

CROSS BORDER AND CROSS LINE

PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN
NORTH WEST SYRIA



Women leaders in
Northwest Syria
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ACRONYMS

Accountability To Affected Populations (AAP)
Action For Humanity (AFH)
Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)
Gender-Based Violence (GBV)
Government of Syria (GoS)
Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP)
Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

International Non-Government Organisation (INGO)
Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)
Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT)
Syria Cross-border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF)
Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC)
UN Monitoring Mechanism (UNMM)
United Nations (UN)
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian

Affairs (OCHA)
United Nations Security Council (UNSC)
Whole of Syria (WoS)
Women-Led Organisations (WLOs)
Women's Advisory Group (WAG)
Women's Rights Organisations (WROs)

“THE CONTEXT HAS SHIFTED FOR WOMEN. WE HAVE ACHIEVED A LEVEL OF SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT, CONNECTING WITH PEOPLE AND ATTEMPTING TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE. NOW, WE ARE RETURNING TO DISCUSSING THE STORY OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISTRIBUTION OR RELIEF PACKAGES TO NORTHWEST SYRIA?”

“CONFLICTS OVER RESOURCES AND AID WILL ARISE, AS WE HAVE WITNESSED IN SEVERAL CAMPS, LEADING TO DISPUTES, ARMED CONFRONTATIONS, AND CASUALTIES. SERVICES COULD LOSE IMPARTIALITY, FOCUSING ON SPECIFIC AREAS, LEADING TO RESOURCE CONFLICTS BETWEEN REGIONS. WITH LIMITED RESOURCES, CONFLICTS AND DISPUTES ARE LIKELY TO ARISE.”

INTRODUCTION

This briefing addresses the consequences and implications of United Nations (UN) negotiations on delivering assistance and protection into North West Syria with parties to the armed conflict from the perspective of women and girls living and working in that region. The failure to reach consensus in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2672, on 10 July 2023, has impacted on UN humanitarian access to 2.7 million Syrians through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing point. The UN's negotiations for access to Northwest Syria on the basis of approval and control by a key party to the conflict, the Government of Syria (GoS), has major implications for both how the UN is perceived, and for the terms of how aid and protection are delivered to communities caught up in the conflict and living in that part of the country.

Produced by Action For Humanity (AFH), in partnership with the Women's Advisory Group (WAG), and in consultation with nearly 270 women in Northwest Syria, this briefing documents the perspectives and concerns of Syrian women and girls living there, and women active in civil society on the ground, and outlines recommendations based on their views and priorities. Throughout this report, we will use the term 'women's value in society' in place of 'gender equality' to better align with the preferred terminology of women that we consulted with on this report living and working in North West Syria, who often refer to progress for women in these terms.

With a population of 4.5 million people, 90% of whom receive humanitarian assistance, civilians - including women and girls - in Northwest Syria are currently heavily reliant on cross-border delivery of humanitarian assistance, protection and other forms of support. Through the cross-border mechanism, which was introduced and mandated in July 2014 by UNSC resolution 2165,³ the UN has facilitated vital support², ensuring that each month, 2.7 million individuals have access to essentials, including medicines, clean water, food, nutrition assistance, shelter materials, and protection services.⁴ The UN-mandated access model provided the legal framework for channelling funds through the UN system to support Syrian civil society organisations, including through partnerships with UN agency partnerships and through allocations via the Syria Cross-border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF).⁵ This support includes grants to Syrian NGOs, including direct and indirect support to women-led organisations (WLOs) and women's rights organisations (WROs).⁶

The inability of the UNSC to reach agreement on a renewal to the UNSC Resolution authorising the cross-border mechanism has led to the UN negotiating an agreement with the Government of Syria (GoS) on the UN's authority to conduct cross-border operations into Northwest Syria through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing.⁷ We will refer to this as the current political "GoS consent model" of operation. This arrangement has bypassed the deadlock within the UN Security Council on a Resolution guaranteeing cross-border support to people in Northwest Syria.⁸ This arrangement, initially declared by the GoS on July 13, 2023, allows the UN to deliver humanitarian assistance to Northwest Syria for six months, starting from July 13, 2023, until January 13, 2024.⁹

This has fundamentally changed the legal and political basis upon which the UN response is authorised.¹⁰ Negotiations on cross-border aid delivery into Northwest Syria can also only be understood in the context of deliberations on cross-line aid efforts, which constitutes aid delivered by agencies based in GoS-controlled parts of Syria and overseen by GoS linked actors, such as the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC). There is currently a lack of clarity around the current cross-line modality, as well as plans by the UN to take this forward.¹¹

We recognise the complex challenges that the UN faces, particularly when dealing with the aftermath of intricate political negotiations within the UNSC. The report documents the perspectives and concerns of Syrian women and girls living in Northwest Syria and women active in civil society, providing recommendations to inform decision-making within the UN and among influential governments, donors, and civil society organizations (CSOs), both national and international. We hope that the insights we provide will contribute to informed decision-making not only within the UN but also among influential governments, donors, civil society organisations (CSOs), both national and international.

Specifically, Our Findings Highlight:

- The Current 'GoS Consent' Framework is Perceived by Women as Compromising the Reputation of the UN System and Agencies, and the Principled Nature of Delivery of Assistance and Services, in Northwest Syria
- Women are Concerned that Hard-won Gains on 'Women's Value' and Active Participation in Society in Northwest Syria Could be Undermined by the Current Model
- Women Anticipate Negative Consequences in Terms of Access, Funding and Operational Space for Local Civil Society, Including Women's Organisations and Networks, in Northwest Syria
- Women See Potential for Increased Conflict Both Within Northwest Syria and the Wider Region Linked to the Withdrawal of UN-led Humanitarian Operations
- Women's Awareness of Legal and Political Mechanisms that Influence Cross-border Assistance is Gendered and Linked to Education Opportunities

THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN NORTHWEST SYRIA

Approximately 90% of Syrians now experience poverty, largely due to the absence of progress towards a political solution and the protracted nature of the conflict.¹² This humanitarian situation has intensified over recent years, leading to increased rates of malnutrition,¹³ the first cholera outbreak in over a decade,¹⁴ and the exposure of Syrian families to the effects of climate change, with hotter summers and unpredictable winters further exacerbating the difficult situation.¹⁵ The catastrophic earthquake in February 2023 further compounded these challenges, displacing families and further damaging critical infrastructure.¹⁶ Funding has also fallen dramatically in recent years. The Syria Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) currently requires an estimated \$5.41 billion in funding but has received only \$1.59 billion so far, resulting in a coverage rate of just 29.4%.¹⁷

