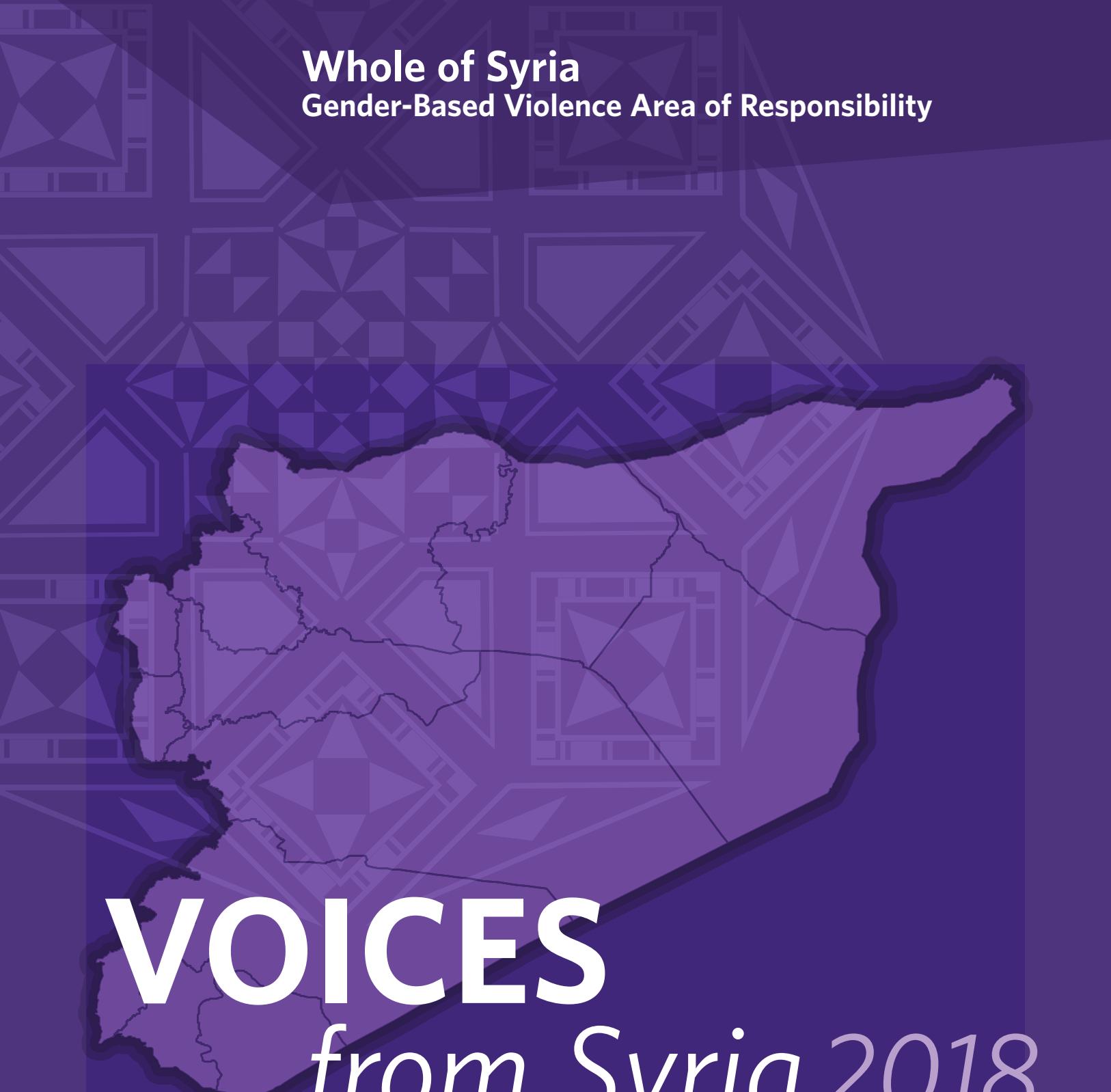


**Whole of Syria**  
Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility



# VOICES from Syria 2018

*Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview*





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



A large, light gray outline map of Syria is positioned in the background, centered on the country's terrain. The map shows the coastal areas, the Golan Heights, and the Jordan River.

# VOICES from Syria 2018

*Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview*



**GBV AoR**  
Whole of Syria

## Acknowledgements

The Whole of Syria gender-based violence area of responsibility (GBV AoR) would like to thank all implementing partners inside Syria, who made this analysis possible by conducting assessments in the midst of extremely difficult operational conditions. The rich data generated is a testament to partner organizations' ability to create a non-judgmental and safe environment in which these highly sensitive issues could be openly discussed.

We are also grateful to the coordinators from the gender-based violence, general protection, child protection and mine action AoRs, in the three hubs and on Whole of Syria level, for their collaboration and support in the analysis of the data. The help of consultants was also very valuable in mapping and data analysis. The support of the protection information managers was also instrumental for aggregating the different quantitative data sets.

Finally, our biggest thanks and acknowledgments go to the Syrian women, men, adolescent girls and boys as well as the GBV experts who participated in focus groups discussions, key informant interviews or other assessments and who openly discussed such a challenging topic as gender-based violence and thereby generated the largest amount of data to date on GBV inside Syria.

## Acronyms

AoR	Area of Responsibility
CP	Child Protection
CMR	Clinical Management of Rape
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PSEA	Protection from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation
PWD	People with Disabilities
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WoS	Whole of Syria

**Date of Publication: November 2017**

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## Foreword

As the war in Syria approaches its eighth year the humanitarian situation has passed a tipping point in terms of generational change. Even if the fighting were to stop tomorrow, the after-effects will continue for many years. This is especially true for women and girls due to the entrenched complexity of the issues they continue to face every day. The scars now run too deep for easy and immediate solutions.

This report provides important insights into the lives of women and girls caught up in the crossfire, providing a valuable guide to help aid agencies in delivering an informed response to gender-based violence (GBV) nationwide. Compared with last year's report, it is clear that none of the existing forms of GBV have lessened in their impact. Moreover, the higher quality data this year reveal worrying extensions of negative coping mechanisms such as movement restrictions, marriage, polygamy, survival sex, as women and girls adapt as best they can to the exhaustion of protracted conflict in a society with ingrained patriarchal attitudes. By examining each of the different directorates, we can see the vast range in complexities across the country.

With men absent, injured, killed, or unable to find employment the burden of responsibility often falls heavier on the shoulders of women and girls to maintain households. However, these additional responsibilities do not necessarily lead to greater empowerment or freedom for women. Invariably, it leads to an increase in workload and sometimes to additional abuse as men resist a perceived threat to their dominance. From aid distribution to gaining documentation, to attending school, guarding against exploitation and abuse is a constant challenge.

Given the length of the war, the different forms of GBV have often become interlinked. A girl forced into a child marriage five years ago may now be a widow or divorcee (sometimes more than once) with children to protect and feed. With this data, we now are better able to chart the trajectories these survivors have followed. The data and stories contained in this report also highlight, as also documented in previous reports, the important role played by specialized women's and girl's services and safe spaces in helping to protect the vulnerable and to mitigate the effects of GBV.

As before, I would like to personally commend and thank everybody - women, girls, men and boys - who have courageously shared these testimonies, often taking personal risks to speak out on this difficult subject. It is their voices that tell us the reality of their experiences and help direct efforts to address the complex issues of GBV.

**Daniel B. Baker**

UNFPA Syria Regional Humanitarian Coordinator

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1



# Executive Summary

# 1.1 Overview of findings

The 2018 assessments confirmed that gender-based violence, particularly verbal harassment, domestic violence (including family violence against women and girls), child marriages and the fear of sexual violence including sexual harassment, continue to pervade the lives of women and girls in Syria inside and outside the home, resulting in very few spaces where women and girls feel safe. The fear of sexual violence, often associated with abduction, is a concern raised by women and girls, contributing to psychosocial stress and further limitation of their movements. The restriction on freedom of movement of women and girls also inhibits their access to services, humanitarian aid and ultimately their rights. The shame and stigma surrounding sexual violence contributes to survivors not talking about violence when it happens. Women and girls also fear honour killing as a result of sexual violence. Families arrange marriages for girls, believing it will protect them and ease the financial burden on the family. Girls are reportedly being married younger. The socio-economic situation, lack of livelihood opportunities, and increased poverty is ultimately leading more women to resort to negative coping mechanisms such as survival sex.

## Effects of extended conflict

The length of the crisis and the deep-rooted patriarchal structures underpinning Syrian society, in conjunction with the mounting lawlessness in some areas, are normalising this violence, with women's rights continuing to be eroded.

## Types of gender-based violence

### Child marriage<sup>1</sup>:

Marriage of children under 18 years old is not a new phenomenon in Syria. However, with the protracted nature of the crisis child marriage has evolved from a cultural practice to a coping mechanism in the crisis. Families arrange marriages for girls, believing that it will protect them and also needing to ease the financial burden of the family. According to GBV experts, this trend has been increasing in 2017 due to the crisis, and there is an understanding that girls are being married at younger ages.

 *She has made her 15-year-old daughter marry because she was afraid of assault or kidnapping. When she is married, her husband protects her. (Woman from Dana sub-district, Idlib governorate)*

### Domestic violence<sup>2</sup>:

 *When a man gets angry, he hits his wife with whatever is in his hand. (Woman from Al-Khashniyyeh sub-district, Quneitra governorate)*

Domestic violence is one of the most commonly mentioned types of violence in the qualitative data. It often occurs with physical, emotional or verbal violence, sexual violence and economic violence. Emotional/verbal violence could take the form of yelling, insults and threats (e.g. of divorce). Similarly, the crisis brought on changes in traditional gender roles in some areas, where women began to work outside the house to contribute to or solely provide the family's income. This has also been linked to increases in domestic violence, as men perceive the change in family dynamics as a threat.

### Family violence:

Women also recount violence perpetrated by other family members, such as in-laws and in particular the brother of their husband. Violence against children by their parents was also noted as a concern. Boys and girls are both at risk of violence at the hands of their parents or caregivers, more frequently noted as fathers and uncles rather than mothers or aunts.

<sup>1</sup> The report uses the term child marriage; however, the term early marriage can also be used to define a marriage of a girl under 18. The report uses the terms interchangeably. The definition can be found in the annex.

<sup>2</sup> Domestic violence in the GBV section refers to intimate partner violence. However, many of the participants of the assessments interpreted domestic violence to also mean family violence, which can include intimate partner violence, but also violence between father and son, brothers, brother against sister, brother in laws against women etc.

## Sexual violence:

Sexual violence is one of the most frequently cited types of violence discussed by participants in the qualitative data and mostly by women in both qualitative and quantitative data sets. Women discussed daily fear of sexual violence including street harassment and rape.

“*Women and girls are the most vulnerable to sexual violence because of their weakness and male domination. (Adolescent boy from Saraqab sub-district, Idleb governorate)*

Participants in qualitative assessments noted that the purpose of kidnapping and abduction of women and girls was often associated with rape and sexual assault. Displacement and living in camps are noted as being particularly unsafe environments for women and girls and places where the risks for sexual violence were high. Reasons given were a lack of privacy (in tents, or in latrines), overcrowding and mix of people who do not know each other, poverty and financial desperation, and chaos or lawlessness.

Overall, the shame and social stigma associated with women and girls' virginity deeply influence both the impact of sexual violence and the coping mechanisms available to survivors. Murder of women and girls by their family members in the name of honour, victim blaming and forced marriage to the perpetrators were mentioned without prompting more frequently this year compared to last.

## Sexual harassment:

Shouts, insults, threats and other street harassment of a sexual nature by men and boys toward women and girls poses a daily nuisance and fear, often becoming an obstacle prohibiting them from leaving their homes to access markets, services, distributions, school and work.

## Sexual exploitation:

Assessments confirmed that women and girls also face sexual exploitation. Poverty, displacement, being head of household (often linked to new work places), coupled with gender inequalities are all understood to contribute to this form of gender-based violence.

“*13-year-old girls go to the bakeries to make little money. I know that people exploit those girls sexually in return for buying bread from them. This is very common. (Man from At Tall sub-district, Rural Damascus)*

## Abduction:

Respondents of qualitative assessments of all ages and sexes spoke about the fear of kidnapping. Abduction of women and girls was more commonly associated with rape and sexual assault or even forced marriage, compared to detention and forced conscription for men and boys, or robbery and ransom for those with money.

“*Some accidents related to sexual violence occur in our community. A young man kidnapped a girl because she refused to marry him. (Adolescent girl from Ma'arrat An Nu'man sub-district, Idleb governorate)*

## Detention and torture:

There are reports of first-hand accounts of women who had been arrested and detained in relation to the crisis, that provide details of women's experiences during detention and after release.

## Population at risk

Findings from all data sources show that **women and girls** are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence in Syria, such as early marriage, sexual violence and domestic violence. Displaced women and girls, specifically those living in camps, shelters and informal settlements across the country were seen to be at particular risk of GBV, with reports in some areas of the country of widows and divorced women being placed in separate sections of camps. With regards to sexual violence, early marriage and movement restrictions, **adolescent girls** are particularly affected. Fear of kidnapping and sexual violence would further these restrictions, often leading to families preventing their daughters of going to school. Overall, women and girls are described as in need of a '*male protector*'.

**Widows and separated/divorced girls** and women were perceived to be at particular risk to sexual violence, emotional and verbal abuse, forced marriage, polygamy and serial temporary marriages, movement restrictions, economic violence and exploitation, among others. **Widows and divorced women and girls** expressed fear that their **children would be taken away** from them or that they would be forced to leave their children in order to provide for income. When talking about the reasons why children would be separated or abandoned in the community, death of the caregiver was mentioned most often, followed by the re-marriage of parents, in particular the mother, and thirdly divorce. The lack or loss of civil documentation and/or property-related documents has also major implications for widows and separated/divorced women and girls. FGD participants described how not having a family booklet could hinder widows and separated/divorced women and girls in accessing to distributions, as they would be considered as part of her parents' family.

**Female-headed households** are also associated with an increased risk of sexual violence. **People with disability (PWD)** were identified as particularly affected by violence, including GBV, in Syria.

## Coping mechanism

There is much shame and social stigma associated with women and girls' virginity and upholding traditional gender roles. In many cases of violence, even when families recognize that the act is non-consensual, the blame is placed on the shoulders of the woman. This deeply influences the coping mechanisms available to prevent and minimize the risks of GBV, and also for survivors to cope after experiencing GBV.

The most frequently cited way for women and girls to cope after experiencing GBV was to **tell no one about it, to remain silent** and keep it a secret. The most common cited strategy to minimize the risks of GBV for women and girls was to change or limit their movement, appearance and behaviour. Women and girls either choose or are forced by their husband or family to stay at home, to only leave the house during the day, or only leave the house only if accompanied by a husband, brother or parent. Other strategies reported were **non-disclosure, dress restrictions, running away, self-defence/carrying a weapon - child marriage, divorce, survival sex and relying on humanitarian assistance**.

Some women and girls did describe **positive coping mechanisms** being able to talk to close friends about experiences of violence, to rely on their family's support, to seek justice, to rely on their own psychological strength, or to seek health or protection services as a means of coping with violence.

## Movement restrictions

Men, women, girls and boys reported restrictions on their movement due to safety issues linked with the crisis, such as fear of detention, kidnapping and arrest, shelling and explosions and crime.

## Availability and access to GBV services across Syria

In 2017, the geographical **reach of GBV services** has significantly increased, alongside the number of services being provided. In August 2017, 38 more sub-districts were being reached with GBV activities compared to December 2016, bringing it to a total of 121 sub-districts. Furthermore, during this period, the number of partner organizations offering GBV services has increased from 44 to 71. Data sources confirmed satisfaction with the GBV services where they existed, especially in relation to individual and group counselling sessions, empowerment activities, such as vocational training courses, and awareness raising sessions. Participants in FGDs expressed a need for more services for GBV survivors and 59% of communities reporting needing women and girl's centers. Distance to service delivery points and lack of transportation, especially in rural areas, family restrictions and a lack of trust or fear of stigmatization **are the main barriers** for women and girls to access GBV services. **A lack of awareness** about the existence of GBV services was mentioned as another barrier to accessing services as well as the **lack of clear referral pathways** for GBV survivors in some areas of the country.

## Access to humanitarian assistance

As in the 2017 HNO assessments, concerns with access to humanitarian assistance were raised. Distribution sites are often perceived as **unsafe places**, which are **dominated by men**. In some areas people described how they hesitated going to crowded distributions sites, especially in camp settings, given that these were sometimes targets for aerial bombings. At the same time, participants of FGD said that women and girls benefitted from distributions, as the **whole family** would be assisted. Women and girls would receive aid, but often indirectly.

## 1.2 Guide to analysis in the document

This report highlights the GBV protection needs of each of Syria's 14 governorates, identifying gaps in service provision. It is intended to inform the development of projects for the 2018 Syria Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) and the GBV response in Syria.

The report is divided into four sections:

- A brief outline of Methodological Approaches that contributed to the wider assessment, including the limitations of the assessment.
- The Key Findings, including specific types of GBV, negative coping mechanisms, and women's and girls' access to humanitarian assistance. Linkages between GBV concerns and other sectors are also highlighted.
- The Governorates' Overview in Section 4 provides reference figures and analysis of the data available for each governorate.
- Finally, in the Annexes, a detailed overview of the various methodologies used for each assessment that was analysed is available, as well as the references and list of secondary data sources and a glossary of terminology.

2



# Methodology of Assessments

## 2.1 Overview of GBV data sources, assessments and coverage

The challenges of collecting data on GBV issues are well documented, especially in societies where discussions around GBV are considered shameful or taboo. However, the 2018 assessments represent the largest amount of data gathered on GBV since the start of the Syria crisis. This includes extensive qualitative information on sexual violence, sexual harassment and child marriage, provided by women, men, adolescent girls and adolescent boys. Below is an overview of assessments that informed the GBV analysis.

Assessment	Led By	Type / Tool <sup>3</sup>	Type of Data
Multi-sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA)	OCHA	Key Informant Interview	Quantitative
Syria Hub Protection Needs Assessments (SHPNA)	Syria Hub Protection Sector	Key Informant Interview	Quantitative
		Community Sources	Quantitative
		Community Direct Observations by Partners	Quantitative
Focus Group Discussions	Protection Sector (Jordan and Turkey hubs only)	FGD Guidance Note	Qualitative
GBV Expert Focus Group Discussions	GBV AoR	Delphi Method GBV statements drafted by GBV coordinators/IMs	Qualitative
Secondary Literature Data Desk Review	GBV AoR	N/A	Qualitative

Despite the on-going conflict across Syria, the assessments were successful in recording the GBV concerns of Syrians living in all fourteen governorates. Data from all the assessments (both **quantitative and qualitative**) was collected at community level<sup>4</sup> and consolidated for the analysis. It was collected in 4,185 communities (including 32 urban neighbourhoods) located in 254 sub-districts out of 272 sub-districts across the country.

The SHPNA and MSNA used a common set of indicators, with minor differences in the phrasing of some questions, which made it possible that a joint quantitative dataset could be produced and analysed<sup>5</sup>. Attention was specifically devoted to sex and age disaggregation and each of the protection issues were detected for male, female, boys, girls, adolescent boys, and adolescent girls and – in most cases – persons with disabilities.

Data obtained through 117 Focus Group Discussions by Jordan and Turkey hubs sector members, GBV Expert Focus Group Discussions and existing secondary literature was analysed separately. FGDs used the following sampling criteria for selecting sub-districts: percentage of IDPs in the sub-district in relation to the overall number of IDPs in Syria and the population size of the sub-district. FGDs participants were disaggregated by age and sex, including adolescent girls and boys (age 13-17) as well as women and men (age 18 and above).

3 In addition to the specific assessment tools, the Protection Sector developed a Protection Sector Glossary used across the assessments.

4 For three cities, data at neighbourhood level from MSNA was available and considered as separate communities.

5 Please see Whole of Syria 2018 Protection Needs Overview (PNO): National Overview V1 (12 Oct 2017) for more information on the methodology of data consolidation (indicators, concept of occurrence and frequency of occurrence, aggregation, etc.) of the quantitative data sets.

## 2.2 Themes of GBV analysis and adherence to ethical guidelines

As in previous years, the overall analysis of GBV issues covered the following themes:

- Different types of GBV
- Availability of specialised services for GBV survivors
- Negative coping mechanisms affecting women and girls
- Movement restrictions for women and girls
- Restricted access to services for women and girls
- Risks to women and girls when accessing aid

Other themes that emerged in the qualitative analysis were also added, such as for example civil documentation issues

**GBV remains underreported** worldwide due to fears of stigma, retaliation and limited availability of accessibility of services. Moreover, it is widely understood that in emergency situations, many forms of GBV are significantly aggravated. However, the aim of the assessments was not to assess the overall prevalence of types of GBV. According to IASC GBV guidelines<sup>6</sup>, the aim of seeking population-based data on the true magnitude of GBV should not be a priority in any emergency, due to the safety and ethical challenges in collecting it. Likewise, when gathering data on sexual violence, the **ethical and safety recommendations for collecting information** on sexual violence in emergencies were taken into account<sup>7</sup>.

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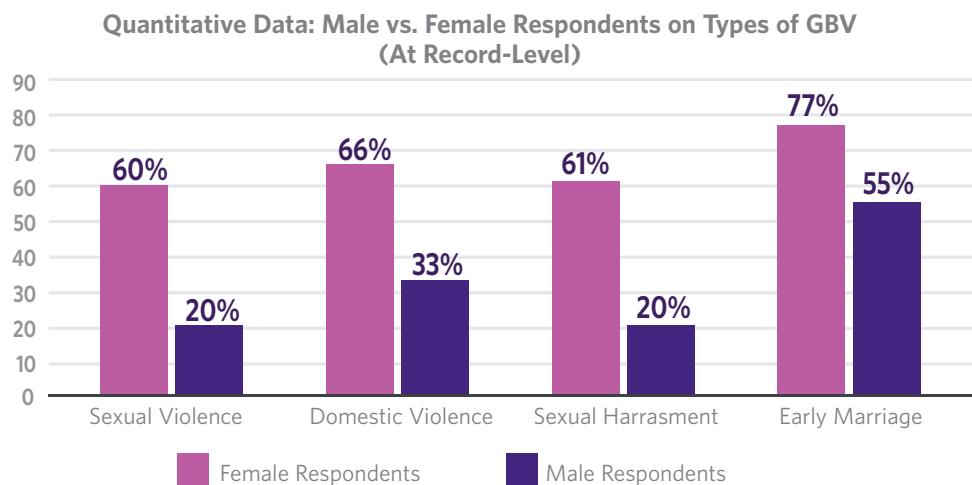
<sup>6</sup> IASC GBV guidelines (2015). Gbvguidelines.org

<sup>7</sup> WHO (2007). WHO Ethical and safety recommendations for researching, documenting and monitoring sexual violence in emergencies.

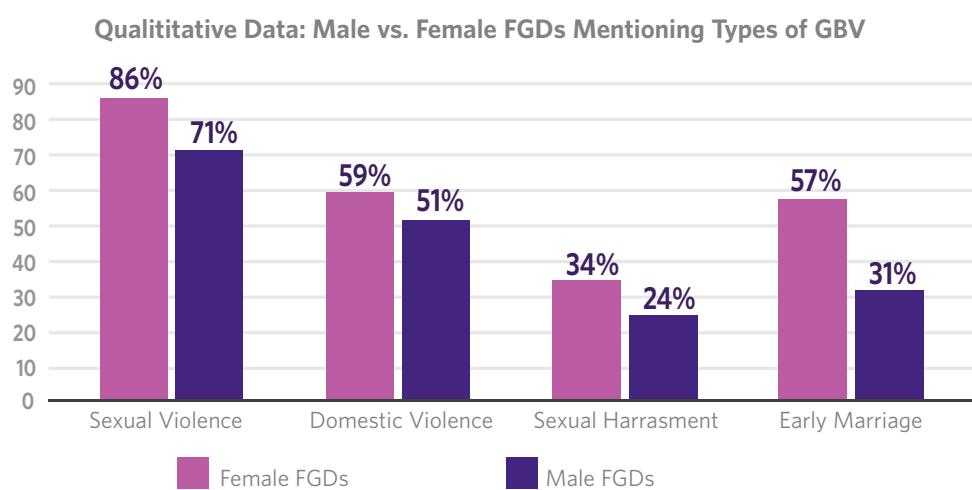
## 2.3 Limitations of the assessment findings

Despite the assessment representing the largest GBV assessment to date inside Syria, certain limitations do need to be acknowledged.

GBV, and in particular sexual violence, is **underreported** and rarely discussed openly by both females and males. This is regardless of the culture, religion, or geographic region, as studies have shown<sup>8</sup>. It is interesting to note that female participants in all data sets highlighted the types of gender-based violence that take place.



**Fig. 2.3.1 Male vs. Female Respondents on Types of GBV in Quantitative 2018 HNO Data**



**Fig. 2.3.2 Male vs. Female FGD Participants on Types of GBV in Qualitative 2018 HNO Data**

This is explained by the fact that women and girls experience the type of violence more than men and are able to speak to it. In quantitative multi-sectoral assessments, the targeted population is also often not familiar with the vocabulary around GBV, and enumerators without being specialised on GBV issues can face challenges in this regard, despite having been trained. Quantitative assessments are thus not expected to accurately reflect the scale and nature of sexual violence in an emergency. What they can do is highlight broader safety concerns and help identify situations where additional GBV expertise, resources and more in-depth GBV-specific assessment may be needed. For these reasons, the Syria HNO GBV analysis is based both on qualitative and quantitative data sources.

Efforts were made to ensure a **gender balance** when conducting the assessments. Data collectors were trained to seek out female respondents when possible using best practices that were culturally sensitive and relevant for the method used. Despite these efforts, the overall percentage of female enumerators and female key informants remained low in the quantitative assessments.

3



# Findings

GBV continues to pose a pervasive threat to women's and girls' well-being throughout Syria. This section presents the assessment findings according to the indicators set by the WoS GBV sector:

- Types of GBV reported as a concern
- Negative coping mechanisms used by women and girls
- Movement restrictions for women and girls
- Availability and access to GBV services across Syria
- Risks for women and girls when accessing aid

This section also outlines other recurring thematic areas within the data sets. These include changing family dynamics, social groups most vulnerable to GBV and linkages between GBV and other sectors.

## 3.1 The main types of GBV reported to be a concern for women and girls

 *For girls there is no freedom of movement. There is no longer a safe place. (Woman from Badama sub-district, Idlib governorate)*

Child marriage, domestic violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment economic violence, and abduction of women and girls are all discussed below. Data showed that urban communities were more likely than the national average to describe domestic violence, sexual violence and sexual harassment as occurring 'very commonly' for one or more population groups.

Women and girls are exposed to many risks related to the crisis and hostilities including shelling, destruction of infrastructure, displacement, etc. However, the crisis is also happening within a context of cultural norms that give women an inferior status to men. Due to this, women are exposed to additional risks such as violence in the home, whilst receiving fewer freedoms to protect themselves and their families. They are targeted for specific types of violence and exploitation simply because they are women.

While women and girls do talk about fears related to violence perpetrated by armed groups, they are also (and probably more frequently) facing violence at the hands of the everyday men in their lives: husbands, fathers, brothers, uncles and neighbours in their community. Similarly, women and girls report facing violence both inside and outside the home, resulting in very few places that are deemed as safe.



### Child marriage

 *I know one of the girls whose father denied her education and married her at an early age. When her husband died in a battle, her father married her to another man. Shortly after her second marriage, her husband divorced her. Her father married her for the third time. When I see her, I feel that she is mentally ill and very depressed. (Adolescent girl from Badama sub-district, Idlib governorate)*

Marriage of children under 18 years old is not a new phenomenon in Syria. It is a practice that is linked to culture and tradition, associated with the belief that women need protection by men. However, the protracted nature of the crisis has influenced the nature of child marriage to put a heavier impact on girls.

 *Forced marriage of a young girl to her cousin at a certain age existed before the crisis, but this practice has increased during the crisis because of the need to seek protection, the lack of men, the worsening economic situation, or because the girls are exploited, or threatened at gunpoint. (GBV expert from Syria Hub)*

In addition, women and girls in particular face sexual harassment and threats of abduction and sexual violence on a daily basis. In response to these risks, child marriage has changed from a cultural practice to a coping mechanism in the crisis.

Families may arrange marriages for their girls because they want to protect them, whilst easing their own financial burden.

According to GBV experts, this trend has been increasing due to the crisis, and there is an understanding that girls are being married at younger ages. When asked, adolescent girls stressed the lack of decision-making power that they have in this matter, as they are often pressured both by cultural norms and financial need, or forced by their family.

 *I want to change my future because I see failure down the track with an early marriage and no education. But I do not know how to change my destiny. (Adolescent girl from Dana sub-district, Idlib governorate)*

Reference was made to cases where girls married combatants, foreign fighters and family members. Girls also married adult men much older than them, while others married adolescent boys.

Some parents believe that a married girl will benefit from protection by her husband from safety threats such as sexual violence and abduction. The husband is also expected to provide basics such as food, shelter and stability at a time when her family cannot.

**“** *There are parents who force their daughters to get married because they do not have enough money to buy food for them. (Adolescent girl from Duma sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)*

In addition, this may provide financial relief for the girl's family by reducing the family size and accessing the dowry as a means of income.

**“** *Parents accept such marriages because of bad circumstances, the desire to benefit from their dowry, and to reduce the family's expenses. (Adolescent girl from Lattakia sub-district, Lattakia governorate)*

## Impact of child marriage

The risks of child marriage for girls are substantial. Girls engaging in sexual activity are more at risk of sexually transmitted infections, while early pregnancies pose enormous health risks for girls. Once married, girls are often forced to drop out of school and face additional restrictions of freedom and movement.

**“** *Some say that when a 14-year-old girl is made to marry, she must leave school and be controlled by a man who will prevent her from leaving the house. (Woman from Daret Azza sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*

Some girls described it as a loss of childhood. Married girls are moreover at risk of domestic violence - whether physical, verbal or sexual - and may be isolated from friends and family, particularly in cases where the girl was married during displacement and her family moved on to a different location.

**“** *I knew a little girl whose parents were very poor. They married her to an old man who had a lot of money. He married twice before her and he treated her very badly. He beat her so much and one day he broke her hand and even put out a cigarette on her body. The girl is now divorced but she wants to return to him for the money. (Woman from Hama sub-district, Hama governorate)*

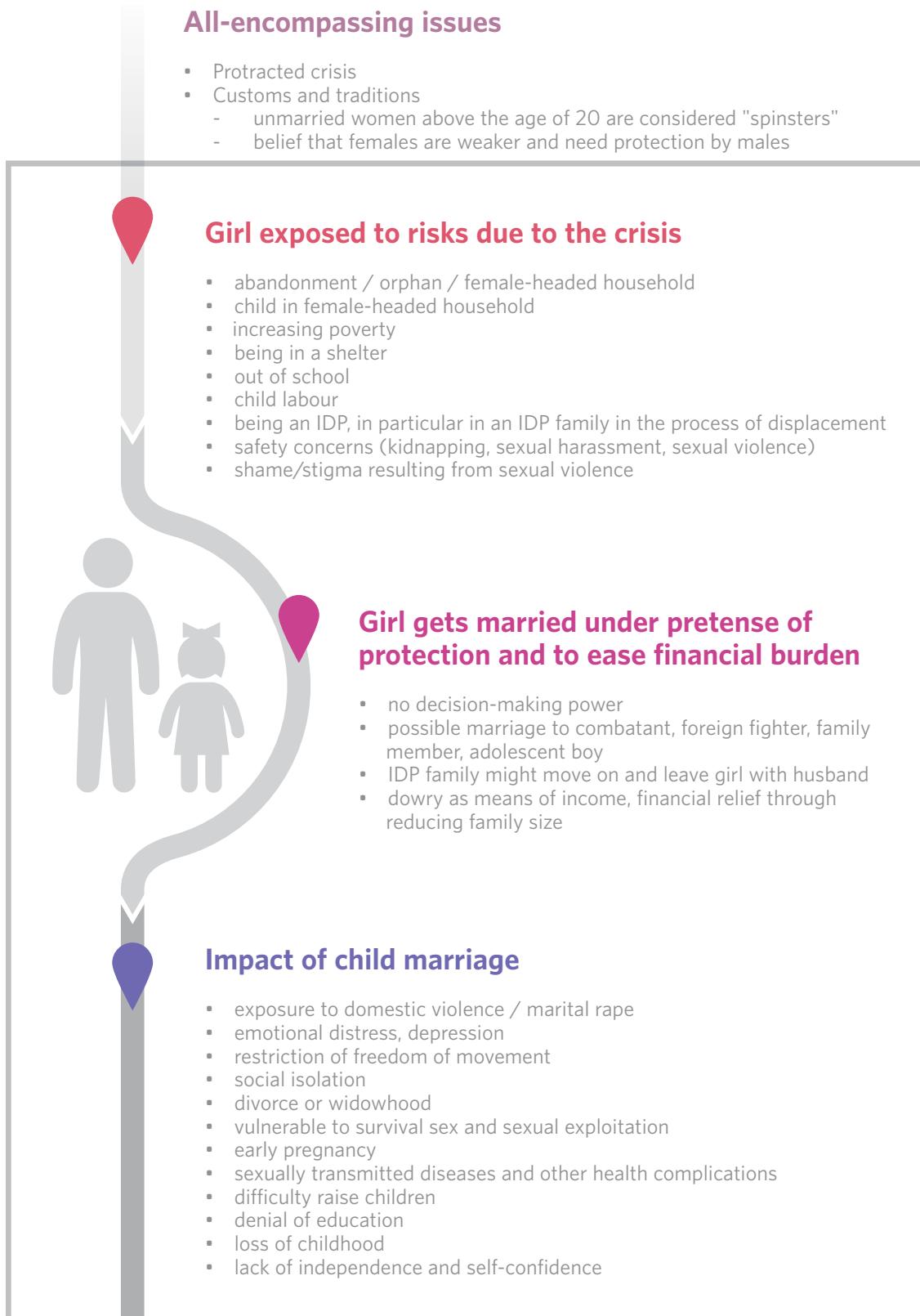
All of these issues can take a toll on the girls' mental health and lead to emotional distress and depression, along with the missed opportunity to mature, develop independence and self-confidence before entering into marriage.

Now that the crisis has been on-going for several years, data from this year's qualitative assessments sheds more light on the impact of child marriage over time. Participants highlighted that child marriage often ends in widowhood if married to a combatant, or divorce, in part because these children are not yet mature enough to function in an adult relationship.

**“** *[Girls usually marry at] 15 or 14 and sometimes even 13 years old. All this leads to divorce because the mind at this stage has not fully matured. (Man from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)*

**“** *There is the issue of family disintegration and divorce as a result of child marriage. Many girls are pregnant with babies that will not see their fathers. We find many girls, married at a young age, who have lost their husbands and now are left as widows without anyone to support them. (Woman from Saraqab sub-district, Idlib governorate)*

In addition, some participants noted that any children born from the marriage are at risk of being abandoned if the mother remarries - which she may be forced to do by her family or out of financial necessity.



**Fig. 3.1.1 Contributing Factors and Impact of Child Marriage**



## Domestic violence

### Domestic violence and the crisis

Domestic violence<sup>9</sup> was one of the most commonly mentioned types of gender-based violence affecting women and girls - although this is perhaps unsurprising given that domestic violence is an issue that women and girls face worldwide. Like child marriage, domestic violence is not a new phenomenon in Syria, and is often normalised and ingrained in culture.

**“** *Of course, the father is suffering psychologically as a result of the war and constant hardship. This poor psychological state makes him beat his wife and children. So he has become severely violent. (Adolescent girl from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)*

Participants perceived an increase in domestic violence since the start of the crisis. The crisis has brought about changes in family dynamics – with women working outside the house to contribute to or become sole provider of the family's income - that men interpret as a threat to the traditional balance of power.

**“** *My brother-in-law hit his wife and broke her hand. He said: "A woman whose voice is so high should be dealt with this way. (Woman from Daret Azza sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*

**“** *Every young man wants to prove his strength as a man. For example, if a young man is insulted, he will not tolerate it, and this is where the violence stems from. (Adolescent boy from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)*

Some of the changes that families face due to the crisis are structural, such as poverty, rising prices, unemployment, and displacement, while others are psychological, such as the six long years of hardship, stress and pressure. Both male and female participants discussed how the sustained toll of these problems on traditional roles of power – especially the culturally-important role of household provider - have eroded men's capacity to manage their anger. The stress they feel has lowered the threshold at which they resort to violence.

**“** *Participant (4): Their woman is their outlet! Due to the high prices and the lack of work, when a man comes home with no money, he blows off steam by fighting with his wife. (Adolescent boy from Kafr Nobol sub-district, Idlib governorate)*

### Domestic/family violence<sup>10</sup> against men

While Syrian men and boys do face violence within the family at the hand of a brother, uncle or father - as is the case globally - men remain overwhelmingly the perpetrators of gender-based violence in Syria. In the assessments, there were only two references to men experiencing domestic violence by their wives. In the qualitative data, men said they feel violated that women are no longer listening to them and talking back. While changing gender roles may result in women having more power in the household – which is perceived by men as a threat to their control - this generally results in increased violence against women.

**“** *The exchange of roles has led to increased violence by men against women. Because women now work and are financially independent, they have become disrespectful of men. (GBV expert from Syria Hub)*

### Consequences of domestic violence

While the health and psychosocial consequences of domestic violence are shared globally, women and girls in Syria are often especially reluctant to seek out services. In particular, the isolation - exacerbated by movement restrictions - can have a profound impact on women and girls who also may run the risk of losing their children

**“** *My sister's husband beats her and when she asked for a divorce, he threatened her that he would take her children far*

9 Domestic violence in this section refers to intimate partner violence. In many of the interviews, participants understood domestic violence to refer to violence within the family. This report makes an effort to separate the two issues.

