its core moral principles.

An activist from Suwayda told the researcher that young women were targeted with Cyber Extortion and economic blackmail to coerce them into distributing drugs:

> I want to be clear: society is experiencing a violent moral shock. The rise of armed groups has led to exploitation of women and girls through a system of digital blackmail via social media, forcing them to participate in criminal activities such as kidnapping and drug distribution. One example comes from the city of Salkhad, where women and girls were blackmailed into working with an armed gang. When Military Security arrested some members of the gang, a Facebook page published inappropriate material, including photos both of underage girls and married women, retrieved from the gang members' mobile phones that exposed women who had been coerced into working with them. The release of this material enraged their families led to these women's abuse; there were reports that some of them were killed. Due to the closed nature of the city's society, the incident was covered up and our efforts to report on it or uncover the identities of the murdered women were blocked.[24]

Yet the anger expressed by Suwayda residents in their anti-drug demonstrations[25] is a crucial factor that could help lay the groundwork for rebuilding a moral family system by reinforcing societal values that reject such activities. Some studies indicate that young men and women in low-income communities are more likely to be drawn to delinquent peers.[26] However, the presence of families that raise their children well, even under conditions of poverty, can provide individuals with a reliable, solid foundation and a moral compass.[27] This demonstrates the importance of the family as a key pillar of resilience that must be

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[22] Expert No. 3, author interview (remote), southern Syria, 17/1/2024.

[23] Thuraya Aqsari, *Ishkāliyyat Khurūj al-Marʾa min al-Bayt wa-Dukhūlihā al-ʿAmal wa-l-Majāl al-ʿĀmm (al-Maghrib Anumūdhajan)* (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2019), p. 116.

[24] Expert No. 8, author interview (remote), southern Syria, 16/1/2024.

[25] "Bitafwīḍ min Ahālī al-Suwaydāʾ. Iʿtiqāl 4 Ashkhāṣ Ḍimna Ḥamlat Rijāl al-Karāma Ḍidd al-Mukhadarāt," *Althania (Youtube Channel)*, 26/1/2025, accessed on 10/2/2024, at: https://bit.ly/4170NUk

[26] Patrick H. Tolan, Nancy G. Guerra & Luisa R. Montaini-Klovdahl, "Staying out of Harm's Way: Coping and the Development of Inner-City Children," in: S. A. Wolchik & I. N. Sandler (eds.), *Handbook of Children's Coping: Linking Theory and Intervention* (New York: Plenum Press, 1997), pp. 453-479.

[27] Miguelina Germán, Nancy A. Gonzales & Larry Dumka, "Familism Values as a Protective Factor for Mexican-Origin Adolescents Exposed to Deviant Peers," *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, vol. 29, no. 1 (2009), pp.16-42.

supported to help societies move forward, particularly in light of the widespread and ongoing displacement currently affecting Syrian society.

The Effectiveness of Local Organizations in Supporting Syrian Families

> What is the point of educating women in our region that beating and insulting a woman is unacceptable, and that she has equal rights with men – when she is laughed at and mocked when reporting spousal assault to the police? In our training, supported by European organizations, we teach women that they have equal rights with their husbands, stirring up tensions within the family, yet there is no legal or governmental support for women's rights and demands.[28]

During this study, both male and female civil society activists in Syria repeatedly voiced similar concerns regarding the nature of projects funded by Western organizations.

It is undeniable that women in conflict zones require additional support, particularly given that women and children are often the groups most affected by war and disaster.[29] This has led to a global trend of supporting women in war zones, in line with United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 of 2000,[30] which established the Women, Peace, and Security agenda and called for its implementation in conflict zones and for allocation of significant fund to support this effort. In response, Western organizations began designing projects aligned with Resolution 1325, first to secure their share of core funding, and subsequently to set up intermediary organizations or groups in conflict zones to implement projects focused on economic, political, and human rights empowerment. These dynamics apply to organizations operating in Syria.

One cannot overlook the positive impact of such projects for Syrian women and, by extension, on other family members, as "women and girls are more vulnerable to poverty [than other groups]. In villages, they constitute more than half of the population, and their activities remain primarily linked to difficult household tasks, due to lack of fair and equal access to basic infrastructure".[31] Therefore, empowering women and ensuring they have equitable access to resources and opportunities serves the best interests of the family, provided that all family members are aware of, and understand, the meaning of partnership and the importance of equality between men and women in opportunities, rights, and responsibilities.