The protracted nature of the conflict in Syria has also brought about gendered impacts that significantly compound the challenges faced by all segments of society, including women, girls, men, and boys.¹⁸ These burdens have disproportionately fallen on marginalised groups, with women and girls facing heightened risks.¹⁹ The earthquake, which struck southern and central Turkey and northern and western Syria on 6 February 2023, further exacerbated these challenges, with women and girls facing specific gender-related issues including an increase in gender-based violence (GBV), increased caring responsibilities, further limited access to education and skills development, and economic constraints which have led to an increase in women seeking low wage or undignified work. Additionally, older women and women with disabilities faced unique challenges that often go unaddressed. Exclusion from decision-making processes remains a significant challenge, which further perpetuates gender disparities.²⁰

Despite these challenges, it's worth noting that women have become increasingly active and visible during the earthquake response, serving as first responders and playing critical roles in ongoing relief efforts. This shift in dynamics presents an opportunity to harness and channel

women's newfound leadership roles towards broader peacebuilding and community development initiatives.²¹

Background on the UN Security Council Border Mechanism

The UN Security Council's border mechanism for the delivery of assistance and services into Syria, established under Resolution 2165 in July 2014, was created in response to the challenging humanitarian situation in Syria.²² This mechanism allowed for the delivery of humanitarian assistance into non-government-controlled parts of Syria without requiring the consent of the Government of Syria (GoS). Over the years, this mechanism has undergone several revisions and renewals.²³

Up until July 2020, the UNSC mandated four border crossings for the UN cross-border humanitarian assistance delivery mechanism into Syria.²⁴ These border crossings were authorised through various resolutions, which allowed UN agencies and humanitarian partners to use Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa on the Syrian-Turkish border, Al-Yarubiyah on the Syrian-Iraqi border, and Al-Ramtha on the Syrian-Jordanian border for the delivery of crucial support to populations throughout Syria.²⁵ However, as of 2020, the number of authorised border crossings was reduced from four to just one, with only Bab al-Hawa remaining authorised.²⁶ In July 2022, the Bab al-Hawa mechanism's mandate was reduced from 12 months to 6 months.²⁷

In the initial days following the earthquakes, there was a notable delay in providing vital humanitarian assistance and supporting search and rescue teams. This delay was partly attributed to the damage to the Bab al-Hawa border crossing, which limited access. Additionally, there were concerns about using alternative border crossings not officially authorised by the Security Council.²⁸ On February 13, the GoS consented to open the Bab al-Salam and al-Ra'i border crossings for operational access. Access through the Bab al-Salam and al-Ra'ee border crossings has since been extended until 13 November.²⁹

Cross-Border and Cross-line Delivery Modalities Represent two Distinct Approaches to Providing Humanitarian Assistance to Different Regions of Syria.³⁰

- Cross-border delivery, exemplified by the use of the Bab al-Hawa and the Bab al-Salam border crossings, allows the UN to provide assistance and services directly into Northwest Syria from neighbouring countries.³¹ The primary advantage of this modality is its ability to bypass regions controlled by the GoS, which has been historically characterised by political complexities.
- Cross-line delivery entails directing humanitarian assistance through areas controlled by the GoS. There are concerns with adopting cross-line modalities, including community acceptance, conflict sensitivity in delivery of assistance, risk management, monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and transparency.³²

Following the recent uptick in violence on multiple fronts, which are further impacted by the alarming developments in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the region, spillover into Syria is not just a risk; it has

already begun.³³ A refocus on credible political processes that work towards a framework that enables the Syrian people to realise their legitimate aspirations, in line with Security Council resolution 2254, is essential.³⁴



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Northwest Syria
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RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research uncovered varied awareness among women regarding the legal and political processes that underpin cross-border assistance delivery. Despite this disparity, common concerns emerged about the impacts of transitioning from UNSC authorisation to a consent-based model. A substantial portion of surveyed women (65%) were aware of the UNSC border mechanism, but an overwhelming 93% recognised its vital importance. These women acknowledge the UNSC resolution as a contributor to advancing the value of women, bolstering their active roles in society, and promoting community stability.

THE CURRENT 'GOS CONSENT' FRAMEWORK IS PERCEIVED BY WOMEN AS COMPROMISING THE REPUTATION OF THE UN SYSTEM AND AGENCIES, AND THE PRINCIPLED NATURE OF DELIVERY OF ASSISTANCE AND SERVICES, IN NORTHWEST SYRIA

- Women emphasised that cross-border operations are still the best way to reach communities who need assistance and services. Any shifts in operational models need to be in complementarity to cross-border operations.
- Women express concerns about a lack of clarity surrounding the GoS consent model and also the current cross-line modality. They raised apprehensions over community acceptance, monitoring modalities, risk mitigation and politicisation.
- Women expressed concerns about the lack of assurances against an arbitrary withdrawal of consent, or non-renewal by the GoS, and underscored that the arrangement lacks sustainability.
- Women are concerned that the UN has not yet provided clarity on how the cooperation and coordination with the GoS will function under the GoS consent model, particularly surrounding access restrictions that may limit their work.
- Women's concerns extend to the limited consultation surrounding the negotiation process between the UN and GoS, as well as the absence of consultations with affected populations, including women and girls, and local organisations, including WROs and WLOs. Additionally, among the women who were aware of UN-led consultations, they unanimously emphasised the need for consultations to be more comprehensive and substantial in addressing these critical issues.

- Women are concerned about the ambiguities surrounding the future of the Whole of Syria architecture with the regional leadership base in Amman, and the preservation of the autonomy, independence, and integrity of the northwest Syria response, including the protection of information of affected populations and Syrian humanitarian workers.

- Women are concerned that the current GoS consent model could lead to increased political manipulation of aid delivery; undermining the impartiality of humanitarian assistance and further compromising the space for protection efforts, particularly in limiting civil unrest.

- Women cited past experiences of how access for humanitarian, development or other kinds of programming (including women's rights) was obstructed and manipulated during the conflict. In their experience, agreements reached with one side of the conflict (in contrast to the previous UNSC agreement governing cross-border aid delivery) represent a heightened risk of such obstruction and manipulation.

- Women emphasised the persistent challenges related to access from GoS during emergencies, which have been observed in both the earthquake aftermath and the delivery of assistance to government-held areas to deliver humanitarian assistance. This historical pattern with the regime raises concerns about the potential reemergence of similar barriers, which could impede the effective distribution of assistance.

- The uncertainty caused and risks of principled aid delivery being compromised by the "GoS consent model" may undermine donor confidence in sustaining humanitarian funding.