10 Domestic violence in the GBV section refers to intimate partner violence. However, many of the participants of the assessments interpreted domestic violence to also mean family violence, which can include intimate partner violence, but also violence between father and son, brothers, brother against sister, brother in laws against women etc.

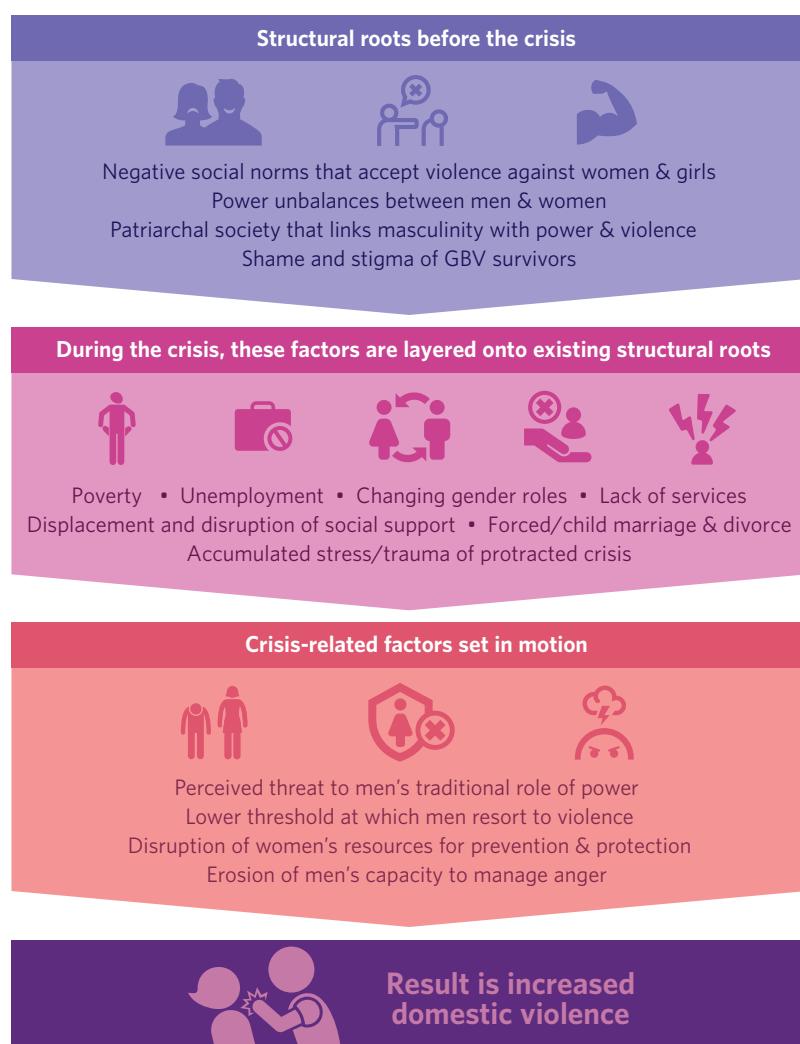
*away and wouldn't allow her to see them. She went back to live with him even though he kept beating her. (Adolescent girl from A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*

Whereas men actions are explained as a result of stress, women are often blamed for provoking the violence or allowing it to happen.

*“I know a woman who was used to being beaten by her husband. Now she can't move because her knee cartilage was broken. I told her that her personality is weak. (Woman from Homs sub-district, Homs governorate)*

Some women said that they would be able to seek support from their families or from services to protect themselves from domestic violence, while for others this would not be possible.

*“When a husband beats his wife, she may turn to her parents for help. However, the reaction of the parents might be insensitive. They could tell her: "It is okay, you have to live, he is your husband and you have to endure for the sake of your children in case he divorces you." (Adolescent girl from Jaramana sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)*



**Fig. 3.1.2 Contributing Factors to Increased Domestic Violence**



## Family violence

“ Women face violence in the home from their husbands, brothers and fathers. (Adolescent girl from Suluk sub-district, Ar-Raqa governorate)

Often closely linked with domestic violence, violence between family members contributes to the home being considered as an unsafe place for many women and children. Women and girls recounted violence perpetrated by other family members, such as in-laws and in particular the brother of their husband, in addition to the violence carried out by their husbands.

“ I know a woman whose husband is lost. Once her husband’s brother smacked her on the face. She complained to police, and they forced him to vow that he will never attack her again. (Woman from Homs sub-district, Homs governorate)

Violence against children by their parents was also noted as a concern. Boys and girls are both at risk of violence at the hands of their parents or caregivers, more frequently noted as fathers and uncles rather than mothers or aunts.

“ In my house, I may verbally abuse the girl, but I would hit the boy because he can bear more. (Man from Ma’arrat An Nu’man sub-district, Idlib governorate)

Quantitative data suggests that while violence against children affects both boys and girls equally at younger ages, girls may be at additional risk of violence when they reach adolescence.

“ The father does not shout at the boy like he shouts at the girl. When the girl is older than the boy, she will be accountable and exposed to violence more than the boy. (Adolescent girl from Duma sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

Consequences of family violence can reach severe physical injury, and are also associated with psychological distress and depression.

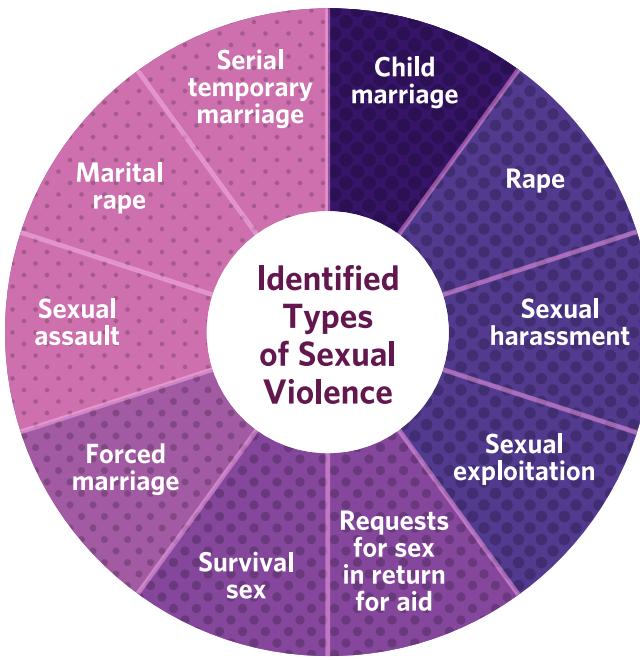
“ Physical violence has been increasing. Last month, you might have heard about the incident of a father who kept beating his daughter until she died. This is more than violence - this is brutality. (Man from Qudsiya sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

Participants also noted the presence of violence between children in a family, usually by a brother against his sister.

“ My family is falling apart, as they have inherited the habit of beating from their father. Beating has become a widespread habit in the family. The father beats his children, and the children beat each other. (Woman from A’zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate)



## Sexual violence



**Fig. 3.1.3 Identified Types of Sexual Violence**

Sexual violence is one of the most frequently cited types of violence discussed by participants in FGDs, and both the fear of and experience of it affects the lives of women and girls. Participants discussed a daily fear of sexual violence including street harassment and rape, as well as abduction, because it usually relates to sexual violence.

### Rape and sexual assault

Women and girls were identified as being the most vulnerable group at risk for sexual violence, and many women and girls stated that they feared rape and sexual assault on a daily basis. Though many participants talked about this vulnerability as a product of the '*inherent*' weakness of women and girls compared to men, they also noted that this type of violence exists within a patriarchal culture where women are targeted due to their lower social status.

*“Women and girls are the most vulnerable to sexual violence because of their weakness, and male domination. (Adolescent boy from Saraqab sub-district, Idlib governorate)*

Participants of the FGDs said that the motive of kidnapping and abduction of women and girls was often associated with rape and sexual assault.

*“Girls who have been displaced or caught up in the war have more concerns such as fear of abduction, rape, death and financial or sexual exploitation by either their relatives or people whom they are working with. (Adolescent girl from Lattakia sub-district, Lattakia governorate)*

Displacement and living in camps are noted as being particularly unsafe environments for women and girls. There, the risk of sexual violence is particularly high. Typical reasons given were a lack of privacy (in tents or in latrines), overcrowding and mixing of people who do not know each other, poverty and financial desperation, and lawlessness.



*There is no security or anybody that protects the border and transit routes to Turkey from exploitative smugglers. We have heard a lot about rapes and assaults on many women and girls, who were then smuggled into Turkey. (Adolescent girl from Badama sub-district, Idlib governorate)*

Coming into contact with armed groups, especially when moving through checkpoints and areas where soldiers are stationed, is understood to carry risks of sexual violence.



*On checkpoints, soldiers can call any girl to get out the car, and if people try to protect her, they will be hurt or arrested. (Man from At Tall sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)*



*There was a girl in Aleppo, and one of the army thugs liked her, and so he raped her before her parents and others. (Adolescent girl from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)*

In addition, various accounts of forced marriage to the perpetrator of a rape were mentioned as a way to preserve the honour of the survivor and her family.



## Sexual harassment

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*And some types of men, even if they don't touch you, they will say cruel words. Therefore, if it is not by deed, it will by words. And if not by words, it will be by looks. (Woman from Qudsiya sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)*

Shouts, insults, threats and other street harassment of a sexual nature by men toward women and girls can pose a daily nuisance and fear, often developing into a barrier that prohibits women and girls from leaving their homes to access markets, services, distributions, school and work.

Harassment of this form may be perpetrated by men of any age, even boys, but was noted to be particularly frightening when coming from taxi or bus drivers, or from those linked with armed groups, as women feared they could be abducted.

## Girls and sexual violence

Girls noted particular risks of sexual violence (harassment, abduction and rape) while on the way to or from school. These risks are often the main reason cited for girls to drop out or be pulled out of school by their parents.



*When schools are open, there is a lot of hitting going on. There were people placed on watch on occasion to protect girls on their way to school. However, those on watch might get in trouble themselves. The [harasser] could be the brother of some battalion leader, or one of his relatives could be a battalion leader. No one dares talk back to them. (Man from Dar'a sub-district, Dar'a governorate)*

Unaccompanied girls, orphans or those living with relatives and away from their parents were understood to be at risk of sexual violence. Their vulnerable situation is usually caused by divorce and remarriage of their parents, or working outside of the home, for example as a cleaner or servant in someone else's house. Even more than adult women, girls have little control over most aspects of their lives, from clothing, to choice of friends, to school, movement, and even to marriage.

**“**The home is supposed to be a safe haven for the girl if she is subjected to violence outdoors, but in many cases, the girl is exposed to violence at home more than other places. When the parents are separated, the girl is exposed to a lot of violence. If the girl stays in her father's house, she may be insulted and humiliated by her father's new wife. If she stays with her mother, her mother's husband may subject her to verbal and sometimes sexual violence. (Adolescent girl from As-Sweida sub-district, As-Sweida governorate)

## Men and boys and sexual violence

Children in general were cited as vulnerable to sexual violence. When the specific sex was mentioned, girls were seen as being at much higher risk than boys. It is worth noting that, as with women and girls, perpetrators mentioned in cases of sexual violence against boys were all male.

Within the qualitative data analysed for this report, the only mentions of sexual violence against men were perpetrated in prisons and during detainment.

## Consequences of sexual violence

In addition to the health and psychosocial consequences of sexual violence, the shame and social stigma associated with women and girls' virginity deeply influences both the impact of sexual violence and the coping mechanisms available to survivors. Heavy emphasis is placed on female virginity and modesty as part of family honour.

**“**The biggest problem lies in the community and how it deals with the victims of violence. Most of the time it is against the victim of violence, which is the weaker link in the problem. I will give you an example: if a girl is raped, she will be described as the one who has brought shame on her parents as if she had asked for this rape. If she had not wanted it to happen, it would have never happened. According to them, if this was not the case, why didn't this happen to any other girl? If it happened then it was because she wanted to find someone who was willing to marry her. He would always treat her on the basis that he had done her a great favour by marrying her and he would keep reminding her of this favour till the end of her life. Usually such a husband would marry another woman in addition to her. (Man from Jaramana sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

Women and girls mentioned being afraid of how their families may react if they were victims of sexual violence. Married women may face divorce from their husbands, or husbands may take a second wife to compensate for reduced "value" of the first. Girls may be forced into marriage with the perpetrator, or with another man as a means of covering up her dishonour. Survivors of sexual violence, in the most extreme cases, may also face murder by their family members in the name of honour (see box "Honour Killings").

**“**We heard of rape cases, and then the parents hated their girl and wanted to marry her off as soon as possible. (Adolescent girl from Homs sub-district, Homs governorate)

Some women and girls talk about running away after experiencing sexual violence as a way of protecting themselves from shame and family repercussions.

**“**A girl (14 years old) was forced by her family to marry someone she does not like, to the extent she was hit in front of him. Her fiancé started to hit her too, and so she fled on her wedding day to Damascus. (Adolescent girl from Kafir Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)



## Honour killings

Murder of women and girls by their family members in the name of honour was mentioned without prompting more frequently this year than compared to last year. Each time, the victim mentioned was a woman (never a man) and it was linked with sexual violence, though not necessarily rape - in some cases it occurs even as a reaction to street harassment or assault, or in other cases assumed sexual violence during detainment. Some mentioned that honour killing has increased since the onset of the crisis because of an increase in sexual violence, and because of an increase in lawlessness. Additionally, girls now have fewer social resources available to hide or protect themselves due to displacement and the collapse of social support structures.

- “ When a girl is raped, this problem is solved by either marriage or murder. (Adolescent girl from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)
- “ The men must be held responsible for this. The most important thing for the man is that nobody speaks badly about him. I mean even if his daughter is raped, he either kills her or forces her to shut up. She is considered responsible for bringing shame upon him. (Woman from Jaramana sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)
- “ A girl, our neighbour, was exposed to sexual harassment... Imagine you were in her shoes. If she returns home, her parents will kill her. She does not know what to do. Everyone in the community is armed. (Woman from Qudsiya sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)



## Sexual exploitation

- “ Exploitation of women is everywhere, and especially towards widows who do not have any source of income. She will prove easy prey for some men who have money in order to satisfy their desires. It happened to me personally. But there is no authority that can call to account, punish or deter anyone who is responsible for these acts. 'If you have money, you can do anything you want.' I repeated this statement during the court hearing, complaining that the authorities do not listen because of the lack of money and lack of highly influential social connections. (Woman from Salqin sub-district, Idlib governorate)

The assessments confirmed that women and girls face sexual exploitation. Poverty, displacement, being head of the household, coupled with gender inequalities are all understood to contribute to this form of gender-based violence.

Women who are heads of the household due to divorce, separation or the death of their husband, may find themselves with few options for supporting their families.

- “ I know a woman whose husband died and who has seven kids. Her cousins work as smugglers and are well off. Her cousins tell her they would pay her 100,000 SPs per month if she comes to them whenever they tell her to... she needs the money because she has seven kids and it takes an enormous effort to bring them all up alone. (Woman from Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

Children and especially girls are also at risk of sexual exploitation. Separated and unaccompanied children, or those living in a female-headed household, are perceived to be at highest risk.

- “ 13-year-old girls go to the bakeries to make a little money. I know that people exploit those girls sexually in return for buying bread from them. This is so common. (Men from At Tall sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)
- “ Participant 1: Girls are exploited. Some girls are deceived into doing bad things because they need the money.  
Participant 2: Yes, this is too common. (Men from At Tall sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

Camps were also identified as locations that increase the risk of sexual exploitation of women and girls. Participants referred to sexual exploitation of women and girls who attempted to leave the camps through a local sponsor.

**“**[IDPs] are more prone to harassment than the locals. Locals are generally known and so movement is easier for them than IDPs. Female IDPs, in general, are at a higher risk of being exploited than the local population. (Woman from Dar'a sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

**“**There is sexual violence such as the recent abduction of girls, and recently brothels have been discovered in the camp. (Adolescent girl from Badama sub-district, Idleb governorate)

Participants described scenarios in which men in positions of power abuse their authority to make sexual advances on women and girls in exchange for goods or services necessary for survival. Women described how the suggestion of sexual exploitation would make them feel shame and discomfort, and fear repercussions if they deny the request. Women stated that some would avoid accessing services for fear of or to avoid sexual exploitation.

**“**We have heard about a few cases where women are exploited during aid distributions. Some distributors might ask for a woman's phone number, or they might give her a lift to her house to take something in return. (Woman from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

Many find themselves in such a dire situation that they resort to survival sex out of desperation to earn money, to access humanitarian aid or to secure shelter for their children.

**“**There are many cases of "sex for money", more than before, because of the economic situation and the absence of the male factor for various reasons. (GBV expert from Syria)

Sexual exploitation by humanitarian workers at distributions was commonly cited by participants as a risk faced by women and girls when trying to access aid. (See: 3.10 Availability and Access to GBV services across Syria.)

**“**The more the girl gives to the distributor, the more aid she will receive. (Adolescent girl from Badama sub-district, Idleb governorate)

Women may also face sexual exploitation in attempting to secure housing for themselves and their families, either by shelter supervisors or by private owners.

**“**She could not pay the rent of the house she was living in, yet the property owner allowed her to live there for free providing that he could sleep with her daughters whenever he wanted. (Woman from At Tall sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

## Impact of sexual exploitation

In addition to the health and mental health repercussions related to sexual violence, sexual exploitation - or the threat of it - may become a barrier to accessing humanitarian aid.

**“**Some women have given up receiving aid because of the provocative treatment they receive from distributors. (Adolescent girl from Badama sub-district, Idleb governorate)

Also, similar to sexual violence more broadly, there is the important impact of shame and social stigma related to sexual exploitation.

**“**Now you have to distinguish between the issue of sexual violence and the issue of a woman who is forced to work in prostitution in order to earn her food and feed the persons that she provides for. This woman will be exposed to violence twice: violence by the community and violence by the person who rapes her, because she is forced into doing this. (Man from Jaramana sub-district, Rural Damascus, governorate)

## Serial temporary marriage

“ During the crisis, repeated child marriage was spread (several marriages within less than a month) without sparing time between one marriage and another for the waiting period decreed by Islam. This has led to illegal marriage and it is exploitation for material and economic reasons, either to relieve the parents' of their child's expenses or in order to increase the number of family members on the assistance list. I think that young girls' marriage is more sexual exploitation than violence in some cases. (GBV expert from Syria)

One specific type of sexual exploitation that came out in expert FGDs were cases where women and girls were married temporarily through Islamic marriage agreements, so allowing a husband sexual access to a woman for as little as a few hours before the marriage is then annulled. This phenomenon of temporary and at times serial marriages was already discussed in last year's assessment and was again found this year in the FGDs as well as in the discussions of GBV experts from all WoS hubs. Some GBV experts linked it to survival sex '*under the name of an unofficial marriage contract*' and one expert gave the example of girls under the age of 18 being married and divorced several times within one month '*without sparing time between one marriage and another for the waiting period decreed by Islam*'. Women and girls may face these marriages repeatedly with several men, resulting in sexual exploitation that essentially grants men short-term sexual access in exchange for payment or material support under the guise of marriage.

“ Prostitution networks have surfaced in some shelters, using the pretext of marriage to employ girls in prostitution. (GBV expert from Syria)

The lack of civil registration of these '*marriages*' also absolves men of responsibility for any resultant children and places children at risk of being unregistered. These marriages would be issued unofficially by religious leaders in the community, and the lack of documentation for these marriages would result in children without birth certificates and the women and girls without any rights after the divorce.

“ Temporary marriages happen as well in Jerablus sub-district. Due to a fear of abduction, the family wants to marry their girls off. The ceremonies are conducted by a Sheik without informing the local council. If the husband then leaves, there are not guarantees for her future. (GBV expert from Syria)

“ Participants agreed that distributions are rarely received for free. Mostly they are distributed for money or for sexual services, such as marriage for a short period of time, from the officials to receive a meal. (Woman from Kafir Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

The data does not give an indication with regards to the extent of these forms of marriages in Syrian society.

## 3.2 A gendered lens on the crisis

### Abduction

“ She made her 15-year-old daughter marry because she was afraid of assault or abduction. Now that she is married, her husband will protect her. (Woman from Dana sub-district, Idlib governorate)

Although participants of all ages and sexes spoke about the fear of abduction, they noted that abduction of women and girls was more commonly associated with rape and sexual assault or even forced marriage, compared to detention and forced conscription for men and boys, or robbery and kidnapping for ransom for those with money.

“ A short while ago, a divorced woman was seized in front of a hospital and after that she was raped. (Woman from Mare' sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

“ Some women get kidnapped for marriage. (Man from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

In the most extreme cases, abduction may end in homicide for women and girls, and the fear of this is widespread among participants.

“ [There are] many abduction cases and robberies because of the widespread availability of guns. Among these cases was a murdered girl whose body was thrown in the Euphrates for reasons still unknown. (Man from Jerablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

“ Girls are being abducted then they are found dead. (Woman from Kafr Nobol, Idlib governorate)

“ People, especially girls, are afraid of being kidnapped or murdered. (Adolescent girl from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

Abduction related to unsafe transportation seems to be more of a risk for women than for men, and leads to stricter movement restrictions for women and fewer transportation options as compared to men.

Abductions appear to occur more frequently at night for both men and women, but women and children may face more risk at camps compared to men.

Beyond the actual acts of abduction, the fear of kidnapping was widespread and frequently mentioned during assessments, without prompting.

“ There are no clear security forces in place to prevent women from being subjected to problems such as kidnapping and rape – even to the extent that abduction takes place in broad daylight. No one does anything or helps because of the fear that has taken control of the people. (Woman from Daret Azza sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

This fear was one of the main justifications behind movement restrictions, most commonly for women and girls compared to men and boys<sup>11</sup>.

### Detention and torture

First-hand accounts of women who had been arrested and detained in relation to the crisis, have demonstrated the similarities in how women report that they are treated both during detention and after their release<sup>12</sup>.

“ We have seen cases of [female] detainees who come to our centre. Psychological violence happens a lot in prison, including threats to cancel family visits or beat up their family. (GBV expert from Syria)

After women are released from detention, they report a daily struggle to heal and survive. Many reported severe physical injuries from violence, including gynaecological injuries such as fistula from sexual violence, and health conditions such as pneumonia or hepatitis. All reported suffering from psychological distress.

<sup>11</sup> In some areas this fear was more prevalent for men and boys. See governorate specific results for details.

<sup>12</sup> Secondary literature reports (2017) available upon request.

Whereas both men and women may suffer brutal violence and torture during detention and resulting psychological distress, the shame and social stigma that women face after release is the most telling point where their experiences diverge.

“ We can't ignore the discomfort and embarrassment felt by the parents, relatives, neighbours and... the local community for the [female] detainee after her release, which male detainees don't face. Moreover, male detainees are treated in a different manner, with heroism and other qualities being projected upon them, even though the male detainees suffered from many kinds of torture and violence including sexual violence. This is caused by gender roles, and their respective status according to the collective consciousness of these local communities. (Secondary literature source, 2017)

The widespread assumption that women detainees have experienced sexual violence, whether true or not, can be perceived as promiscuity and therefore a stain on her dignity and honour by families and community members. Reports indicate that the consequences of this stigma reach so far as social isolation, rejection from employment, divorce, family disownment, or even honour killings.

“ We have also seen the spread of prostitution networks among women released from holding facilities or prisons. (GBV expert from Syria)

“ When [women] leave [detention] they are stigmatised. Because she was detained, everyone thinks she is a survivor [of sexual violence]. Her husband might divorce her or her father might kill or disinherit her. (GBV expert from Syria)

## Lawlessness

Among the many risks associated with increasing violence and specifically GBV in parts of Syria is the notion of chaos, in which people can do what they want without facing consequences. In part, this was related to the breakdown of protection services such as police or courts because of the crisis in some areas. However, another important aspect of this idea of lawlessness is the dismantling of pre-crisis social structures, which also erodes existing social protection mechanisms.

“ Of course, having no authority to hold guilty people accountable for what they had done is a problem, which causes additional stress. We live in concern that no authorities will ensure we receive our rights in case we suffer injury. This uncertainty has led to the spread of criminals, robbers, and molesters. (Woman from Dar'a sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

“ I have a 14-year-old daughter. I lock the door when I go out to my work because I am afraid that unscrupulous people might break into the house. The absence of law, the deterioration of education as well as abject poverty has pushed many towards crimes of kidnapping and robbery. (Woman from Dana sub-district, Idlib governorate)

### 3.3 Affected populations at particular risk of GBV

#### Women and girls

The findings from all quantitative and qualitative data sources indicate that women and girls are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence in Syria - as is the case globally. The types of violence women experience are typically child marriage, sexual violence and domestic violence.

**Displaced women and girls**, specifically those living in camps, shelters and informal settlements across the country are understood to be particularly vulnerable to GBV. In the qualitative data, women and girls are mentioned eight times more frequently as '*particularly vulnerable to violence*' than boys and men. When comparing how many different types of violence affect different age and sex groups, again, women and girls are mentioned in relation to four times more types of violence than men and boys, including different types of sexual violence, violence between husband and wife, child marriage and violence related to denial of resources, among others. With regards to sexual violence<sup>13</sup>, child marriage and movement restrictions, **adolescent girls** are found to be particularly impacted. In 65% of focus groups across the whole country, participants gave clear examples of how girls are being restricted in their movements. This was echoed by GBV experts and secondary literature sources. Overall, women and girls are described as being in need of a '*male protector*' and as '*inherently*' vulnerable.

*I am afraid of adults assaulting me... (Participant was fighting back the tears.) I am scared when I go out to buy what my mother needs. If my father had been alive, I would not have been forced to leave the house. (Adolescent girl from Duma sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)*

*Cases of early widowhood are on the increase in the shelter centres. This leads to undocumented multiple marriages, as well as cases of physical violence. (GBV expert from Syria)*

#### Widowed, divorced and separated women and girls

As in last year's assessments, specific groups of women and girls were perceived to be at higher risk of GBV than others. The vulnerability to GBV of widows and separated/divorced girls and women was evident in the data. Both groups were perceived to be at particular risk of sexual violence, emotional and verbal abuse, forced marriage, polygamy and serial temporary marriages, movement restrictions, economic violence and exploitation, among others. Participants discussed the '*need to find husbands for these women and girls*' in order to increase their protection and safeguard their honour. Many examples were given of such women and girls having been re-married to extended family members and others '*to be taken care of*'.

*Not only girls suffer this type of violence. There are widows and divorced women who are thought of as more vulnerable to harassment since they have no one to support them or defend them. Our society is patriarchal. (Woman from Hawash sub-district, Homs governorate)*

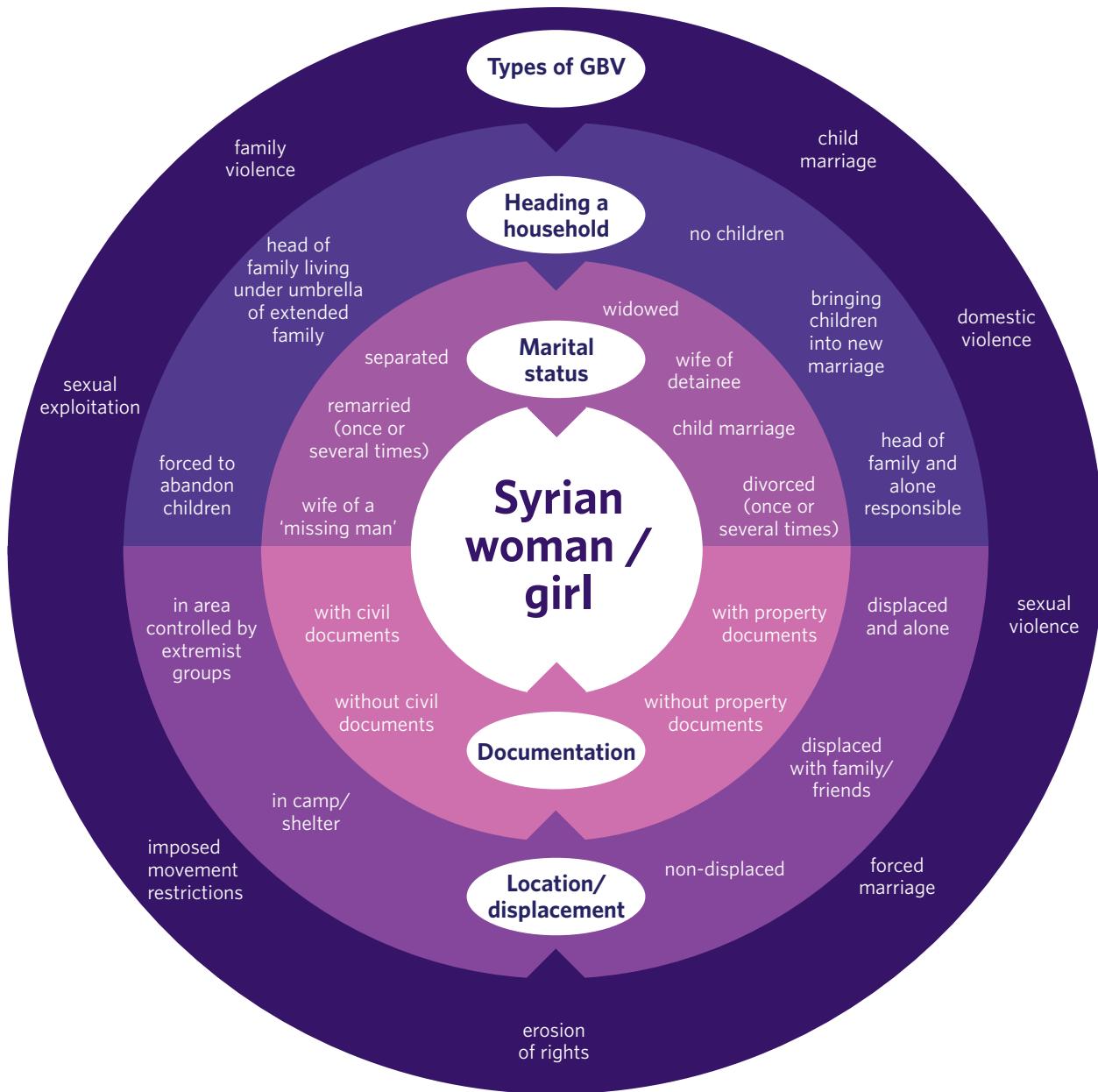
*The only thing they've advised men to do [at the mosques] after the crisis - and because there are many divorced women and widows - is to marry two or three women. That is the only piece of advice. (Woman from Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)*

*The widow is treated badly and violently by society. Maybe marriage can provide her with a safe place if this marriage is appropriate. (Adolescent girl from Harasta sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)*

Saying this, however, widows and separated/divorced girls and women are not a homogenous group. Instead, various factors significantly impact the risks, vulnerabilities and consequently the needs of these women and girls:

Being a widow or a divorced women/girl is highly **stigmatised** by society, which has direct implications in terms of their ability to find work and to access service and resources. While widows are also affected by this, in particular divorced and or separated women and girls suffer from being regarded as '*bad*' and '*intrinsically responsible for failure of a marriage and the suffering of their husband and children*'. Participants also named wives of detainees and wives with unaccounted men as being particularly vulnerable to emotional and verbal abuse, and being constantly watched by the community and gossiped about.

13 See section 3.1 on sexual violence for more details on groups by age and sex affected by sexual violence.



**Fig 3.3.1 Complexity of impact of the protracted crisis on Syrian girls and women with a particular focus on windows and divorced women and girls**

This can lead families, as well as women and girls, to employ **negative coping mechanisms**, such as movement restrictions, forced and child marriage, survival sex and in particular non-disclosure. Participants described how families would often try to re-marry these women and girls as quickly as possible again. In contrast, a few positive examples of how these women and girls were cared for by their extended families were also mentioned.

‘‘ Yes, the girl, whether widow or divorced, is exposed to a lot of marginalisation in our community and people talk badly about them. (Woman from Hama sub-district, Hama governorate)

‘‘ A woman cannot move freely, especially widows and divorced women, since this would harm their reputation. (Woman from Zarbah sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

A particularly painful fear of widows and divorced women and girls is that their children could be **taken away** from them or that they could be forced to **leave their children** in order to provide an income. When talking about the reasons that children would be separated or abandoned in the community, the death of the caregiver was mentioned most often. This was followed by the re-marriage of parents, in particular the mother, and thirdly divorce. In this context, the available data also showed the scale of the extremely vulnerable situation of many separated and unaccompanied children across the country.

‘‘ Some widows take their children with them wherever they go because their husbands' families threaten to take the children from them. (Adolescent girl from Ma'arrat An Nu'man sub-district, Idleb governorate)

‘‘ A mother has lost her husband because of the war, so her parents forced her to abandon her child and re-marry. The child stayed at his grandmother's home. (Adolescent girl from A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate))

Across the datasets, **displaced widows and divorced women and girls** were identified as particularly vulnerable to different types of violence, such as sexual violence and child marriage. In Idleb governorate there were reports<sup>14</sup> of internally displaced widowed and divorced women and girls being segregated from other people in camps, under the guise of protection, and being subject to further restrictions in movement or in the right to keep their children, amongst others. This finding was echoed by GBV experts working in those areas. These separate camp sections were associated as places where men would go looking for wives. In Raqqa governorate, there were also reports of wives and widows of ISIL fighters being stigmatised and placed in separate sections of camps with their children.

The **lack or loss of civil documentation and/or property-related documents** also has major implications for widows and separated/divorced women and girls, in particular in non-government-controlled areas in Syria where official documents cannot be easily obtained. In fact, one female FGD participant from a non-government-controlled area in Dar'a governorate believed that '*the main reason that couples were separated was because one of them does not have ID*'. Participants described how not having a family booklet could hinder widows and separated/divorced women and girls from accessing distributions, as they would be considered as part of their parents' family.

‘‘ If a widow has a family booklet, she would still receive a distribution when she goes back to her parents. If she has no proof of identity, then she would get nothing. (Woman from Mzeireb sub-district, Dar'a governorate))

‘‘ I got married and wanted to document my marriage, but every sub-district sends me to the other. Then I became pregnant and delivered the baby. I went to Hamouriyah to secure a birth certificate for him, but they required my divorce paper from my ex-husband. My baby turned two years old and still neither my marriage nor my baby's birth is documented. Newborns are at highest risk of not being officially registered. (Women from Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

Recent research by the UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council in areas of Syria, accessed cross-border from Turkey and Jordan, has complimented these findings. They have shown that widows and divorced girls and women are more reliant on family members as their main source of **income** and are highly at risk in terms of losing **property**, and consequential poverty. While it is clear that there is provision in Syrian law for divorced and widowed women, legal protection is sometimes conditional. For example, in the case of an irrevocable divorce, if the husband can prove that the divorce is the fault of his wife, she loses her right to the dowry as agreed in the marriage contract in accordance with Article 59 of Personal Status Law 59/1953<sup>15</sup>. These findings were also confirmed by FGD participants.

14 Secondary Literature Report, January 2017. Available upon request.

15 UNHCR / NRC, Displacement, housing, land and property and access to civil documentation in the north west of the Syrian Arab Republic, July 2017, p. 21.

## Female-headed household

The data does not make it clear how many widows and divorced/separated women and girls are heads of **female-headed households** and how many live with their parents and extended families. What becomes very clear, however, is that these women and girls, who are either alone or with children and do not have families to be with, are at particular high risk of violence and extreme poverty. In displacement situations, they often group together to protect themselves and support each other. GBV experts working in government-controlled areas perceived that '*children and female heads of households are sexually exploited and that this exploitation is growing strongly*'. For areas accessed through cross-border operations, GBV experts also mentioned female-headed households and female IDPs in relation to survival sex. Generally, FGD participants perceived a '*house without males as unsafe*', especially if located near to armed groups.

 *There are fears especially for women because they are the weakest members in the community and especially those who have no breadwinner. (Woman from Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idleb governorate)*

Female-headed households are understood to be at **increased risk of sexual violence** in particular, participants highlighted the fear of girls in those families of becoming victims. Distribution points were mentioned as posing a high threat of sexual harassment and other types of GBV<sup>16</sup>.

 *There are a lot of women whose husbands are arrested, killed, martyred, or who have emigrated. Therefore, a lot of women are left alone with their children in their homes ... For example, if the woman does not live close to her parents, she will be worried about the night time, especially if she has young daughters. This is another problem ... even in the smallest details that she has to carry out - such as opening the door if someone knocks at the door, or even if she goes out to buy something - she has to worry about her daughters. She is always under direct pressure. (Woman from Jaramana sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)*

In a few focus groups, participants also mentioned wives whose husbands have been injured in the crisis. These women and girls were described as living in a '*de-facto female-headed household*', having to assume many '*male*' responsibilities in the household, including the care for a disabled person.

## People with disabilities

Participants often expressed that people with disabilities (PWD) are **inherently 'unable to protect themselves'**, '*weak*' and '*without control*', whether with regards to safety issues or risks of violence. References were also overwhelmingly dominated by a perception of them being a **homogenous group**, not differentiating between types of disability, age or sex, and how the effects of the disability on the person can change over time. However, specific **sub-groups** relating to GBV were occasionally mentioned, for example when an adolescent girl in the governorate of Rural Damascus said that she perceived '*a girl with disability being in a more difficult position than a disabled young man*'.

This sense of PWD being **without self-protection** was at times also mentioned in relation to GBV, and in particular sexual violence, because of communication barriers and difficulty in detecting dangerous situations. In addition, risks increase in displacement situations if people with disabilities are separated from caregivers.