In this context, civil society has a valuable role to play in raising awareness of the importance of implementing state laws that regulate the process of community justice. Civil society can exert direct influence through programmes aimed at strengthening family cohesion and supporting individuals in facing the psychological and social challenges brought about by the war. As part of the social fabric, civil society possesses the knowledge and flexibility needed to navigate changes in family structure, making it an essential component in the process of building peace and societal stability.[32]

Alongside civil society, local organizations play an essential role in meeting the needs of affected communities. Owing to their proximity to the population and deep understanding of the cultural and social context, they are well-positioned to provide effective support tailored to the actual needs of families.[33] Their role complements that of civil society through the implementation of programmes that enhance families'

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[28] Expert No. 3, author interview (remote), southern Syria, 19/1/2024.

[29] Moosa Elayah, "*al-Ṣirāʿāt al-ʿArabiyya: al-Taṭawwurāt wa-l-Anmāṭ*," in: Ibrahim Fraihat (ed.), *Fahm al-Ṣirāʿāt al-ʿArabiyya* (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2024).

[30] United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 1325 (2000): Adopted by the Security Council at its 4213th meeting, on 31 October 2000," 31/10/2000, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: https://bit.ly/4b6XFfV

[31] Aqsari, p. 125.

[32] Alice Chancellor, "The Women Want the Fall of the (Gendered) Regime: In What Ways are Syrian Women Challenging State Feminism Through an Online Feminist Counterpublic?," *Cornell International Affairs Review*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2020), pp. 137-183.

[33] Moosa Elayah & Willemijn Verkoren, "Civil Society During War: The Case of Yemen," *Peacebuilding*, vol. 8, no. 4 (2020), pp. 476-498.

ability to adapt to the new reality and contribute to rebuilding trust, both among family members and between the family and the community.[34] To fulfil their role during and after conflict, local organizations rely on the financial, logistical, and technical support of international organizations. While this support is often crucial, it can pose challenges due to the insufficient adaptation to local contexts.

In fact, policies and programmes designed by international organizations may be misaligned to the social and cultural environment in which they operate, thereby reducing their effectiveness. This underscores the need to integrate the role of international organizations with that of local organizations and civil society in order to achieve reconstruction goals in an effective and sustainable manner.[35] Because international organizations base their agenda on UNSC Resolution 1325, feminist efforts add another dimension to this theoretical framework by emphasizing women's empowerment within the family and society. Feminism enhances the role of women in difficult circumstances as active participants in the peacebuilding process, particularly by empowering them to help create new family dynamics that are better adapted to and more responsive to the challenges brought about by war.[36]

Each of these components – community reconstruction, civil society, and local, international, and feminist organizations – forms part of an integrated system with the potential to contribute to a comprehensive reconstruction process. No component can operate in isolation; each contributes to creating an environment that supports the rebuilding of families and communities, while respecting their unique cultural and social contexts. The ultimate goal of this integrated approach is to achieve genuine and sustainable reconstruction, restoring dignity to individuals and cohesion to families.

Although local organizations have done important work in Syria, their activities remain unsustainable. Their existence, growth, and continuity depend on two factors. The first is the leniency or repressiveness of the security forces or *de facto* authorities. An example can be found in statistics from Impact Research[37] regarding organizations active in Syria up until 2021. In 2015, Daraa was home to as many as 50 organizations; however, this number swiftly dropped to ten after the Assad regime regained control of the governorate in 2018. The interests of the intelligence services are also intertwined with those of the government, as one activist in Suwayda pointed out:

> The regime refuses to license civil society organizations in Suwayda. Instead, it rejects, boycotts, and supresses them. In 2018, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour issued a decision prohibiting cooperation with civil society organizations in the province on matters related to combating violence against women except for the Syrian Trust for Development, which is licensed by the ministry. Accordingly, any lawyer found to have cooperated with civil society organizations in a pro bono defence for women is tried by the Bar Association. All the lawyers who work with us, both men and women, are subject to restrictions and are wanted by the [regime's] security agencies and the Palestine Branch.[38]

The second factor affecting the sustainability of local organizations in Syria is the issue of funding. Donors largely determine the programmes, projects, and activities of these organizations, making them dependent on donor's agendas and priorities. This can shift attention away from certain aspects of social work in favour of others.[39] It explains the imbalance in the activities of local organizations, where some aspects receive more attention depending on the amount of funding available, even if this comes at the expense

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[34] Rania Maktabi, "Female Citizenship under Authoritarian Rule in the Middle East: Baʿthist Syria and Beyond," *Bustan: The Middle East Book Review*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2018), pp. 157-175.