- Some women highlighted the importance of the UN's role in ensuring accountability for the delivery of assistance, which includes enhancing feedback and collaboration among various NGOs and researching effective communication channels for community consultations, especially in areas with limited technology trust. Their continued support is crucial to strengthen humanitarian response efforts. Women mentioned the significance of the UN Monitoring Mechanism (UNMM) in monitoring and ensuring accountability for cross-border aid delivery, contrasting it with the absence of a similar mechanism for cross-line assistance. The UNMM, established in accordance with the UNSC Resolution, has made the northwest Syria response one of the most scrutinised globally, monitoring cross-border relief consignments and maintaining UN oversight to support cross-border aid delivery.³⁵

- Beyond implications for the UN's role in humanitarian, early recovery or development actions, this shift to GoS consent model also has the potential to impact negatively on trust and engagement with the UN in the political track (/peace) efforts; including in terms of space for civil society, including women's organisations, to engage and consequences for them in doing so.

- Women express concerns over the insufficient dialogue (to date) between the UN and key humanitarian stakeholders regarding contingency plans in the event of a non-renewal, or compromise of the new model. They acknowledge the magnitude of the operations currently led by the UN and suggest that the development of effective joint operating models will require a significant amount of time to implement.

“FROM OUR EXPERIENCE, THE IMPACTS OF THE EARTHQUAKE WERE MADE ALL THE WORSE DUE TO THE COMPLETE CLOSURE OF THE CROSSINGS RIGHT AFTER IT STRUCK. THIS LED TO THE DAMAGE CAUSED BY THE EARTHQUAKE BEING EVEN MORE DASTROUS AS IT HINDERED THE ACCESS OF MACHINERY AND TEAMS ABLE TO ASSIST IN SEARCHING FOR SURVIVORS.

“BASED ON MY EXPERIENCE OF CROSS-LINE ASSISTANCE, DELIVERIES ARE EXPOSED TO MILITARY AND SECURITY CAMPAIGNS AND COMPLICATIONS, ESPECIALLY IN THE EVENT OF POSSIBLE CONFLICTS. THIS WILL LEAD TO A REDUCTION IN THE FREQUENCY OF INCOMING ASSISTANCE (IT MAY BE SUSPENDED FOR A LONG PERIOD UNTIL THE SECURITY SITUATION RETURNS TO NORMAL).

“IF THE CROSS-BORDER INTERVENTION DECISION IS SUSPENDED OR THREATENED, IT WILL CREATE AN ATMOSPHERE OF INSTABILITY AMONG DONORS WHICH WILL LIKELY RESULT IN A DECLINE IN FUNDING AND A LOSS OF A CRITICAL COORDINATION MECHANISM POSSESSED BY THE UN...WE'RE NOW FACING A DANGER THAT GOES BEYOND THE ISSUE OF CROSS-BORDER INTERVENTION; IT'S ABOUT FACING ANOTHER DISRUPTION AND CHAOS IN RESPONSE EFFORTS WITHIN THESE AREAS.

“FROM MY EXPERIENCE OF ASSISTANCE THAT COMES CROSS-LINE, ALL OPERATIONS WERE DIRECTLY MONITORED BY SECURITY FORCES. ASSISTANCE IS FULLY MANAGED BY SECURITY FORCES.

“THE ABSENCE OF THE UN WOULD BE A DISASTER. SOMETIMES WE FEEL IT'S BUREAUCRATIC, BUT IT PROVIDES A MECHANISM TO PROVIDE ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED POPULATIONS. IF OCHA DOESN'T CONTINUE, THESE MECHANISMS WILL BE LOST. AFTER 8 YEARS WE HAVE MECHANISMS IN PLACE, IF THEY DON'T CONTINUE IT WILL BE LOST, AND I WILL BE SO FRUSTRATED.

WOMEN ARE CONCERNED THAT HARD-WON GAINS ON 'WOMEN'S VALUE' AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN SOCIETY IN NORTHWEST SYRIA COULD BE UNDERMINED BY THE CURRENT MODEL

“IN THE EVENT ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT BECOMES UNAVAILABLE, WOMEN WILL STRIVE TO CONTINUE, BUT NOT ALL WOMEN HAVE THE MEANS TO PURSUE THIS DIRECTION BECAUSE IT'S TIED TO THE AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES WITHIN REACH. RESOURCES ARE CRUCIAL FOR WOMEN TO BE ABLE TO WORK. THE REALITY WE ARE EXPERIENCING, WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS AND ORGANISATIONS, HAS PROVIDED SIGNIFICANT OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN'S ROLES, AND THIS ROLE WILL DISAPPEAR WITH THE CESSATION OF AID.

- Impacts on women's leadership in institutions and programmes: Women described how the delivery of assistance through the UNSC mandated cross-border mechanism played a significant role in providing women with opportunities for participation and leadership in volunteer efforts, as well as in the leadership of civil society organisations involved in aid efforts. Projects aimed at women, addressing gender-based violence, providing equal employment opportunities, and enhancing women's presence in workplaces facilitated women's access to services and decision-making roles. These gains could be put at risk. Factors contributing to this concern include fewer available leadership roles, potential increased security risks, and decreased opportunities for women to coordinate efforts. The shift could reinforce social norms regarding women in decision-making roles, potentially impacting women's lives in both the short and long term. Many women who participated in this study emphasised their determination to maintain their work even in the instance of a non-renewal of the border mechanism and therefore a huge decline in resources, but they also noted that many may not have the resources to continue. This was described as a critical loss.

“THE DELIVERY OF ASSISTANCE THROUGH THE CROSSING PLAYED A SIGNIFICANT, IMPORTANT, AND WONDERFUL ROLE. IT PROVIDED WOMEN WITH AMPLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION. AMONG THE MOST PROMINENT WAS WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT AND LEADERSHIP IN VOLUNTEER EFFORTS AT ALL STAGES, FROM THE EARLY HOURS OF THE EARTHQUAKE TO THE RECOVERY PHASE. GENERALLY, WOMEN HAVEN'T HAD AS MUCH OPPORTUNITY IN THE PAST AS THEY DO NOW. IN TODAY'S SOCIETY, THERE ARE MANY WOMEN WHO ARE FULLY ENGAGED IN COMMUNITY WORK. HOWEVER, THE SUSPENSION OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE WILL HALT OUR ROLE.

“WOMEN HAVE TAKEN ON AN ACTIVE ROLE IN COMMUNITY AFFAIRS IN NORTHWEST SYRIA. THEY HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ESTABLISH THEIR PRESENCE AND ENHANCE THEIR ROLES BY ENGAGING IN CIVIL COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES, THEREBY STRENGTHENING THE POSITION OF WOMEN WITHIN SOCIETY. AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE, WOMEN DEMONSTRATED THEIR PRESENCE, LEADERSHIP, AND SIGNIFICANCE. MANY WOMEN PROVIDED ASSISTANCE AND MORAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT. SOME OF THEM EVEN MANAGED TO REACH DECISION-MAKING POSITIONS. HOWEVER, ALL OF THIS PROGRESS WILL BE IN VAIN IF THE RESOLUTION IS HALTED.