<sup>16</sup> For more information see: 3.11 Women's and Girls' Access to Humanitarian Assistance in the Form of Distributions.

“*They are the most vulnerable to violence because they often cannot defend themselves or run away from dangers. (Adolescent girl from A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*

“*A participant said her sister-in-law is disabled. She is 20 years old and sometimes wants to sit in front of the tent entrance. Her brother and sister keep scolding her and consider her sitting outside. Sometimes they are afraid of the presence of young men standing at the roadside who look suspiciously at her. (Woman from Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate)*

People with disabilities are mentioned several times in relation to sexual violence, in particular rape and sexual harassment. GBV experts also discussed this observation during one of the group discussions, specifically naming women and girls with disabilities as being victims of sexual harassment and exploitation. Examples came from five different governorates - from urban and rural, host community and IDP settings. Both male and female victims as well as various age groups, except those aged above 60, were mentioned. Several participants reported having disabled family members, who they feared for with regards to sexual violence. Mental disability was also specifically mentioned.

“*Yesterday, a disabled girl was playing in the street. One of the young men lured her with some candy and then raped her. So this group of people should not be marginalised. (Adolescent girl from As-Sweida sub-district, As-Sweida governorate)*

“*My son is mentally disabled and I fear he will become a victim of sexual violence because he can't think or understand anything. (Woman from Salqin sub-district, Idleb governorate)*

“*People with special needs are subject to sexual harassment. This is because they have no awareness or self-control, and so are easy to exploit. (Adolescent girl from Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*

In several communities, the qualitative data shows that **specialised GBV** services as well as other **GBV programmes** can only be accessed by people without disabilities.

“*Specialised GBV services do exist, but only the healthy access them. Very few persons with special needs are able to access these services. (...) The mobile teams are not sufficient. (GBV expert from Syria)*

“*The protection services available in our community include educational institutes, recreational kindergartens, Quranic schools and women's centres for psychosocial support. They are easily accessible to community members with the exception of the elderly and the disabled. (Man from Saraqeb sub-district, Idleb governorate)*

## 3.4 Coping mechanism

Against a backdrop of violence and insecurity, the assessments found that women and girls are using a variety of coping strategies to minimise the risks and effects of GBV, and unmet basic needs. However, there is much shame and social stigma associated with women and girls' virginity and upholding traditional gender roles. This deeply influences the strategies available to prevent and minimise the risks of GBV, and also for survivors to cope after experiencing GBV.

The most commonly cited strategy to minimise the risks of GBV for women and girls was to **change or limit their patterns of movement, appearance and behaviour**. Women and girls either choose or are forced by their husband or family to stay at home, to only leave the house during the day, or leave the house only if accompanied by a husband, brother or parent. Many also describe changing their pattern of movement to avoid crowded places like markets or narrow streets, looking down when walking, and wearing clothes that are considered more '*decent*' in order to avoid sexual harassment.

Some coping strategies do not entirely prevent harm. Instead, potential threats are replaced by (perceptively) less harmful ones, or the 'best available' course of action. For example, in the case of child marriage, the risks of being married in childhood were seen by some parents to outweigh the risks of being without a male protector at a time of conflict and insecurity. Across the different data sets, a range of negative coping strategies were reported. The most common were: movement restrictions, including dropping out of school; dress restrictions; running away; self-defence; child marriage; divorce; survival sex.

### Non-disclosure

**“Any lady suffering such a case would not speak, due to being afraid from her family in the first place. If a woman suffers even a simple kind of sexual harassment she would not speak of it as society does not accept it. (Woman from Dar'a sub-district, Dar'a governorate)**

The most frequently cited way for women and girls to cope after experiencing GBV was to tell no one about it, to remain silent and keep it a secret. Non-disclosure was mentioned as a coping mechanism in 58% of all FGDs (61% among female participants and 53% of male). In fact, many FGD participants, both male and female, cited non-disclosure as the only coping mechanism available to female survivors of violence in order to avoid scandal, gossip, shame and social stigma, along with additional restrictions of freedom or punishment.

### Victim blaming

In many cases of GBV, even when the act of violence is recognised as non-consensual, the finger of blame is pointed at the woman. Thus, the majority of coping mechanisms available place the responsibility of preventing and responding to violence on the victims of GBV, rather than the perpetrators.

**“This kind of violence takes place the most because of how people are dressed nowadays, which causes harassment. When a man sees a girl wearing revealing clothes, he would definitely harass her and lose his mind. Even old people harass children under 15. (Woman from Hawash sub-district, Homs governorate)**

Whereas men report being more likely to have access to mediation and justice mechanisms, or more likely to seek revenge on a perpetrator if they experience violence, women report being expected to change their movement, appearance and dress, to act more '*modestly*' and more '*decently*', to stay silent or attempt to advocate for themselves in situations where they have little decision-making power.

**“Some girls seek their parents' support when they are subjected to harassment or sexual violence. Nevertheless, the parents' reaction is not always good. Some parents blame the girl instead of protecting her and tackling the problem. That is why many girls tend to remain silent and do not talk about what happened to them because they know that the community will not seek justice for them. (Adolescent girl from Jaramana sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)**

Some participants recognised that women and girls face violence regardless of the coping strategies employed to prevent violence, and many noted that there was nothing they could do to protect themselves.

Rarely did participants talk about coping mechanisms that hold accountable perpetrators of violence against women and girls (such as seeking justice) or suggest changing the behaviour of the perpetrators rather than the victims (such as through awareness raising sessions).

*“The most annoying thing we are often exposed to as girls is verbal harassment when we go to the market or the park. I always wonder why [men] do not treat us as their sisters. (Adolescent girl from As-Sweida sub-district, As-Sweida governorate)*

## Positive coping mechanisms

Some women and girls did describe being able to talk to close friends about experiences of violence, to rely on their family's support, submit a complaint to the police, to rely on their own psychological strength, or to seek health or protection services as a means of coping with violence. Girls in particular emphasised the protective effect of being able to stay in school.

*“When a woman gets a degree, she becomes strong and can defend herself in all circumstances. A girl who is forced to marry early leaves school and finds no support in the future. Child marriage destroys the future of girls and causes them long-term instability. (Adolescent girl from Jaramana sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)*

## 3.5 Movement Restrictions

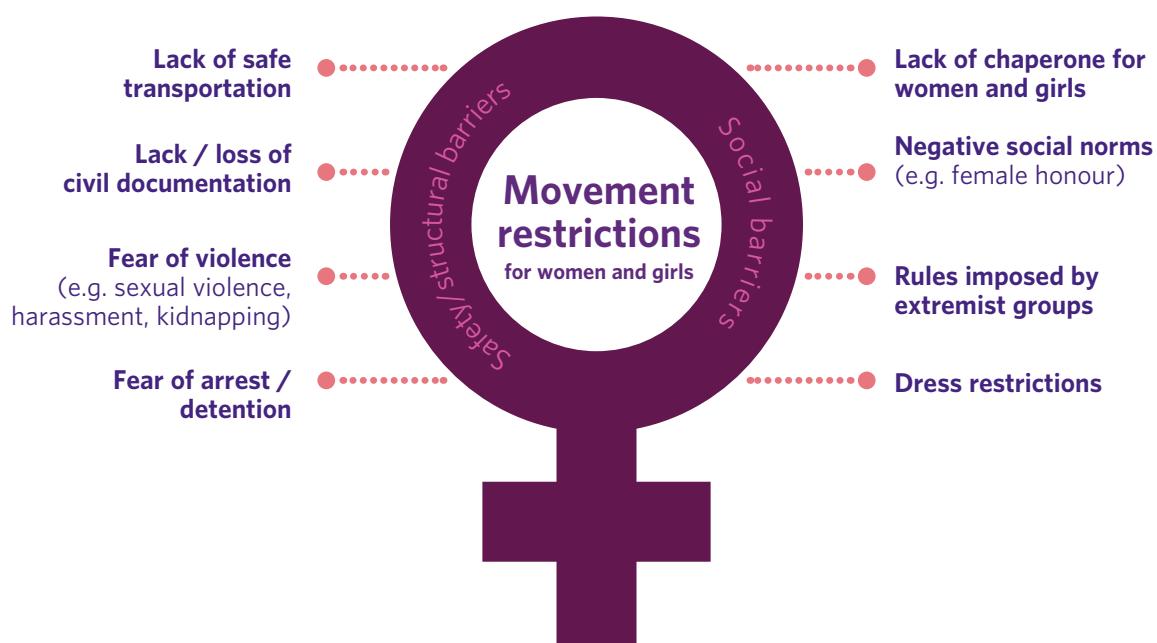
“ I move freely, only women have obstacles. (Man from Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idleb governorate)

“ Everybody can move freely except women. (Adolescent boy from Idleb sub-district, Idleb governorate)

“ Women and children should neither visit neighbours nor go to school. They should stay at home. (Man from At Tall sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

“ Women are afraid of walking around. In the past, a woman would go out and walk around at any time, and would go shopping or visit relatives and friends. Now, they go only in the daytime and are harassed and hear bad words from youths. The youths dare more than ever and nothing scares them. If a woman asks for help, no one will help her. (Adolescent girl from Nawa sub-district, Dara'a governorate)

Movement restrictions were commonly cited among FGD participants regardless of age and sex as a daily hassle and occurrence. Our assessment found much overlap between movement restrictions and the experience or fear of violence. They were presented as a coping mechanism, cultural expectation or a type of violence in and of themselves. Men, women, girls and boys reported restrictions on their movement due to safety issues linked with the crisis, such as fear of detention and arrest, shelling and explosions and crime. Men and boys' movement restrictions were also linked strongly to the fear of forced conscription. Women and girls expressed additional reasons for movement restrictions, and in many areas FGD participants said that women and girls are more affected by more severe restrictions.



**Fig. 3.5.1 Movement Restrictions for Women and Girls**

## Safety and structural barriers to movement for women and girls

One reason behind movement restrictions was to prevent or reduce the risk of certain types of violence and safety issues that target women more than men. The most dangerous include abductions and sexual violence.

**“** There are great concerns especially for women due to movement restriction and acts of abduction and harassment. War has badly affected our daily life. (Woman from Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idleb governorate)

**“** The impact of violence on our daily lives is profound. Movement of girls is restricted. They are constantly afraid of being subjected to abduction and extortion. (Adolescent girl from Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

**“** As for cases of sexual violence, there is complete silence about these cases. Girls protect themselves from violence by not leaving the house. (Adolescent boy from Saraqab sub-district, Idleb governorate)

Sexual harassment or street harassment was a daily and pervasive obstacle for women and girls of any age to move freely.

**“** A girl used to come back from university in Aleppo at night without having any problems, but now harassment to girls has spread in the streets, even in the daytime; and my parents have become worried about me and prevented me from leaving home. (Adolescent girl from Saraqab sub-district, Idleb governorate)

**“** All girls are subjected to all kinds of harassment and dirty talk in the street and cannot go out on their own to public places. (Adolescent girl from Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

Another safety concern that affects women and girls is the lack of safe transportation. With the crisis, public transportation is no longer existent in some areas. However, while men and boys seem to be able to access private transportation, women and girls said that they could not due to fear of kidnapping and sexual harassment, or the possibility that being seen in a private vehicle with a man that is not in their family would damage their reputation and provoke stigma and gossip from others.

**“** I cannot move freely and the problem of transportation is real. There is no public transport to use, the transportation vehicles used are private cars and girls and women cannot use them... we are afraid to go on them for fear of being kidnapped or spoken about by people. (Woman from Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

**“** Most of the restrictions might be unavailability of vehicles because since the crisis, of course, there has been no transport between villages and regions. So, those who have transport can move and those who don't may ask any passing car for a lift. This may cause concerns if they go with someone they do not know, or they may get hurt, especially women or girls who will not trust anyone to get lifts from them. (Woman from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

Lack of civil documentation is also a structural concern that some women reported as a barrier to movement, which might affect women differently than men especially with regards to marriage contracts and registration of children (see: 3.8 Civil Documentation and Housing, Land and Property Rights for Women).

**“** I am married but I have neither a family-record book nor an ID. I can't register my children in the personal-status department or in schools, and I don't have a marriage contract. If something bad happens, we can't go to Lebanon or Jordan because I don't have anything to prove that I am married. I am afraid of travelling because they might take my children because I don't have anything proving that they are my own children. (Adolescent girl from Izra' sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

## Social barriers to movement for women and girls

On top of safety concerns such as explosives, kidnapping and sexual violence, women and girls expressed just as much if not more concern about stigma, gossip and damage to their reputation that they face by family and community if they move outside of the house.

**“** People cannot move freely within Al-ZarbahZarbah due to security circumstances, presence of explosives, and lack of security. The same applies to neighbouring societies. Girls and women are those most at risk of having their freedom and movement restricted, out of fear for their safety and reputation. (Adolescent girl from Zarbah sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

While women in Syria may have faced some movement restrictions prior to the crisis due to traditions and cultural norms that emphasise female honour, many women and girls drew attention to the stark contrast between their freedom of movement before and after the crisis for cultural, not safety, reasons – such as the importance of avoiding scandal and gossip.

In some areas, extremist groups impose more restrictive rules for women and girls compared to before the crisis.

**“** We used to live comfortably, and now we are monitored and have to wear a veil and they stop us from leaving the house. (Adolescent girl from Kafir Nobol sub-district, Idlib governorate)

**“** People's gossip, community's injustice, and the ban on mixing with others limit the freedom of movement because the husbands don't allow their wives to go out. Unfortunately, men dominate and if a girl goes out, she brings shame! Most men think like that. (Woman from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)

Many women and girls report being obliged to ask permission from their husband to leave the house, and report repercussions from families along with gossip and damage to their reputation as a result of breaking culturally-mandated movement restrictions.

**“** My mother used to go out alone, but now it is not allowed for her to go without my father's permission. (Adolescent girl from Ma'arrat An Nu'man sub-district, Idlib governorate)

**“** Many girls and children stopped leaving home for fear of being beaten or insulted by the families, particularly if the family is strict. (Woman from Dar'a city, Dar'a governorate)

**“** Women are more likely to be constrained than men because of fear of bad people talking about them... Women have less freedom to move because of fear of people's words or fear of their husbands. (Adolescent girl from Busra Esh-Sham sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

Part of the cultural expectations in some areas is that women and girls are chaperoned by a male family member in public because of increased violence targeted at women, and harsher social norms against women's rights, movement restrictions end up being much stricter for women compared to men and boys, compared to before the crisis.

**“** We girls go out in groups... and we only go out in the day. My brother is 13 years old and he goes out without fear. I am older than he is and I am afraid of going out alone because most of the camp's streets are narrow and unlit. (Adolescent girl from A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

**“** We used to go to the market with ease before the conflict. After the conflict, we stopped going to the market except with my brother or father. We used to go on trips and have fun. Now we can't leave the house because of the lack of safety. (Adolescent girl from Al-Khashniyyeh sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

In many areas, women become completely dependent on men to move - whether to access the market, to visit with friends and family, to go to school, to go to work, to access services, or to access aid. This was not the case before the crisis. During a focus group with men, they confirmed that they would not let their wives, daughters or sisters go out alone:

**“** Participant 7: I do not let her go anywhere alone.

Participant 9: I do not let her work outside the house at all.

Participant 4: I go with her. (Adolescent boys from Kafir Nobol sub-district, Idlib governorate)

This can be especially problematic for unaccompanied women and girls - widows, divorcees - or those that suffer from domestic and family violence, as it can morph into another means of abuse of power and control.

**“** I think that divorced girls are the most vulnerable to violence because of the community's view: a divorced woman should not go out, because people will gossip about her. My sister is divorced and wherever she goes she is told, "you must not ..." My mother, my brother, and my brother-in-law all pressure her and deny her everything... (Participant stopped talking and started crying). (Woman from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)

“ As for divorced women and widows – regarding the stigma, loss of reputation and people’s ruthless talk – they watch the widow closely, keep her under suspicion and send someone to follow her wherever she goes. (Adolescent girl from Dana sub-district, Idlib governorate)

## Consequences of movement restrictions for women and girls

Many girls report that they have had to drop out of school due to movement restrictions imposed by their parents, and a few participants mentioned women that were locked in their homes during the day while their husbands are away.

“ Boys are more able to protect themselves. All places are unsafe for me and this has its effect on my daily routine, which is not to go to school. I always stay away from strangers and never go out unless accompanied by either my mother or my brother. (Adolescent girl from Busra Esh-Sham sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

This also limits the ability of women and girls to access services.

“ Not all people get services because of discrimination and the increasingly overprotective husbands who do not let them go out on their own. Men get services by themselves. (Adolescent girl from Dana sub-district, Idlib governorate)

“ A young man could go by himself to the doctor if he experienced violence more easily than a young woman, because she cannot go outside alone. (Adolescent girl from Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

“ I am very comfortable [at this Women and Girls Safe Space]. I suffered a lot to be allowed to come. My parents believe that the girl should not go out of the house alone. People are talking about me a lot because I get out of the house a lot and this is unacceptable in our community, but I do not listen to anyone's words and I am not affected by their gossip. (Woman from Hama city, Hama governorate)

Such restriction of freedom and particularly movement restrictions take a psychological toll on women and girls.

## 3.6 Restrictions of freedom

Often strongly correlated with movement restrictions is the restriction of freedoms and rights of women and girls in general, and the denial of resources, services and opportunities.

“ What types of violence for girls under 18? The first problem she has is the father's violence. For instance, he may be cruel.. If she wants to go out, she will get stopped at checkpoints. He will stay at home worried, so either he oppresses her or makes her feel afraid in the community. There is also the brother's violence. He is domineering and stubborn and tells her to stay at home. If she is a student and wants to go to university or an institute, he will tell her to stay at home and forget her studies. She will miss the chance of having a degree, which will result in more family problems. (Woman from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

### Restrictions of friends

Movement restrictions can also severely limit women and girls' social lives leading to social isolation.

“ Most of us cannot go to the market without the escort of a mother. Even having friends is forbidden. (Adolescent girl from Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate)

### Dress restrictions

Women and girls also face restrictions or control over the way that they dress in public, both as a type of violence and coping mechanism (to prevent sexual harassment).

“ We are afraid of walking in the streets while wearing certain types of clothing. (Woman from Mzeireb sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

“ They must cope with a curfew. In Idleb women are stopped by female police if they are not covering enough of their face. They are also forced to stay at home or be accompanied by men at all times. These strict codes are imposed by armed groups. (GBV expert from Syria)

“ ISIS tells the woman to cover up. They strip away her freedom. She can barely even breathe, and hates to go out. (Adolescent girl from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

“ Moreover, our outfits have changed. My father made me wear a cloak and a face cover while I was still 13 years old out of his fear of life at the camp. Although, when we were still living at our home, my elder sister did not wear them until she was 18 years old. (Adolescent girl from A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

### Restrictions from education

Both boys and girls reported being forced to drop out of school for economic and safety reasons, though the higher value placed on boys' education over girls' meant that this often disproportionately affects girls. Fear of sexual harassment moving to and from school is a barrier to girls' education, and child marriage was also cited as both a cause and effect of girls' dropping out of school.

“ Before the conflict, education was accessible to women. After the conflict, a girl can barely finish high school. (Adolescent girl from Khan Arnaba sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

“ The participants raised the issue of exploitation of girls and forcing them to drop out of school for economic reasons. (GBV expert from Syria)

“ The girl is denied education because schools are far away and the parents fear for her safety. If she had been a boy, she would have continued her education. (Adolescent girl from Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate)

“ On their way to school, girls are followed and harassed by young men. (Adolescent boy from Daret Azza sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

Many girls expressed sadness and regret at not being able to continue schooling, though one example from a FGD showed the difference that parents can make in helping girls to continue with their education.

“ It is forbidden to teach girls in our village after sixth grade. They must marry and leave school. I challenged my family and the environment in which I live. My father had to teach me even though the villagers were talking about us a lot. I came back after a while and became a teacher in the same village. I was the first girl from the village and I taught people of the same village. And then all the girls wanted to become like me. (Woman from Hama city, Hama governorate)

“ My cousin has complained to my father that I go to school through the vegetables market, which is full of young men, bearing in mind that it is the only way available to school. Therefore I currently go secretly to school to complete my exams. (Adolescent girl from Mare' sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

## Particular concerns for adolescent girls

FGDs with adolescent girls provided some of the most self-aware and illuminating discussions about the complicated interactions of GBV. Adolescent girls are old enough to remember life before the crisis, but young enough that they have spent much of their lives in crisis. As is the case worldwide, adolescence is a time of self-discovery, questioning the status quo and pushing boundaries. Girls in Syria are no exception, possibly even more so because of the particularly restrictive boundaries that they face.

“ A conflict has emerged between parents and their daughters, who want to defy customs and traditions. (GBV expert from Syria)

“ Girls have frustrated ambitions because of social restrictions. (Adolescent girl from Daret Azza sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

Girls expressed an acute awareness of the imbalance of power between men and women, and as well as a desire for equality and freedom, an end to harassment, and a future beyond child marriage. Girls want to make decisions, and for society to judge them less harshly.

“ We suffer violence when we talk about our political or social opinion. We do not have the right to make our own decisions for our future. Most of us have many problems such as the lack of confidence, domestic violence and psychological pressure because of the low economic and social situation which reflects on our families, and in turn on us as well. (Adolescent girl from Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate)

“ I wish to have equality in rights and duties between males and females. I wish to eliminate outdated customs and traditions that restrict women's freedom. (Adolescent girl from Busra Esh-Sham sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

## 3.7 Discrimination and inequality affecting women and girls

The root causes of GBV are gender inequality and power imbalances between men and women.

<p>In my opinion, women are those most prone to risks since we live in a male-dominated society. As soon as they see a girl walking alone in the street, they would think bad thoughts. There are many despicable people who would not hesitate when it comes to doing bad things to the girls in front of them.</p> <p><i>(Woman from Dar'a city, Dar'a governorate)</i></p>	<p>Males control females within the family. Marrying young denies girls the chance to play and go to school.</p> <p><i>(Adolescent girl from A'az sub-district, Aleppo governorate)</i></p>
<p>Society thinks that if a child turns out to a good person, then it is thanks to his father. If the child turns out to be bad, then it is the fault of his mother.</p> <p><i>(Woman from Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)</i></p>	<p>It is more important for boys to complete their studies than it is for girls.</p> <p><i>(Adolescent girl from Ma'arrat An Nu'man sub-district, Idlib governorate)</i></p>
<p>Girls are denied education and if they demand it, they are treated with violence.</p> <p><i>(Adolescent girl from Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate)</i></p>	<p>"Women have adapted to the reality of domestic violence. The husband believes that he has the right to practice these forms of violence with his absolute male power"</p> <p><i>(Woman from Suluk sub-district, Ar-Raqa governorate)</i></p>
<p>Psychological violence includes injustice, humiliation and denial of rights. When a woman is beaten, she bears the beating. But she cannot tolerate the injustice and deprivation of rights. That is harder for her. Many women lost their future and were deprived of schooling because of the lack of support for them. Their relatives oppressed them.</p> <p><i>(Adolescent girl from Badama sub-district, Idlib governorate)</i></p>	<p>Females suffer from violence the most. My parents treat my brother in a way that is different from me. Our community sees males as stronger and smarter creatures.</p> <p><i>(Adolescent girl from Damascus city, Damascus governorate)</i></p>
<p>What safety problems do women, men, girls and boys face in your community? Underestimating women's abilities and possibilities.</p> <p><i>(Adolescent girl from Jebel Saman sub-district, Aleppo governorate)</i></p>	<p>The most common thing is social violence where girls cannot achieve what they want, be it work, or anything else. There are social customs restraining us here.</p> <p><i>(Woman from Dar'a city, Dar'a governorate)</i></p>
<p>Little girls might be more vulnerable to threats than others because most cases of sexual violence have been with girls under 16 years old. This is not to mention the violence within the household, such as insults and offence from the father or brother. In other words, it is caused by male dominance.</p> <p><i>(Man from Qudsya sub-district, Rural Damascus)</i></p>	<p>Which groups do you think are the most at risk for sexual violence? Participant No. 2. Women, because they have no rights and they are seen as worthless in society.</p> <p><i>(Woman from Dana sub-district, Idlib governorate)</i></p>
<p>Boys have authority over girls. A boy can prevent his sister from going to school. Whatever a girl says is considered shameful.</p> <p><i>(Adolescent girl from Ma'arrat An Nu'man sub-district, Idlib governorate)</i></p>	<p>Parents say that they don't want to educate their daughters or let them work. A girl is better suited to stay in her husband's house.</p> <p><i>(Woman from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)</i></p>

## 3.8 Civil documentation and housing, land and property rights

**“** We, as women, are marginalised in this respect. They say: “Shut up ... don't say anything ... you have nothing to do with this matter ... it's none of your business”. We therefore do not know how to get the documents. (*Woman from Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate*)

With every year of the crisis, women and girls living in non-government areas face greater risks in relation to the loss and lack of civil documentation. Recent assessments by the Norwegian Refugee Council and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees<sup>17</sup> point to ‘women's disproportionate lack of civil and HLP-related documentation’. Findings show that women were significantly less likely to possess a passport (1/50 women compared to 1/5 men), marriage certificates, other civil documentation and property documents.

The authors point out how this again has considerable impact on the woman's ability to exercise various rights against the backdrop of a country where ‘a woman's registered legal identity in the Syrian civil registration system both prior to the conflict and today is linked to that of her husband or father’. Likewise: ‘males in the household would often make decisions, regarding their place of residence prior to displacement, without consulting female members of the household’<sup>18</sup>. This immanent inequality is also expressed by one man in Idleb governorate, who stated in the FGD that ‘Once a girl gets married, she loses all her documents’.

**“** Discriminatory laws, norms and practices around ownership, inheritance and decision-making – examples of which existed in Syria prior to a conflict – now exacerbate the challenges that women face. (*Secondary literature source, 2017*)<sup>19</sup>

The marriage certificate is of particular importance for a Syrian woman, given that obtaining a family booklet, registering children and proving their nationality as well as obtaining a divorce certificate is closely linked to her rights to claim her and her children's inheritance (after death) or her dowry (after divorce). With regards to claiming inheritance, one report also states that ‘due to cultural norms, there is tremendous pressure upon women not to realise their HLP rights, even if they are aware of their right to do so’<sup>20</sup>.

**“** There is a man who hit his wife and then divorced her. She was not able to prove her marriage from him. (*Woman from At Tall sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate*)

**“** There are women who get married on the basis of a contract issued by a Sheikh (without officially registering their marriages) and when the husband dies, she has no legal rights at all and she gets nothing from her late husband. (*Man from Salqin sub-district, Idleb governorate*)

Missing documentation might also impact female-headed households during screening procedures when crossing lines into areas controlled by armed groups in the Raqqa and Aleppo governorates, according to a report.<sup>21</sup>

Missing documentation has significant implications on movement, accessing education, services and distributions, obtaining employment, travelling abroad, financial security, among other concerns, which – given the difference in the possession of documentation – affects women and girls significantly more than boys and men in Syria.

**“** The group which is affected most in these cases is the women. We do not know where to get the documentation such as the identity card, passport and family identification document, which makes it hard to access aid distributions. (*Woman from Salqin sub-district, Idleb governorate*)

**“** Participant 8: They won't be able to get an inheritance.

Participant 7: Women won't be able to resume their learning if they lose their documents.

Participant 8: They are unable to move anywhere.

Participant 2: They are unable to get a job.

Participant 7: They are unable to travel out of the village.

Participant 6: They aren't able to travel if they want to.

Participant 1: If a girl rides a bike with her brother, a moral dilemma can take place because they can't prove they are brother and a sister. (*Women from Kafr Nobol sub-district, Idleb governorate*)

17 Displacement, housing, land and property and access to civil documentation in the north west of the Syrian Arab Republic, Norwegian Refugee Council / United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, July, 2017, p.20-21.

18 Displacement, housing land and property and access to civil documentation in the south of the Syrian Arab Republic, Norwegian Refugee Council / United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, July, 2017, p.18-19.

19 Displacement, housing, land and property and access to civil documentation in the north west of the Syrian Arab Republic, Norwegian Refugee Council / United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, July, 2017, p.20.

20 Displacement, housing, land and property and access to civil documentation in the north west of the Syrian Arab Republic, Norwegian Refugee Council / United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, July, 2017, p.21.

21 Screening and Sponsorship Procedures: Ar-Raqqa and Aleppo Governorates, Syria Protection Cluster (Turkey), June 2017, p. 4.

## 3.9 Changing family dynamics

The changing nature of marriages, identified in the past two HNO assessments, continues. Participants in the assessments felt that the rates of divorce and polygamy are on the rise and often linked to changing gender roles in families, early and forced marriages as well as serial temporary marriages of women and girls, and domestic violence. Other factors such as family separation due to detention, family members leaving the country or family members being part of armed groups also impact transforming family dynamics and so continue to be pertinent concerns.



### Divorce

The issue of divorce was mentioned by participants despite not being probed for in the context of discussions on domestic violence happening toward women and girls, child marriage, civil documentation, family separation and the abandonment of children.

Most examples given reflected divorces **initiated** by men. However, in several FGDs, participants talked about women and girls asking for divorce, mostly linked to domestic violence. A GBV expert also noted that there were more divorces initiated by women and girls as a coping mechanism to partner abuse. One woman said that a divorce filed by women would mainly happen in the first one to two years of marriage before a pregnancy. Once children were involved, she said, affected women and girls would hesitate taking such steps out of fear of losing their children.

The main **reason** mentioned for divorce was child marriage and young people '*not being mature enough*' to interact responsibly in marriage and take care of children. Societal pressure to have a first child as soon as possible after the wedding adds to the emotional strain on these young people.



*Facilitator: Has there been an increase in child marriages?*

*Participant 1: Very much.*

*Participant 5: Lots of marriages and even divorces.*

*Participant 4: A girl who is 15 years old would get married only to be divorced two months later.*

*Participant 1: Girls as young as 14 are getting married.*

*Facilitator: Girls are getting married at the age of 14?*

*Participant 2: Yesterday a 13-year-old girl got married. (Woman from Dar'a city, Dar'a governorate)*

Another reason given included family separation because of detention with one report<sup>7</sup> naming 86% of interviewed persons mentioning fear of divorce during their detention.



*There have been many divorces, as men abandon their wives, travel and stay abroad for several years. (Man from Suluk sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate)*

The loss of rights was related to potential loss of the dowry ('*some husbands take them away*'). Despite the favorable legal framework for divorce in Syrian law, there is a strong likelihood that the women will lose her children, especially in the case of re-marriage. She will often face further control with regards to movement or employment by the extended family to '*guard the family's honour*'. One major reason for the particular vulnerability of divorced women and girls is the growing lack or loss of civil documentation and of property documents, in particular in non-government-controlled areas where official documentation cannot be obtained. (see section 3.5 for more information on vulnerabilities of divorced and separated women and girls).



*Divorced women are often denied the right to see their children. (Adolescent boy from Daret Azza sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*



## Polygamy

As with divorce, the qualitative data highlights the issue of polygamy. FGD participants gave examples of how this affected women and girls and often noted that the standards in these marriages were not complying to rules given on polygamous marriages in Islam. Examples were also given how husbands would threaten to take another wife.

Many perceived a linkage between the increased number of widows and divorced women and girls and polygamy. Taking a widow or a divorced women or girl as additional wife seems to be encouraged by some religious leaders in the country, seeing it as a way to protect women and restore their reputation. ISIL fighters were specifically mentioned as marrying numerous women.

**“**Cases of early widowhood are on the increase in the shelter centers. This leads to undocumented multiple marriages, as well as cases of physical violence. (GBV expert from Syria)

**“**An ISIL fighter can marry four or five women without documentation, for example taking several sisters. (GBV expert from Syria)

One man in rural Damascus described how polygamy would be a way of '*redeeming*' a female victim of rape of her shame by marrying her and '*doing her a great favour*'.



## Forced marriage

Forced marriage is mentioned mostly in the context of violence against women and girls and child marriage<sup>23</sup> (for more information on child marriage see: Section 3.1, Child Marriage). Both male and female FGD participants raised this as a concern in Syria, with many mentions in the Idlib governorate<sup>24</sup>. Women and girls were mostly reported as being married to extended family members, such as cousins. However, there were also forced marriages to strangers (including in countries abroad and to landlords for rent purposes), to members of armed groups, including ISIL, and also to rape perpetrators. One GBV expert noted the fear in some areas that women and girls would be abducted and then forced to marry ISIL fighters.

**“**Widows are forced to marry ISIL fighters. They cannot stay alone. (GBV expert from Syria)

**“**I know a girl, who is 18 years old, and got married to a man who is 80 years old. Her parents forced her to marry in a state of depression after she left school. (Adolescent girl from Saraqab sub-district, Idlib governorate)

While marriage to extended family members is a relatively common practice in the region, including Syria, many FGD participants perceived an increase in forced marriage in their communities, owing to increased numbers of widows, higher poverty levels and ongoing displacement. Families would force widows in the family to remarry to '*gain freedom of movement within the community*' or on the pretext of protecting her children, namely to '*raise them properly*' or to '*keep them from being lost*'. The first choice as her new husband would usually be her brother-in-law.

One GBV expert described that marriage would sometimes be forced upon women in displacement as a coping mechanism by families to '*protect them from constant strangers due to repeated IDP movement*'. In secondary literature on women that experienced detention, forced marriage was also commonly mentioned as a practice by families after the person's release to safeguard the family honour under the pretext of '*caring for the woman*'<sup>25</sup>. Saying this, in all data sources forced marriages were always mentioned from an angle of violence and pain and not in a positive way. Adolescent girls, for example, often expressed their fears of being forced into marriage with a stranger or someone they wouldn't have chosen themselves.

23 Except for the issue of child marriage, the topic of forced marriage was not prompted in the assessments.

24 This should however not be taken as an indicator for an increased prevalence in the rate of forced marriages in that geographical area, given the limitations in assessment methodology.

25 Secondary Literature Report, 2017. Available upon request.

One report<sup>26</sup> highlighted the potential risk of existing IDP '*screening processes*' of armed groups at lines of control, such as in Aleppo and Raqqa governorates, to contribute to higher numbers of forced marriages. These screening processes include a sponsorship system for IDPs, which impacts whether they can leave IDP transit sites and where they are allowed to go. A 'sponsor' would complete several administrative steps for one IDP family, sign a document guaranteeing that the family has no ties to ISIL and then bring the family to his/her location.



## Changing work responsibilities at a household level

Findings from the discussions of GBV experts and FGD beneficiaries reveal that the development of gender roles in Syria in relation to the crisis in the past year is **multi-faceted**. While many believed that the '*roles of men and women have exchanged*', others argued that instead '*additional roles have in fact been added*' to women's responsibilities. GBV experts concluded in discussion on this topic that 'while women in Syria have been more empowered in recent years, they do not have more authority'.

- “ Women have new responsibilities - but not more freedom. (GBV expert from Syria)
- “ Women have been forced to do two jobs, inside and outside their homes. The positive development is that women have asserted themselves. The negative aspect is the mounting pressures placed on their shoulders and their exposure to sexual harassment at the workplace. This has created pressures on women, especially from men, who want to protect their image in society. (GBV expert from Syria)

Overall, estimations are that 9% of families in Syria are headed by women and girls for various reasons such as displacement, death of the husband and detention. In addition many families are headed by men with permanent disabilities, who are in need of constant support and unable to take on the same responsibilities as before the crisis (for more information on disability and GBV see: 3.3, People with Disability). These factors, plus other influences such as social media and new employment opportunities, have significantly impacted the role of women and girls in Syria throughout the crisis, with more women assuming roles 'outside the home', which were traditionally assigned to men.

- “ When I worked in Damascus I noticed that some women were forced to go out for work. This changed their usual roles - which was just staying at home. In contrast, men had less access to work and other outdoor activities because of the checkpoints and other political dangers. (GBV expert from Syria)
- “ In fact, there has been no exchange of roles, but rather additional roles that have been assigned to women. (GBV expert from Syria)

Reasons behind women assuming these new roles were, according to GBV experts and FGD participants, mainly related to unemployment of male members of the family and often related to poverty, movement restrictions for men and the death or absence of male members in the family. This '*forced mothers to look for a job to get money and buy food for her and her children*', as one participant put it. Other triggers influencing gender roles included families empowering their female family members for safety reasons, and families living in crowded conditions with new people when being displaced, which then affected the way girls and women started interacting with men and boys around them.

- “ How do girls here act to protect themselves, especially in case of shelling or if a lady faces an attempted kidnapping or the like? Here in this community, the idea of teaching girls to drive is becoming more prevalent. Girls take courses, and since most have cars now, in cases of displacement they can move to another governorate or village. This is one of the procedures around here. (Woman from Dar'a city, Dar'a governorate)

<sup>26</sup> Protection Monitoring Task Force, Syria Protection Cluster (Turkey), Screening and Sponsorship Procedures: Ar-Raqqah and Aleppo Governorates, Update No. 1, June 2017, p. 4.

However, these changes have **positive and negative implications** for women and girls. A GBV expert working in government-controlled areas felt that '*women have become stronger and they can no longer return to their old life*', but was countered by another person saying that this very much depended on the geographical area where the women lived in Syria, referencing areas controlled by Islamic extremist groups.

“ In Al-Hasakeh I can see women empowerment also at a political level. In Jarablus I see more responsibilities but decreasing power for women - no right to choose whom to marry, whether or not to study or to move without approval. (GBV expert from Syria)

While few voiced the opportunity of women to be more financially independent in the course of these developments, others gave examples of it back firing on them, with husbands claiming the money or even reverting to violence. One expert gave an example of a woman that was forced into prostitution in this context. Overall, only one GBV expert expressed that he felt that society was partly starting to 'accept this change' of role of women and girls. Most other experts and FGD participants, comprising people from all WoS hubs, warned about the **risks** associated with it and highlighted that these negative consequences have indeed increased.