[35] R. B. Khoury, "Aid, Activism, and the Syrian War," PhD Dissertation, Northwestern University, Northwestern, 2021.

[36] Ayşegül Gökalp Kutlu, "The Gender of Migration: A Study on the Syrian Migrant Women in Turkey," *Kadın/Woman 2000, Journal for Women's Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2020), pp. 21-38.

[37] "List of Syrian CSOs: 2020-2021 Mapping," *Impact Research*, accessed on 18/9/20, at: https://acr.ps/1L9zQEt

[38] Expert No. 8, author interview (remote), southern Syria, 16/1/2024.

[39] Moosa Elayah, Q. Gaber & M. Fenttiman, "From Food to Cash Assistance: Rethinking Humanitarian Aid in Yemen," *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*, vol. 7, no. 11 (2022).

of actual human needs. The neglect of people and society stems from neoliberalism, which enshrines "the desperate defence of capital as an absolute value".[40] Furthermore, "the deep nature of the neoliberal model lies in the prioritization of the market over people, society, or the environment, which is what Thomas Frank calls the ideology of 'One Market Under God'."[41]

Impact Research's statistics show that between 2020 and 2021, the number of active local organizations in Syria reached 934. However, only 16 of these organizations specialized in working with children. In contrast, the number of relief and charitable organizations, as well as those specializing in women's empowerment, is increasing. Interviewees attributed the high number of women's empowerment projects to the availability of funding. Their initiatives ranged from integrating women into the labour market through vocational training aimed at providing a potential source of income, to raising legal awareness and enhancing women's ability to navigate official procedures. This includes obtaining government documents, proving customary marriages, registering children in the civil registry, and securing inheritance for themselves or their children in cases involving the loss of a father or husband.

Although respondents acknowledged the presence of many organizations dedicated to women's empowerment, the survey results revealed a discrepancy in awareness of various types of violence among women of differing education levels: 27% among women with low education, 51% with intermediate education, and 65% with higher education. When respondents were asked about the extent to which organizations in Syria met their needs for legal support relative to psychological support, they expressed limited recognition of the effectiveness and legal presence of women's support organizations, with only 28% of the total sample reporting that such services were being provided. This percentage varied across regions, with the most pessimistic responses recorded in Hasaka (6%), Qamishli (14%), and Daraa (7%), indicating that the organizations dedicated to women's empowerment fell short of meeting needs.

The difficulty of conducting scholarly research on Syria prior to the revolution and the war – because researchers are required to adhere to regulations imposed by security and intelligence agencies – has resulted in a dearth of statistics and studies on the issue of violence against women. This, in turn, has made it challenging to conduct comparative research to assess the situation of women before and during the war.

The data underpinning the current study show that the rate violence experienced by Syrian women varies across regions: 71% in northwest Syria, 66% in northeast Syria, and 69% in southern Syria. However, these figures must be approached with caution: Nearly half of Syrians are female, and they suffer additional forms of violence beyond the political and economic violence endured by both men and women. This reflects a deeper rupture in the family system, raising questions about the extent to which international organizations – and the local ones they fund – are committed to supporting the Syrian family system during times of crisis and war.

Are these organizations providing services to reunite families and preserve the social values necessary to rebuild society and social institutions? Such services might include launching educational programmes for the generation raised during the war, including mental health programmes; war trauma treatment; and behavioural and cognitive therapies to address generational gaps, identity fragmentation, integration into traditional societal affiliations, and alignment of new affiliations in host communities. Equally important are development projects aimed at narrowing the class disparities exacerbated by the war, addressing its impact on race relations, and responding to its consequences for children and their families. Behavioural and psychological projects to enhance self-confidence and foster psychological and physical resilience among the war generation are also crucial in this regard.

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[40] al-Hussain Shakrani, *Ḥuquq al-Ajyāl al-Muqbila bi-l-Ishāra ilā al-Awḍāʿ al-ʿArabiyya* (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2018), p. 96.

[41] Murad Diyani, *Ḥurriyyah – Musāwāt – Indimāj Ijtimāʿī: Naẓariyyat al-ʿAdāla fī al-Namūdhaj al-Librālī al-Mustadām* (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2014), pp. 50-54.