- Economic concerns: Women, both aware and unaware of the mechanism, express concern over economic challenges, including currency devaluation, increased living costs, reduced fiscal income, and mounting domestic debt. Gender inequalities in access to economic opportunities exacerbate disparities between men and women in employment and income-generating activities. Women may have less influence on household decisions if their financial contributions decrease, leading to a higher risk of domestic violence.

“THE CURRENT SITUATION PROVIDES GOOD EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS CREATE A DECENT ENVIRONMENT FOR WOMEN. HOWEVER, IN THE ABSENCE OF SUPPORT, WOMEN WILL BE FORCED INTO LABOUR-INTENSIVE JOBS, WHICH WILL AFFECT CHILDREN AND THE MARGINALISED GROUPS.

- Access to Education and Training: Worries revolve around restricted access to education and training programs, with the potential for reduced educational offerings, leading to school dropouts and a widening gender gap.

“TRAINING COURSES FOR WOMEN WILL STOP. AS WELL AS EDUCATION, THESE COURSES PROVIDE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MORAL SUPPORT, EMPOWERING ACTIVE WOMEN TO CREATE PROJECTS THAT ENSURE JOB OPPORTUNITIES AND INCOME FOR FAMILIES.

- Heightened Risk of Gender-Based Violence (GBV): The change in the authorisation model raises concerns about an upsurge in gender-based violence (GBV) risks, encompassing abuse, domestic violence, harassment, and sexual exploitation. The potential loss of safe spaces for women and increasing workplace violence are significant concerns.

“PROGRAMMES TAILORED TO SUPPORT WOMEN PROVIDE SAFE CENTRES AND SPACES. IF THIS STOPS AND THE INTERVENTION MECHANISM IS NOT RENEWED, THESE SAFE SPACES FOR WOMEN WILL BE LOST.

- Balancing Unpaid Care Work: Women are already disproportionately burdened with unpaid care work, and this burden may intensify if social protection systems weaken. Men's reluctance to assume caregiving responsibilities places additional strain on women.

“A SHORTAGE OF RESOURCES CAN LEAD TO INADEQUATE CHILDCARE, WHICH WILL MEAN WOMEN HAVE TO TAKE ON TWO ROLES AND IT WOULD BE UNMANAGEABLE.

- Disproportionate Impact on Marginalised Groups: The change in authorisation is expected to disproportionately affect marginalised groups, including older people, children, and widows, placing them at significant risk.

“A STORY HAPPENED TO ME YESTERDAY, A MOTHER WITH A DISABLED CHILD CAME TO US ASKING FOR INFANT FORMULA BECAUSE HER CHILD WAS HUNGRY AND ON THE BRINK OF DEATH. THIS CHILD IS ONE OF THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN IN SIMILAR SITUATIONS.

WOMEN ANTICIPATE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES IN TERMS OF ACCESS, FUNDING AND OPERATIONAL SPACE FOR LOCAL CIVIL SOCIETY, INCLUDING WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS, IN NORTHWEST SYRIA

- Women working in civil society organisations, including women-led organisations and networks, in Northwest Syria highlighted how the space for their ability to work has never been easy and has evolved over time. Yet instability of the UN cross-border mechanism, including closures and reopenings, has further disrupted the continuity of those efforts, and undermined capacity-strengthening efforts: both of local women's organisations, and engagement with other institutions (including humanitarian organisations) on their approach to addressing access of women and girls to services, employment of women in their organisations and partnership with women's organisations. forced local civil society actors to establish new partnerships and mechanisms.

- Concerns also raised regarding the impacts of a shift to the GoS consent model for funding to civil society in general, and both funding and political attention given to supporting local women's organisations and networks in particular. A number of local women's organisations have benefitted from funding accessed either directly from UN agencies and funding mechanisms, or indirectly through International Non-Government Organisation (INGO) INGO 'intermediary' agencies channelling funds from UN agencies and mechanisms.

- The ongoing instability has led some women working in the humanitarian sector or wider civil society in Northwest Syria to seek alternative livelihoods, potentially resulting in a loss of experienced women professionals from those sectors.

- Women are concerned about the risks faced by CSOs, WROs and WLOs in operating under a cross-line model. They are concerned about which entity will lead cross-line delivery going forward, about the suitability of the items that may come cross-line and about their ability to continue operating without registration with the GoS.

- Women in this study stress the significance of shifting from humanitarian assistance to early-recovery in Syria to meet evolving community needs, especially given the context of protracted conflict. Concerns about aid politicisation, resource diversion, and inefficiencies hinder efforts to scale up early-recovery. Yet the women interviewed and surveyed for this paper highlighted how gains have been made in their participation in areas like education, livelihoods and other activities that go beyond the category of humanitarian and relate to early recovery and development efforts. Potential UNSC authorisation changes could further restrict these initiatives, reducing funding and local support. Any further obstacles and disruption to early recovery efforts supported by UN-led operations raise concerns for them about this translating into further set-backs on women's well-being and their role in society.

“DIRECTLY, A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF ACTIVE LOCAL ORGANISATIONS ARE AT RISK OF COLLAPSE IF THE CROSS-BORDER INTERVENTION DECISION IS HALTED. IF THE DECISION IS SUSPENDED, SOME OF THESE ORGANISATIONS, INCLUDING THOSE WITH WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS, MAY HAVE TO CEASE THEIR OPERATIONS.

“THE CLOSURE OF CROSS-BORDER WILL INCREASE THE LOAD ON LOCAL ORGANISATIONS TO PICK UP THE GAPS LEFT BY THE UN. THIS WILL HAVE IMPACTS ON OUR WOMEN'S HEALTH CENTRES, AMBULANCE SERVICES, PROCUREMENT LINES INCLUDING FOR MEDICINE, ETC.

“WHEN A CROSSING IS CLOSED AND THEN REOPENED, THERE'S AN ATMOSPHERE OF INSTABILITY BECAUSE YOU HAVE TO SEARCH FOR NEW PARTNERS OR ALLIES TO BE ABLE TO DELIVER SERVICES OR ACHIEVE A RESPONSE. INSTEAD OF IMPROVING AND DEVELOPING THE EXISTING COORDINATION MECHANISMS DURING A CROSSING CLOSURE, THERE'S A SEARCH FOR ENTIRELY NEW MECHANISMS, STARTING FROM SCRATCH.

“ WE WITNESSED AN INCREASE IN PROGRESS TOWARDS EARLY RECOVERY IN THE PREVIOUS PERIOD, BUT IT STOPPED AFTER REDUCING THE NUMBER OF CROSSINGS AND REDUCING SUPPORT FOR LOCAL ORGANISATIONS, WHICH WILL AFFECT THE STABILITY OF THE ENTIRE REGION.