“ The exchange of roles opens new doors for women, but exposes women to further violence from their partners and society at large. (GBV expert from Syria)

“ Some husbands feel threatened that wives have more power and resort to violence to express their control over them. (GBV expert from Syria)

Types of **GBV mentioned in relation to changing gender roles** were sexual exploitation and sexual harassment at the work place as well as domestic violence and sexual violence at home. The latter was often linked to divorce or threats of the husband to initiate divorce.

“ Any problem taking place between them would lead to violence. The husband would want to prove that he is a man. (Woman from Mzeireb sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

“ Sexual violence and domestic violence increased as a result of exchanging the roles of males and females, thus leading to a reduced role for men. Consequently, men seek to compensate for the loss of their role. (GBV expert from Syria)

In relation to the change in gender roles, **increased pressure for women** and the burden of juggling responsibilities "*inside and outside the house*" were mentioned most often, as well social stigma related to the new role. Several GBV experts reported having conversations with women who were struggling emotionally because of this to the degree of requiring professional support. The impact this was having on children was also discussed.

## 3.10 Availability and access to GBV services across Syria

### Reach of GBV programming in 2017

As highlighted in figure 3.10.1, in 2017, the geographical reach of GBV services has significantly increased, alongside the number of services being provided. In August 2017, 38 more sub-districts were being reached with GBV activities compared to December 2016, bringing a total of 121 sub-districts. Furthermore, during this period, the number of partner organisations offering GBV services has increased from 44 to 71.

In section four of this report maps per governorate reflect the type of GBV services and activities that were implemented in Syria between January and August 2017, comprising specialised services for GBV survivors as well as GBV prevention activities and empowerment activities for women and girls. Depending on the types of GBV programming, activities and services were implemented in static facilities, such as women and girls safe spaces, community centres, health facilities and schools, or through community outreach workers and mobile units.

Partners were able to implement GBV programming through women and girls safe spaces, other static facilities and outreach teams in 21 sub-districts in hard-to-reach areas, including ISIL areas, and four sub-districts with besieged locations, despite working in the most difficult circumstances. Overall, GBV programming was implemented in 81 communities (in 26 sub-districts across ten governorates) ranked as level 5 "Critical Problem" on the 2017 Protection Sector Severity Scale and in 19 communities (in five sub-districts across six governorates) that were ranked as level 6 "Catastrophic Problem". In 48 communities (in 23 sub-districts across nine governorates) in these areas with "Critical Problems" or "Catastrophic Problems" GBV actors implemented specialised services for GBV survivors.

However, the data showed that 59% of communities reported needing women and girls centres.

### Type of GBV programming in 2017

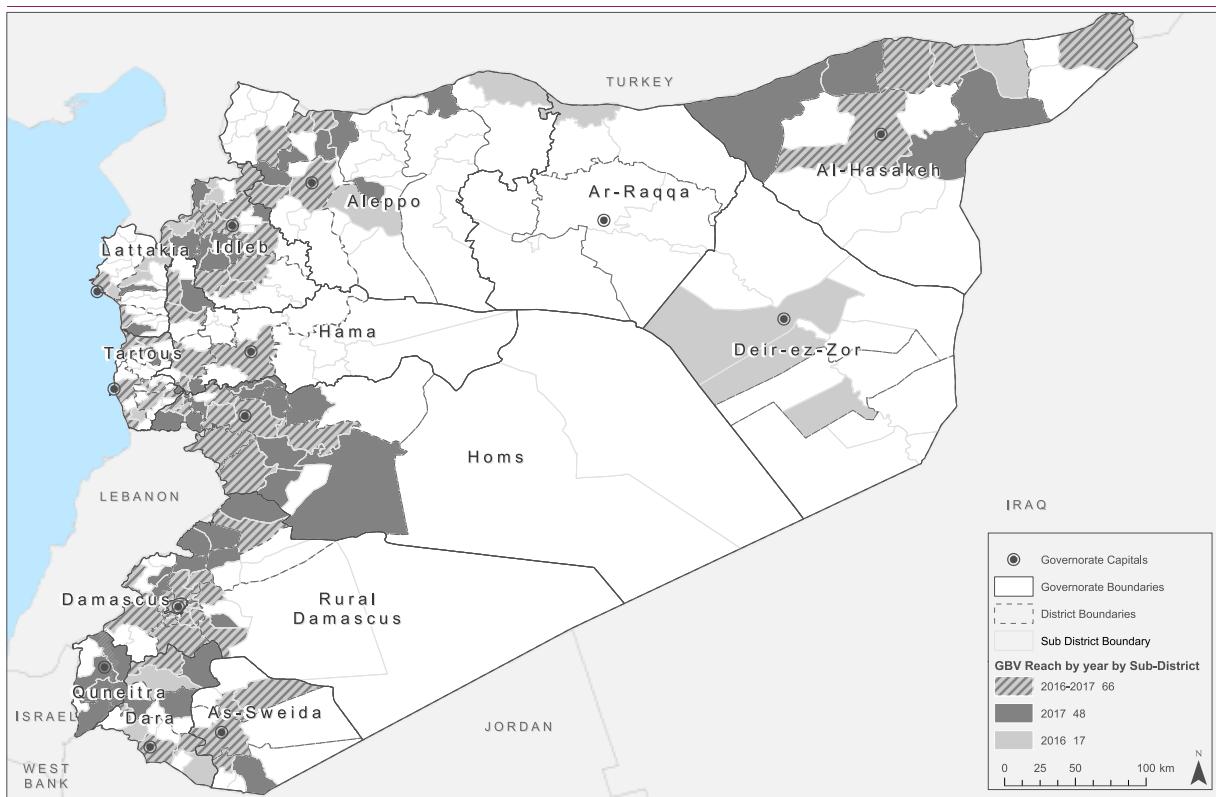
Services for survivors included specialised psychosocial support, case management, legal services for survivors and the establishment of referral mechanisms to these specialised services. In August 2017 a total of 114 communities in 74 sub-districts were reached with specialized services for survivors of GBV.

GBV prevention activities and empowerment activities for women and girls included awareness raising through direct contact initiatives as well as through mass media channels, distribution of dignity kits, individual and group counselling, psychological first aid, and other non-specialised psychosocial support activities, such as life skills activities, vocational training and livelihood / economic empowerment activities and recreational activities. In August 2017 119 sub-districts were reached with GBV prevention activities and empowerment activities.

Complementing the GBV programming, various types of GBV capacity building initiatives were implemented for front-line responders in 42 sub-districts between January and August 2017. These included training on case management, psycho-social support, women empowerment and gender equality and GBV basic concepts.

In addition, the health sector in coordination with the GBV AoR increased the availability of Clinical Management of Rape (CMR) at health facilities and provided CMR training for medical staff.

GBV experts noted in their discussions the effect that sustained funding and hence programming has had on the ability to implement GBV programming and to build capacity of specialised staff at field level, in particular given the sensitivity of the issues addressed and the time it needs to build trust in communities. They also mentioned having a more structured GBV mobile outreach in many communities, including for specialised services.



**Fig. 3.10.1 Whole of Syria - reach of the gender-based violence sub- sector as of August 2017**

## Satisfaction with existing GBV programming and need

Within the FGDs, participants expressed satisfaction with the GBV services they had access to, especially in relation to individual and group counselling sessions, empowerment activities, such as vocational training courses, and awareness raising sessions.

“ Girls seek help not to heal but to fix the situation and social isolation and stigma. (GBV expert from Syria)

Where available, participants also expressed gratefulness for specialised services for GBV survivors, but often emphasised that these were the only ones available in their geographical area and that there was dire need for more of them, and that they should be combined with awareness raising sessions for all family members. In some areas with new GBV programming, participants mentioned the need for more training of staff in specialised response to GBV survivors.

“ You may come to take advice from female workers here. It is a centre to support and assist women. I feel comfortable here because there is no mixing here between men and women. It is only for women. (Adolescent girl from Homs city, Homs governorate)

While the reach of GBV actors providing GBV specialised services in Syria has increased in 2017, participants in FGDs expressing great need for more services for GBV survivors clearly outnumber those talking about the availability of such services. GBV Experts reiterated this need for specialised services for most areas across the country in their discussions and noted that often the existing specialised services were neither complimenting each other nor being implemented in a comprehensive manner in relation to other existing services in the community.

“ There are no services to support survivors of violence, especially sexual violence. (Woman from Badama sub-district, Idlib governorate)

In parts of the country the absence of legal services and judicial redress mechanisms for women and girls that are easily accessible and non-partisan make comprehensive support for survivors of GBV even more difficult. Survivors of GBV would therefore most often resort to not speaking about their experience. In contrast, qualitative findings show that men and boys that have become victims of violence would often seek justice through local judicial redress mechanisms.

**“** Participant 5: *75% of women who face sexual violence don't go to an official authority. They are afraid of making a complaint because their reputation might be defamed. Furthermore, they know that there is no point of making such a complaint. (Man from A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*

**“** *There are legal services but sometimes they are not fair. If the young man's family is stronger, the girl's right may be lost. (Adolescent girl from Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*

Only few participants in FGDs from government-controlled areas mentioned women and girls being able to access support in legal issues, such as issuing divorce papers or documenting marriages.

## Barriers to GBV services / activities

Distance to service delivery points and lack of transportation, especially in rural areas, family restrictions and a lack of trust or fear of stigmatisation are the main barriers for women and girls to access GBV services. Distance to services is often linked to the need of women and girls to have a chaperone who accompanies them there.

**“** *Some women and children have concerns about access to women's centres for fear of the aerial bombing and the inability to go to these centres alone without a male companion. (Man from Saraqab sub-district, Idlib governorate)*

In many parts of the country such movement restrictions for women and girls are seen as part of social norms and FGD participants would describe them as “customs and traditions” that prevent access to services.

**“** *Girls can never visit those centres because of community traditions that prevent them from going out so that they do not experience violence. Some participants say that very few girls can visit such centres. (Adolescent girl from Daret Azza sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*

**“** *These services are difficult to access for women due to customs and traditions. (Woman from Daret Azza sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*

While mobile and outreach teams were mentioned positively by some FGD participants, others also pointed out that the existence of a nearby centre for women and girls would always have more immediate and sustained impact on lives.

Participants in various discussions across the country talked about the fear of being stigmatised, or as some put it “*of being scandalised*” or “*regarded as a criminal*”, and potentially bringing shame to the family by accessing GBV services. Families, in particular husbands and brothers, were described as sometimes preventing women and girls from accessing services as they would not like them to disclose any emotional discomfort or any problems in relationships. Widows and wives of detainees were mentioned as particularly vulnerable in relation to not being able to access services, owing to restrictions from their extended family.

**“** *Service and care centres are rare and we cannot go because our families do not allow us to present our psychological and social problems. (Adolescent girl from Dana sub-district, Idlib governorate)*

GBV Experts noted that objection from families to women and girls receiving GBV services or participating in empowerment activities would at times result in violence toward the woman or girl at home, for example “*after attending vocational training*”. To prevent GBV programming from becoming a violence risk factor for women and girls, the GBV Experts expressed the need for better integration of GBV programming with health programming as well as comprehensive awareness raising for all members of the family.

“

*The topic of GBV is a sensitive one. When a woman receives any service, it could put her in risk from her caretaker. Therefore, the provided services should be incorporated with the health sector in order to guarantee safety. (GBV expert from Syria)*

A **lack of awareness** about the existence of GBV services was mentioned as another barrier to accessing services as well as the **lack of clear referral pathways** for GBV survivors in some areas of the country. GBV experts also noted other barriers such as the lack of approval from authorities and a **lack of specialised GBV organisations** to provide services for survivors, in some parts of the country.

## 3.11 Women's and girls' access to humanitarian assistance in the form of distributions

As in the 2017 HNO, concerns with access to humanitarian assistance were raised. According to the qualitative data, distribution sites are often perceived as **unsafe places**, which are **dominated by men**. In some areas people described how they hesitated going to crowded distributions sites, especially in camp settings, given that these were sometimes targets for aerial bombings.

**“** *For example, young widows cannot go to the local council or check with the distribution agency to get this aid because most of the workers there are male.*  
*(Adolescent girl from Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*

At the same time, participants of FGD said that women and girls benefitted from distributions, as the **whole family** would be assisted. Women and girls would receive aid, but indirectly.

**“** *We have benefitted from distributions, even when males are the recipients.* (Woman from Saraqab sub-district, Idlib governorate)

**“** *Women do not come to receive the distributions. They send someone to get it for them.* (Adolescent boy from Salqin sub-district, Idlib governorate)

Elderly women and pregnant women were also mentioned as not receiving enough support in the context of distributions and experiencing health problems as a result. According to the qualitative data, adolescent girls would rarely be involved in distributions at all – often with the explanation that girls would generally “*stay at home*” and “*could not leave the house alone*”.

### Barriers of women and girls to distributions

Overall, the main concerns raised in the context of distributions were **discrimination and favouritism**, which were mentioned in 75% of the FGDs across all 13 assessed governorates. FGD participants gave many examples of relatives of distribution staff or of local authorities being favoured whilst people in need in the community were neglected.

**“** *Priority is given to relatives of members of the local council and leaders of the armed factions. The categories that deserve such as widows, divorcees and senior citizens are neglected.* (Man from Saraqab sub-district, Idlib governorate)

However, whilst this affected men's and women's access to aid, women, FGD participants and GBV experts highlighted how in particular widows, divorced and/or displaced women, experience many further restrictions, relating to sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, gender discrimination, economic violence and stigmatisation. In some locations adolescent girls reported that they could not go to distributions as '*people would think badly of them*' and other FGD participants mentioned that '*females, in particular divorcees and widows, are afraid that their reputation would be defamed*' when receiving aid.

Without a male relative, it is much more difficult for women and girls to access aid, which highlights the social barriers that they face in receiving humanitarian assistance. While in a few locations widows were specifically mentioned as being assisted with distributions, in other locations divorced women and widows were seen as unable to access distributions. Some participants gave examples of those women struggling to obtain aid without having support in childcare, being more subject to sexual harassment than others or not having the right documentation.

**“** *Divorced women and widows suffer a lot in having access to the distributions.* (Woman from Mare' sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

**Safety concerns**, in particular with regards to violence at distribution sites and fear of sexual violence and exploitation, were also mentioned in 44% of FGDs across 11/13 of the assessed governorates. Participants of FGD and GBV

experts linked violence at distribution sites to issues such as dissatisfaction about the quality of distributed items, anger about perceived favouritism, over-crowdedness, a lack of organisation, chaos and the spread of weapons in the community that would be quickly used in such situations. In the focus group discussions, distribution sites were mentioned most frequently as locations where violence happens, after '*homes*' and '*schools*'. The perception that distribution sites are unsafe and places of violence impact women's access to them, either by not being allowed to go or being unwilling to. It is worth noting that in the very few specific accounts in the qualitative data of men facing barriers to distributions, some physical violence and humiliation was mentioned.

**“** *The simplest thing nowadays is to kill a person - any person is worth just one bullet only. In our community, if someone has even a trivial dispute with another person, maybe for a basket distribution, they will beat each other in public. They would consider this an offence to be beaten in public. So they have the intention of killing. This has become very simple. (Woman from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)*

Distributions were also sometimes described as **disorganised and crowded**. In several locations FGD participants described that it would take hours to receive a distribution, exposing particularly vulnerable groups, such as elderly people, people with disabilities or pregnant women, to health risks due to heat and standing for a long periods of time. During one discussion, women described their hesitation to receive food parcels after cases of food poisoning from expired food leading to multiple deaths in the community.

Furthermore, **access issues** related to civil documentation, '*not being on the list*', transportation and distance to distribution sites were listed as barriers. In particular for widows and divorcees, lack of civil documentation and '*not being counted*', for example because of being in their idda period (the legally prescribed period during which a woman cannot re-marry after being widowed or divorced), was reported as an issue.



## Sexual exploitation and sexual harassment

The reports in this year's qualitative data sources, namely community-based focus group discussions and GBV expert discussions, of **sexual harassment** and **sexual exploitation** taking place in the context of distributions significantly outnumber the reports in last year's assessments. GBV experts noted the lack of existing complaints mechanisms in many distribution sites.

The topic was often discussed in relation to women and girls only being able to go to distribution with a chaperone and examples were mentioned of women deciding not to get distributions any more to avoid sexual harassment by men awaiting distributions or distribution staff. Being hindered from going to distributions sites due to a lack of male chaperon was mostly mentioned in FGDs with female adolescent participants.

**“** *Some women go to aid distribution centres with their brother or relative and sometimes send someone to receive aid instead. Some women declined to go to the relief centre and receive aid because of fear of harassment, and some women have given up receiving aid because of the provocative treatment they receive from distributors. (Adolescent girl from Badama sub-district, Idleb governorate)*

**“** *Widows and divorcees have to go themselves to receive distributions, and they suffer a lot because of humiliation and standing for many hours in the queue. (Man from Saraqab sub-district, Idleb governorate)*

In focus groups discussions from various governorates in Syria, examples were given of women or girls marrying officials for a short period of time for 'sexual services' in order to receive meals, distributors asking for telephone numbers of women and girls, giving them lifts to their houses '*to take something in return*' or obtaining distributions '*in exchange for a visit to her home*' or '*in exchange for services, such as spending a night with them*'. Women and girls '*without male protectors*', such as widows and divorcees as well as female IDPs, were regarded as particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

**“** *We heard about women being blackmailed were the distributor asked for favours from women in exchange for services - such as spending a night with them. (Adolescent girl from Homs city, Homs governorate)*

“ Divorcees and widows are the most at risk for sexual violence. We have heard about a few cases where women are exploited during aid distributions. Some distributors might ask for a woman’s phone number, or they might give her a lift to her house to take something in return. (Woman from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

Despite organising different **queues** for women and girls at some distributions sites, participants in those locations still reported continued harassment, causing women to again avoid distributions. In several locations concerns were also raised with regards to **photographs** being taken by humanitarian actors without the consent of the concerned women and girls.

“ Our neighbour no longer goes to receive aid except with her brother or her father so that no one will bother her while waiting for her turn. There are also photographs taken during the receipt of aid, which is hated by all the women very much. (Adolescent girl from Badama sub-district, Idleb governorate)

“ Separated children, the elderly and widows are humiliated during the distribution by making them pose for pictures if they want to receive anything. (Adolescent girl from Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

“ Distribution sites are often a disgrace. People are insulted, especially when the sponsor wants to photograph women, children and old people. They photograph those people to tell the world that these people are the main recipients. However, they are in fact the most deprived. Many organisations ask for official documentations even though there have not been any official departments in our community for six years. (Man from A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

## 3.12 Linkages between GBV concerns and other humanitarian sectors

Throughout the assessments, clear linkages were evident between GBV concerns and other sectors. This highlights the need for holistic, multisector approaches to GBV prevention and response that also takes into account the IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action (2015). The following table highlights linkages with other sectors that emerged from the available qualitative assessment data.

Sector	GBV Concerns
EDUCATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Girls are being forced to quit school to marry</li> <li>Girls are kept home from school because of fear of kidnapping and harassment on the way to school</li> </ul> <p><b>“</b> <i>The girl is denied education because schools are far away and the parents fear for her safety. If she had been a boy, she would have continued her education. (Adolescent girl from Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sexual exploitation at schools</li> </ul> <p><b>“</b> <i>There is an increase in sexual exploitation of children in return for something material, especially in young and underage children, and mostly at schools. (GBV expert from Syria)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preference for boys education</li> </ul> <p><b>“</b> <i>Girls are denied education and if they demand it, they are treated with violence. (Adolescent girl from Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate)</i></p> <p><b>“</b> <i>Parents say that they don't want to educate their daughters or let them work. A girl is better suited to stay in her husband's house. (Woman from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)</i></p> <p><b>“</b> <i>It is more important for boys to complete their studies than it is for girls. (Adolescent girl from Ma'arrat An Nu'man sub-district, Idleb governorate)</i></p>
WASH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Latrines and toilets are unsafe for women and girls (risk of violence) especially at night due to lack of lighting</li> </ul> <p><b>“</b> <i>The lack of lighting on the road leading to the bathrooms at night caused severe reluctance to go to the bathroom or to refrain from going, resulting in the emergence of many diseases that greatly affected their health. (Adolescent girl from Badama sub-district, Idleb governorate)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competition at water tanks: women against men, or widows against others</li> <li>Needed distributions of dignity kits and diapers</li> </ul>

27 IASC / Global Protection Cluster, Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing risk, promoting resilience and aiding recovery, 2015.

## SHELTER

- No access to sanitary materials for women and girls, posing a high risk of exploitation and abuse
- Adolescent girls only able to access health services with a chaperon

**“** Yes, there are free health services centres and there is no harm if we go there. However, we need to be escorted by one of our parents. (Adolescent girl from Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate)

- Missing clarity on referral pathways for GBV survivors
- Necessary training on CMR for health frontline staff

**“** The topic of GBV is a sensitive one - when a woman receives any service, it could put her in risk from her caretaker. Therefore, the provided services should be coordinated with the health sector in order to guarantee safety. (GBV expert from Syria)

- Lack of female gynaecologists

**“** We do not have a female gynaecologist. If a woman is going to give birth, she has to travel 50 km in order to get it done. (Man from Izra' sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

- Harassment, favouritism and discrimination when receiving health services

**“** They might also suffer harassment while receiving any health services or food aid. (Woman from Dar'a city, Dar'a governorate)

**“** In relation to women, the service is bad and they are vilely treated by staff. There is arrogance shown towards patients and customers in spite of being disqualified (not being qualified??). Appointments are very difficult to get and there is often discrimination. (All participants agreed that nepotism decides which patients see doctors and in which order.) If you reached the doctor's clinic and you weren't from the same country, you might not get an appointment or you may have to pay for the free service. Or perhaps you wouldn't even receive medicine. Factions are forming in the health centres, with wards dedicated for members. Even emergency cases are not allowed to enter there. (Adolescent girl from Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

- Sexual exploitation by landlords in exchange for rent

**“** Violence is so common. As a provider for my household, I went with an old woman to a man who rented houses. First he offered to rent a house for 15000 SP, and then he offered to let me get the house I wanted in return for marriage. (Woman from At Tall sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

**“** I went through a similar experience. My sister and I were looking for a house to rent when we came across a woman who was living in Al-Tal. She could not pay the rent of the house she was living in, yet the property owner allowed her to live there for free providing that he could sleep with her daughters whenever he wanted. (Woman from At Tall sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

- Violence in shelters

## CHILD PROTECTION

- Increased risks of unaccompanied and/or unregistered children following divorce of parents, increased in relation to child marriage
- Linkages between domestic violence and psychological harm to children
- Increase of undocumented marriages impact on unregistered children
- Sexual exploitation of girls in the context of child labour, in particular when serving as maids in private homes

## DISTRIBUTIONS

- Harassment/ movement restrictions to market
- Barriers for women accessing food aid
- Sexual harassment (insults, especially when unaccompanied)
- Shame/embarrassment/fear of scandal because of "*male environment*" - male distribution workers, men accessing aid at the same time (even if there are separate queues), photography
- Some say that unaccompanied women don't receive food distributions (widows, single women/girls, divorced, second wives)
- Need male accompaniment for "*safety*", to avoid gossip, and to help carry the distribution
- No safe transportation to arrive to the distribution point or to carry aid back (transportation was noted heavily by women as being unsafe for them for fear of kidnapping or scandal)
- A few noted that men receiving the distribution take out some of the food items and keep them or sell them instead of giving to the family
- A few noted that women, widows, etc were actually prioritised for distributions, or distributions for women took place at a separate safe place (worth analysing by governorate to see trends)
- Child labour - girls might work in bakeries, or sell bread on the street, and become exposed to sexual exploitation
- Quality of distribution



*Due to customs and traditions, girls who go for relief are sometimes beaten by their parents because it is wrong in their opinion. (Man from Daret Azza sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*



4

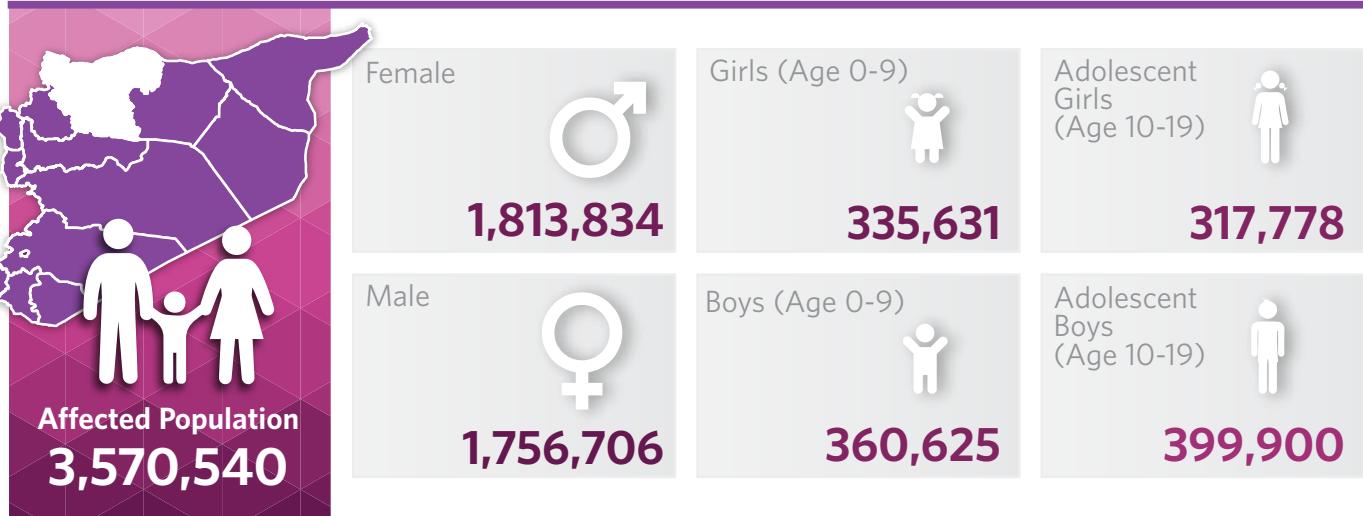


# Results by Governorates

Section Four provides an overview of the GBV concerns reported in each of the 14 governorates across Syria:

Aleppo	Al Hasakeh	Ar-Raqqa	As-Sweida	Damascus	Dar'a	Deir-ez-Zor
Hama	Homs	Idleb	Lattakia	Quneitra	Rural Damascus	Tartous

## Governorate Overview



## 4.1 Aleppo

### Types of GBV reported as protection concerns



#### Child marriage

Child marriage was discussed in the majority of FGDs<sup>28</sup>, comprising men, women, adolescent boys and girls from government-controlled and non-government-controlled areas. This was mirrored in the quantitative assessments, which found that in almost half of all communities in Aleppo, adolescent girls were affected by child marriage including 19% of girls below the age of 12.

There is more data than in the past years on very young girls getting married, such as 14-year-old girls, and even mention of divorced girls at that age. One GBV expert noted an increase of child marriage in Aleppo governorate.

Risk factors mentioned were poverty, living in camp settings, fear of abduction as well as cultural factors, such as a deep-held belief that that girls should not have a voice and therefore may not refuse an arranged marriage. Another group at particular risk were abandoned girls and separated girls.

*“Sexual violence cases have become numerous because of the expensive living costs and the difficulty of marriage. There are cases of underage girls being married off because of their father's poor economic situation. (Man from Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*

<sup>28</sup> 83% of all FGDs in which child marriage was discussed were conducted with female participants, and 53% were with adolescent girls.



**Fig. 4.1.1: Population Data, Aleppo**

“ I have a cousin who lived with her grandfather after her parents' separation. Then, her grandfather passed away and she lived at her grandmother's. When her grandmother passed away, her maternal uncle sponsored her. After the girl had problems with her uncle's wife, her uncle made her marry at a young age. Her mental health is now very poor. (Woman from A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate) ”

“ I know a family who have two young girls who got married because they feared they might get kidnapped. (Woman from Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate) ”

The impact of child marriage was discussed extensively, in particular by female FGD participants in Aleppo governorate. Health implications for girls, such as miscarriages, were mentioned as well as maternal deaths. Child marriage was often raised in the context of child labour – boys taking up certain types of work, girls other types of work and then '*getting married*'. One woman in Daret Azza sub-district said she believed that "*child marriage for girls was the worst type of child labour*". It is clear from the data that marriage normally means the end of education for a girl in Aleppo governorate. Indeed, adolescent girls mentioned the end of their education as a fear linked to being married early. Further impacts discussed were domestic violence, psychological problems and the resulting '*chaos in households*'. Child marriage was also mentioned in relation to divorce.

“ My cousin got married in this way and then she was exposed to physical violence by her husband. Now she is 14 years old and divorced. (Adolescent girl from Mare' sub-district, Aleppo governorate) ”

“ Some say that when a 14-year-old girl has to marry, she has to leave school and is controlled by a man that ”

prevents her from leaving the house. (Woman from Daret Azza sub-district, Aleppo governorate) ”

“ The problem of child marriage for girls leads to cases of miscarriage and death at birth. This hardship then creates psychological problems, with girls deprived from enjoying their childhood. (Adolescent girl from Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate) ”



### Domestic violence

FGD participants reported an increase in domestic violence in their communities in Aleppo governorate '*because of the war*'. Female participants mentioned it more than twice as many times as men in the discussions. This included verbal and physical violence, such as beatings. In addition, one woman in Aleppo city insisted that '*there is no sexual violence between a man and his wife. This is not sexual violence*', clearly reflecting the perception that marital rape is acceptable and showing the difficulty of talking about such topics in these communities.

FGD participants linked domestic violence to child marriage and the '*immaturity of young husbands*' as well as widows being remarried to family members (in particular the brother-in-law) and experiencing violence in that new marriage.

“ We see that violence has increased a lot and the father practices violence against his children and the mother as well. (Adolescent girl from A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate) ”

“ My brother-in-law hit his wife and broke her hand. He said: "A woman whose voice is so high should be dealt ”

*with this way". (Woman from Daret Azza sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*

**“** *Household heads act violently with everybody in their household. After they come back from work or the war, they vent their frustrations by making trouble with every one of their family members. (Adolescent boy from A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*

The main coping mechanism mentioned was non-disclosure. Survivors rarely seek medical services. Women and girls will also stay in abusive relationships because of threats that their children will be taken away from them. Participants reported domestic violence happening openly in camp settings, without protection for the victim.

**“** *Nobody can protect women and children. For example, there is a man in the camp who beats his wife every day. Everybody hears her shouting but no one can help. (Adolescent boy from A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*

**“** *My sister is always beaten by her husband. He tells her that she can leave him and go to her family. In truth, he knows that we are very poor and unable to make a living for her with her three children. My sister keeps silent and doesn't complain to the court (because according to her it is a shame to make a complaint against her husband). (Adolescent boy from A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*

**“** *When my sister's husband beat her, she went to the medical point for treatment and did not say that the cause of bleeding was beating. She said that it was caused by a motorcycle accident. (Adolescent girl from A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*



## Sexual violence

The threat of sexual violence, including many reports of incidents, was discussed in 96% of FGDs in the assessed communities in Aleppo governorate (including government-controlled and non-government-controlled areas) - as well as in several sources of secondary literature, with female FGD participants addressing it 2.5 times more often than male participants. Types of reported sexual violence included rape and gang rape, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and sexual assault.

Women and girls were reported to be at particularly high risk of sexual violence in Aleppo governorate, although sexual violence toward children (without further sex disaggregation) and between children was also mentioned and confirmed by GBV experts.

**“** *My neighbour's daughter who is a seven-year-old girl went to buy some items for her and her younger brother. She was followed and sexually assaulted. (Adolescent girl from Zarbah sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*

Perceived high-risk sites for sexual violence include camp settings (especially communal sanitation facilities), school bathrooms, barriers and checkpoints, distribution points (because of overcrowding, despite measures such as separate queues for women and girls), specific roads (e.g. leading from camps to health facilities), prisons, screening centres (e.g. for people crossing from one area of control in Aleppo to the other area of control), as well as family homes and shelters. While camps were mentioned as high-risk sites for sexual violence, it is worth noting that sexual violence was in fact more frequently mentioned by host community members<sup>29</sup>.

Fear of sexual violence was reported to limit women's movements, in particular those of adolescent girls. One GBV expert reported the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, linked to sexual violence.

**“** *When girls are subjected to violence, they cannot do anything or complain to anyone and all they can do is hide everything for fear of shame. To protect themselves from kidnapping or sexual violence, they do not go out on their own. (Adolescent girl from Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*

FGD data clearly indicated the extent of the fear of sexual violence by women and girls and the fear of victims not to be identified because of shame, social stigma and possible family rejection. Men in one discussion about sexual violence talked about several girls who had abortions (or miscarriages<sup>30</sup>) after being in prison.

**“** *In cases of sexual violence, they do not have confidence in the people who should protect them, so the problem grows bigger and they feel ever more scared. (Adolescent girl from Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*



## Sexual harassment

Of the different types of sexual violence, sexual harassment was mentioned most by community members in Aleppo governorate. Adolescent girls recalled '*inspecting looks from young men and the old men*' as a 'safety threat'. Adolescent FGD participants mentioned sexual harassment twice as many times as adult FGD participants. In Mare sub-district, girls gave examples of how sexual harassment affected their daily lives, with one girl secretly walking to school through a crowded marketplace despite her father's disapproval and another girl not being allowed by her parents to go to the market because she wasn't veiled.

Overcrowded living conditions, with mixed sexes sleeping in shared rooms, and crowded places, such as markets, were named as some of the risk factors.

29 This is in comparison to the proportions of FGDs conducted with IDPs or residents / host community members.

30 In colloquial language the Arabic word used for 'abortion' is the same as the one used for 'miscarriage'. From the context of this quote, it seems however, as if the men were indeed referring to abortions following sexual violence rather than spontaneous miscarriages.

Furthermore, adolescent girls in several FGDs identified harassment as a '*safety concern*' for women and girls at distribution sites and as a reason not to go, which was echoed by adolescent boys and women.

**“**A participant says that widows face more barriers than other groups simply because they have no male relatives to help them receive distributions, and they are at risk of sexual harassment and exploitation. Those women cannot depend on male relatives to receive their own distributions, as they may claim part of them. (Adolescent girl from Daret Azza sub-district, Aleppo governorate)



## Rape

Reports of rape, including gang rape, and the threat or rape for women and girls were discussed in FGDs in Aleppo governorate. Most discussions around rape also included reports of kidnapping of women and girls. A fear of children, in particular separated children, was being raped. There was one report of a woman being raped by a group that video-taped the rape for '*provocation*' but was later arrested by the military faction controlling the area. GBV experts mentioned health service delivery points in Eastern Aleppo requesting more Clinical Management of Rape treatment in 2017 and noted that access of rape survivors to such services remains difficult.

The issue of rape was also connected to honour crimes committed by families of the victim. This was mentioned by women from Jarablus sub-district in relation to crimes committed by ISIS.

**“**There are many cases of honour crimes. Girls who have been raped by ISIS were murdered. (Adolescent girl from Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

High-risk locations for rape named by FGD participants were checkpoints, prisons and shared camp sanitation facilities.

**“**A short while ago, a divorced woman was abducted in front of a hospital and after that she was raped. (Woman from Mare' sub-district, Aleppo governorate)



## Sexual exploitation

Sexual exploitation was several times discussed in the context of distribution points and receiving aid, in particular in relation to female-headed households such as widows. One secondary literature report<sup>31</sup> found '*increased risk of sexual and gender-based exploitation and abuse in the form of pressure from landlords and parents upon girls to enter into forced marriages*'. One group of

adolescent boys discussed having heard of '*adults offering money or cigarettes in exchange for sex*' with children.

**“**In the squatter refugee camps, some distributors use their authority to sexually abuse women. (Adolescent boy from Azaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

**“**In addition, there are cases of kidnapping that have happened recently, with cases of sexual exploitation of martyrs' widows in exchange for helping them. (Man from Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate)



## Polygamy

Without being prompted, polygamy was reported by FGD participants from several sub-districts in Aleppo governorate. Examples were given of survivors of sexual violence being married into polygamous marriages '*as a favour to save the family's honour*' and wives being threatened with polygamy by their husbands, referring to the '*many widows*' in the governorate. GBV experts reported women and girls arriving in Jarablus sub-district from ISIS-controlled areas, where they were married to an ISIS fighter together with several other women and girls.

**“**The women were asked the question: would you prefer to get your husband to marry another wife or to die? The majority answered they prefer to die. (Woman from Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

Second wives were reported to being denied distributions in Daret Azza sub-district. In one discussion in Azaz sub-district men discussed how families of first wives were unable to stop men deciding to take a second wife and how polygamy affected children in the household '*because their fathers keep moving between their wives' houses*'.



## Temporary serial marriages

In one FGD, participants discussed some women and girls experiencing multiple, short-term marriages in Aleppo governorate. GBV experts also reported on serial temporary marriages taking place in Jerablus sub-district, linking it to the fear of kidnapping. They pointed out the negative impact for the woman and girl if her husband separates from her, given the lack of official documentation.

**“**Participant No. 11: I myself married a man after he left his first wife. We were married for 15 days and then he left me and returned to his old wife. (Woman from Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

<sup>31</sup> UNHCR / NRC, Displacement, housing, land and property and access to civil documentation in the north west of the Syrian Arab Republic, July 2017, p. 17.



## Family violence

Most references of FGD participants to family violence are about male family members, in particular fathers, committing violence towards children, both boys and girls. Girls were specifically mentioned as experiencing violence from fathers and brothers.