Most interviewees questioned the ability of international organizations to understand the cultural context of Syrian society and to address the needs of individuals and families in a manner that is appropriate to that context. They argued that it is impossible to pursue feminist goals by empowering women to understand their rights while leaving their male counterparts uninformed. An academic and instructor at Damascus University suggested that, at times, it may be necessary to circumvent the agenda of the donor organization. She conducts European-funded training sessions in which she incorporates elements aligned with the traditional context, such as encouraging women to recognize the traditional role of men in Syrian society, to understand that change cannot occur overnight, and to be aware of their rights while exercising diplomacy.[42]

Another activist shared her experience of adapting the Syrian societal context to align with the agenda of a European donor organization. She argued that the issue with the project in question began with its title, "*My Body Is Mine*" – a European formulation which she believed would provoke backlash from Syrians, both men and women, as it encourages women to assert bodily autonomy in a way that could be culturally provocative. In response, she transformed the Arabic title into: "*I Am Not a Piece of Cloth*!". This allowed her to reframe the project's goal around the issue of how women are judged based on their clothing. The girls and women in the campaign wore clothes in various styles, including traditional rural attire, allowing rural women to assert: "I wear rural clothes, but I am educated". Similarly, girls wore hijabs to express that they were both veiled and modern. The activist said:

> We shared the campaign on social media under the title "*I Am Not a Piece of Cloth*" and invited people to send in photos expressing the same concept. During the campaign, we also received photos and messages from young men, saying that they too were judged based on their appearance. For example, one young man shared that he was mocked because of his long hair, with people calling him "*ṭanṭ*" [a derogatory term implying effeminacy or homosexuality]. Another man working as a truck driver and porter sent a photo of himself dressed in shabby clothes, accompanied by the message: "I am a porter, but my children are studying at university".[43]

In this respondent's opinion, the campaign was successful because it did not clash with Syrian society's limitations on women's freedom to claim bodily autonomy, an inviolable principle with deeply rooted religious and social conceptual roots. However, the organization would not have been able to secure funding had it not manipulated the campaign' title to align with local values. Such efforts remain rare and are largely individual initiatives, driven by the awareness of activists rather than that by international donor bodies.

Overall, both elements – the conflict between civil society organizations and the authorities, and the mismatch between the programmes these organizations attempt to implement on the ground in Syria and the agendas of European donor organizations, hinder the efforts of civil society organizations to carry out projects that meet the needs of Syrian society in general, and families in particular. The funding and logistical support are among the most important factors influencing civil society work in terms of impact. Nevertheless, this factor, which can serve as an obstacle to the work of organizations and civil society, is frequently overlooked.[44]

Local Knowledge Production and Its Discontents

Young Syrians have been navigating a digital revolution and a popular uprising since 2011, giving rise to new understandings of affiliation and behaviour, particularly a sense of belonging to what Manuel Castells describes as a "network society". One defining feature of such a society is the tension between identities

[42] Expert No. 10, author interview (remote), southern Syria, 13/1/2024.

[43] Expert No. 2, author interview (remote), northwestern Syria, 9/1/2024.

[44] Hussam Shehadeh, *al-Mujtamaʿ al-Madanī* (Damascus: Bayt al-Muwatin li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawziʿ, 2015), pp. 37-39.

rooted in place and those shaped by networks that transcend spatial barriers.[45] For this generation, affiliations stem from the convergence of digital network flows and a sense of belonging to primary communities, which have been reshaped by the post-revolutionary dynamics in Syria. As such, these generations are simultaneously connected to, and distanced from, both affiliations.

This hybridization produces what Darren Barney calls "network identities", where differences and commonalities generate a diversity of behaviour and affiliations.[46] These identities and societal conditions may obscure the concept of citizenship for a generation that has grown up amid war, witnessed the injustice and corruption of ruling institutions, and seen their failure to improve the population's economic well-being. This is compounded by experiences of displacement, migration, and the disintegration of family structures in which stereotypical roles have shifted, with mothers and, at times, even children assuming responsibility for the family's livelihood.

There is an urgent need to strengthen the cohesion of societal values, customs, and behaviours to ensure the continuity and vitality of the family and, subsequently, to ensure the moral and behavioural well-being of individuals and national institutions. Reconstruction, relief, and empowerment efforts in Syria cannot succeed without concurrent efforts to strengthen the identities of the younger generation and support their behavioural orientation and emerging affiliations toward sustainable social and national development.