“ WE ADVOCATE FOR THE REDIRECTION OF ASSISTANCE TOWARDS EARLY RECOVERY PROJECTS TO ENHANCE SELF-RELIANCE AND LIVING CONDITIONS AND PROVIDE LONG-TERM OPPORTUNITIES.

“ EARLY RECOVERY FOCUSES ON CAPACITY BUILDING, WHICH LEADS TO EMPOWERMENT. THIS SUPPORTS THE DEMAND FOR RIGHTS AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION. THE ABSENCE OF EARLY RECOVERY PROGRAMS AFFECTS THE EXISTENCE OF WOMEN'S CAPACITY-BUILDING AND EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS, WHICH, IN TURN, HINDERS THEIR PARTICIPATION AND THE ASSERTION OF THEIR RIGHTS.

WOMEN SEE POTENTIAL FOR INCREASED CONFLICT BOTH WITHIN NORTHWEST SYRIA AND THE WIDER REGION LINKED TO ANY WITHDRAWAL OF UN-LED HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS

- Women have voiced concerns about the transition to a GoS consent-based model, particularly with regard to granting consent for humanitarian access to an entity known for its well-documented history of non-discriminatory attacks on civilians, which includes humanitarian workers, as well as civilian infrastructure like schools, marketplaces, neighbourhoods, and hospitals.
- Women express concerns about tensions within communities worsening and/or taking on new directions driven by intensified competition for severely constrained resources, unequal distribution of humanitarian assistance, increased crime and violence, exacerbating community tensions and hostilities.
- Women also express concerns about the monopolisation of certain foods and consumer goods by traders, leading to price manipulation and scarcity. This situation could exacerbate humanitarian suffering, drive up crime, and increase sectarian conflicts.
- Family separation is a concern as men and young people may migrate due to hardships caused by the dynamics outlined above, which could lead to further instability and disrupt families and communities.
- Women perceived that the UN has at times played a role in maintaining a fragile stability and serving as a neutral mediator among various factions involved in the ongoing conflict in Northwest Syria.

- Family separation is a concern as men and young people may migrate due to hardships caused by the dynamics outlined above, which could lead to further instability and disrupt families and communities.

“ [THE BORDER IS] VERY IMPORTANT FOR MAINTAINING THE STATE OF SEMI-STABILITY THAT HAS BEGUN TO PREVAIL IN NORTHWESTERN SYRIA, BECAUSE IF THE ECONOMIC SITUATION AND HUNGER SPREADS, THE SITUATION WILL DETERIORATE, AND THE LAW OF THE JUNGLE WILL PREVAIL.

“ THE UN ALSO HAS A FORM OF NEUTRALITY WHEN ENGAGING WITH THE VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS, INCLUDING CIVILIANS, LOCAL PARTNERS, AND RESPONSIBLE ENTITIES. WE'RE NOW FACING A DANGER THAT GOES BEYOND THE ISSUE OF CROSS-BORDER INTERVENTION; IT'S ABOUT FACING ANOTHER DISRUPTION AND CHAOS IN RESPONSE EFFORTS WITHIN THESE AREAS.

“ THERE WILL BE A SIGNIFICANT NEGATIVE IMPACT OF ANY CLOSURE OF UN-AFFILIATED BORDER CROSSINGS ON THE DETERIORATION OF CONDITIONS, AND A SIGNIFICANT LACK OF STABILITY. IT COULD PAVE THE WAY FOR A RETURN TO PREVIOUS MILITARY OPERATIONS, EFFECTIVELY ABANDONING THE SYRIAN PEOPLE AND LEAVING THEM TO SUFFER AND MIGRATE.

“ IT WILL CERTAINLY HARM THE STABILITY OF THE SITUATION BECAUSE TRADERS WILL HOARD GOODS, LEADING TO PRICE INCREASES AND THE SPREAD OF CHAOS IN SOCIETY (THEFT, MURDER, LOOTING)

“ THE CESSATION OF ASSISTANCE ENTRY THROUGH THE BAB AL-HAWA CROSSING COULD HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON SECURITY AND STABILITY AROUND THE WORLD, NOT ONLY IN NORTH WEST SYRIA. IF NORTH WEST SYRIA WAS TO BECOME AT THE MERCY OF ASSISTANCE BEING DELIVERED CROSS-LINE, THEN THIS WOULD CERTAINLY LEAD TO LIVELIHOODS BEING LOST, POVERTY AND HOPELESSNESS WORSENING, AND IT COULD BECOME A MAJOR DRIVER OF MIGRATION AS PEOPLE BECOME DESPERATE TO FLEE.

“ ULTIMATELY, WHEN FAMILIES CAN'T MEET THEIR BASIC NEEDS, THEY WILL EXPERIENCE FRUSTRATION AND DESPAIR, CONSIDERING MIGRATION AS AN OPTION DUE TO THE CURRENT HARSH CONDITIONS.

“ IF WE OBSERVE THE MIGRATION NUMBERS AMONG HUMANITARIAN AND CIVIL WORKERS, WE WOULD SEE A TERRIFYING INCREASE OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS DUE TO RESTRICTED MOVEMENT.



Women leaders in Northwest Syria
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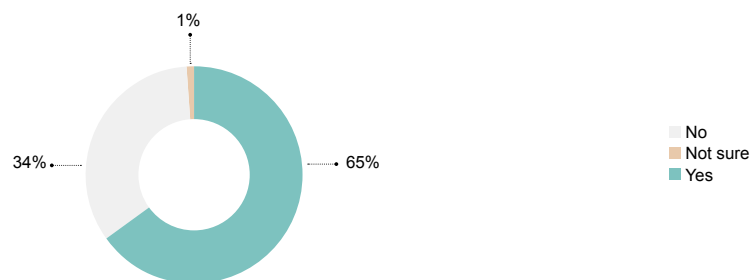
WOMEN'S AWARENESS OF LEGAL AND POLITICAL MECHANISMS THAT INFLUENCE CROSS-BORDER ASSISTANCE IS GENDERED AND LINKED TO EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

For women who participated in this study, the UNSC border crossing that was mandated from 2014-2023 is considered to be very important, attributable, in part, to advancements in women's value and heightened stability at the community level within Northwest Syria.

In one of the surveys conducted among women from Northwest Syria, it was found that a majority said they had some level of awareness regarding the legal and political mechanisms that influence

cross-border assistance and forms of support to Northwest Syria. Out of the 118 women surveyed, roughly two-thirds (65%) said they had an awareness of the legal and political mechanisms that influence cross-border assistance, while approximately one-third (34%) reported limited awareness. 1% expressed uncertainty. Among the one-third of women who were unfamiliar with the mechanism, many were still able to offer comments on the support and assistance provided by the UNSC border mechanism.