**“** Violence in general is suffered by girls from their fathers, brothers, or husbands. It can be both verbal and physical. (Adolescent girl from Zarbah sub-district, Aleppo governorate)



## Honour killings

Incidents of honour crimes committed by family members and coping with sexual violence by staying silent because of the fear of honour killings were mentioned more in this year's data sets than in previous years, in particular by adolescent girls but also by women and men. GBV experts working in non-government-controlled areas also reported honour killings, saying that '*honour killings after rape were increasing*', particularly with reference to Jarablus sub-district.

**“** A friend of mine had been kidnapped for a whole month and after that she came back and we heard that her father had slaughtered her. (Adolescent girl from Mare' sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

**“** There are many cases of honour crimes. Girls who have been raped by ISIS were murdered. (Woman from Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate)



## Abductions

The fear of abduction of women and girls, as well as reports of incidents, were mentioned in more than half of the FGDs in Aleppo governorate, often in relation to sexual violence. Another motive for abductions was '*taking the woman's jewellery*'. Participants clearly perceived that abductions were increasing in Aleppo governorate and linked this to the spread of weapons.

**“** There's a frightening absence of legal force that prevents women from being subjected to problems such as kidnapping and rape (to the extent that the abduction of women was done in front of everyone). No one does anything or helps because of the fear that has taken control of the people. (Woman from Daret Azza sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

Adolescent girls explained that the fear of abduction makes them limit their movement. Families were also reported to marry daughters early '*because of fear of*

*abductions*'. In the data there are several accounts of homicide of women and girls after being kidnapped.

**“** I was at my balcony, and I saw young men kidnapping a girl in front of me. (Woman from Jebel Saman sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

**“** A participant says that lack of transportation means frequent kidnappings. As a result of this insecurity, women are more at risk of movement restrictions. (Adolescent girl from Daret Azza sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

Organ trading was mentioned in two FGDs with women and adolescent girls in Daret Azza sub-district. Fear of abduction linked to organ trading was said to be a reason for limiting movement restrictions.

**“** However, moving to other communities or villages is almost impossible especially at night because of kidnappings carried out by gangs that aim at blackmailing people or trafficking in human organs. (Adolescent girl from Daret Azza sub-district, Aleppo governorate)



## Detention and torture

Detention of women was mentioned several times by FGD participants and in secondary literature within Aleppo governorate. According to several FGD participants, women get arrested at checkpoints '*on the pretext*' of missing documentation. In one discussion, women said that they would limit their movements because of fear of arrests. GBV experts working in non-government-controlled areas reported women experiencing sexual violence in prisons, echoing secondary literature reports.

## Affected population groups

Social Groups reported to be at high risk of violence included women, adolescent girls, widows, divorcees, wives of detainees, children, people with special needs, IDPs and orphans.

**“** The widows and the divorced are considered the most vulnerable to danger and fear. The absence of a man at home threatens the family. (Woman from Jebel Saman sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

**“** (Discussion on how sexual violence is coped with) Sometimes there are some personal initiatives: some educated people (such as a camp manager, a sheikh of a mosque, a school teacher) try to solve the problem and obtain compensation for the victims. However, these initiatives are powerless given the vast number of cases. There was a situation some months ago in one of the camps. An armed man forced a widow to leave the camp and nobody dared to stop him. (Man from A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

## Coping mechanisms



### Non-disclosure

The most-mentioned way of coping with violence, and in particular sexual violence, was non-disclosure - namely to stay silent. Men, women, adolescent girls and boys all agreed on this fact, pointing to the impact that disclosure would have on the victim. Stigmatisation by the community and being shamed were fears mentioned, as well as the fear of being blamed for the violence, and honour killing. One adolescent boy explained that women would also decide to remain silent in the belief that '*wives should not complain about their husbands*'.

**“** I complain to God but most of the time I can do nothing but cry. (Woman from Mare' sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

**“** Sexual violence affects women because they cannot talk about what is happening to them. A woman can keep quiet about the situation of violence or she can speak out about her rights. But she will then draw attention to herself. (Woman from Daret Azza sub-district, Aleppo governorate)



*Cases of sexual violence: All the participants agreed that most cases of sexual violence are met with silence for fear of scandal. (Man from Daret Azza sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*



### Victim blaming

Several male and female FGDs in Jarablus, Mare, and Atareb sub-districts discussed how victims of violence were blamed for the original acts by their community and their family. This was sometimes linked to honour killings.



*The participants spoke about the necessity of finding women's support and awareness centres and care for girls who have faced sexual violence because they cannot talk about it out of fear for their reputation and their community's view of her as a criminal. (Man from Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate)*

### Reported Coping Strategies in Response to Violence and Unmet Needs

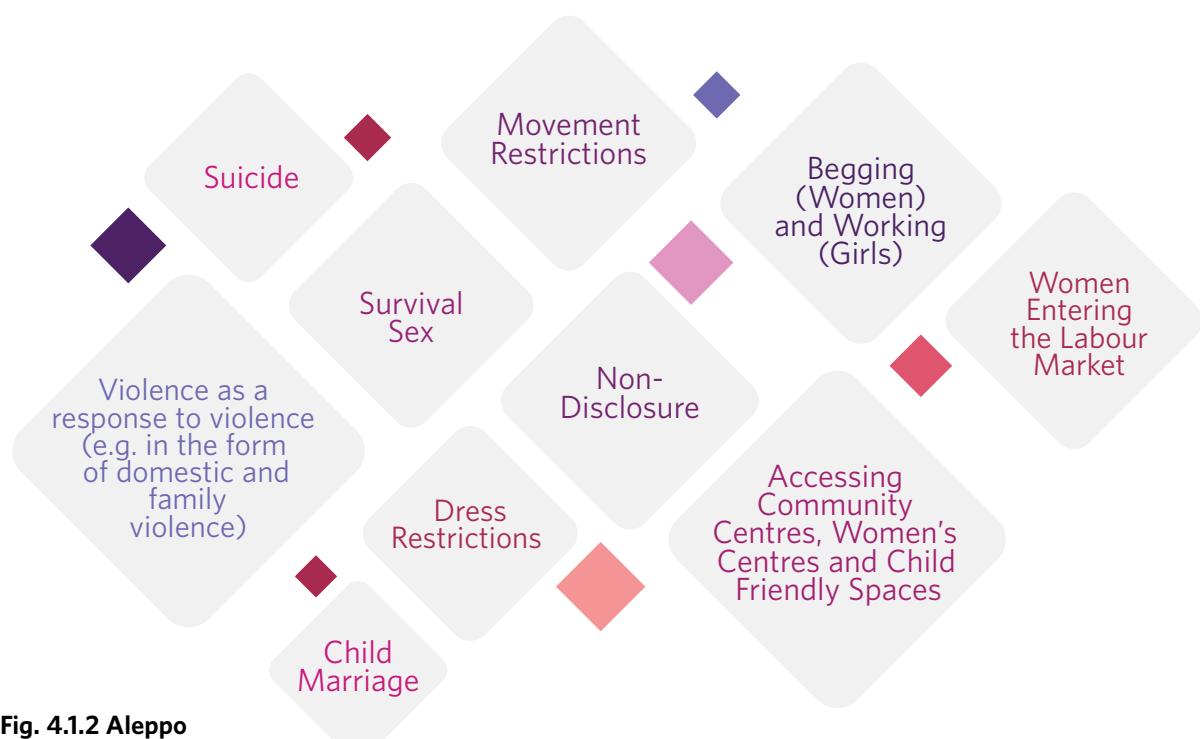


Fig. 4.1.2 Aleppo



## Restriction of freedom

Several forms of restrictions of freedom for women and girls were mentioned in the data from Aleppo governorate. These included movement restrictions, denial of their inheritance and dowry, restriction of access to education and loss of decision-making (e.g. with regards to marriage, education, movement and friendship).

Adolescent boys in Daret Azza sub-district mentioned widows who experienced injustice as '*aid is stolen from them*'. Generally, many FGDs participants discussed how women and girls were seen as '*inferior*' to men and boys and '*had no right to marry, study or move without approval*'. Particularly-affected groups mentioned in the data were adolescent girls, widows and girls who married early.

**“** Women in the town are prevented from acquiring their rightful share of inheritance. They are compensated by a small amount of money, whether they like it or not. (Man from Zarbah sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

**“** When widows take care of themselves, people will blame them. Widows are not entitled to get or do anything. (Adolescent girl from Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

**“** "Girls cannot be free", "Whatever girls do is shameful", "Girls cannot go to school", "Parents choose friends for their daughters - they may not choose their own." (Adolescent girls from Daret Azza sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

## Movement restrictions

85% of FGDs discussed movement restrictions for women and girls in Aleppo governorate. Women and adolescent girls addressed movement restrictions for females almost three-times more often than men and adolescent boys. Reasons given for limiting movement were fear of harassment on the street, lack of safe transportation for women and girls, fear of abductions, and women and girls not being allowed to move without a chaperon from their family. Adolescent girls reported not having official documentation and therefore not being able to move around freely.

Overall, adolescent girls and widows were reported to be particularly at risk of movement restrictions in Aleppo governorate. Saying this however, all women and girls in Aleppo governorate were reported to be affected.

**“** A widow's movement is entirely restricted by the community. (Woman from Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

In Atareb sub-district, men reported that while men had entire freedom in movement, women could only move within the community and not outside – over and above the already-restrictive customs for movement of women. The same was reported by GBV experts for Jarablus sub-district where, according to the experts, women and girls were restricted in accessing the hospital in Membij because of their fear of checkpoints.

**“** Harassment is the most common reason for preventing women from walking alone on the street. (Adolescent girl from Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

**“** The community looks down at a woman or girl when she comes out of the house unaccompanied, or when she wants to get into a car. (Woman from Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

**“** We have difficulties in mobility. We cannot go out at night, as transportation is bad and expensive. We have to go far to obtain our basic needs. (Woman from Jebel Saman sub-district, Aleppo governorate)



### Dress restrictions

Across non-government controlled areas in Aleppo governorate, female and male participants reported dress restrictions for women and girls, particularly for adolescent girls and in camp settings. Adolescent girls perceived these restrictions to have increased.

**“** Moreover, our outfits have changed. My father made me wear a cloak and a face cover while I was still 13 years old, because of his concerns over life at the camp. Conversely, when we were still living at our home, my elder sister did not wear a veil until she was 18 years old. (Adolescent girl from A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

**“** I used to love singing, but now that we are living in a tent I can no longer raise my voice because the tent's cloth does not muffle my voice. I used to love running and playing when I was in the sixth grade and wore a face cove. But if I ran in the streets now, people would say that I am impolite. (Adolescent girl from A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

## Civil documentation

Lack and loss of civil documentation were reported as a major concern in particular for adolescent girls, widows and divorcees in Aleppo governorate. The lack of IDs and official marriage certificates would often be followed by the lack of birth certificates for any children coming from the marriage. Widows and divorcees are being denied their inheritance and dowry.

**“** I know a woman who is 20 years old but does not have an identity card and therefore can't authenticate her marriage or her children. (Woman from Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

## Access to GBV services

No. of organisations involved in GBV response by hub (August 2017)

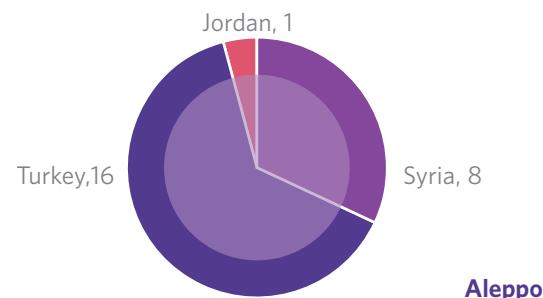


Fig 4.1.3 Organisations involved in response in governorate

Only one FGD with women in Azaz sub-district mentioned existing specialised GBV services for women and girls in Aleppo governorate. Whilst this reflects great gaps in services across the governorate, it also highlights a lack of awareness about existing local services. The need for such services was expressed by men, women and adolescent girls in several other discussions across the governorate. This was also reflected in quantitative assessment findings, which indicated that only in 4% of communities was psycho-social support for survivors of sexual violence and/or domestic violence deemed 'present and sufficient'. Respectively, medical treatment for survivors of sexual violence and/or domestic violence was also only perceived as 'present and sufficient' in 3% of communities in the governorate. In contrast the same assessments found that in 37.5% of communities, women and girls' safe spaces were 'present and sufficient'.

**“** We are relieved when we come to the Woman Protection Centre, and we think that it is a safe place where we feel comfortable. We do not know if there were other centres that provide psychological support other than them. (Adolescent girl from A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

**“** In many FGDs, participants expressed the need for more such woman and girls centres. They argued that 'the increase in cases of violence against women' meant that specific groups of women and girls, such as widows and divorced women, were in particular need of support. Other identified service gaps included the need for more empowerment activities, and in particular vocational training,

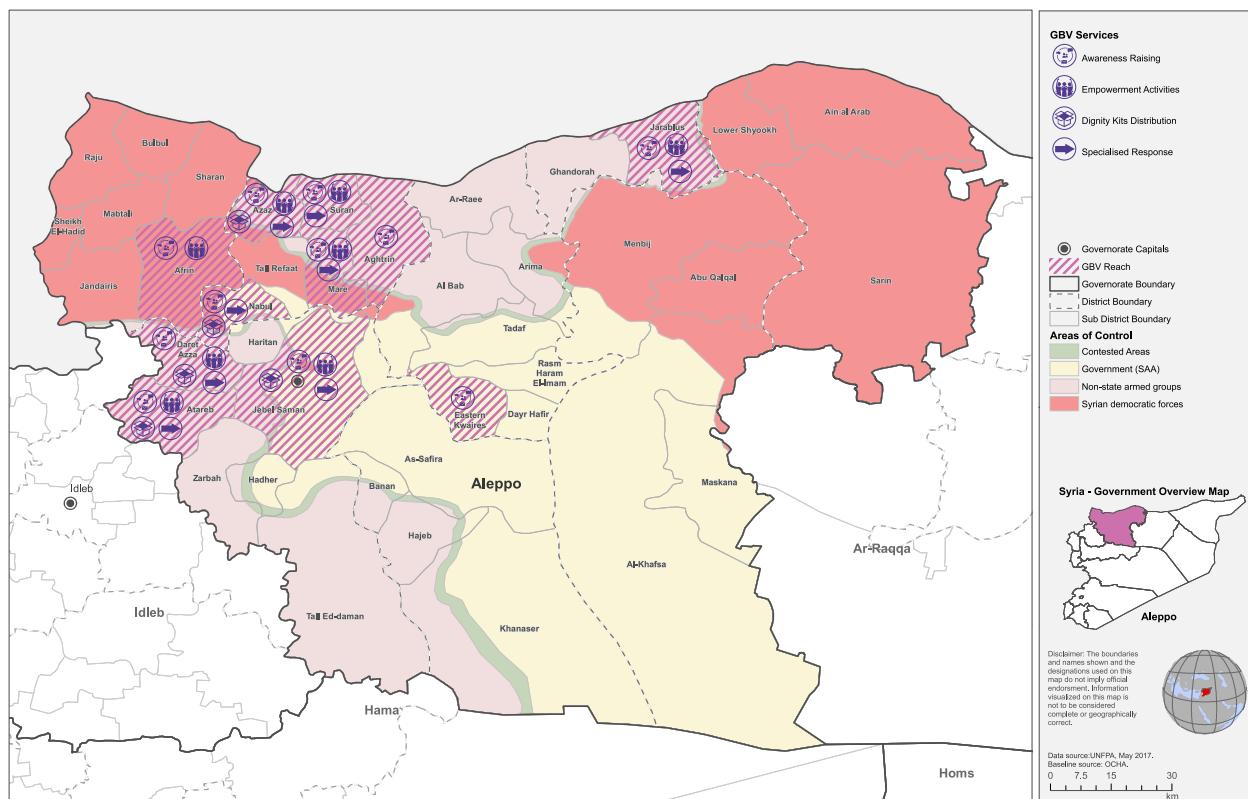
livelihood/economic empowerment projects and awareness sessions on child marriage, better training of staff and a better geographical spread of services and women, and girls' safe spaces.

“ There are no specialised centres for women and no psychological support is offered for women and girls who survived ISIS abuse. (Woman from Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

“ There are no women's protection centres. This increases the number of cases of violence against women. We therefore ask for a women's union or centre to protect women's rights to empower them and protect themselves. (Woman from Daret Azza sub-district, Aleppo governorate)

“ One assessment report from camps in non-government controlled areas in Aleppo governorate found that access to information on the available services was a barrier for GBV survivors as well as the lack of clear referral pathways that are in place.

The following map highlights available GBV services in Aleppo governorate, as of August 2017.



**Fig 4.1.4 Map of governorate services**

## Risks and barriers when accessing services and humanitarian assistance

Reported risks associated with women's and girls' access to services included discrimination and favouritism, in particular against widows and divorced women. Barriers to services mentioned in FGDs were distance to services and lack of transport for women and girls, family restrictions, a male service environment without female staff, lack of awareness about existing services, lack of knowledge on GBV referral pathways and lack of childcare.

**“Women's basic concerns: going to a centre and not finding a woman that facilitates the business of women and who can therefore represent them. (Woman from A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate)**

Distributions sites were generally described as a 'male environment', considered unsafe and violent for women and girls in Aleppo governorate. Reported risks associated with women's and girls' access to distributions included sexual exploitation, sexual harassment (especially of adolescent girls), requests for sexual favours in return for aid, discrimination and favouritism (in particular against widows and divorced women), theft and forgery, physical violence, humiliation and shaming. Women and girls reported feeling especially uncomfortable when their pictures were taken without consent at distribution sites.

**“In the squatter refugee camps, some distributors use their authority to sexually abuse women. Moreover, those distributors are capricious, giving people aid according to their moods. (Adolescent boy from A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate)**

**“Divorced women and widows suffer by lack of access to distributions. (Woman from Mare' sub-district, Aleppo governorate)**

**“Girls cannot receive distributions because they would be exposed to things that cause them shame. (Adolescent girl from Zarbah sub-district, Aleppo governorate)**

Barriers for women and girls to access distributions included not having a chaperon to accompany them to the distribution point, a male environment without female staffing, lack and loss of civil documentation, missing transportation and distance to distribution points, crowded and disorganised distributions that forced women and girls to 'stand for a long time next to men'.

**“The most common problem faced by women during distributions is that some organisations take photos while delivering relief distributions. (Adolescent boy from Daret Azza sub-district, Aleppo governorate)**

## Governorate Overview



## 4.2 Al Hasakeh

### Types of GBV reported as protection concerns

*The constant burden of poor living conditions has weakened our memory. There are many physical pains. We feel that we will explode sometimes. We hate everything. We wish death sometimes. We live in tension every day. (Women from Areesheh sub-district, Al Hasakeh governorate)*

FGD participants from Al Hasakeh governorate discussed how poverty and the length of the crisis have impacted the emotions and resilience of the people there. Adolescent girls perceived that '*males are more aggressive because of the war and the lack of resources*'. Distribution sites were reported as locations where violence occurs '*due to poverty*'.



#### Child marriage

According to quantitative data sources, child marriage occurs in more than 60% of communities in Al Hasakeh governorate. More than 42% of communities report that child marriage affects girls below the age of 12. The main reasons given for child marriage were financial problems, perceived protection and because of societal pressure. GBV experts also linked child marriage in Al Hasakeh governorate to sexual violence and forced marriage to perpetrators.



#### Domestic violence

Adolescent girls in Areesheh sub-district described domestic violence as '*normal in the community's customs*



**Fig. 4.2.1: Population Data, Al Hasakeh**

and traditional life'. During the FGD they compared their situation to the time when ISIS controlled the area ('when extreme violence took place against women') and perceived the situation of women as therefore significantly better. The girls also reported 'women and girls being subjected to physical assault', although it is not clear from the context who the perpetrators were and where this violence took place.



### Sexual violence

According to quantitative data sources, women and adolescent girls are most at risk of sexual violence. The threat of sexual harassment was mentioned by GBV experts in the context of discussing aid distribution in Al Hasakeh governorate. Overall, women, adolescent girls and girls below the age of 12 are more affected by sexual harassment than men and boys, according to quantitative data sources.

In one FGD, adolescent boys mentioned women and girls being most at risk when traveling to certain areas, because they 'feared armed groups' were there.



### Abductions

Cases of abductions of adolescents (not sex-aggregated) were reported in Al Hasakeh governorate. In one FGD, adolescent boys described how adolescents sitting at checkpoints would 'threaten other adolescents to present their IDs and if they do not comply, they abduct them'.

Organ trading was mentioned in one FGD by adolescent

boys in Areesheh sub-district and linked to abductions.

‘‘ People have seen adolescents being abducted. Gangs kidnap them to trade human organs. (Adolescent boy from Areesheh sub-district, Al Hasakeh governorate)



### Detention and torture

Men in Areesheh sub-districts reported that 'anyone hosting a refugee or IDP in his/her home would be held accountable and sentenced to imprisonment'. This was not explained further in the data.

## Affected population groups

Social Groups reported to be at high risk of violence and marginalisation included widows, the elderly and people with special needs. Female IDPs were mentioned as being particularly at risk of violence.

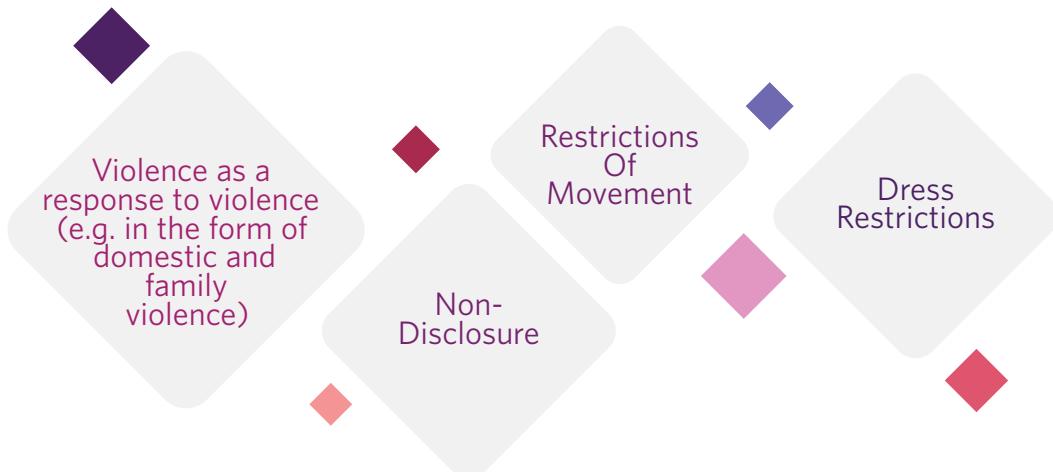
## Coping mechanisms



### Non-disclosure

‘‘ Women hesitate to seek help and medical care because they fear it's a 'scam'. (Woman from Areesheh sub-district, Al Hasakeh governorate)

## Reported Coping Strategies in Response to Violence and Unmet Needs



**Fig. 4.2.2 Hasakeh**

## Movement restrictions

Restrictions were reported for all age and sex groups in the FGDs in Al Hasakeh governorate. GBV experts discussed camps where only people with sponsorship ('*an invitation*') were allowed to leave the camp. Movement restrictions for adolescent boys were linked to the fear of conscription. FGD participants perceived these restrictions to result in more aggressive behaviour by adolescents that interrupted their education, which was echoed by men in another FGD. Men also linked movement restrictions of young people (not sex-disaggregated) to unemployment, lack of civil documentation ('*they cannot go to Hasakeh city to get basic documents, like a family book or marriage registration*') and emotional burden ('*including boredom and emptiness*').

Movement restrictions for women and girls were linked to general restrictions by their families and also for cultural reasons, such as '*fearing to go to the market*' or not being allowed to '*leave the home in the evening*'.

**“ Adolescent boys are forced by their parents to stay home so that they can be safe. (Adolescent boy from Areesheh sub-district, Al Hasakeh governorate)**

Quantitative data findings indicated that for people without ID cards movement restrictions were a major concern. Checkpoints, rules of authorities, screening processes and missing civil documentation were mentioned as main barriers to movement.

## Civil documentation

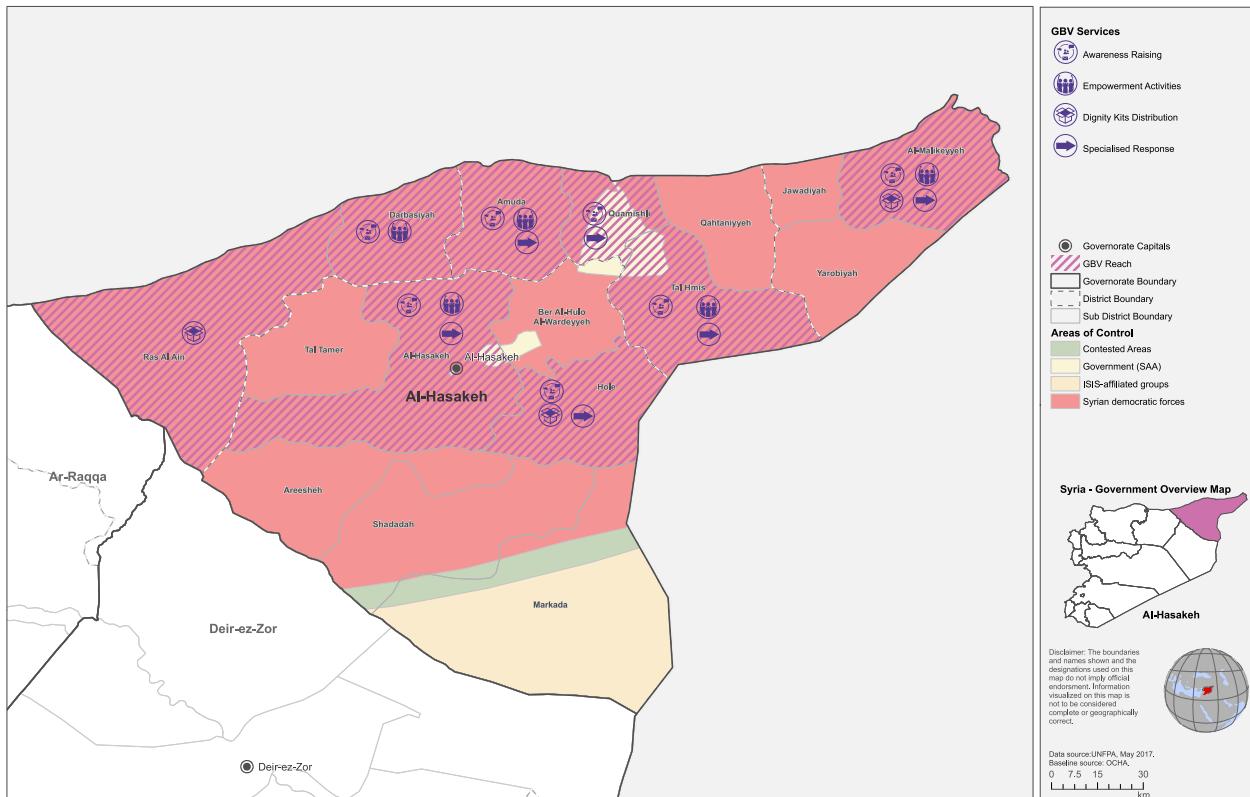
Lack and loss of civil documentation were reported as a major concern in particular for adolescent boys and girls in Al Hasakeh governorate, as they would not be able to obtain marriage registrations and family books upon marriage.

## Access to GBV services

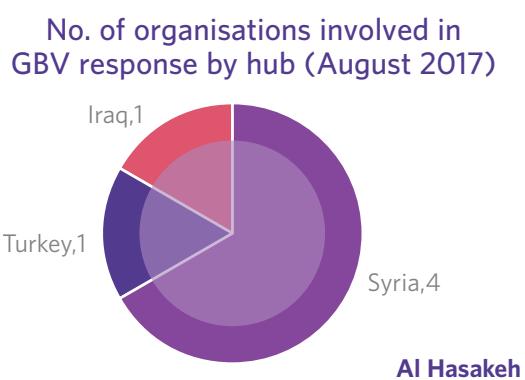
FGD participants reported a lack of specialised services for GBV survivors in Al Hasakeh governorate. Quantitative data findings confirmed this, as in the majority of communities in Al-Hasakeh governorate women and girls safe spaces, medical treatment for survivors of sexual violence and/or domestic violence as well as PSS for survivors of sexual violence and/or domestic violence were reported to '*not be present and needed*'. Women in one FGD mentioned that '*there are no places to provide psychological support - or legal services*'. Furthermore, fear of stigmatisation would prevent survivors from seeking services. Moreover, the lack of doctors and medication, and in particular the lack of gynaecologists, was mentioned. Adolescent girls reported the need for vocational training for women and adolescent girls.

**“ There are no protection services, like community centres, child-friendly spaces, safe spaces for women and girls, psychosocial support, or assistance with civil documentation. (Woman from Areesheh sub-district, Al Hasakeh governorate)**

The following map highlights available GBV services in Al Hasakeh governorate, as of August 2017.



**Fig 4.2.3 Map of governorate services**



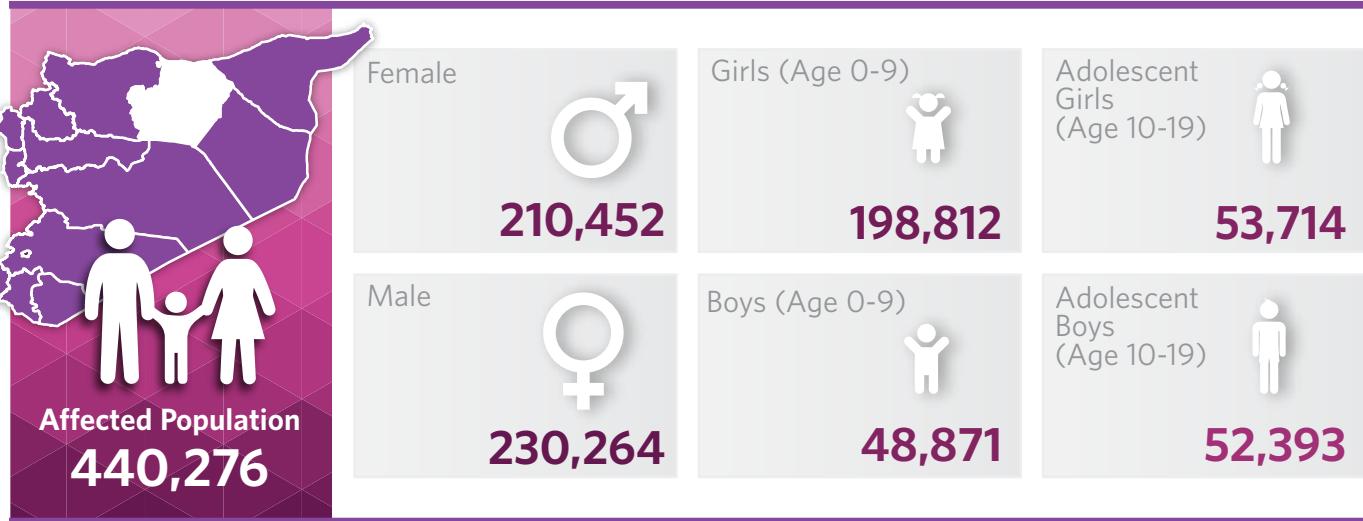
**Fig 4.2.4 Organisations involved in response in governorate**

## Risks and barriers when accessing services and humanitarian assistance

GBV experts reported discrimination and the risk of sexual harassment at distribution sites in Hasakeh governorate. This was echoed by women and men in FGDs who said that community '*leaders benefitted more*'. Aid distribution was also described as '*unfair because of bribery and favouritism*'. Women in Areesheh sub-district reported that hand-outs were limited to people with civil documentation. Adolescents with disabilities were also specifically mentioned as having problems accessing aid.

**“** There is aid distribution by some humanitarian organisations, but the services provided are basic and do not meet current needs. (Man from Areesheh sub-district, Al Hasakeh governorate)

## Governorate Overview



## 4.3 Ar-Raqqa

### Types of GBV reported as protection concerns

“ We fear the return of militants, of al-Qaeda (ISIS). We fear war and displacement. (Adolescent girls from Suluk sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate)

Various forms of GBV were reported in qualitative and quantitative data from Ar-Raqqa governorate. FGD participants from Ar-Raqqa governorate discussed that women in the governorate were forced to work to provide their families with basic needs and in this context mentioned the work place as a place of violence. Violence was also mentioned in the context of aid distribution, ‘owing to poverty’. Furthermore, the lack of education was seen by FGD participants as a contributing factor to increased violence.



#### Child marriage

Child marriage was reported in more than 95% of communities in Ar-Raqqa governorate in quantitative findings and also discussed by FGD participants, with adolescent girls being most at risk. In more than 50% of communities, it was reported that girls below the age of 12 were affected.



**Fig. 4.3.1: Population Data, Ar-Raqqa**



### Domestic violence

Domestic violence against women and girls was reported by men, women and adolescent girls in Ar-Raqqa governorate. Adolescent girls in Suluk sub-district linked the occurrence of domestic violence '*for the simplest reasons*' to the unemployment of husbands. Men echoed this in their discussions and named '*frustration at being unable to provide for their family*' as a trigger of violence.



*Women have adapted to the situation of domestic violence. Husbands believe that they have the right to practice these forms of violence due to 'absolute male power'. (Woman from Suluk sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate)*



### Sexual violence

Quantitative findings reported sexual violence, including sexual harassment, affecting women and girls in the majority of communities in Ar-Raqqa governorate. Overall, girls and women were more at risk than boys and men, according to that data. FGD participants echoed these findings. Women in Suluk sub-district named adolescent girls as being particularly at risk of sexual violence. Men saw overcrowding and mixed sexes sleeping together in same rooms as risk factors for sexual violence. When discussing sexual violence, adolescent girls in Ar-Raqqa governorate perceived women and girls to be '*inherently weak', 'easy to confuse and to deceive'*'.



### Family violence

Family violence was reported in several FGDs from Ar-Raqqa governorate. Adolescent girls reported that girls were beaten by their fathers and brothers, and men mentioned that children were beaten by parents '*for the simplest reasons*'.



*Girls are beaten by their father and brothers. Women face violence in the home from their husbands, brothers and fathers. (...) Girls and women endure a lot of "interrogation" from their siblings. (Adolescent girl from Suluk sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate)*



### Economic violence & exploitation

In one FGD, women reported women and girls having limited access to resources and goods in Ar-Raqqa governorate. They also discussed the very low wages that women and girls receive for work.



*A girl said: girls or women receive a small wage, but they do not have free will to use it. (Woman from Suluk sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate)*



### Divorce

Men reported an increase in divorces in one FGD in Suluk sub-district in Ar-Raqqa governorate. They linked it to '*men abandoning their wives and travelling abroad for several years*'.

## Affected population groups

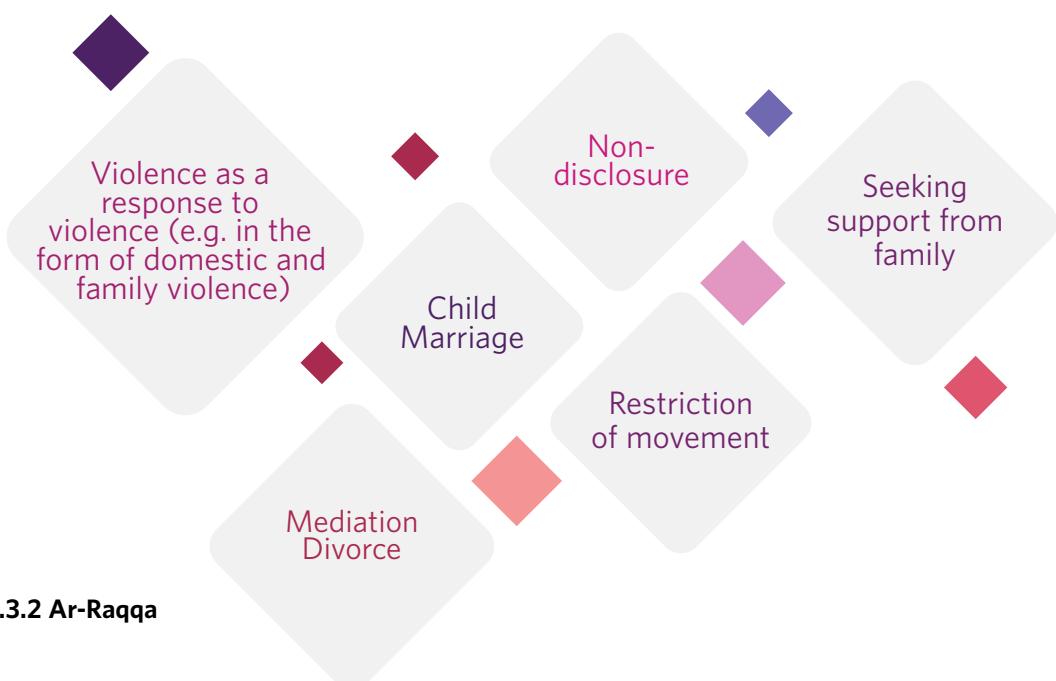
Social Groups reported to be at high risk of violence and marginalisation included women and girls, widows, the elderly, children and IDPs. Boys were reported to be particularly at risk with regards to conscription by armed groups.

## Coping Mechanisms

In Ar-Raqqa governorate, adolescent girls reported seeking the support of family members when coping with violence. Moreover, committees functioning as courts or mediators were mentioned in Suluk sub-district in the context of violence, including female committee members.

Saying this however, FGD participants also mentioned the hesitation of women and girls to seek help and medical care because of fear of stigmatisation.