The 1987 Brundtland Report on sustainable development[47] addressed the need to consider the social dimension as a pillar of sustainable development. Sustainable development is linked to social capital, represented by the relationships and networks formed among people, the degree of trust shared between them, and the associated challenges of discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization.[48] In the context of war, disaster, community reconstruction, and family support, local research in the countries affected can provide a body of knowledge steering governments toward both institutional and human development and sustainability.

Overcoming societal emergencies and crises requires cooperation with the family itself. For instance, it was important – as one research has concluded – to promote Mexican family values to shape adolescents' behaviour and their interaction with institutional systems and policies, thereby meeting the external environment's demands for appropriate behaviour. It was essential to devise methods, approaches, and tools that support family values, given the family's role in addressing problems associated with adolescent behaviour, particularly within the school context.[49]

European research in the context of wars and disasters has also addressed the importance of family stability, in a field now recognized as Family Studies. For instance, scholars have studied the effects of the Second World War on the generations that lived through it, examining symptoms of stress, post-traumatic stress disorder, and the loss of a sense of security, as well as the resulting behavioural and psychological problems.[50] Other studies have focused on the epigenetic impact (changes in gene expression due to environmental

[45] Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 11-48.

[46] Darin Barney, *al-Mujtamaʿ al-Shabakī* (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2015), pp. 179-204.

[47] *Our Common Future: The World Commission on Environment and Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[48] Ibrahim al-Issawi, *al-ʿAdāla al-Ijtimāʿiyya wa-l-Namādhij al-Tanmawiyya: Maʿ Ihtimām Khāṣṣ bi-Ḥālat Miṣr wa-Thawratihā* (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2014), p.150.

[49] Germán, Gonzales & Dumka, pp. 16-42.

[50] See also: Gail Agronick et al., "New York City Young Adults' Psychological Reactions to 9/11: Findings from the Reach for Health Longitudinal Study," *American Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 39. no. 1-2 (2007), pp. 79-90; Kimberly A. Ehntholt & William Yule, "Practitioner Review: Assessment and Treatment of Refugee Children and Adolescents Who have Experienced War-Related Trauma," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, vol. 47, no. 12 (2006), pp. 1197-1210; Fawzyiah Hadi, Maria Magdalena Llabre & Susan Spitzer, "Gulf War-Related Trauma and Psychological Distress of Kuwaiti Children and their Mothers," *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, vol. 19, no. 5 (2006), pp. 653-662; Roberta J. Apfel & Bennett Simon, *Minefields in Their Hearts: The Mental Health of Children in War and Communal Violence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

factors) of wars and disasters, including the epigenetic impact of the famine that hit Germany between 1916 and 1918 on the children and grandchildren of those who lived through it when they were 8-12 years old.[51] Such findings are now incorporated into policy and practice in German family affairs, informing ongoing evaluations of services provided to families in the areas of healthcare for children with disabilities and young children in kindergartens, and the extent of the positive and negative impacts on family structures in Germany.

Other studies have addressed the issue of maintaining positive behavioural modes that were prevalent before the war, and the role they can play in overcoming post-traumatic conditions.[52] Some studies have focused on monitoring stress-related growth, transformational adaptation,[53] and post-traumatic growth by observing the ability of those exposed to war and disaster-related trauma to identify and adhere to values[54] that provide stability during times of acute stress. This research has focused on the dissemination of positive societal images experienced or created during the war, such as community solidarity and mechanisms of civic engagement. The promotion of such values contributes to enhancing resilience and resistance among peoples, helping them to survive and find new outlets in war. Another comparative study covering the period of World War II, concluded that all age groups recover from poor physical growth once their conditions improve through post-war health and social welfare programmes.[55]

Such studies have not remained confined to library shelves; they have been used to shape the policies of Western institutions and governments toward building stable societies. This perspective contributed to the emergence of the *Gemeentilijke Gezondheidsdienst* (GGD), the municipal health service in the Netherlands.[56] Branches of this institution were set up in each municipality to address children's mental, physical, and behavioural health issues. From birth, every child and their family are connected to their local GGD, which oversees vaccinations and monitors developmental milestones both at home and in school. The GGD also assigns specialists to schools; if any concerning behaviour or developmental issue are observed, the specialist communicates with the family to coordinate support for the child. In cases of parental separation or the death of a family member, for example, the specialist intervenes to spare the child psychological trauma that could negatively affect their behaviour.