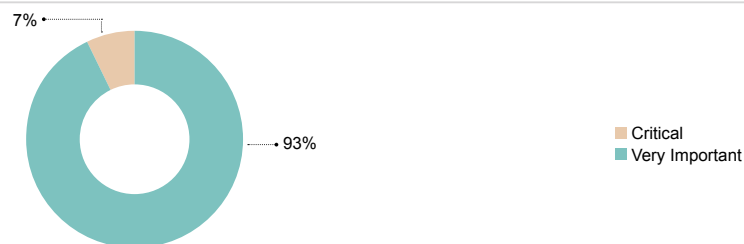
WOMEN'S AWARENESS OF CROSS-BORDER MECHANISMS IN NORTHWEST SYRIA



Among the women who said they had an awareness of the UNSC border mechanism, a total of 76 individuals, an overwhelming majority (93% of this group) said that they considered the border mechanism to be of critical importance.

7%, emphasised that it was very important. This demonstrates a substantial consensus among women who are informed about the mechanism regarding its critical role in the context of cross-border assistance and support.

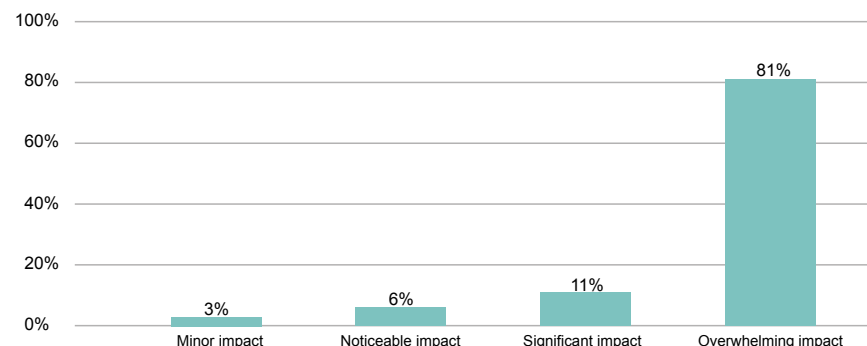
WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CROSS-BORDER MECHANISM



Of the women who said they had less awareness of the mechanism, 81% said that a reduction in UN-led

operations and support would have an overwhelming impact on their ability to access critical services.

WOMEN'S VIEWS ON HOW A REDUCTION IN UN-LED OPERATIONS WILL AFFECT THEIR ABILITY TO ACCESS ESSENTIAL SERVICES



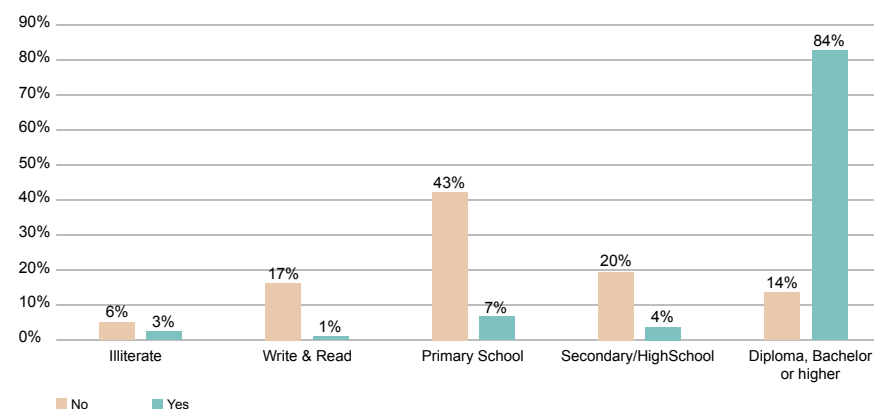
WOMEN'S AWARENESS OF THE UNSC MECHANISM IS LINKED TO TRENDS IN EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

The data on women's awareness of the UNSC mechanism in relation to their education levels in Northwest Syria reveals a clear correlation, with higher education associated with increased awareness. Women who said they could not read or write and those who can read and write but lack formal education displayed lower awareness levels, mirroring the regional context where illiteracy and limited access to information may

limit awareness. Women with primary school education showed a higher level of awareness, while those with secondary/high school education had a comparatively better awareness.

Women with diplomas, bachelor's degrees, or higher education exhibited the highest awareness levels.

CORRELATION BETWEEN WOMEN IN NORTHWEST SYRIA'S ACCESS TO EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES AND AWARENESS OF THE UNSC MECHANISM



However, it is worth considering the potential sampling bias introduced by the dataset's overrepresentation of women with a higher education (59.2% of the sample), which could overstate the link between education and

awareness. To draw more accurate insights regarding women's awareness in Northwest Syria, ensuring representation of women with lower education levels is imperative.

WOMEN FACE GENDER DISPARITIES IN ACCESSING INFORMATION AND DECISION-MAKING REGARDING THE MECHANISM

A separate survey targeting both men and women and focusing on gender disparities revealed trends in awareness of the UNSC border crossing mechanism. Among male respondents, 58% reported an understanding of the mechanism, with

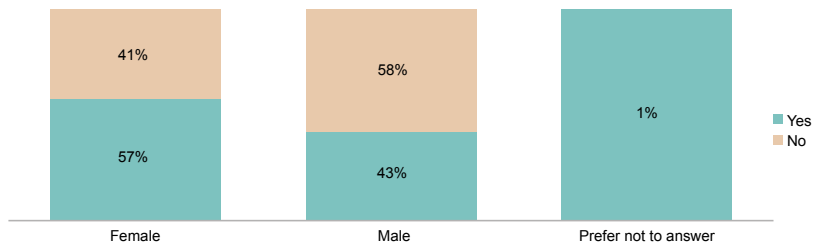
43% indicating a lack of awareness. In contrast, women's awareness levels were lower, with 41% reporting understanding the mechanism and 57% indicating a more limited knowledge about it.

“MEN HAVE A GREATER UNDERSTANDING DUE TO THEIR DIRECT INVOLVEMENT IN THE METHODS AND MECHANISMS OF HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE. ADDITIONALLY, MEN OFTEN HOLD LEADERSHIP ROLES IN THESE OPERATIONS AND WITHIN LOCAL ORGANISATIONS. FOR INSTANCE, TODAY I AM PART OF A GROUP THAT INCLUDES THE MOST PROMINENT ACTIVISTS AND ACTORS IN NORTHWEST SYRIA. THERE ARE ONLY TWO WOMEN AMONG THE MEMBERS OF THIS GROUP, WHILE THE REST ARE ALL MEN. MEN, DUE TO THEIR AUTHORITY AND POSITIONS IN SOCIETY OR WITHIN ORGANISATIONS, TEND TO BE MORE ENGAGED IN THESE ISSUES THAN WOMEN.