### Reported Coping Strategies in Response to Violence and Unmet Needs



**Fig. 4.3.2 Ar-Raqqa**

## Movement restrictions

Women, adolescents and IDPs were mentioned in FGDs as being particularly affected by restrictions of movement in Ar-Raqqa governorate. Adolescent girls mentioned that women and girls would not go anywhere without a chaperon. These findings were also reflected in the quantitative data.

Reasons given in FGDs were '*customs and traditions*', checkpoints, screening processes, missing civil documentation (such as IDs) as well as the strict laws of extremist groups, such as ISIS. Quantitative data confirmed these findings and curfews, general violence, the presence of explosive hazards and activities of armed groups were also mentioned as barriers to movement in many communities throughout the governorate.

**“** *There is no freedom of movement in the areas under ISIS control (Raqqa). (GBV expert from Syria)*

## Civil documentation

Lack and loss of civil documentation were reported as a major concern in Ar-Raqqa governorate, being closely linked to the issue of movement restrictions, arbitrary arrest and access to services, such as education. Quantitative findings confirmed this, reporting it as a major protection concern in almost 90% of the communities across age and sex groups. The inability of registering births and marriages puts women and girls particularly at risk of being denied their resources and rights.

**“** *Some people have documents, but the majority do not have documents. IS confiscated many documents and some of them are lost. The biggest challenge is the lack of civil status records in the area. (Man from Suluk sub district, Ar-Raqqa governorate)*

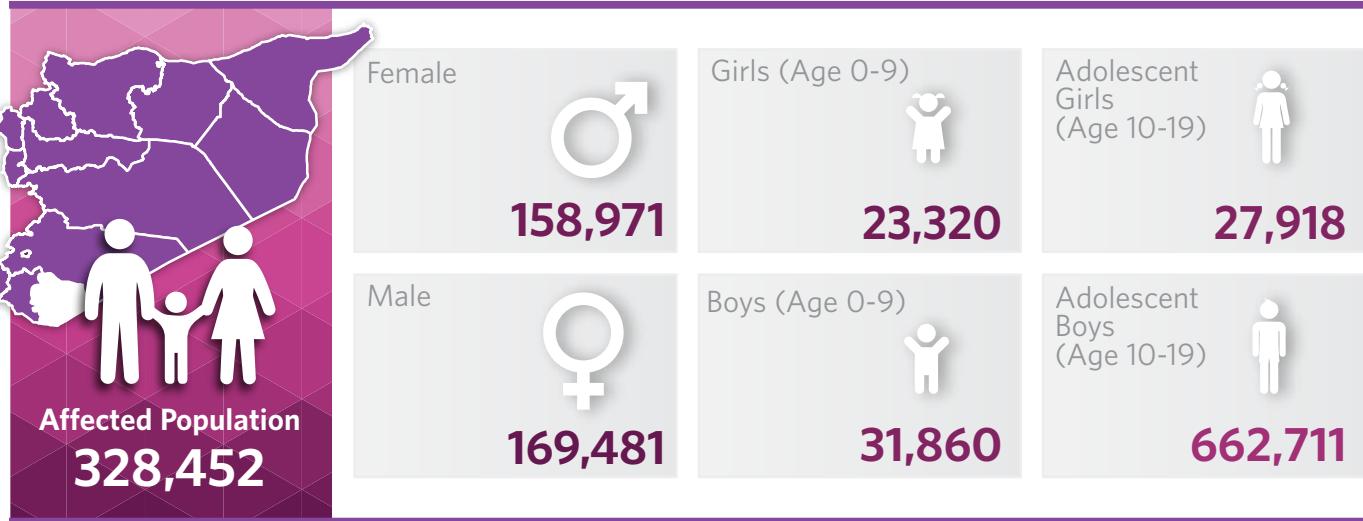
In quantitative findings, almost 100% of communities in Ar-Raqqa governorate reported further need for specialised GBV services, including the establishment of women and girls safe spaces as well as the provision of PSS and medical treatment for survivors of sexual violence and/or domestic violence. This was confirmed in some of the qualitative data sources, where adolescent girls reported '*no places for the provision of PSS to women and girls*'. Women reported that health centres would have neither doctors nor medication available.

In qualitative data, GBV experts reported available but limited services in Ar-Raqqa governorate, including mobile and outreach teams for awareness raising sessions, PSS and referrals. One GBV expert mentioned in this context the need for more long-term funding for GBV interventions, given the required process to establish operations and the limited human resources available.

## Risks and barriers when accessing services and humanitarian assistance

FGD participants reported returnees, IDPs, women and girls as being at risk of deprivation of humanitarian assistance in Ar-Raqqa governorate. The particularly difficult situation for IDPs was mentioned, as they '*cannot meet their basic needs without access to the cities*', according to adolescent girls in Suluk sub-district.

## Governorate Overview



## 4.4 As-Sweida

### Types of GBV reported as protection concerns



#### Child marriage

Quantitative assessment data indicates that child marriage is a protection concern in the majority of communities in As-Sweida governorate. Adolescent girls are disproportionately affected by child marriage throughout the governorate, as parents arrange marriages for them for economic reasons and because of pressure from the society. Some parents also marry their daughters to '*protect*' them.



#### Domestic violence

Domestic violence in As Sweida is reported to be linked to poverty and unemployment, which is normalised in society to an extent that response is difficult. It is also reported to include economic violence.



*We hear our next-door neighbour beating his wife and children, yet we cannot interfere and his wife says that it's not anyone else's business. (Woman from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)*



*The conditions of our country make men get angry and beat their wives. The main cause is the financial distress that makes any disagreement turn into a problem. My husband is an officer and his salary is 40,000 Syrian Pounds and we are displaced. We have to pay rent for the house in addition to the house and children expenses, and we cannot afford all this. Any*



**Fig. 4.4.1: Population Data, As-Sweida**

*small problem is exaggerated and leads to beating and shouting. (Woman from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)*

**“** *I have a friend who has eight children and she works, shops, pays the rent, yet her husband takes her salary because he is dominant. In reality, he is nothing without her. (Woman from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)*



### Sexual violence



### Sexual harassment

Sexual Harassment, particularly against girls, will take place in parks, markets and schools.

**“** *The most annoying thing we’re often exposed to as girls is verbal harassment when we go to the market or the park, for example. I always wonder why they do not treat us as their sisters... There should be awareness centres for young men to change their way of thinking. (Adolescent girl from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)*

**“** *There have been many incidents of harassment among schoolchildren and we face many of these cases in our community. We have recently heard many stories about harassment at Hamad Abu Fadl School. (Adolescent girl from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)*

Quantitative data findings also indicate that women and adolescent girls are particularly affected by sexual harassment.



### Rape

Mentions of rape were in relation to neighbours and community members. Reports included the rape of children, leading to severe health and psychological consequences.

**“** *A girl was raped by her neighbour’s son. He threatened that he would kill her father and brother if she told anyone what had happened to her. After that, she began to bleed and her mental state deteriorated due to what happened with her. If her parents had known about the threat, this would not have happened to her. She would have known how to defend herself and avoid violence. (Adolescent girl from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)*

**“** *Sexual violence and rape do exist in our community and there are many cases, and some of these cases are hidden. For example, one of our neighbour’s daughters is nine years old and she was playing in the street when their neighbour took her to his room and raped her. However, the girl kept quiet because she was afraid of her parents and because of the man’s threats. (Woman from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)*



### Family violence

Family violence is also normalised to an extent that home is not necessarily considered a safe place. Qualitative data in As-Sweida called particular attention to the family violence against children by step-parents in situations of divorce and remarriage.

“

*There is beating in almost every household. It is normal for violence to happen inside the house because in public they care about tarnishing their image. (Woman from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)*

“

*The house is supposed to be a safe haven for the girl if she is subjected to violence, but in many cases, the girl is exposed to violence at home more than anywhere else. When the parents are separated, the girl is exposed to a lot of violence. If the girl stays in her father's house, she may be insulted and humiliated by her father's wife. If she stays with her mother, her mother's husband may subject her to verbal and sometimes sexual violence. (Adolescent girl from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)*

“

*We see violence everywhere and every day. It takes all forms, from intellectual, cultural, physical, and psychological to economic and sexual. (Adolescent girl from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)*

“

Qualitative data indicates that women and girls in general are subject to GBV, divorced girls and people with disabilities came out as specifically affected populations.

“

*Divorced girls are the most vulnerable to violence because of community stigma. A divorced woman should not go out, because people will gossip about her. My sister is divorced and wherever she goes she is told, "you must not ..." My mother, my brother, and my brother-in-law all harass her and deny her everything. (Woman from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)*

“

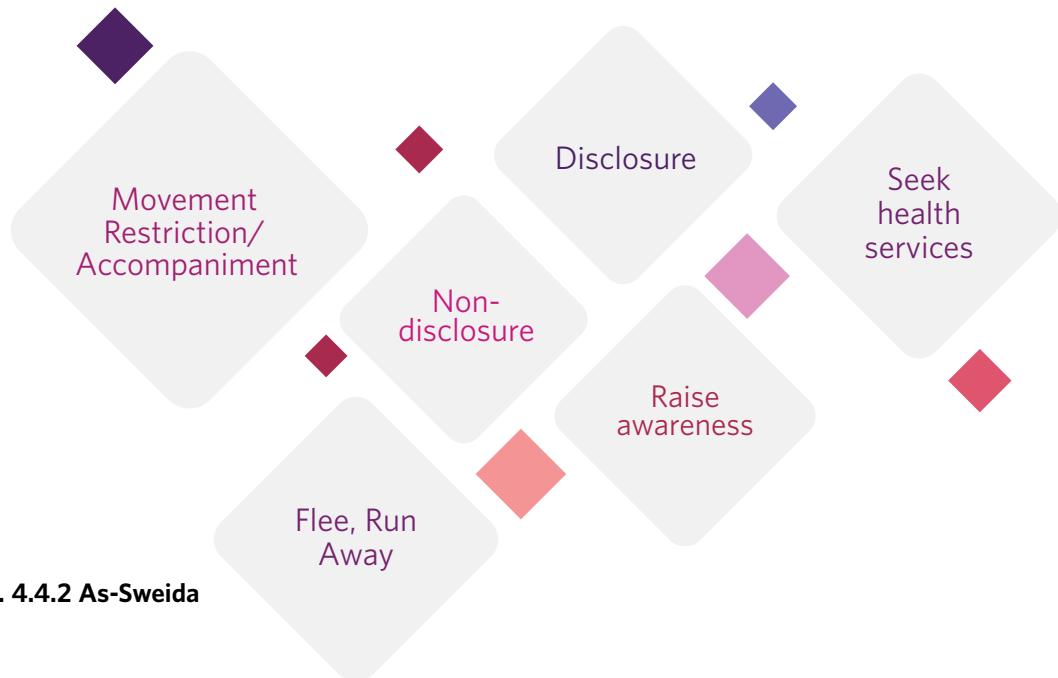
*I think the most vulnerable group is people with disabilities because of their weakness. They are vulnerable to molestation and rape. (Woman from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)*

“

*People with disabilities are also vulnerable. Yesterday, a disabled girl was playing in the street. One of the young men lured her with some candy and then raped her. This group of people should not be marginalised. (Adolescent girl from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)*

## Coping mechanisms

### Reported Coping Strategies in Response to Violence and Unmet Needs



**Fig. 4.4.2 As-Sweida**

Examples of positive coping mechanisms were given in qualitative data, such as relying on close friends and neighbours, or even the school's psychologist, to talk about experiences of GBV.

stay in her husband's house. (Woman from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)

## Movement restrictions

“ When a mother does not listen to her daughter well, the girl turns to her friend or neighbours if they prevent her from leaving the area. A girl needs a female like herself to sympathise with her and feel for her when she tells her problems. Perhaps she might have been exposed to the same problem as the girl herself so she would be comfortable to talk to her. Some girls turn to the school's psychologist, who in turn guides them well. This psychological guide may give her a way to tell her family about what happened with her. (Adolescent girl from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate) ”

“ Some girls do not dare to go to the market alone without their brothers for fear of being harassed and because they have a weak character, and cannot defend themselves. In contrast, some girls have a very strong character and defend themselves stoutly. These things vary from one girl to another. Each girl behaves according to her character. (Adolescent girl from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate) ”

While some movement restrictions on women and girls in As-Sweida are related to concerns for safety and violence prevention, others are related to gossip and stigma within the community and restrictions imposed by women's husbands.

“ We must support girls and raise their awareness so that they can move forward. (Adolescent girl from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate) ”

“ People's gossip, community's injustice, and the ban on mixing with others limits the freedom of movement because the husbands don't allow their wives to go out - so that they don't know their rights and rebel and demand them. (Woman from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate) ”

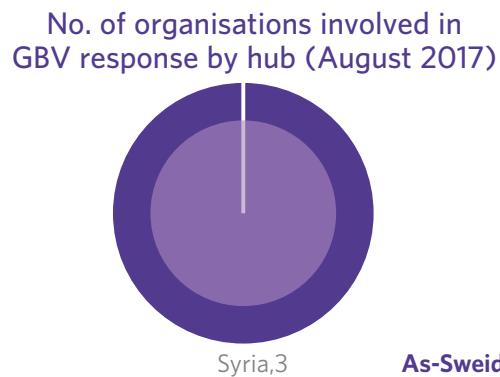
## Restriction of freedom

Qualitative data talked about girls' lack of access to education, employment and even isolation from friends and social groups or interactions.

“ Parents say that they don't want to educate their daughters or let them work. A girl is better suited to ”

“ Unfortunately, men dominate and if a girl goes out, she brings shame! Most men think like that. (Woman from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate) ”

## Access to GBV services



**Fig 4.4.4 Organisations involved in response in governorate**

The quality of existing GBV services in As-Sweida was talked about positively in qualitative data, along with other services that benefit women and girls such as food distributions and health services.

“ Services such as the safe space centre are secure and easily accessed. One can even receive a confidential service without being scandalised. The organisers are very respectful of our situation. Everyone needs PSS because of this crisis. I don't know any centre other than this one whose services have benefited us a lot. There isn't any type of discrimination or injustice in providing the service. Far from it - everyone is treated very nicely. I am grateful from the bottom of my heart. What I like most is that the services are integrated. I mean you can come to one place and receive everything you need. (Woman from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)

“ I was displaced in 2011, and when I came to As-Sweida, I benefited from all of the food baskets that have helped me a lot. Other than that, when I was pregnant, I learned about the Family Organisation Association and found out that there is a gynaecologist in the centre. Therefore, I came here and she monitored me very kindly during my whole pregnancy period. Moreover, she has provided me with useful advice and the medicines I need. (Woman from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)

Qualitative data also talked about additional needs for women and girls, particularly safe spaces where they can speak freely and confidentially, and even seek refuge or protection after experiencing violence.

“ We really need a safe place where we can express our opinions and be free from problems. Our parents always ask us to stay at home because they fear for our lives. (Adolescent girl from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)

“ I dream of a place or a centre that protects all battered girls with full protection, in addition to a psychosocial

*and medical support team that provides a safe space for girls to turn to with their dignity intact. I wish we had such a centre in As-Sweida. (Woman from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)*

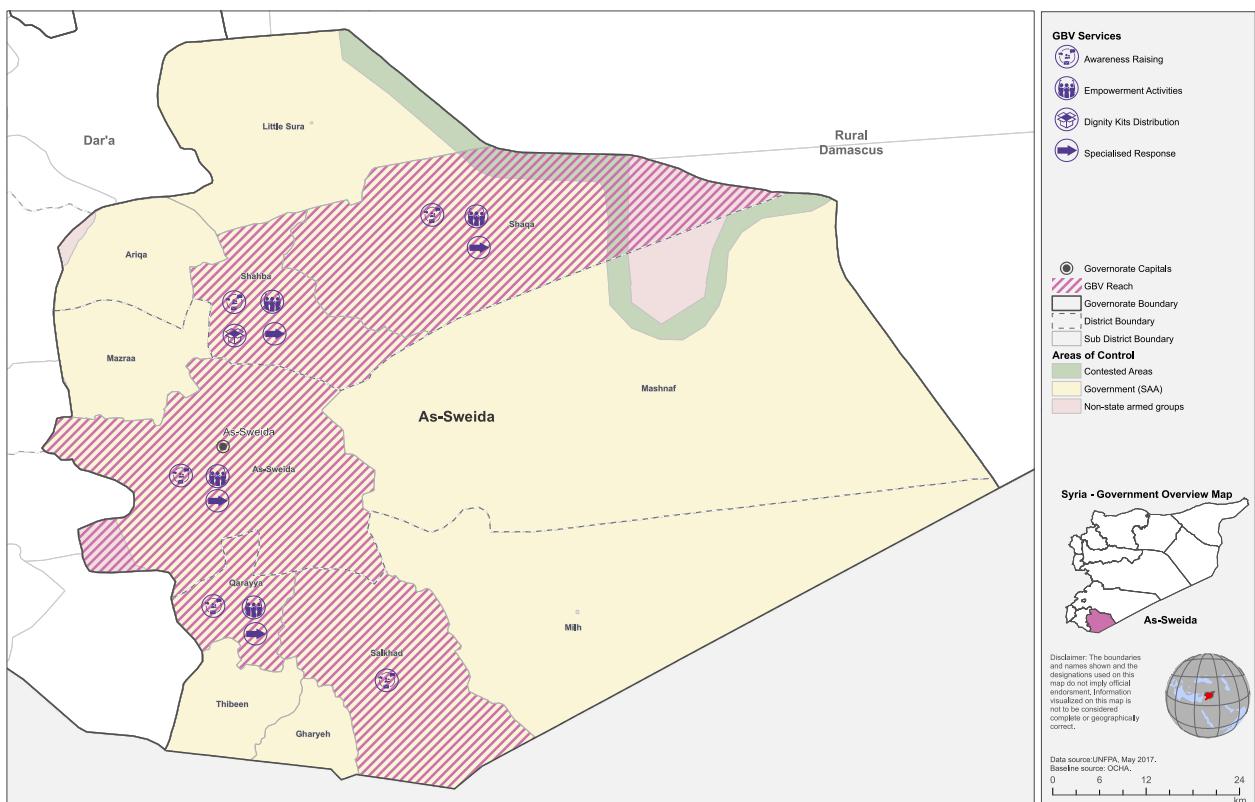
Barriers in accessing services in As-Sweida include non-disclosure as well as restrictions from family members.

*I came to the centre and told my story and asked for PSS. My condition has changed because of this. However, other people might not choose to turn to the centre because violence cases are often kept secret. (Woman from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)*

*My divorced sister cannot go out because of the pressure she faces and the difficulty she has dealing with her parents. [If the centre] hadn't encouraged her to come and benefit from the courses - and my parents were convinced and trusted the centre - she would have never been allowed. (Woman from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)*

In quantitative findings, almost the vast majority of communities in As-Sweida governorate reported further need for specialised GBV services, in particular the establishment of women and girls safe spaces.

The following map highlights available GBV services in As-Sweida governorate, as of August 2017.



**Fig 4.4.3 Map of governorate services**

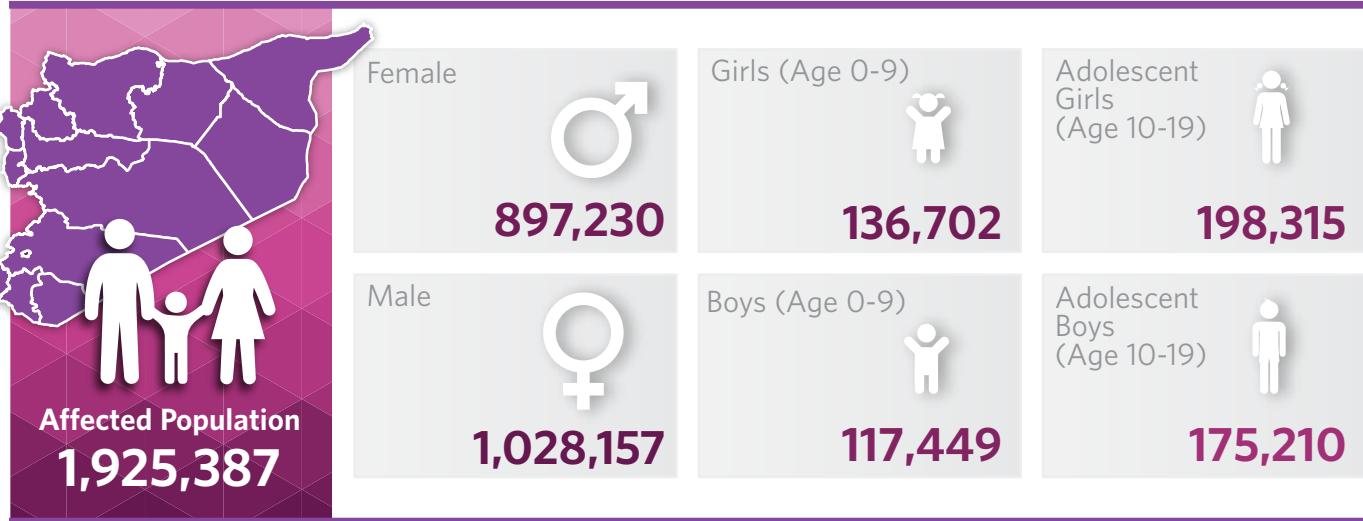
## Risks and barriers when accessing services and humanitarian assistance

*Some associations only give one food basket to each man even if he has more than one wife. Certainly this basket will not be enough, especially with the presence of many children. (Adolescent girl from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)*

*If the assistance reaches a man, like my neighbour, he would take the bulgur and the lentils and sell the rest, even though his family needs it. (Woman from As-Sweida city, As-Sweida governorate)*

Women who are second wives in a polygamous marriage are reported to benefit less from distributions, and some men may sell distribution items before they reach the rest of the household. FGD participants mentioned one account of verbal abuse by aid distributors towards women beneficiaries.

## Governorate Overview



## 4.5 Damascus

### Types of GBV reported as protection concerns

Qualitative data from Damascus governorate reflects the pressure people have experienced in recent years, with references made to '*psychological and economic violence suffered by everyone*'. Adolescent girls are perceived as being most affected by violence. Homes, the way to school (for adolescent girls) and schools were identified as typical places where violence occurs. Other perceived risk factors mentioned were overcrowded living conditions of families, including increased mixing of sexes, in displacement, as well as the high number of female-headed households.

“ Females suffer from violence the most. My parents treat my brother in a way that is different from me. Our community sees males as stronger and smarter creatures. (...) The community differentiates between boys and girls. (...) There is violence in the way people look at and treat girls. (Adolescent girls from Damascus city, Damascus governorate)

“ I do not let my daughter visit any of her friends because I am worried about her. (Woman from Damascus city, Damascus governorate)



#### Child marriage

Quantitative data findings report high levels of child marriage in Damascus governorate, with adolescent girls being mainly affected. Reasons given in the qualitative data for child marriage were firstly societal pressure, followed by economic reasons and desiring '*improved protection*' for the girl.



**Fig. 4.5.1: Population Data, Damascus**



### Forced marriage

In one discussion, GBV experts told of a group of women in Damascus, who had been forced to marry members of armed groups and were now being taken care of in shelters.



### Domestic violence

GBV experts reported increased domestic violence in shelters in Damascus governorate and put this down to the '*pressure that the families in those centres experience and because of the change in gender roles*'. A woman mentioned the necessity of centres to provide care for women that are victims of domestic violence.



### Sexual violence

The threat of sexual violence, and in particular sexual harassment was discussed in the qualitative data. These findings were echoed by quantitative data sources. Adolescent girls were perceived as being particularly at risk. Sexual harassment was reported in the context of aid distribution.



*Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to violence. They suffer sexual harassment. (Adolescent girl from Damascus city, Damascus governorate)*

GBV experts also discussed sexual violence, in particular against children and between spouses, in secondary schools and at distribution sites in Damascus. They perceived the lack of supervision of children, early exposure to sexual acts in shelters and overcrowding as risk factors. Abandoned buildings were also mentioned as locations where sexual violence takes place.



### Abductions

Abductions of women and men in Damascus governorate was discussed in the qualitative data. While some perceived them to be '*common*', others felt they are reduced in urban settings but still common in rural settings or '*unsettled areas*'. One women perceived men to be more vulnerable to abductions than women - quantitative data however does not reflect that differentiation between age and sex groups. Qualitative and quantitative data sources do not provide more details about the context of these abductions.

*Theft and abductions take place in places far from the city centre. My friend's nephew was kidnapped more than seven months ago when he was in one neighbourhood and we haven't heard anything about him since. (Woman from Damascus city, Damascus governorate)*

## Affected population groups

Social Groups reported to be at high risk of violence and marginalisation included women and girls, in particular adolescent girls, female-headed households (in particular divorced women), the elderly, people with special needs and IDPs.

## Coping mechanisms

### Reported Coping Strategies in Response to Violence and Unmet Needs



Fig. 4.5.2 Damascus

## Movement restrictions

Participants in all qualitative data reported restricted movement for adolescent girls, women and men at the age of military conscription. Adolescent girls reported going out less often through fear of violence, going mostly with a family chaperon, being afraid of taking buses or taxis, and not leaving the home in the evenings. Female IDPs described how restricted their movement became (in contrast to before) once they got displaced. Men at the age of military conscription were reported to restrict their movement because of fear of being stopped at checkpoints, especially in less central areas of the city. Movement restrictions were also linked to the loss and lack of civil documentation and the high number of checkpoints in the city. These findings were also reflected by quantitative data sources listing checkpoints and screening processes as reasons for movement restrictions.

**“I don't trust anyone. I don't leave the house at all unless it's for something urgent or to come to the women's centre. (Woman from Damascus city, Damascus governorate)**

**“I go only with my family, not alone, to protect myself. (Adolescent girl from Damascus city, Damascus governorate)**

**“My mother limits my movement. She doesn't allow me to go out more than once a day. (Adolescent girl from Damascus city, Damascus governorate)**

GBV experts also mentioned divorced women in Damascus not leaving their houses, fearing stigmatisation by the community.



### Dress restrictions

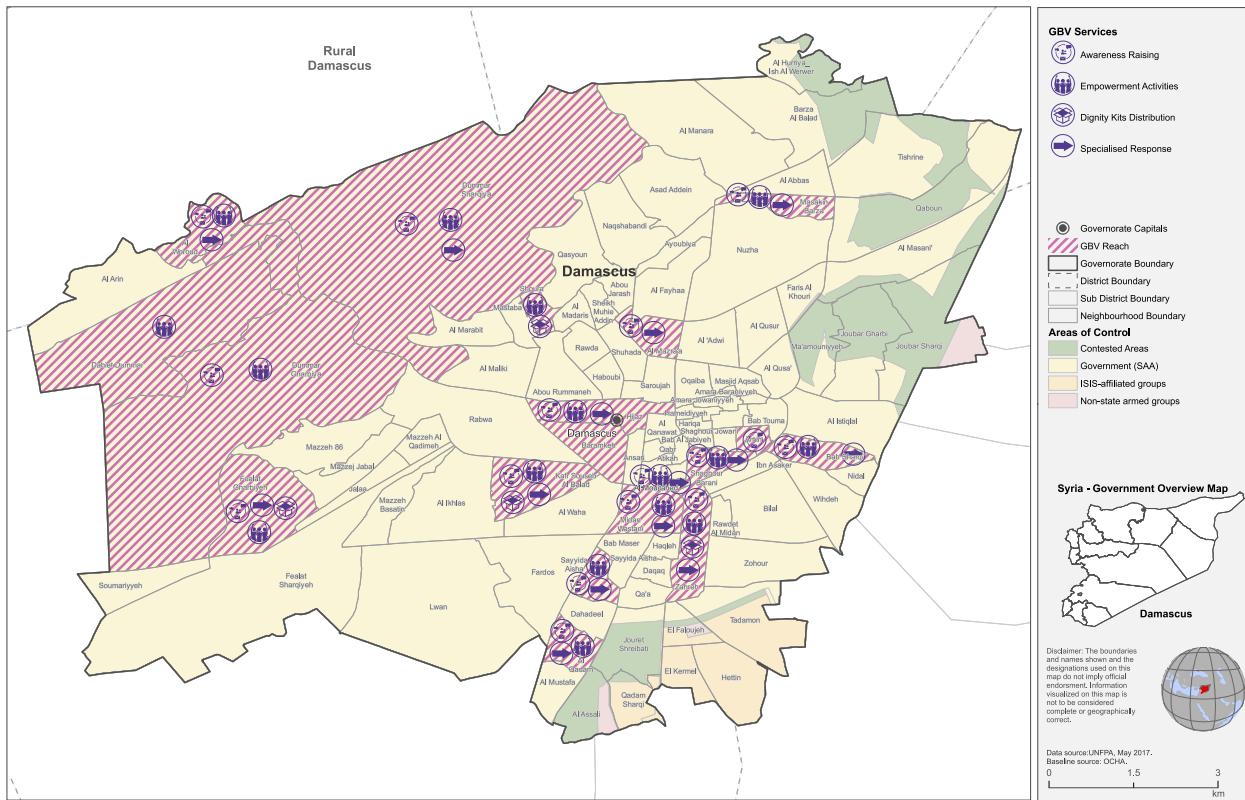
In the qualitative data, adolescent girls and women both mention that women would '*dress themselves more decently*' as a way to protect themselves from violence.

## Civil documentation

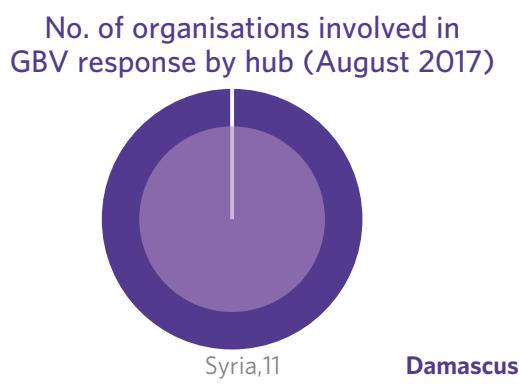
In the qualitative data, the loss and lack of civil documentation when discussing reasons for movement restrictions, was reported.

## Access to GBV services

The following map highlights available GBV services in Damascus governorate, as of August 2017.



**Fig 4.5.3 Map of governorate services**



**Fig 4.5.4 Organisations involved in response in governorate**

GBV experts mentioned increased services for GBV survivors in Damascus. However, they also pointed out the continued need to provide more specialised medical services and more women and girls safe spaces. This was echoed in the qualitative data, where the existence of PSS and legal services for women and girls, as well as medical treatment for GBV survivors was reported.

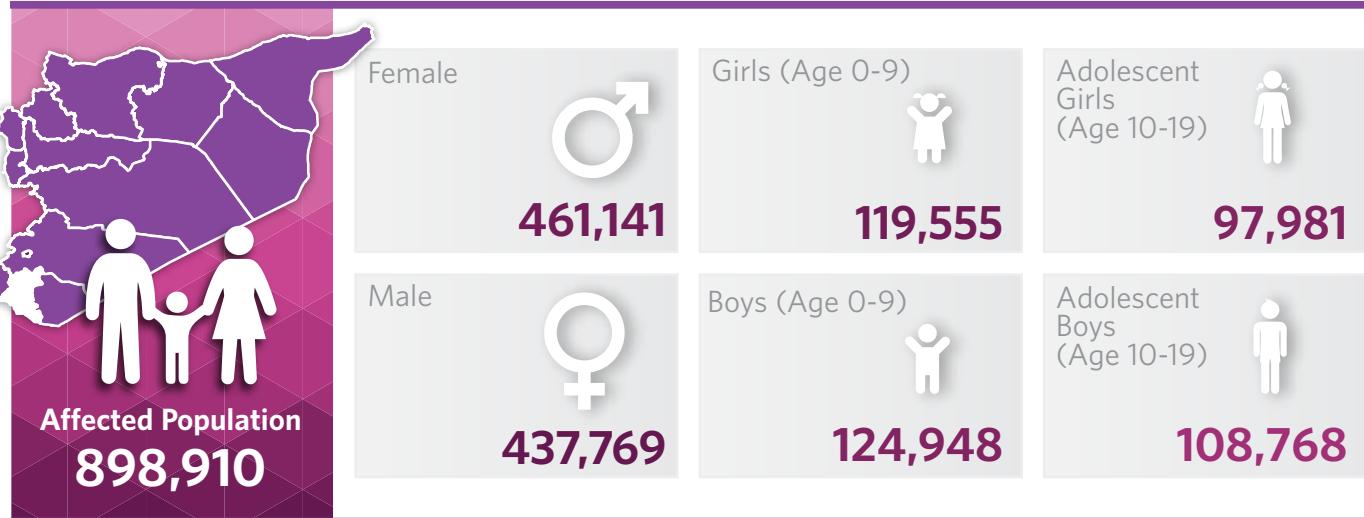
*“For me, the services are available and are improving, and there is no difficulty in accessing them. The safe space centre is spacious and good. (Woman from Damascus city, Damascus governorate)*

GBV experts also pointed out that more effort is needed to make the existing services in Damascus known to people. The need for more PSS and medical treatment for survivors of sexual violence, as well as the need for more women and girls safe spaces, was also reflected in quantitative findings in Damascus.

## Risks and barriers when accessing services and humanitarian assistance

Several barriers to aid distribution were mentioned in the qualitative data. Women mentioned mistreatment, favouritism, humiliation and sexual harassment at distribution points, with one woman saying that because of problems there she had '*given them up*'.

## Governorate Overview



## 4.6 Dar'a

### Types of GBV reported as protection concerns

“ I think we are starting to become accustomed to violence, and no longer able to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong. (Woman from Dar'a city, Dar'a governorate)

FGD participants widely discussed risk factors triggering GBV in their communities in Dar'a governorate. In some communities the large influx of IDPs was mentioned, alongside overcrowded living conditions and increased mixing between sexes. Others perceived the increase of working women and insecure transportation as risk factors. Unemployment, poverty, dire economic conditions at family-level, patriarchal structures and the overall lack of legal redress mechanisms and rule and order were also mentioned. In several FGDs, participants discussed increased drug consumption (pills and narcotics) and the spread of weapons as further reasons for increased violence. Adolescent boys in Nawa sub-district also mentioned '*young men easily being provoked by the indecent clothes of girls*' and '*the absence of fathers leading to increased violence of adolescent boys*' as additional risk factors. Specific locations of GBV mentioned in the data were homes, schools, side roads and crowded public places, such as distribution sites, markets and IDP camps/shelters.

“ Those who want to harass girls may do so freely because there is no one watching like before. (Woman from Mzeireb sub-district, Dar'a governorate)



Fig. 4.6.1: Population Data, Dar'a



### Child marriage

FGD participants perceived an increase in child marriages in Dar'a governorate and called it 'widespread'. Child marriage was often mentioned when discussing 'the most dangerous types of child labour' as well as denial of education. Various examples of 13- and 14-year-old girls were given. It was linked in discussions to a perceived increase of divorces, displacement, abandoned of children and displaced men looking for '*a girl to take care of them*'. Adolescent girls in Izra' sub-district also related child marriage to female-headed households, saying that '*families that are supported by women do not have enough money and therefore marry off their daughters at an early age*'. But overall, many FGD participants gave examples of girls being married off '*because of poverty*'.

**“** *I know someone whose father died and then went to her grandparents' house with her mother. They arranged a marriage for her but she was divorced after one month. Her maternal uncles did not allow her to come back. This means she lived with her paternal uncles. There are too many girls made to marry indiscriminately.* (Woman from Mzeireb sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

**“** *At what age do girls usually marry? Participant No. 2: 15 or 14 and sometimes 13 years old. All this leads to divorce because the mind at this stage has not fully matured.* (Man from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

Quantitative assessment data findings also indicate that child marriage is a protection concern in the vast majority of communities in Dar'a governorate. Adolescent girls are particularly affected by child marriage across the governorate, as parents arrange marriages for them for economic reasons, because of pressure from the society and 'to protect' their daughters.



### Domestic violence

Domestic violence was mentioned in 52% of FGDs in Dar'a, with specific mentions around movement restrictions and marital rape.

**“** *Regarding the physical violence, if the woman is married, she won't always say she was beaten so that her parents may intervene and solve the problem. Some women say: "I don't want to put my marriage at risk. I want to stay with my husband and children. I will put up with it until this situation changes".* (Woman from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

**“** *Participant 1: We still find people hitting women or locking them up.  
Facilitator: Do you mean there are men who beat their wives?  
Participant 2: Wives get beaten, insulted and humiliated.* (Woman from Dar'a city, Dar'a governorate)



### Sexual violence

Sexual violence was mentioned in 67% of FGDs in Dar'a. Women and girls report experiencing frequent sexual harassment at schools, distribution points, on the street and in camps. This is reported to be increasing because of lawlessness and the lack of accountability among the men and boys who have perpetrated it since the crisis began.

**“** *It is highly likely that girls suffer harassment or insults on their way to or back from their work or school. It could also happen in the market. It could happen anywhere.* (Woman from Dar'a city, Dar'a governorate)

 *The lack of control or judicial authorities whose job is to punish those committing harassment allows people to take it too far. They are certain no one will punish them.* (Woman from Dar'a city, Dar'a governorate)

Some FGDs mention harassment escalating to the point of kidnaping, and rape committed by taxi drivers who abduct women. Quantitative data findings also indicate that women and adolescent girls are particularly affected by sexual harassment in the governorate.

 *They keep harassing girls till they abduct them.* (Adolescent girl from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

Women IDPs in particular experience sexual exploitation in order to access basic needs and services for themselves and their families.

 *Some women need money to meet their children's need, so they accept to have sex with others.* (Adolescent girl from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

 *A woman (IDP) would receive an aid packet, in exchange for a visit to her home.* (Man from Dar'a city, Dar'a governorate)



## Family violence

Similar to domestic violence, women and children face family violence often at the hands of fathers, brothers and uncles.