Some may argue that it is still too early to conduct similar research on Syrian family affairs, given that the country remains in a state of conflict. However, the studies cited above, and the pressing needs of families and society in Syria,[57] demonstrate that it is imperative to begin developing a vision for studying family affairs in Syria. It is equally important to establish and operationalize Arab institutions dedicated to producing research relevant to Syria's current context. Such efforts are essential for recovery and strategic human development capable of advancing the building of a society resilient to crises, including the normalization of drug trafficking or the distortion of religious and moral values into drivers of extremism.

Moreover, the rebuilding of family and community institutions through effective projects and initiatives must be grounded in local research. Development programmes currently led and funded by international organizations are largely based on studies conducted in Western or African societies with past experiences of war and disaster.

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[51] Gerard J. van den Berg & Pia R. Pinger, "A Validation Study of Transgenerational Effects of Childhood Conditions on the Third Generation Offspring's Economic and Health Outcomes Potentially Driven by Epigenetic Imprinting," *Discussion Paper*, no. 7999, IZA (Feb. 2014), accessed on 3/10/2023, at: https://bit.ly/3CZpREN

[52] Stephen Joseph, P. Alex Linley & George James Harris, "Understanding Positive Change Following Trauma and Adversity: Structural Clarification," *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2005), pp. 83-96.

[53] Carolyn Aldwin, *Stress, Coping, and Development: An Integrative Perspective* (New York: Guilford Press, 1994).

[54] Tolan, Guerra & Montaini-Klovdahl, pp. 453-479.

[55] Noël Cameron, "Child Growth and Armed Conflict," *Annals of Human Biology*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2023).

[56] "Wat doet een GGD," *GGD GHOR Nederland*, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: https://bit.ly/3EH7Bkh

[57] Shatha Dhafer al-Jundi, "*Ba'd 7 Sanawāt Ḥarb: al-Usra al-Sūriyya Bayn al-Tafakkuk al-Ijtimā'ī wa-l-Nuzūḥ wa-l-Lujū'*," *Jiroun*, 11/12/2017, accessed on 7/1/2024, at: https://bit.ly/41jUZZ1

This framework, shaped by various experiences, renders such programmes foreign, and perhaps even alien, to Arab (and specifically Syrian) society. It is also important to give research centres an active role in protecting the interests of future generations. While international laws and conventions prioritize the protection of children during disasters and conflicts, the Arab world – embroiled in wars and internal conflicts often fuelled by regional and international forces – has failed to uphold this principle. Instead, Arab children are frequently dragged into conflicts, in violation of International Humanitarian Law and the broader human rights framework.[58]

One of the participants in the current study, a feminist writer with extensive experience in social work, likewise emphasized the importance of fostering knowledge production within Arab research institutions and through experts and researchers who come from the same Arab context, arguing that Arab researchers are better equipped to understand the region's realities, contexts, and needs. She added that local Syrian organizations often face challenges in their interactions with international organizations, as they risk being treated as tools for implementation rather than sources of knowledge. As the participant put it:

> Even when we are commissioned to conduct research, our role is limited to data collection within Syria on violence against Syrian women, for example. As for producing research-based knowledge, that remains off limits to us; it is entrusted exclusively to European research organizations. This is deeply painful, as it forms the basis for conclusions that are often misaligned with the actual needs and realities of our societies.[59]

Conclusion

Bashar al-Assad's flight from Syria on 8 December 2024 sparked widespread debate about how to navigate the country's next political and economic phase, including reconstruction, peacebuilding, and transitional justice. However, little attention has been devoted to the recovery of the Syrian family. The findings of this study underscore the need for such attention, showing that Syrian society continues to face numerous challenges related to families and women, chief among them the dilemmas of displacement, which has fragmented the Syrian family system. This necessitates substantial efforts to promote recovery from the psychological shocks and behavioural disruptions suffered by women, children, and men alike.[60]

This study has shown that the prolonged war in Syria has profoundly impacted family and social structures, dismantling the fundamental bonds that once underpinned social cohesion. It has also highlighted the urgent need to provide psychosocial support to affected individuals and communities. As international organizations strive to address the resulting challenges, it is essential to consider the unique cultural and social fabric of Syrian society. Insufficient attention to these factors has diminished the effectiveness of such efforts, despite good intentions. In this context, greater sensitivity to cultural and social dynamics would enhance the adaptability and relevance of these initiatives, aligning them more closely with the actual needs of Syrian society. Adopting such an approach would not only accelerate post-war recovery but also reinforce societal values that benefit all members of the society.