Women have expressed a strong desire to enhance their awareness. Among the participants who reported having no awareness of the mechanism, a notable 97% expressed a desire to learn further

information about it. This suggests the importance of addressing gender-based disparities in knowledge and empowering women with greater access to information and opportunities for engagement.

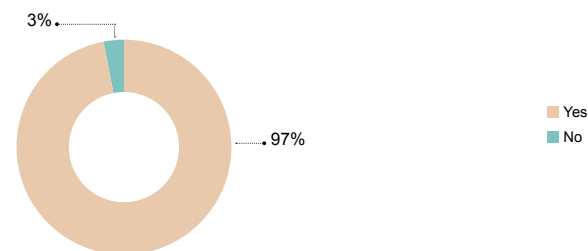
GENDER DISPARITIES IN AWARENESS OF THE UNSC BORDER CROSSING MECHANISM



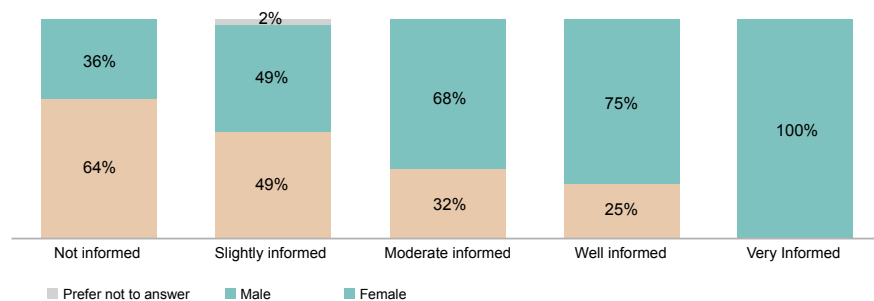
When asked to choose from five different levels of awareness, the survey results also reveal significant differences in awareness levels between men and women regarding the UNSC cross-border mechanism. A higher percentage of men,

particularly in the “Moderately Informed” and “Well-Informed” categories, report feeling more informed about this mechanism compared to women. In contrast, a substantial portion of women said that they are “Not Informed” or “Slightly Informed.”

WOMEN'S INTEREST IN GAINING IMPROVED AWARENESS OF LEGAL AND POLITICAL MECHANISMS INFLUENCING ASSISTANCE IN NORTHWEST SYRIA



DIFFERENCES IN AWARENESS LEVELS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IN NORTHWEST SYRIA CONCERNING THE UNSC CROSS-BORDER MECHANISM



As mentioned previously, any gender disparities in awareness could be linked to education levels, as broader trends show that women's access to education often influences their access to awareness and involvement in decision making processes. Limited access to educational

opportunities, coupled with exclusion from decision-making processes, leaves women without essential information. In contrast, men, who tend to occupy more decision-making roles, have improved access to information channels, contributing to their higher awareness levels.



Women at the 10th anniversary of the Ghouta attacks in August 2023
© Syria Civil Defense

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to above findings, the following recommendations have been identified and developed also in consultation with women and women's organisations based in Northwest Syria:

- 1 Recognise the gains and what is at risk in Northwest Syria.** Ensure that policy narratives and decision-making processes about the shift towards a GoS consent framework for cross-border delivery - whether in donor capitals, the UNSC Security Council or in other relevant spaces - are informed about the risks and negative consequences already being felt by women and girls in Northwest Syria. For all the longer-term challenges in Northwest Syria, it is important to recognise that steps had been taken to implement and strengthen programmes enabling women and girls to access services, women's community centres and educational programmes to provide safe spaces for women where could come together, coordinate on shared interests and participate in livelihoods, education and other activities. Those gains are now at risk. Furthermore, it must be recognised that different categories of women and girls face specific risks as the situation in Northwest Syria evolves; including former detainees and relatives of detainees, women active in civil society, women's human rights defenders and others.
- 2 Involve women in contingency planning.** Develop a comprehensive contingency plan that engages all humanitarian actors, and actively involves women, to explore alternative modalities, including on cross-line delivery, for ensuring continuity in the event that an alternative model is not extended, or is undermined in any way. This plan should address and incorporate the concerns and perspectives of women to enhance its effectiveness and inclusivity. Whilst it is important to avoid contributing to the spread of rumours and fear amongst communities that already face significant threats and stresses, consultation on contingency planning should be undertaken given the substantial time required to build effective joint operating models. Women active in civil society in Northwest Syria should have seats at the table in determining such plans, not just be informed about plans determined by others.
- 3 Put Syrian civil society at the centre of decision-making.** Place consultation and dialogue with Syrian civil society, including Syrian women's organisations and networks, at the heart of decision-making by donors, UN agencies and international NGOs on their strategic and operational plans for access and the delivery of aid and protection into Northwest Syria as the situation evolves. In particular, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) should provide timely updates and adopt a more transparent and sustained dialogue with civil society, international and national/local NGOs, on their negotiations with parties to the conflict. Local civil society actors in Northwest Syria need to strengthen their platforms for coordination and advocacy in order to enable effective

representation to the UN and governments involved in access negotiations. International support should focus on providing platforms and resources for women to determine their own collective action and collaborate and cooperate when they see fit. Do not expect unity amongst Syrian civil society in general or women activists and civil society organisations and networks in particular.

- 4 Maintain the UN/NGO Whole of Syria (WoS) architecture with segregated Hubs** with their autonomous UN/NGO coordination structures for each of the different geographic/political regions; and strengthen the lines of dialogue and engagement between UN coordination actors and processes located in Turkey and national/local NGOs, including women-led organisations and networks, located inside Northwest Syria. That women consulted for this paper called for an independent entity, outside of political influence, which can engage directly with the Security Council for the transparent and efficient delivery of humanitarian assistance, underscores the concerns over how UN agencies are perceived. Recognise that for many civil society organisations working in Northwest Syria, including both humanitarian agencies, women's rights and women-led civil society groups, control of aid delivery into the region by the GoS, as well as GoS access to information about staff and project participants, can put the lives at risk of both those staff and project participants as well as their relatives living in GoS-controlled areas. Maintain and strengthen separate information management systems and coordination institutions that can maintain their independence from GoS controlled systems and institutions.
- 5 Strengthen donor, UN agency and NGO investments into Accountability To Affected Populations (AAP).** Support and strengthen the UN mechanisms by maintaining and improving existing feedback and consultation systems. Additionally, fostering collaboration among different NGOs to combine feedback mechanisms and prioritising appropriate channels to reach and communicate with affected populations, especially in situations where trust in technology is limited, can further improve the quality and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. Additionally, identify ways to sustain and build on the UN Monitoring Mechanism that oversees the delivery of cross-border aid, and recognise the lack of any credible monitoring mechanism overseeing cross-line efforts.
- 6 Increase longer-term, flexible funding to Syrian organisations, in particular women-led organisations and networks,** so they are better able to plan on a multi-year basis and have contingency budgets and preparedness plans in place to respond and adapt as the situation evolves. In particular, support must be maintained to organisations and programmes supporting marginalised groups, such as older people, children, and widows, that are being disproportionately impacted by the situation. For Syrian national and local NGOs, including local women's organisations and networks, to understand and adapt to the evolving situation in terms of cross-border delivery of aid and protection into the region, they need to not be struggling for short-term grant to short-term grant.