 *There is familial violence practiced by fathers and brothers. It is done physically or verbally.* (Woman from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

 *Family violence occurs in every household. This type of violence is due to the current economic situation: some men can't provide for their household, so they shout at their wives and children as a way to vent their anger.* (Woman from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)



## Honour killings

Honour killing of women and girls by their family members in response to sexual violence came out regularly from FGDs in Dar'a.

 *Some girls are killed if they have suffered sexual violence.* (Adolescent girl from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)



## Detention and arrest

Physical and sexual violence was also reported to take place against women in the context of detention, and fear of detention at checkpoints was mentioned as a concern for women and girls.

 *For groups in prison the person most at risk is a woman. For example, female thugs (shabbeihat) will beat her up during interrogations. This condoned by ISIS, and they make their own laws around marriage too.* (Woman from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

## Affected population groups

 *Violence is widespread and women are more vulnerable than men.* (Adolescent girl from Busra Esh-Sham, Dar'a governorate)

While women and girls in general are strongly affected by GBV – it was IDPs, divorcees, widows and girls as they reach adolescence who were reported to be at particular risk.

 *A girl is more prone to harassment than a boy, and especially so for girls who go to other villages. They are more vulnerable to harassment than the locals because locals are generally known and so it is easier for them than IDPs. Female IDPs, in general, are at a higher risk of being exploited than the local population.* (Woman from Dar'a city, Dar'a governorate)

 *The divorced women should avoid crowded places and camps.* (Man from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

 *Of course, there is objection from parents. They say you are grown up and you cannot go out. The older brother may prevent her from going. There are also barriers... for the woman who lost her father or husband. For instance, the uncle would prevent her from going out and would say that your father is dead or detained, just like that. Here there is a great deal of injustice to the woman.* (Adolescent girl from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

## Coping mechanisms

### Reported Coping Mechanisms in Response to Violence and Unmet Needs

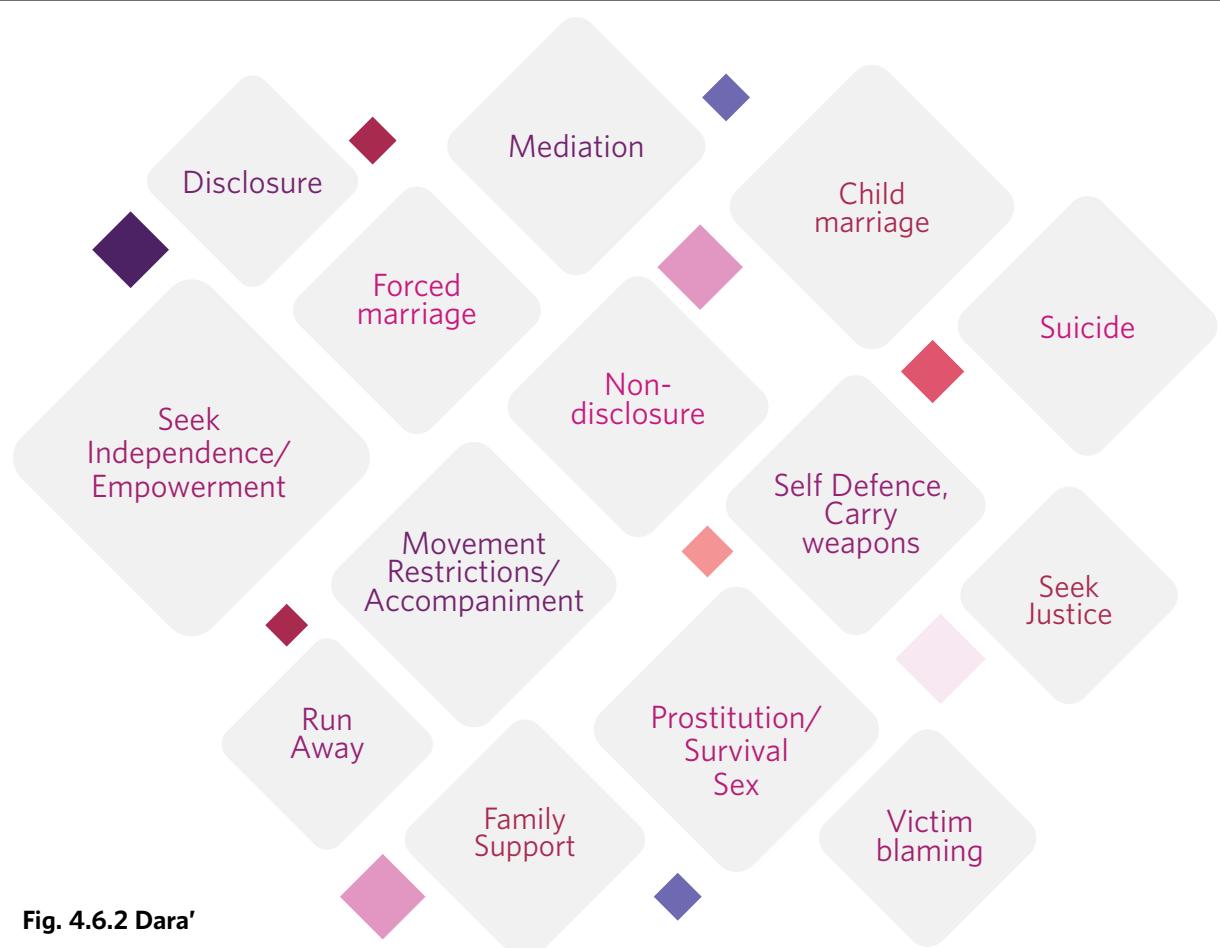


Fig. 4.6.2 Dara'

## Non-disclosure

Remaining silent about the experience of violence is the most frequently reported coping mechanism for women and girls, being mentioned in 45% of FGDs in Dar'a. Likewise, participants linked non-disclosure with the need to avoid gossip and scandal, as well as a sense of futility given the lack of justice mechanisms, and the fear of being killed by family members in the name of honour.

**Participant 4:** Any lady suffering such a case would not speak, due to her being afraid of her family in the first place.

**Participant 1:** And society too.

**Participant 4:** If a woman suffers even a simple kind of sexual harassment she would not speak of it as society does not accept it. (Woman from Dar'a city, Dar'a governorate)

**Participant 4:** Familial violence can't be solved in this way because a girl, who has been beaten by her brother or father, can't complain to others. If she complained, people would talk badly about her. (Woman from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

**Participant 4:** A woman, being weak, would lose her rights. If there were someone powerful to aid her, she would have justice. However, if there were not, she can only lament in silence. (Woman from Mzeireb sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

Keeping silent about experiences of GBV, and trauma from the violence itself, was also reported to be linked with an increase in suicide among women and girls.

**Participant 4:** For example, some girls believe that their lives have ended and so the first thing she does is commit suicide. What else can she do? She will not be able to tell her parents. She will keep quiet, and this means she will die slowly. (Adolescent girl from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

Even in areas where there are protection services available, such as police or courts, FGD participants revealed the dilemmas that women and girls must face when making the decision whether to report incidents of violence.

**Participant 4:** She is faced with a dilemma of whether to suppress this within her because she feels weak and knows she can't face up to her community or bear the harassment of men. Or she can be bold, showing the mental strength to cope with this problem. She will therefore go to the nearest police station and make a complaint against the person who raped her and caused this problem. (Woman from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

Adolescent boys and girls in different FGDs pointed out the differences in coping mechanisms available to boys compared to girls, with boys more able to disclose acts of violence and less likely to experience negative consequences after disclosing than girls.

**If boys suffer violence, they can counter it more easily than girls. Boys can register their complaints about violence without the same shyness as girls. (Adolescent boy from Mseifra sub-district, Dar'a governorate)**

**When a girl is raped, this problem is solved by either marriage or murder. When males experience sexual violence, the elders can mediate to solve the problem. (Adolescent girl from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)**

Men's FGDs also brought up the availability of mediation at a family and tribal level for incidents of GBV. However, given that women's FGDs rarely mention this as a possible coping mechanism, it may be a mechanism that, while available to men and boys, is not helpful in advocating for a positive solution for women and girls.

While non-disclosure was the most commonly mentioned coping mechanism, women and girls report willingness to turn to others for support if they have a close and non-judgmental relationship. This highlights the importance of establishing safe and confidential services for women and girls, but also the worth of simply allowing women and girls the freedom to maintain social support networks rather than suffer in social isolation.

**Most of the girls keep it a secret and do not tell anybody. If she has a close friend, she might tell her. If the mother makes the relationship with her daughter a friendship, she would definitely tell her mother. (Woman from Dar'a city, Dar'a governorate)**

## Movement restrictions

FGD participants reported that women and children are more affected by movement restrictions than men, and these restrictions have worsened since the start of the crisis. Indeed movement restrictions for women and girls were mentioned in 71% of FGDs in Dar'a. Participants said movement restrictions for women were the result of fear of violence such as kidnapping and sexual violence. Likewise, social gender norms and the violence that they may face at home if they challenge these gender norms, were identified as causes of restriction. Women and girls expressed feeling depressed and upset about not being able to move as they had before the start of the crisis.

**Actually, there are no security restrictions and nobody asks for any official documents, but our traditions and customs restrict us. (Adolescent girl from Izra' sub-district, Dar'a governorate)**

“ Girls in particular have started to prefer staying at home rather than go out for fear of being kidnapped or suffering sexual assault that would bring shame on her family. This is according to society customs. (Woman from Dar'a city, Dar'a governorate)

“ Women are afraid of walking around. In the past, a woman would go out and walk around at any time, and she would go shopping or visit relatives and friends or go to school. Now, if they go in the daytime, they are harassed and suffer insults from youths. The youths dare more than ever, and nothing scares them. I mean, if a car is passing nearby, she must move away. If a woman asks for help, no one will help her. (Adolescent girl from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

On the other hand, one FGD spoke of a push to empower women and girls by teaching them to drive in order to be able to move more freely and escape in an emergency.

“ Regarding girls, we always say they are at a bigger risk than boys, especially since their freedom is more restricted than young men. When things go wrong, a young man has options. But how can girls protect themselves, whether during the shelling or an attempted kidnapping? Here in Naseeb the idea of teaching girls to drive is becoming more common. Girls take courses, and since most have cars now, if they need to flee, they can move to another governorate or village. (Woman from Dar'a city, Dar'a governorate)

While this could be helpful for those who have access to their own vehicle, women and girls who do not are less able than men to use taxis or take rides in private cars.

“ Those who have transport can move and those who don't may ask any passing car for a lift. They are afraid that if they go with someone they do not know, they may get hurt. Many women or girls don't trust anyone enough to get lifts from them. (Woman from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

## Restriction of freedoms

“ The most common thing is social violence where girls cannot achieve what they want, be it work, or anything else. There are social customs restraining us here. (Woman from Dar'a city, Dar'a governorate)

“ Women have less freedom to move because of fear of people's words or fear of their husbands... Women are more restricted than men are, because they need to escape being talked about... There is no freedom for women because of out-dated customs. (Adolescent girl from Busra Esh-Sham sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

Women and girls in FGDs described a context of restricted freedoms dictated by social customs - imposed by family members or husbands - and the stigma that results from challenging gender norms. These result in dress restrictions and loss of education.

“ It is difficult to move here because there are women wearing a face cover. They wear it because of their traditions and customs. (Woman from Izra' sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

“ Boys are more able to protect themselves. All places are unsafe and this has an effect on my daily routine, which now includes not going to school. (Adolescent girl from Busra Esh-Sham sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

“ For girls there is also the brother's violence. He is domineering and stubborn and tells her to stay at home. If she is a student and wants to go to university or an institute, he will tell her to stay at home and forget her studies. She will miss the chance of having a degree, and consequently, family problems later appear. (Woman from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

## Civil documentation & HLP

Women and girls reported that they are affected specifically by personal status documentation, such as those related to marriage and children. Without official documentation, women are more at risk of being deprived of their rights in cases of divorce for example.

“ I am married but I have neither a family record book nor an ID. I can't register my children in the personal-status department or in schools, and I don't have a marriage contract. If something bad happens, we can't go to Lebanon or Jordan because I don't have anything to prove that I am married. I am afraid of travelling because they might take my children because I don't have anything that proves they are my own children. (Adolescent girl from Izra' sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

## Access to GBV services

FGD participants report awareness of psychosocial support services in some areas, some specialised for children and high satisfaction with services where they are available.

“ Most of the psychological services, especially those for women, are available in the Eastern area of Dar'a. (Woman from Dar'a city, Dar'a governorate)

“ There are educational sessions in the town as well as the psychological support centre of Ghush Al-Zaytoon. I feel very happy when I receive these services. (Adolescent girl from Mseifra sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

“ There is the Safe House centre that provides psychological support. It gives girls the chance to work after training. There are courses on embroidery and

*sewing. (Adolescent boy from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)*

However, in other areas, participants report that no services are available, whether psychosocial, health, justice or specialised services for children and for GBV survivors.

*“The health and psychological services centres are not available and we need them. (Adolescent boy from Busra Esh-Sham sub-district, Dar'a governorate)*

*“The court amounts to nothing, as it is not helpful, especially in cases of violence. This means that there is nobody to give them justice. (Woman from Dar'a city, Dar'a governorate)*

Conversely, where specialised services are available, the link with GBV may impede women and girls from associating with the services.

*“Aren't there care centres for girls?*

*Participant 1: No, there are services for survivors of violence. (Adolescent girl from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)*

No. of organisations involved in GBV response by hub (August 2017)

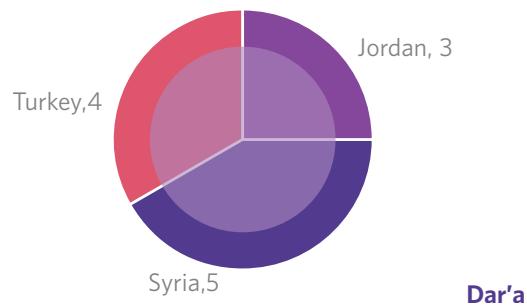


Fig 4.6.4 Organisations involved in response in governorate

The following map highlights available GBV services in Dar'a governorate, as of August 2017.

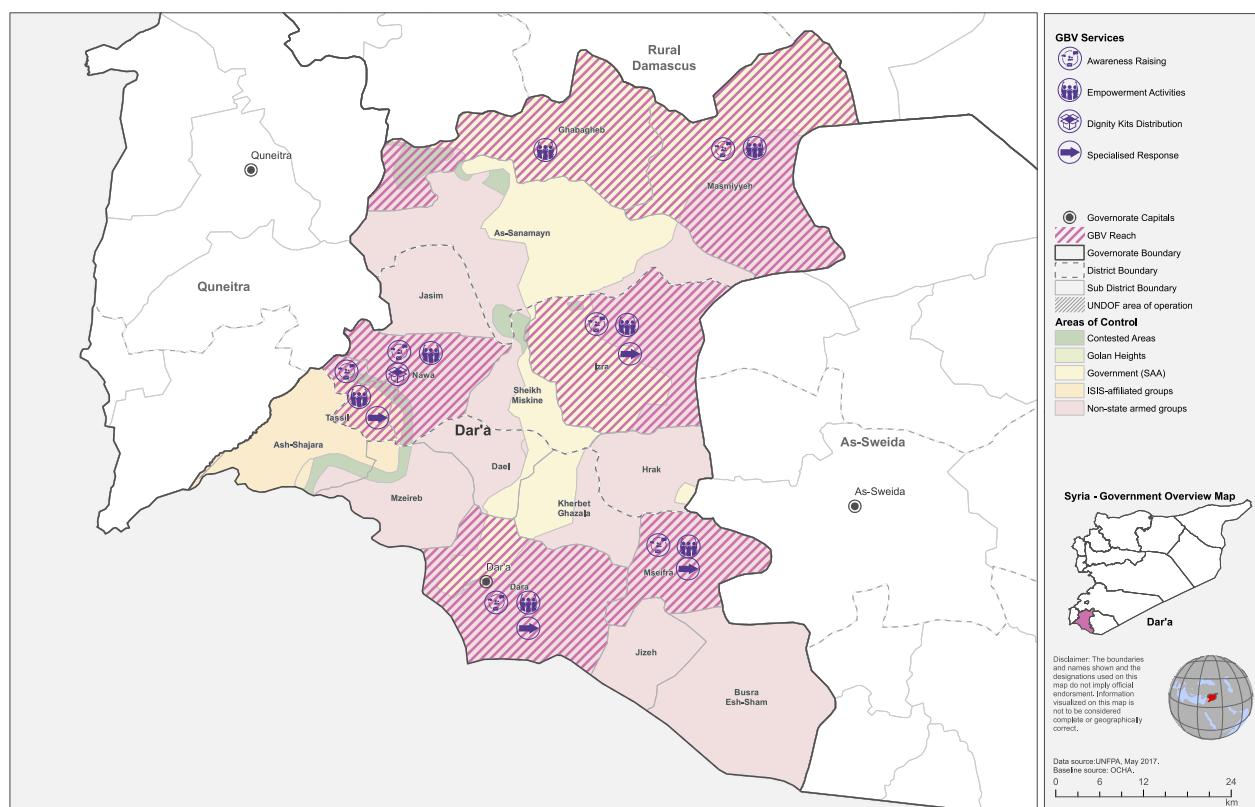


Fig 4.6.3 Map of governorate services

## Risks and barriers when accessing services and humanitarian assistance

FGD respondents spoke of general violence (such as fighting between beneficiaries) during aid distributions, which made women and girls especially feel unsafe about accessing aid. In addition to this, women and girls face sexual harassment and exploitation when trying to access aid.

“ We have heard about few cases where [divorcees and widows] are exploited during aid distributions. Some distributors might ask for a woman's phone number, or they might give her a lift to her house to take something in return. These topics are rarely discussed publicly because our community is traditional. (Woman from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

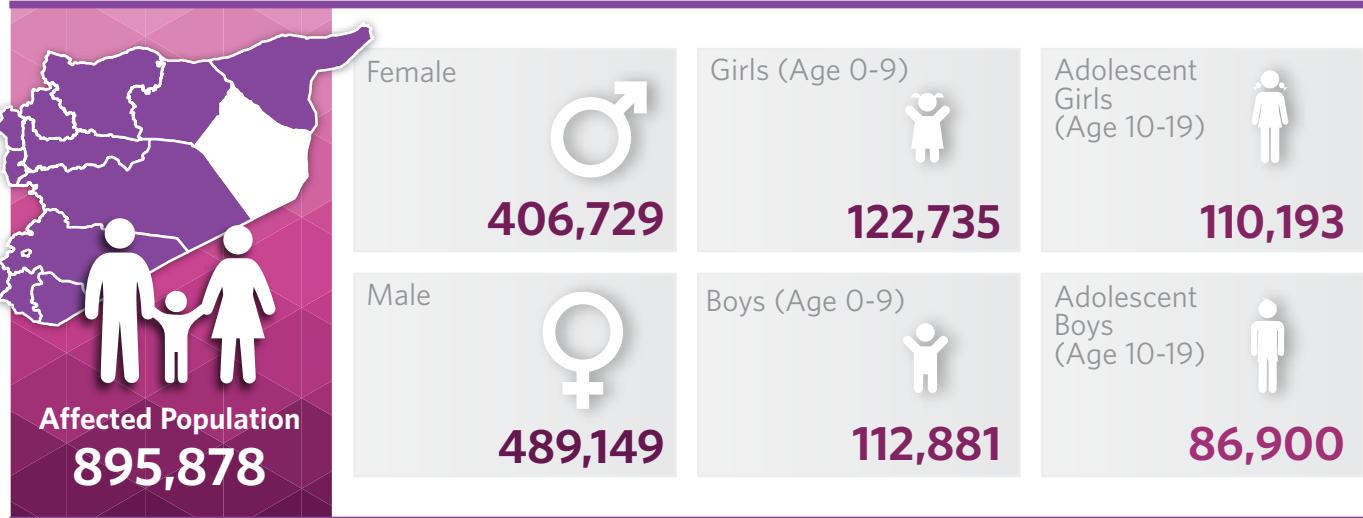
“ We heard episodes of ladies on their way to distribution centres who suffered verbal or sexual harassment... Sometimes they might be touched or endure other types of harassment. (Woman from Dar'a city, Dar'a governorate)

Other barriers are movement restrictions due to checkpoints and lack of civil documentation, notably for divorced or widowed women.

“ In Dar'a there are distribution centres for women but because they must cross the checkpoints, they do not go. Some women do go but they get detained at the checkpoints. (Adolescent girl from Nawa sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

“ A divorced woman will not receive aid if she has no child. She would be counted as part of her parents' family. Even if she had a family booklet, she would not receive anything. If she was a widow and was alone, she would be told to go back to her parents. (Woman from Mzeireb sub-district, Dar'a governorate)

## Governorate Overview



## 4.7 Deir-ez-Zor

### Types of GBV reported as protection concerns



Child marriage

Quantitative data findings report high levels of child marriage in Deir Ez-Zor governorate. While adolescent girls were mostly affected, girls below the age of 12 were also reported as vulnerable to child marriage in around 46% of communities. Common reasons given were finance related, because of pressure from society and for '*protecting*' the adolescent girl. For adolescent boys the main reason for early marriage was to prevent recruitment.



Domestic violence

Quantitative data findings report domestic violence against women and adolescent girls in Deir Ez-Zor governorate.

### Affected population groups

Social Groups reported to be at high risk of to violence and marginalisation included women and girls, in particular adolescent girls.



Fig. 4.7.1: Population Data, Dei-ez-Zor

## Coping mechanisms

### Reported Coping Strategies in Response to Violence and Unmet Needs

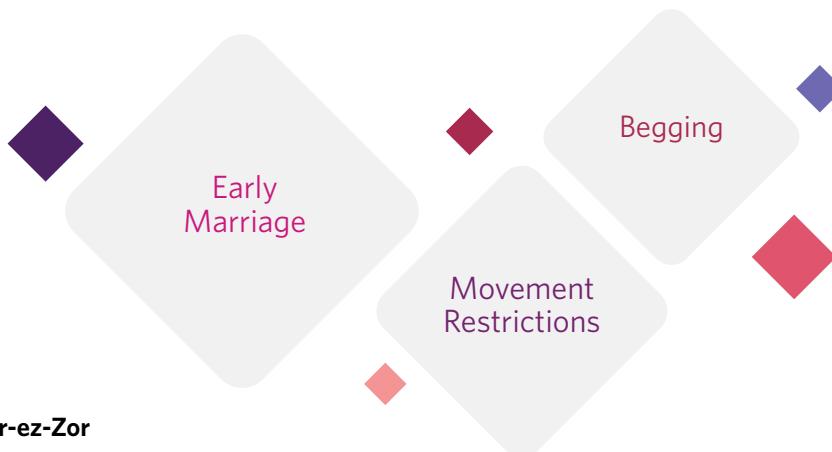


Fig. 4.7.2 Deir-ez-Zor

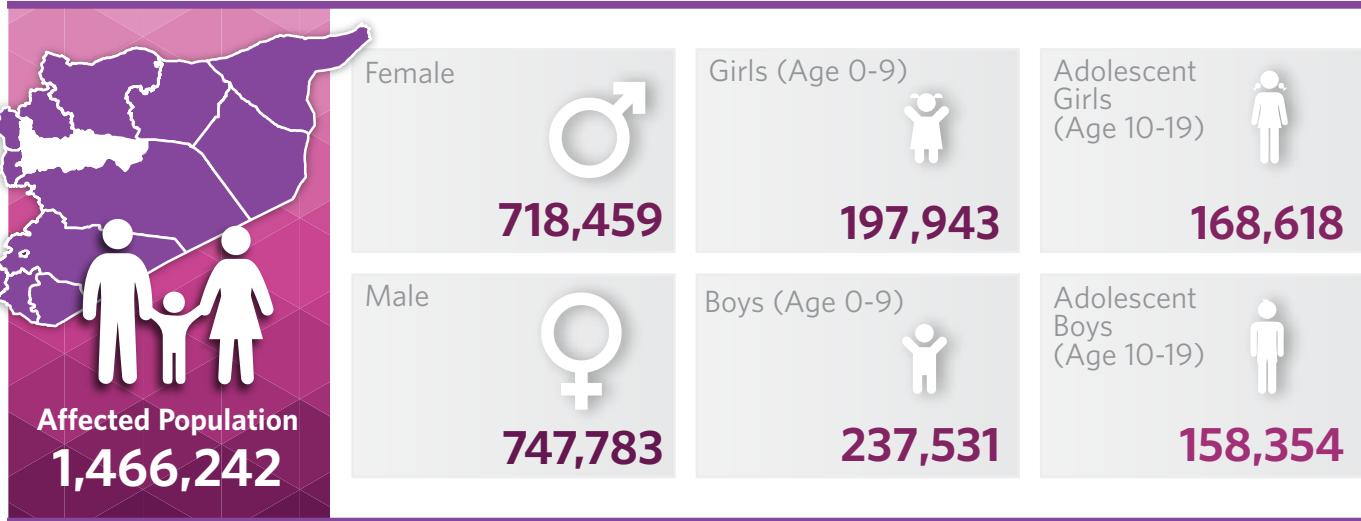
## Movement restrictions

While quantitative findings indicate that all sex and age groups face movement restrictions for various reasons in Deir Ez-Zor governorate, risks for women and girls are significantly higher and described as a '*common*' or '*very common*' issue. Movement restrictions for women and girls also featured as a major negative coping mechanism in the quantitative data, being reported as '*very common*' and '*common*' in more than 80% of communities and existing in all communities. Even if they go out of the

house with a chaperon, women and girls would still be restricted in terms of movement. Rules given by authorities were, besides other reasons, reported to be a primary cause for movement restrictions.

In the majority of assessed communities in Deir Ez-Zor governorate, psychosocial support as well as medical treatment for survivors of sexual violence and/or domestic violence were reported as not existing and needed, according to quantitative data sources. Women and girls safe spaces were also reported as being needed in the majority of communities.

## Governorate Overview



## 4.8 Hama

### Types of GBV reported as protection concerns

Various forms of GBV were mentioned in qualitative assessments by women and adolescent girls in Hama governorate. Risk factors mentioned were poverty and unemployment that result in high pressure on families, the spread of drugs and increase of drug dealers, the presence of displaced people in the communities and overcrowding, and '*cultural*' factors linked to a patriarchal society. School bathrooms, streets and parks (especially with no electricity), distribution sites, shelters and homes were listed as places where GBV occurs. Beneficiaries mentioned GBV survivors being stigmatised (in particular following sexual violence), experiencing severe injuries, suffering psychological distress resulting in apathy, leaving their homes and '*losing their childhood*'.



#### Child marriage

Women and adolescent girls in Hama governorate reported child marriage during qualitative assessments. The consequences of child marriages mentioned included girls being denied an education, once she gets married. Adolescent girls mentioned cases of young girls becoming widows very early.

Women and girls talked about child marriage being a result of poverty, parents wanting to '*better protect*' their daughters and therefore choosing marriage for them, as well as community pressure. These reasons for child marriage were also confirmed by quantitative data findings from Hama governorate.



**Fig. 4.8.1: Population Data, Hama**

“ There are many cases of early marriages in our community out of fear for girls in the current environment. (Woman from Hama city, Hama sub-district) ”

“ I knew a little girl whose parents were very poor, and they married her to an old man who had a lot of money. He had married twice before her and he treated her very badly. He beat her so much and one day he broke her hand and even put out a cigarette on her body. The girl is now divorced but she wants to return to him for his money. (Woman from Hama city, Hama sub-district) ”

Quantitative data also reflected these findings with child marriage identified as a protection concern in the majority of communities in Hama governorate, mostly affecting adolescent girls as well as some girls under the age of 12.



### Sexual violence

IDPs were mentioned as being particularly at risk of sexual violence during one qualitative assessment in Hama city. In another discussion participants mentioned rape. GBV experts noted overcrowding and ‘early exposure to sexual acts in shelters’ as risk factors for sexual violence and children ‘replicating sexual violence, for example in abandoned buildings’.

Women in Hama city discussed specific shelters where according to them ‘residents often suffer from violence’ and ‘a lot of cases with sexually transmitted diseases’ arose. They perceived the ‘psychological impact on girls’ as ‘changing for the worse’ in those locations.

Quantitative data findings from Hama governorate also confirmed the vulnerability of women and girls with regards to sexual harassment as well as sexual violence overall.



### Domestic violence

Both women and adolescent girls gave examples of domestic violence happening in their communities in the FGDs. In one example a woman talked about a girl that committed suicide following repeated beatings by her husband. Another woman in Hama city explained how she and other women benefitted from support at women and girls safe spaces after experiencing domestic violence.

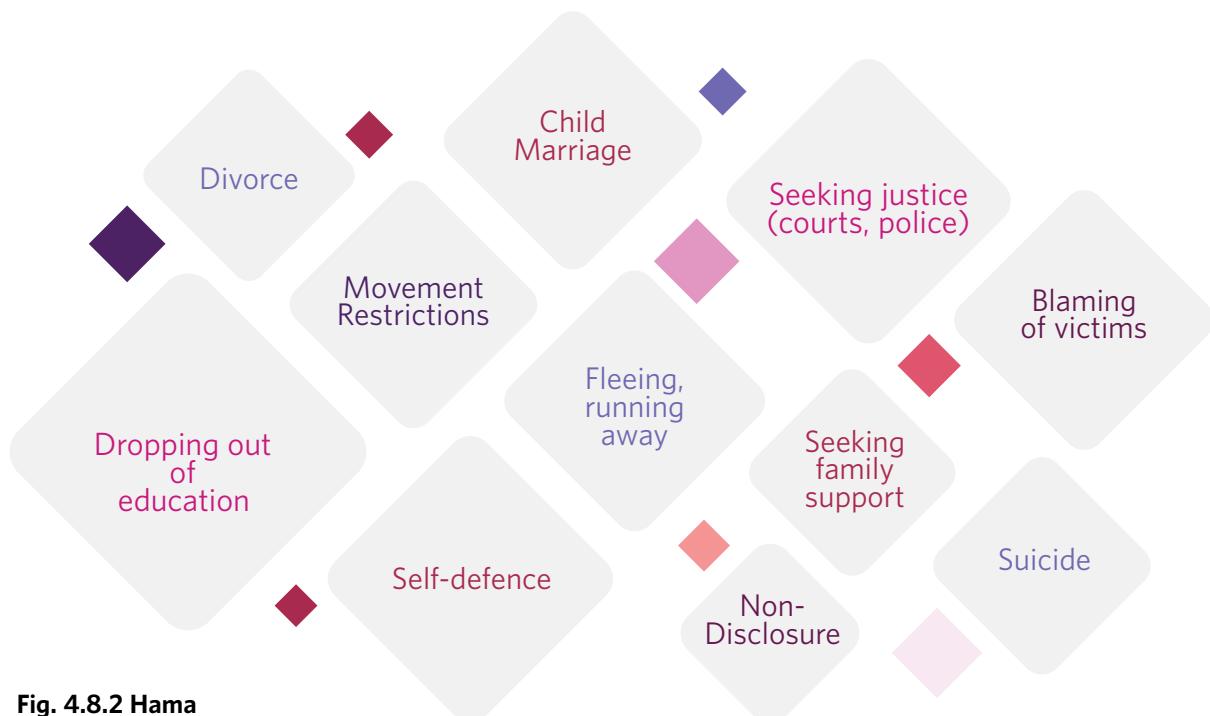
“ I know a very angry person from our village, who constantly beats his wife so much, but she does not want to complain about him because she thinks that it is normal for the woman to be beaten. (Woman from Hama city, Hama sub-district) ”

“ There was a girl who lived in our village and her husband always beat her. She committed suicide. (Woman from Hama city, Hama sub-district) ”

Data reflected that victims of domestic violence would sometimes consider divorce at the beginning of the marriage, but once children were born they would fear to be separated from their children and rather choose non-disclosure. Others would complain, however disclosure could also turn against them with the community commonly perceiving the woman as ‘inherently weak and culpable’.

“ There are many cases in which a woman complains about her husband. At the beginning, she is seen to be right, but later she becomes the sinner, and all the people blame her. (Woman from Hama city, Hama sub-district) ”

## Reported Coping Strategies in Response to Violence and Unmet Needs



**Fig. 4.8.2 Hama**

## Affected population groups

Social Groups reported to be at high risk of violence and marginalisation included women and girls, in particular adolescent girls, IDPs, widows and divorced women, people with disability and orphans.

“ We have a lot of divorcees and displaced widows who are treated badly. They are competing with us for everything, even for water and work, and they think that they are superior than the residents of the city in everything. I hate them a lot and have become afraid of them. (Woman from Hama city, Hama sub-district)

## Coping Mechanisms



### Non-disclosure

Qualitative data clearly reflects that GBV survivors would mostly try to keep the incident secret. Disclosure to family members, in particular the mother, was mentioned on rare occasions. Meanwhile, women and adolescent girls described the fear of stigmatisation and harmful consequences, if they disclosed information.

## Suicide

There are several accounts of suicide from women and girls in Hama governorate in qualitative data.

“ There is a girl (...) who fled and threw herself in the river Assi. And there is also another girl from the same village who fled and nobody has heard anything about her since. (Woman from Hama city, Hama sub-district)

## Movement restrictions

“ Participant 1: I suffered a lot to be allowed to come (to this centre). My parents believe that a girl should not go out of the house alone. (...)

Participant 4: People are talking about me a lot because I get out of the house a lot and this is unacceptable in our community. (Woman from Hama city, Hama sub-district)

Movement restrictions, in particular for adolescent girls, were mentioned by women and adolescent girls in FGDs in Hama sub-district.

## Restriction of freedom

Restrictions of freedom for women and girls were mentioned by adolescent girls when discussing the situation of widows and divorced women, as well as the reasons why victims of domestic violence would not separate from the violent husband. As a result, separated women would often be denied access to their children.

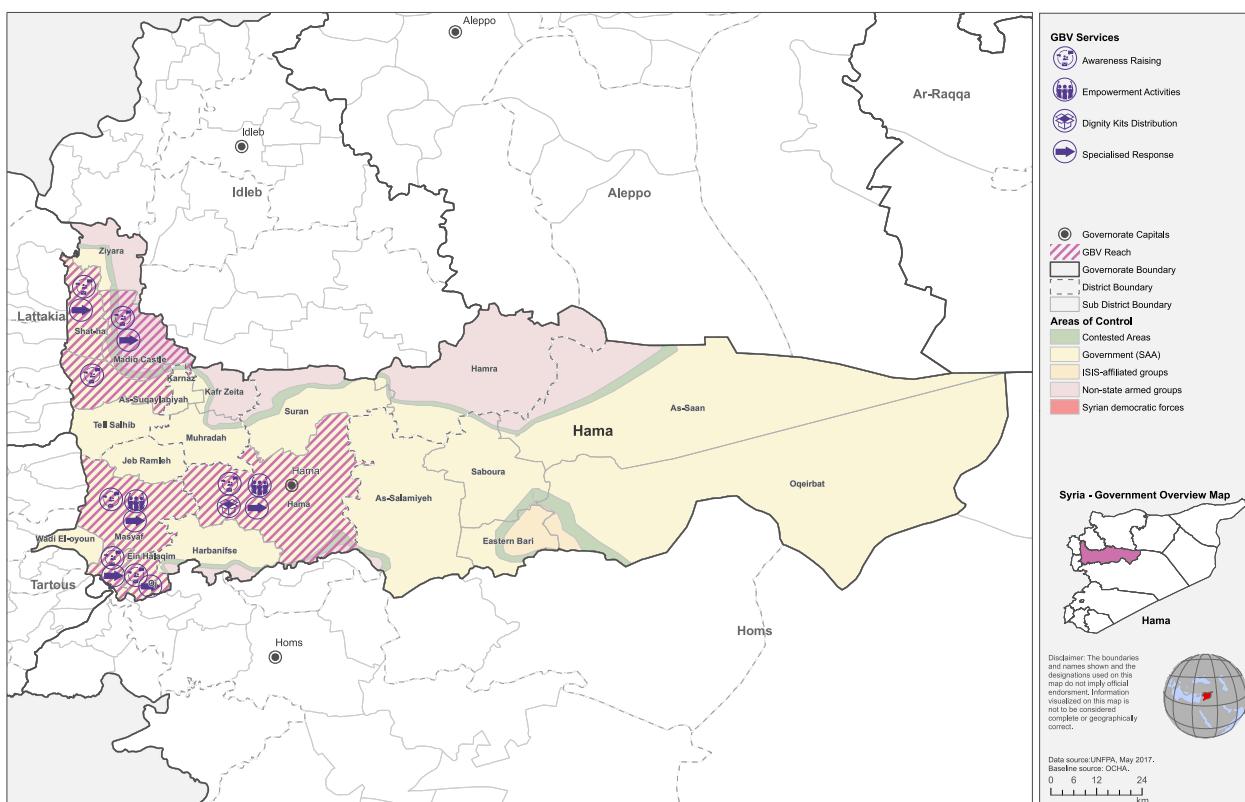
“ I know a father who refuses to give his divorcee the children, so he keeps them with him. (Adolescent girl from Hama city, Hama sub-district)

## Access to GBV services

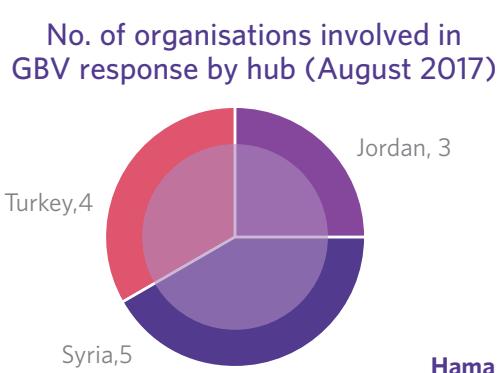
Women and adolescent girls reported very positive experiences at safe spaces for women and girls in Hama governorate. They emphasised that the safe spaces supported women and girls who were victims of domestic violence and suffering emotionally, as well as provided awareness raising. Some mentioned the centres being too far away and transportation being difficult.