Public policies must therefore be developed to support families and society to promote positive values, rebuilding the social fabric, and to consolidating the concepts of citizenship, identity, and belonging. Civil

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[58] Shakrani, pp. 380-396.

[59] Expert No. 7, author interview (remote), northwestern Syria, 18/1/2024.

[60] Boshra Al Ibraheem et al., "The Health Effect of the Syrian Conflict on IDPs and Refugees," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, vol. 23, no. 2 (2017), p. 140; Eran Bendavid et al., "The Effects of Armed Conflict on the Health of Women and Children," *The Lancet*, vol. 397, no. 10273 (2021), pp. 522-532; Hazem Ghassan Abdo, "Impacts of War in Syria on Vegetation Dynamics and Erosion Risks in Safita Area, Tartous, Syria," *Regional Environmental Change*, vol. 18, no. 6 (2018), pp. 1707-1719; Aleksandar Kešeljević & Rok Spruk, "Estimating the Effects of Syrian Civil War," *Empirical Economics*, vol. 66, no. 2 (2024), pp. 671-703.

society organizations must also be empowered and granted the opportunity to implement projects that align with the social context they serve, while also liberating them from the constraints of authoritarianism and subservience to the agendas of Western-funded organizations. Such empowerment would allow civil society to function more effectively and generate a truly positive impact on society, responding to the needs of the population in ways that are compatible with their cultural and social realities.

Arab funding organizations should be established, with civil policies and agendas tailored to specific Arab societal contexts to support the activities of local civil society organizations serving families and affected communities in the Arab world. This requires combined efforts by various actors: intellectuals, policymakers, researchers, and civil society activists. Furthermore, dedicated research centres should be established to study the effects of war on families, focusing on qualitative, quantitative, descriptive, and field studies of emerging phenomena resulting from wars and disasters. Such research would enhance the quality of public policy and produce support strategies that align with the cultural specificities of each society. These research centres would also offer deeper insight into the changing needs of families and the challenges involved in community reconstruction and broader development processes. The resulting research would help develop the activities and initiatives of organizations working to support affected communities. In this regard, it is also essential to enhance cooperation between research centres, universities, and international academic institutions, to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise.

Appendix: Interviewees

Expert's Specialization	Location of Activity	*De Facto* Authority	Organization Code	Gender	Date of Interview	Expert Number
Director of an organization working with women and children, providing legal workshops, and running awareness-raising campaigns addressing gender-based violence, as well as providing support to affected women	NW Syria	Opposition	1M	Female	12 January 2024	1
Social activist focusing on socio-economic support, cultural advocacy, and assisting displaced women	NW Syria	Opposition	2M	Female	9 January 2024	2
Legal expert and scholar on the challenges of legal representation in cases of gender-based violence; activist advocating for legal reforms	Southern Syria	Government	3M	Male	19 January 2024	3
Administrative employee of an organization active in SDF-held areas of Hasaka, Qamishli and Raqqa, which organizes initiatives on peacebuilding and community dialogue on women's issues	NE Syria	Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)	4M	Female	22 January 2024	4

Human rights activist and director of a legal organization; discusses community resilience programmes and advocacy for women's rights	Mid Syria	Government	5M	Male	6 January 2024	5
Journalist and lawyer, covers challenges of advocacy and provides legal support to victims of gender-based violence	Southern Syria	Government	6M	Male	8 January 2024	6
Founder of an economic empowerment programme in northwestern Syria that trains displaced women to manage their affairs in their host areas	NW Syria	Opposition	7M	Female	18 January 2024	7
Founder and director of an organization operating in southern Syria, dedicated to empowering women in political leadership and running awareness campaigns on women's rights	Southern Syria	Government	8M	Male	16 January 2024	8
Coordinator of a programme focusing on community education, promoting legal literacy, and addressing gender-based violence among rural women	NW Syria	Opposition	9M	Female	7 January 2024	9
University lecturer and trainer in professional skills and economic resilience to support women's financial independence	Southern Syria	Government	10M	Female	13 January 2024	10
Social worker providing trauma counselling and psychological support to women affected by violence	NE Syria	SDF	11M	Female	5 January 2024	11
Founder of an organization caring for widows and orphans	Coastal Syria	Government	12M	Female	10 January 2024	12

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