7 Maintain and diversify funding streams and mechanisms that can work whatever scenario plays out in terms of the cross-border channel of support into Northwest Syria, and can function independently of GoS control to support national/local NGOs, including civil society organisations (CSOs), WROs, and WLOs. Increase support for funding mechanisms that involve national/local civil society in their governance processes, and NGO consortia models that implement leadership or co-leadership in decision-making by the Syrian partners involved.

8 Ensure that wider policy and practice also recognise and mitigate how they will be perceived in relation to cross-border support for women and girls, notably initiatives to support Early Recovery. The proposed mechanism to fund Early Recovery in Syria should be designed to address specific challenges and opportunities in each Hub in Syria, including Northwest Syria, and avoid control - or the perception of control - of Early Recovery funding and programming in Northwest Syria by the GoS. Any move towards establishing a centralised Early Recovery Fund managed out of and controlled by Damascus will only worsen the situation in terms of how the agencies involved are perceived as co-opted to and controlled by the GoS.

Women leaders in Northwest Syria
© Action For Humanity

METHODOLOGY

Community Mapping

The selection process for WROs, WLOs, and women community members was guided by several factors. These factors included pre-existing or previous collaborations with organisations like Action For Humanity, other partner NGOs that have a focus on women and girls or that partner with grassroots women's organisations, established affiliations through platforms like the Syria NGO Alliance (SNA) and the Northwest Syria Forum, snowball sampling, or recognition within the community, whether as a religious or community leader.

Notably, the inclusion criteria did not prioritise employment within established organisations. This approach was deliberate, aiming to ensure the representation of women who might face challenges accessing employment opportunities or who actively engage within the domestic sphere, thereby capturing a diverse range of experiences.

Furthermore, it is important to emphasise that participation in the focus group discussions (FGDs) was by invitation, with the primary requirement being that participants were women from northwest Syria, ensuring a nuanced and comprehensive representation of this specific demographic.

Surveys

Two surveys were conducted in Idlib and Aleppo, Northwest Syria, gathering responses from a total of 221 participants. These surveys provided essential quantitative data to establish a foundational understanding of women's viewpoints on the cross border mechanism against the backdrop of recent developments.

The first survey, with 118 responses, exclusively focused on a diverse group of women in Northwest Syria. It aimed to understand the specific gendered challenges and experiences faced by women in relation to the recent developments regarding the border mechanism. This survey was designed to reach women who both did and did not have awareness of the mechanism, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives and concerns.

The second survey, with 103 responses, included both men and women from Northwest Syria. This survey was designed to better comprehend any gendered differences in knowledge and awareness regarding recent developments regarding the border mechanism.

Key Informant Interviews

The research team conducted 12 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with women in or working on Northwest Syria. These interviews offered in-depth qualitative insights and expert opinions on recent developments regarding the border mechanism.

Focus Groups

Two separate focus groups, each consisting of 12 women, were organised to facilitate interactive discussions on women's experiences and perspectives regarding the cross border mechanism. Participants in these focus groups represented a diverse range of backgrounds, including internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host community members, spanning various age groups from 19 to 59 years old.

A dedicated focus group, led by a women's advocacy group, engaged 33 women from diverse sectors, such as female humanitarian workers, journalists, civil society activists, and lawyers. This focus group contributed insights from women actively involved in various aspects of humanitarian and civil society work.

One participant's initiative to lead an additional focus group with a further 23 women, also IDPs and residents in host communities in Syria, demonstrated the importance of this work.

Consultation Sessions

Throughout the research process, four consultation sessions were held with key informants. These sessions provided an opportunity for key informants to provide additional input, clarify findings, and ensure that the report accurately represented their perspectives and insights. Additionally, an extra focus group was convened as part of the research process to gather valuable input and feedback from participants.

Key informants were invited to actively contribute to the research by offering written commentary and insights. They also played a crucial role in shaping the development of a document summarising key findings and recommendations. This collaborative approach aimed to ensure that the report authentically reflected the diverse voices and viewpoints of women in Northwest Syria.

The final draft was shared with participants in both English and Arabic to facilitate a final consultation process. Subsequently, a consultation session was convened with the active engagement of 20 women to gather valuable input and feedback on the document.

Limitations

Firstly, the Syria Cross-border Mechanism and the issue of women's inclusion in decision-making are inherently complex and sensitive topics. Women in Northwest Syria may be reluctant to speak out openly due to fear of potential security concerns. While this study provides valuable insights, it may not capture the full complexity of these issues, and the experiences and perspectives of some women may remain undocumented. A more in-depth and nuanced exploration is essential to yield broader and more inclusive results.

Additionally, the selection of key informants was shaped by existing relationships and networks, potentially introducing selection bias into the study. The sample size, while sufficient for an exploratory study, may not fully capture the diverse range of perspectives within Northwest Syria. Conducting research on a larger scale with a more extensive sample size is crucial to provide for a broader inclusion of women and to garner a more in-depth understanding of women's experiences and perceptions. It is crucial that this work continues on a larger and more systemic scale to include a wider spectrum of voices and experiences.

Practically, the online nature of all of the KIIs and some of the FGDs potentially created certain limitations. Conducting these sessions online required participants to have access to digital devices and a level of digital literacy. This could exclude individuals who lacked resources or skills, potentially limiting the diversity of voices represented in the study. Safeguarding considerations led to the organisation of online discussions in mixed-gender panels, a necessary measure to ensure participant safety and privacy. However, this approach might have deterred some women from participating due to cultural or privacy concerns.



Women leaders in
Northwest Syria
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- ¹<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2023-08/in-hindsight-the-demise-of-the-syria-cross-border-aid-mechanism.php>
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- ⁷<https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/north-west-syria-operational-update-july-august-2023#:~:text=Following%20the%20expiry%20of%20the,starting%20from%2013%20July%202023>
- ⁸<https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/north-west-syria-operational-update-july-august-2023#:~:text=Following%20the%20expiry%20of%20the,starting%20from%2013%20July%202023>
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- ¹⁰SIRF private position paper (copy on file)
- ¹¹SIRF private position paper (copy on file)
- ¹²https://www.rescue.org/press-release/irc-regional-vice-president-mena-suad-jarbawi-briefs-united-nations-security-council?check_logged_in=1
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