In the majority of assessed communities in Hama governorate, psychosocial support as well as medical treatment for survivors of sexual violence and/or domestic violence were reported as not existing and therefore needed, according to quantitative data sources. Women and girls safe spaces were also reported as not present and being needed in the majority of communities.

The following map highlights available GBV services in Hama governorate, as of August 2017.



**Fig 4.8.3 Map of governorate services**



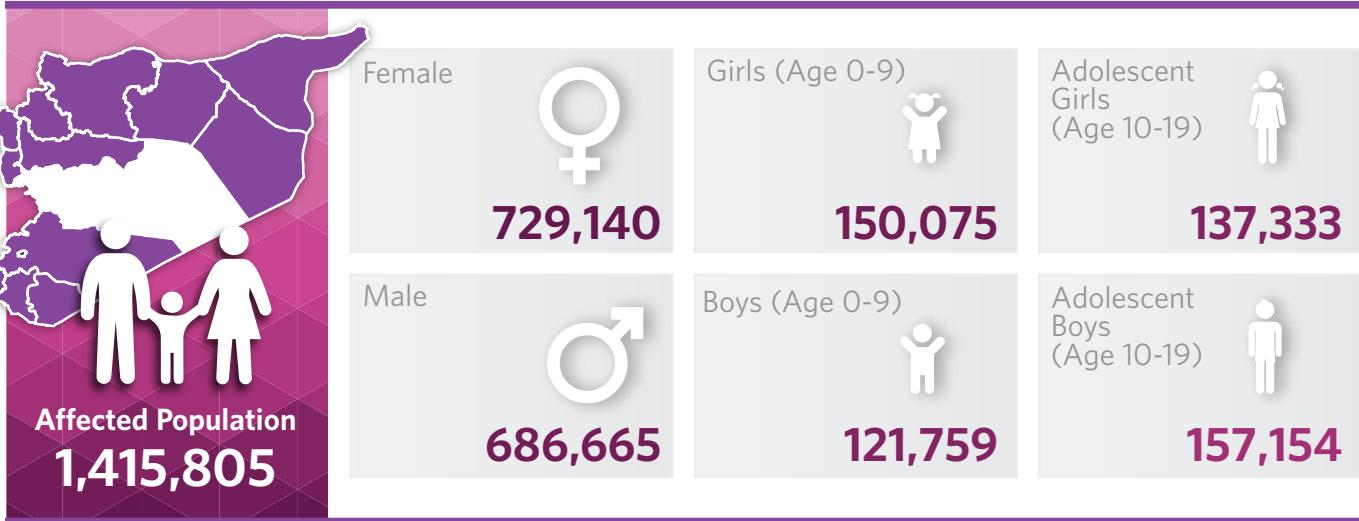
**Fig 4.8.4 Organisations involved in response in governorate**

## Risks and barriers when accessing services and humanitarian assistance

Adolescent girls in Hama city mentioned favouritism at distribution sites, singling out food packets in particular. Women also described discrimination and perceived that 'the aid was not going to the needy'.

*“We live in a village where aid is only given to the officers’ acquaintances and relatives are preferred. The food packets are distributed to the rich, but the poor are ignored. (Adolescent girl from Hama city, Hama sub-district)*

## Governorate Overview



**4.9 Homs**

### Types of GBV reported as protection concerns

Various forms of GBV were mentioned during qualitative assessments by women and adolescent girls. Risk factors mentioned were poverty and unemployment that result in high pressure on families, the spread of drugs and increase of drug dealers, the presence of displaced people in the communities and overcrowding, and '*cultural*' factors linked to a patriarchal society. GBV experts also noted increased levels of risk because of forced displacement in Homs governorate, which '*forces women out of their support networks*'. School bathrooms, streets and parks (especially with no electricity), distributions sites and homes were listed as places where GBV happens. Beneficiaries mentioned GBV survivors being stigmatised (in particular following sexual violence), experiencing severe injuries, suffering psychological distress, leaving their homes and '*losing their childhood*'.



#### Child marriage

According to qualitative assessments child marriage has '*become widespread*' in Homs governorate, in particular to family relatives. The consequences can mean the girl being denied an education once she gets married, and having children very early. Adolescent girls in Hawash sub-district talk about their fear of getting married early, but also of '*girls showing off when engaged*' and the existing '*ignorance when getting married to old men*', with '*girls not thinking of the consequences but instead believing that all men are okay*'.

Women and girls talked about child marriage being a result of poverty as well as community pressure, as



**Fig. 4.9.1: Population Data, Homs**

'there is a common feeling that a non-married girl above the age of 20 is inevitably a spinster', according to an adolescent girl from Homs city. These reasons for child marriage were also confirmed by quantitative data findings from Homs governorate, as well as parents wanting to 'better protect' their daughters and therefore choosing marriage for them. Adolescent girls also linked child marriage to sexual violence, with parents trying to 'marry their daughters as quickly as possible' after rape. One adolescent girl reported a case where a young girl had a miscarriage and was 'risking her life' after getting married 'early'.

“ Women have become proud of arranging child marriages for their daughters so they can have a family of their own, while their neighbours grow old unmarried. (Adolescent girl from Hawash sub-district, Homs governorate)

“ Now many parents have married their daughters to their relatives. (Adolescent girl from Homs city, Homs governorate)

In all qualitative assessment data in Homs governorate, child marriage was perceived by participants as harmful. It was linked to increased divorce, domestic violence, emotional distress, miscarriages and the 'loss of childhood'.

“ I have suffered from much violence because I got married at an early age. I used to stay silent. Now, I react to violence with violence because nobody appreciated my patience before. (Woman from Homs city, Homs governorate)

Quantitative data also reflects these findings with child marriage being a protection concern in the majority of communities in Homs governorate, mostly affecting adolescent girls as well as some girls under the age of 12.

### Sexual violence

63% of qualitative assessments referred to sexual violence in Homs governorate. Rape, in particular of girls, was mentioned by adolescent girls. It is clear from the data that it would usually be coped with by not disclosing the incident to anybody out of fear of stigmatisation by the community. Qualitative data also reported that parents would 'try to marry their daughters as quickly as possible' after they were raped. An adolescent girl also discussed marital rape.

“ The stigma haunts the girl for the rest of her life. (...) No one would say a word. They are afraid of their neighbours, especially if they suffer harassment or rape. (Adolescent girl from Hawash sub-district, Homs governorate)

“ Some women suffer sexual violence from their husbands when they do not consent to having sex or are tired. (Adolescent girl from Hawash sub-district, Homs governorate)

Women and adolescent girls also discussed sexual exploitation in Homs governorate, identifying widows as being particularly vulnerable. Sexual exploitation was discussed in the context of workplaces of women as well as aid delivery.

“ We heard about women being blackmailed where the distributor asked for favours from women in exchange for services, such as spending a night with them. (Adolescent girl from Homs city, Homs governorate)

“ The manager exploited his status to harass my friend and get what he wants in exchange for giving her salary in advance or overlooking her absence. (Woman from Hawash sub-district, Homs governorate)

Sexual harassment was equally mentioned by women and adolescent girls in the qualitative data, which they related to the changes in the way girls dress ('more revealing') and sometimes portrayed men as being 'victims' of this. Widows and divorced women were mentioned as particularly at risk of sexual harassment 'since they have no one to support or defend them'. Women in Homs city talked about girls that were sexually harassed at a school by other school children and, as a consequence, their parents moved them another school.

**“** Many young men harass us as we walk. They talk to us and follow us. (Adolescent girl from Homs city, Homs governorate)

**“** This kind of violence takes place the most because of how people are dressed nowadays, which causes harassment. When a man sees a girl wearing very revealing clothes, he would definitely harass her and lose his mind. Even old people harass children under 15. (Woman from Hawash sub-district, Homs governorate)

Quantitative data findings from Homs governorate also confirmed the vulnerability of women and girls with regards to sexual harassment as well as sexual violence overall.



## Domestic violence

Women and adolescent girls in Homs governorate discussed beatings of husbands 'for the simplest mistakes', verbal violence towards wives, as well as marital rape. One woman spoke about a friend of hers who was beaten by her husband and has since been severely injured and unable to move. Other women discussed not knowing whether wife battery was illegal or not in Syria. Adolescent girls talked about women moving back into their parents homes because of beatings and women also choosing 'to work to support herself' because of domestic violence. In several qualitative data points women and adolescent girls perceived the 'weakness of the wife' to be the cause for domestic violence, with one adolescent girls even claiming that 'some women enjoy being beaten' as the husband would then come across as 'more masculine'.

**“** There are many cases of domestic violence. Some men beat their wives even if they are educated and employed. (...) That is why there should be follow-up and awareness lectures for men to let them know that beating is never the answer. (Woman from Homs city, Homs governorate)

**“** I know a woman whose husband doesn't like females. Once she gave a birth to a female baby. Since then, her father has treated her really badly. Furthermore, the parents are always fighting. (Adolescent girl from Homs city, Homs governorate)



## Family violence

Family violence toward girls, women and elderly people is mentioned in the qualitative data.

**“** When a girl is beaten by her brother or father she feels helpless. She does not accept the violence but she can do nothing and has nowhere to go. (Adolescent girl from Homs city, Homs governorate)



## Abductions

The fear of abductions of women and girls were mentioned in the context of discussing movement restrictions ('husbands not allowing wives to leave the house because of kidnapping'), access to schools and girls living outside the family homes because of attendance to universities. It appears that abductions are linked to smuggling and the demand of ransoms. When discussing aid recipients, one woman in Hawash sub-districts lists 'women whose husbands were abducted' together with 'widows' and 'divorced women', which could be an indicator for how 'normal' abductions seem to have become in Homs governorate.

**“** There are cases of kidnappings, therefore, we refrain from going by taxis. A young man can defend himself if something happens but the girl cannot. (Adolescent girl from Homs city, Homs governorate)

**“** We are afraid of smugglers and being kidnapped for ransom. These smugglers pass through our village. (...) Families are very afraid when their daughters leave home and come home late. They feel afraid about the many wrongs that she could suffer, while for young men it is normal since they can handle themselves. (...) There is a difference because their girl could be kidnapped by smugglers. (Adolescent girls from Hawash sub-district, Homs governorate)



## Detention and arrest

Secondary literature mentioned the detention of women in Homs governorate, with subsequent abuse during their detention.



## Economic violence & exploitation

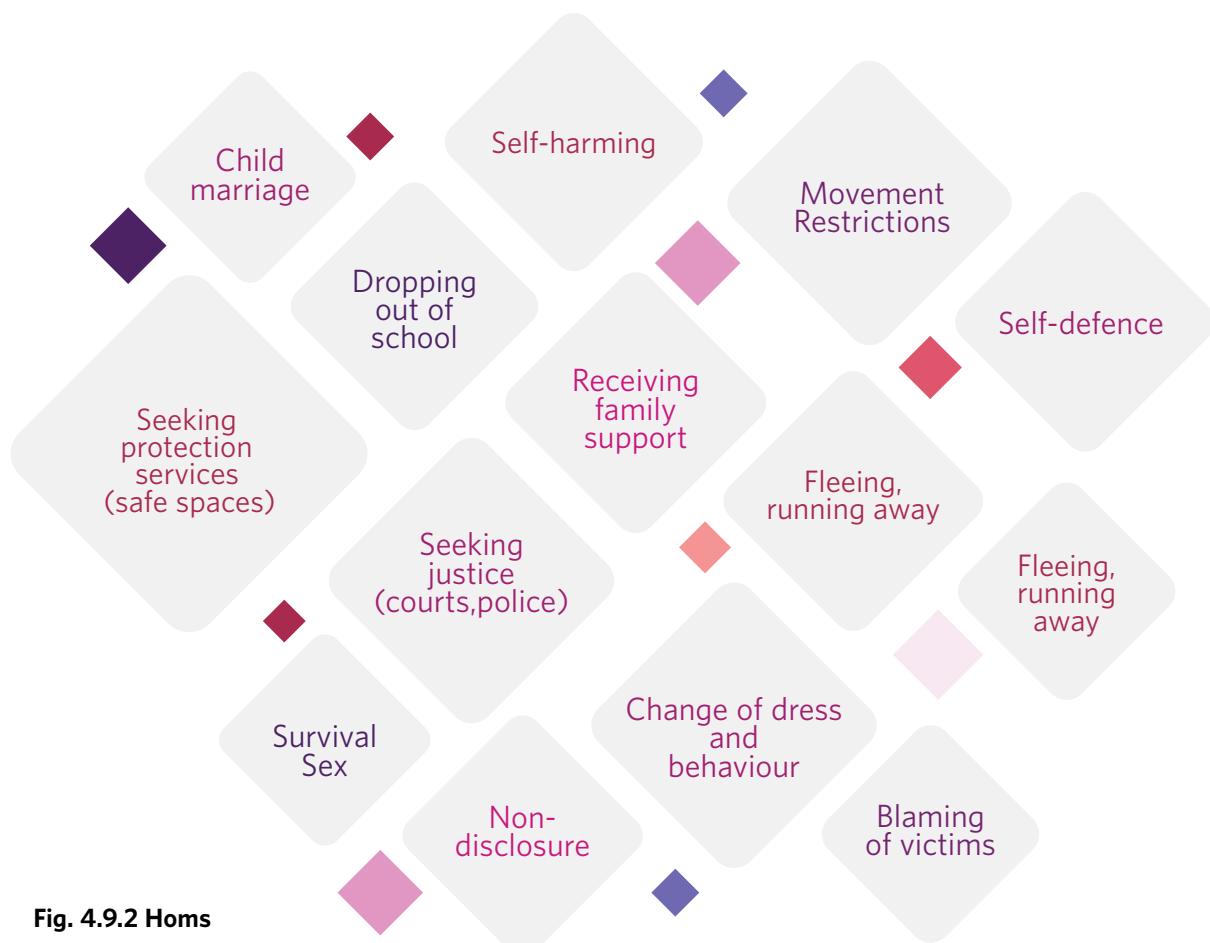
Women and adolescent girls mentioned economic violence, in particular from husbands to wives in qualitative assessments. In one discussion this was linked to domestic violence.

**“** Some employed women suffer beatings while their husbands take their salary and give them no (?) money to spend. (Adolescent girls from Hawash sub-district, Homs governorate)

## Affected population groups

Social Groups reported to be at high risk of violence and marginalisation included women and girls, in particular adolescent girls, widows, divorced women and girls, people with disabilities and the elderly.

### Reported Coping Strategies in Response to Violence and Unmet Needs



**Fig. 4.9.2 Homs**



## Non-disclosure

“ I sit down in my room and I close the door. There is no social care. I think that people in our community are not used to the concept of legal or social care. They think that it is shameful to tell others about their problems, and we can't tell anyone about the problems in our family even if these problems involve physical or psychological violence. (Everyone agreed with this opinion). (Adolescent girl from Homs city, Homs governorate)

Adolescent girls and women related non-disclosure to the fear of '*scandal*' and of being blamed and punished by the family and community. Blaming was again linked to stigmatisation, potential marriage to perpetrators and further movement restrictions. One adolescent girl mentioned that victims would decide to stay silent to '*protect her children*'.

“ When I suffer from violence, I just keep silent because if I reacted, the violence would increase. (Woman from Homs city, Homs governorate)

## Movement restrictions

“ Participant 1: My friend is the only child in her family, and they don't allow her to go out. My other friend is also the only child, but she can move freely. My family doesn't allow me to go out alone, but they favour my sister and allow her to do whatever she wants. Sometimes I hate my family because they treat me like that.

Participant 2: I can't go out alone. My grandmother takes me with her wherever she goes.

Participant 3: I can't go out wherever or whenever I want because I am a female. My brother can go out at any time.

Participant 4: My mother is not strict, but she doesn't allow us to go anywhere far. There should be an older person with us.

Participant 5: Our dad doesn't allow us to go - he is afraid that something bad might happen. He doesn't allow us to have mobile phones. My dad allows my brother to go everywhere, but we can't because we are girls (feeling angry).

(Adolescent girls from Homs city, Homs governorate)

Movement restrictions were discussed by women and girls in 83% of qualitative discussions, mainly affecting adolescent girls. While some gave examples of women going out alone and also sometimes coming home later in the evening, the majority of women discussed restricted movement being imposed by the family for '*protective reasons*'. Adolescent girls reported that families would further restrict movement if the girl if she told them about incidents of GBV, with this being a reason for choosing non-disclosure.

“ If something bad happens to a girl, she prefers not to talk to her parents. She tells no one because if they know about it, they would blame her and prevent her from going out of the house. (Adolescent girl from Homs city, Homs governorate)

In the discussions, adolescent girls differentiated between movement restrictions for young men, who would sometimes stay home through fear of conscription, and movement restrictions for girls, which were more deeply entrenched and '*normal*', related to family values and a '*culture of fearing for girls to bring shame to the family*'. Qualitative data clearly reflects that most adolescent girls only leave their home with a chaperon or in groups with other girls and women in Homs governorate. One adolescent girl mentioned self-harming in this context.

“ Those who do not leave home often might hurt themselves (...). They become apathetic and isolated from those around them. (...) They stop going out with friends and feel afraid. (Adolescent girls from Hawash sub-district, Homs governorate)

## Access to GBV services

“ I feel comfortable here (at the Women and Girls Safe Space) because there is no mixing here between men and women. It is only for women. (Adolescent girl from Homs city, Homs governorate)

Women and adolescent girls reported very positive experiences at safe spaces for women and girls in Homs governorate. They emphasised that the safe spaces support groups of women and girls that would otherwise not receive any help.

In the majority of assessed communities in Homs governorate, psychosocial support as well as medical treatment for survivors of sexual violence and/or domestic violence were reported as not existing and being needed, according to quantitative data sources. Women and girls safe spaces were also reported as not present and being needed in the majority of communities.

No. of organisations involved in GBV response by hub (August 2017)

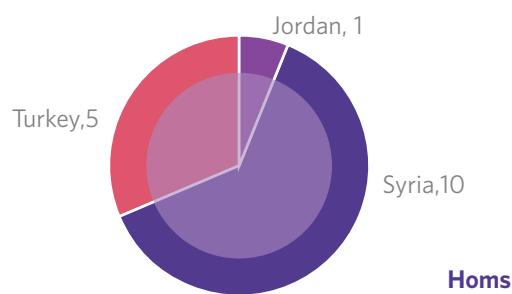
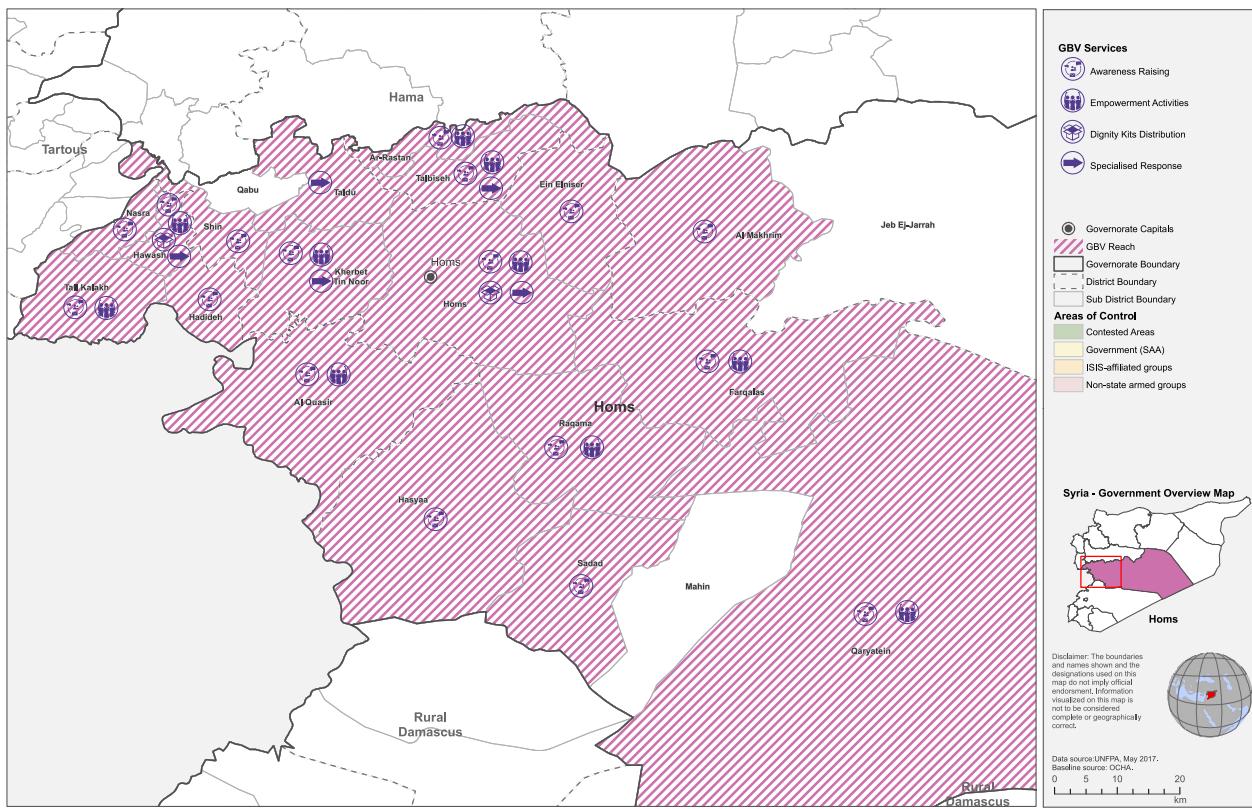


Fig 4.9.3 Organisations involved in response in governorate

The following map highlights available GBV services in Homs governorate, as of August 2017.

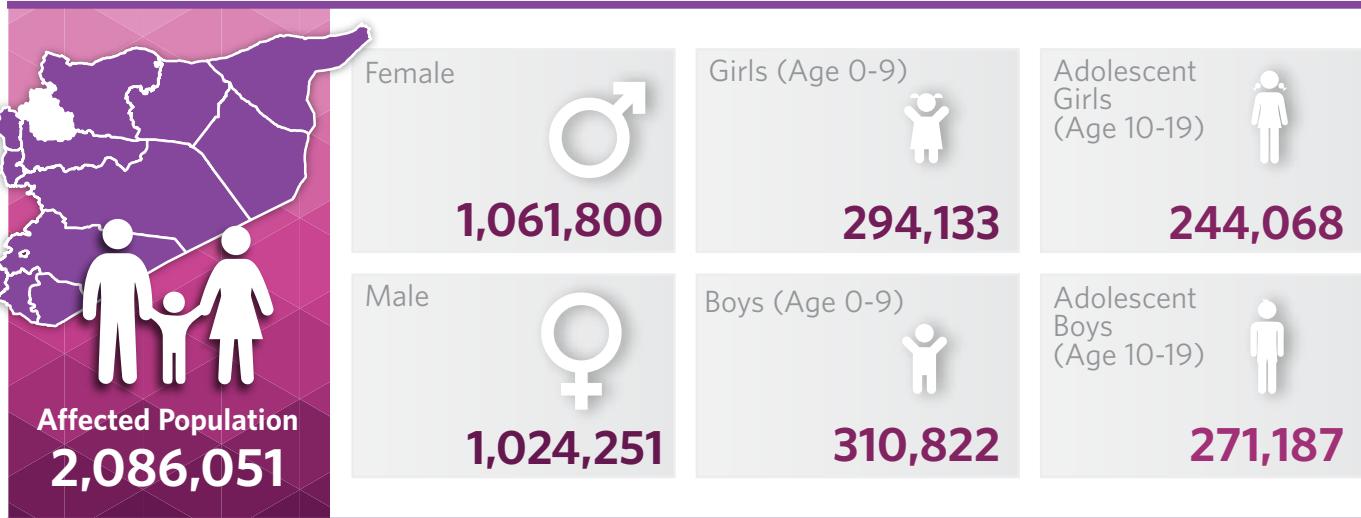


**Fig 4.9.4 Map of governorate services**

## Risks and barriers when accessing services and humanitarian assistance

Women and adolescent girls described favouritism and discrimination sometimes occurring at distribution centres in Homs governorate. Aid distribution would depend on '*favoured positions*' and '*wasta*' (i.e. '*having connections*'), with 'leaders in the community having the biggest share of aid'. People with disability will sometimes be denied aid, as they cannot access it and some distribution centres require presence in person. In one discussion, sexual exploitation of women was mentioned in the context of aid distribution.

## Governorate Overview



## 4.10 Idleb

### Types of GBV reported as protection concerns



#### Child marriage

“ I want to change my future because I see failure at the end of the track with an early marriage and no education. But I do not know how to change my situation (Adolescent girl from Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate) ”

Child marriage was discussed by men, women, adolescent boys and girls as a protection concern in 67% of the FGDs, with female FGD participants mentioning it more than twice as many times. This was mirrored in the quantitative assessments, which found that in 66% of communities in Idleb, adolescent girls are affected by child marriage as well as 28% of girls below the age of 12. GBV experts observed girls below the age of 10 being married in Idleb governorate, including marriage to foreign members of armed factions. FGD participants perceived child marriage to be increasing in Idleb and there is more data than in the past years on very young girls getting married, with examples of young girls having babies and already being divorced.

An adolescent girl in Kafr Nobol sub-district said that '*girls get married at a young age as when they are married young they cannot get pregnant*', which suggests an age of marriage before puberty. Another girl from Dana sub-district described that '*a girl is considered a spinster if she reaches the age of 20 without getting married*'. Women in Saraqab sub-district discussed how girls would not be asked for their opinion but decisions in this regard would be made for them, and one adolescent girl in Ma'arrat An Nu'man sub-district wished that parents started '*seeking*



**Fig. 4.10.1: Population Data, Idleb**

*the girl's consent for the marriage'. Religious authorities were reported to be conducting the weddings.*

“ Child marriages are also becoming commonplace for little girls. This is mainly because they do not go to school any more, and so their families prefer to arrange marriages for them. (Woman from Saraqab sub-district, Idleb governorate)

“ During the war, and the past five years, interest in education has decreased by both parents who worry about sending their children to school for fear of bombing or by the children who believe an education is useless here. This has made children look for crafts and factories - others have joined an armed group in the hope of defending their land and honour, or so they claim. The consequences of this phenomenon for boys are greater than for girls because girls in our community stay at home until they get married. This has recently led to the spread of child marriage. (Man from Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate)

The main reason for **child marriage** mentioned in FGDs was poverty (*'parents desire to get rid of the girl to reduce the expenses'*, according to men in Saraqab sub-district) and parents not being able to afford education (or the transport to the education facility) and therefore marrying off their daughters. Further reasons were the *'protection'* of the girls, also in the light of military attacks, fear of kidnapping, guarding the honour of the family, and cultural factors, such as the perception that girls do not have a voice and therefore may not refuse the arranged marriage. In several FGDs, participants talked about *'old men'* getting married to young girls because of the family's poverty and need for basic supplies, and therefore described a form of survival sex disguised as marriage. Across the discussions in Idleb governorate, child marriage was frequently mentioned in the context of child labour, almost equating it to a form of work. Violence in families was mentioned by

some adolescents as being the reason for some girls to *'look forward to getting married and leaving the family'*. Other groups mentioned to be at particular risk were abandoned girls and female orphans.

“ Most of us get married because our fathers take lack of security as an excuse - as if the husband provides security to them. (Adolescent girl from Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate)

“ There still persists the problem of education. Most of the families are unable to afford the costs of transporting their children to go to distant schools. Marriages are arranged for girls at an early age because they are not educated. (Woman from Saraqab sub-district, Idleb governorate)

“ Some old men marry young girls and exploit their need for money. They give parents a lot of money to marry their little daughter. (Man from Ma'arrat An Nu'man sub-district, Idleb governorate)

“ I made my 15-year-old daughter marry because I am afraid of assault or kidnapping. When she is married, her husband will protect her. (Woman from Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate)

The **impact** of child marriage was discussed extensively, in particular by adolescent girls in Idleb governorate, among them being the loss of education and childhood, domestic violence, sexual violence and emotional abuse (with the latter often being committed by in-laws, as a woman in Dana sub-district pointed out). Women and adolescent girls both described child marriage as being associated with divorce (which by some was perceived as increasing) and sometimes widowhood. The impact on children was discussed and how child marriage can lead to the abandonment of children. One adolescent boy in Saraqab sub-district described the consequence of child marriage as *'the absence of happiness at home'*.

“ There is the issue of family disintegration and divorce as a result of child marriage. Many girls are pregnant with babies that will not see their fathers. Death is also a contributing factor. We find many girls, married at a young age, who have lost their husbands and now are left as widows without anyone to support them. (Women from Saraqab sub-district, Idleb governorate)

“ My friend got married at an early age. However, she wishes she had died rather than been married. (Adolescent girl from Ma'arrat An Nu'man sub-district, Idleb governorate)



### Domestic violence

“ Because of poverty and poor economic conditions, domestic violence is out of control. (Man from Ma'arrat An Nu'man sub-district, Idleb governorate)

Domestic violence, including marital rape and beatings, as a protection concern was discussed in 56% of FGDs in Idleb governorate. It was perceived to be increasing and often associated with child marriage. Similar to child marriage, it is noticeable how many participants offered to tell personal examples from their families in contrast to other topics. Risk factors mentioned by participants were poverty, unemployment and displacement, with camps pinpointed as particularly high-risk sites. One man in Kafr Nobol sub-district mentioned husbands 'beating their wives to take their salaries'.

“ I saw a man beating his wife outside the tent, and no one dared to approach or help her. (Adolescent girl from Badama sub-district, Idleb governorate)

FGD participants discussed the impact of domestic violence on children in the family and gave examples of wives being humiliated in front of others and survivors of domestic violence being admitted to hospitals with broken bones. Wives suffering from domestic violence would sometimes tell their family about the violence, but mostly chose non-disclosure, staying silent and not doing anything about it, because they were threatened with divorce and feared the loss of their children.

“ My mother can't do anything when my father beats her. She can't get any help because her parents are far from here. My father keeps threatening her with divorce. (Adolescent boy from Idleb city, Idleb governorate)



### Sexual violence

In the qualitative data, the threat of sexual violence in Idleb governorate, including many reports of actual incidents, was mentioned by equal numbers of adolescents and adults, with female FGD participants talking about it 1.6-times more often than male

participants. Types of reported sexual violence included rape, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and sexual assault.



### Rape

“ When we first arrived (in the camp), we knew nothing about rape and sexual violence. Now we know a lot. (Adolescent girl from Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate)

The most-mentioned type of sexual violence was rape. Women and girls were reported as being particularly at risk, and in three FGDs boys were also mentioned as victims. One woman talked about 'women working in sales' being raped 'several times'. Other FGD participants mentioned the vulnerability of unaccompanied and separated children. Also, women and girls that were smuggled from Idleb governorate into Turkey were reported as being at particular risk.

“ Our major concern is rape. I have heard about many cases inside or outside Idlib. Those victims have nobody to protect them. (Adolescent boy from Idleb city, Idleb governorate)

High-risk locations were camp latrines, abandoned buildings and work places of girls. Some FGD participants made it clear that they did not see any protection for survivors of rape - instead victims were often forced to marry perpetrators. Rape was also associated with honour killings. Adolescent boys blamed girls of 'provoking rape' by wearing 'make-up and tight clothes', justifying the actions of male perpetrators.

Women and girls said that fear of rape limited their movement. In one FGD, women reported that 'abducted and raped women would then be forced to have an abortion'. Men in Kafr Nobol said that female victims would 'always deny it' and chose non-disclosure in order to avoid shame, with one man saying that 'she would either sell herself or run away'.

“ There are two men who had a fight, and one of them raped the other one's wife and then killed her. (Adolescent girl from Kafr Nobol sub-district, Idleb governorate)



### Sexual harassment

Population groups reported to be particularly at risk of sexual harassment were women, girls, widows and divorcees and children (not disaggregated). Distribution points were disproportionately often named as high-risk locations. Furthermore, unlit paths or roads leading to camp latrines, crowded places such as markets, as well as homes or official departments where girls worked as servants were named as places associated with sexual

harassment.

“ Some women declined to go to the relief centre and receive aid because of fear of harassment. (Adolescent girl from Badama sub-district, Idlib governorate)

“ When there is a widow, everyone chases after her (laughing). (Adolescent boy from Kafr Nobol sub-district, Idlib governorate)

As a result, women and girls described how they would limit their movements to avoid sexual harassment and how they would stop going to distribution sites. In one FGD, a man also described how he was sexually harassed by a bus driver and therefore stopped taking buses. A woman in Hawash sub-district mentioned that ‘even old people harass children under 15’.



## Sexual exploitation

Sexual exploitation was mentioned in seven FGDs, and disproportionately often talked about in the context of distributions and with regards to widows and divorced women. In one FGD, a man said that protecting widows and divorced women from exploitation in the camp setting is a priority. Overall, women and girls were mentioned as vulnerable to sexual exploitation and in one FGD boys were also named. In several discussions, it was said that girls that work in other people’s homes as servants would be sexually exploited.

In Idlib governorate, the negative coping strategies of prostitution and survival sex were reported in five discussions. Adolescent girls in Badama sub-district talked about several brothels operating in their camp. FGD participants mainly related it to poverty forcing women ‘to commit adultery in order to get money to buy food’. In one discussion a man explained that a rape victim would cope with the situation by ‘either selling herself or running away’.

GBV experts reported that ‘survival sex in Idlib governorate is done under the name of unofficial marriage contracts’. One GBV expert also mentioned the case of a woman, who was asked for sex in exchange for being allowed to go out of one of the camps for widows and divorcees to find work. When she refused she was expelled from the camp.

“ Recent cases of prostitution are the biggest sexual violence, especially if the girl is forced to have sex. (Adolescent girl from Badama sub-district, Idlib governorate)



## Sexual assault

Sexual assault was associated with kidnapping, and women and girls were most mentioned as being affected

by it. In one FGD, boys were also mentioned as being vulnerable to sexual assault. In Badama sub-district, adolescent girls talked about sexual assaults on women and girls that were smuggled into Turkey.

Women were said to limit their movement because of fear of sexual assault and in one FGD it was added that fear of kidnapping and sexual assault hindered parents from sending their daughters to school. A woman in Dana sub-district explained that fear of sexual assault was the reason for marrying her daughter at young age – as ‘when she is married, her husband protects her’. As with other types of sexual violence, victims would normally not talk about the incident for ‘fear of scandal’.

“ People tend to cover up things related to sexual assault for fear of scandal. As for the judiciary, women do not dare to resort to them because they belong to the Nusra Front. (Adolescent girl from Badama sub-district, Idlib governorate)



## Polygamy

Polygamy was reported in several FGDs in Idlib governorate and also discussed by GBV experts. Women in Ma’arrat An Nu’man sub-district related it to domestic violence, in particular towards the first wife. In one discussion an example of a ‘first wife’ was mentioned, who wasn’t cared for by her husband any more and was also denied services. Widows were mentioned to be at particular risk of polygamy, with ‘other women treating them badly’ out of fear that their husbands would decide to take a widow as a second wife.

“ Participant 4 added that she is a widow who lives in very bad conditions where she is not respected because of the wives’ fear for their husbands and their jealousy of her. (Woman from Salqin sub-district, Idlib governorate)



## Forced marriage

Forced marriage of women or girls to family members (especially in-laws) ‘for protection’ and to perpetrators (following sexual violence) were mentioned in several FGDs in Idlib, and perceived by some as having increased. Widows were noted as particularly vulnerable, as families would seek to re-marry them quickly in order to ‘raise the children properly’ and ‘keep the children from being lost’. Adolescents in several FGDs talked about the fear of being forced to marry early and without their consent. Depression, constant misery and loss of education were mentioned as the impact on women and girls in forced marriages.



## Temporary serial marriages

In one FGD, participants discussed some women and girls experiencing multiple, short-term marriages in Idleb governorate. It was associated with child marriage, causing the loss of education, depression and mental illness for afflicted women and girls.



## Family violence

Family violence was mentioned in a third of the FGDs in Idleb governorate. Most references to family violence were made about male family members, in particular fathers and brothers, committing violence towards children. Both boys and girls were mentioned as experiencing violence.



*I am a schoolteacher. I have a student that always has bruises on her face because her uncle always beats her together with her widowed mother, whom he provides for. I went to see him and talked to him about the reason of beating her and that she suffers from involuntary urination and is very behind in school. We argued a lot, and the result was that he stopped allowing her to go to school. She was absent for a while then came back again with bruises and scars on her face, involuntary urination and still behind in school – nothing has changed, and I have no idea what to do for this child.*  
(Woman from Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate)



*I have seen so many cases of violent beating that went to hospital such as the husband beating his wife, brother beating his sister, or father beating his daughter.*  
(Adolescent girl from Badama sub-district, Idleb governorate)



## Honour killings

Honour killings were reported in Idleb governorate and associated with families committing the crime after learning about their daughter being raped.



*My friend said that her sister was killed because her parents knew she was raped by someone.*  
(Adolescent girl from Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate)



## Abductions

Fear of abduction of women and girls, as well as reports of incidents, was mentioned in 64% of the FGDs in Idleb governorate, often in relation to sexual violence and

homicide. It was also associated with the trade of body parts such as organs.

Adolescent girls were perceived to be at particular risk. In several adolescent FGDs, examples were given of men abducting girls after they had refused their marriage proposal. Participants clearly perceived abductions as increasing in Idleb governorate and linked this to the spread of weapons. A man in a camp explained that '*kidnappings are carried out in cars or through the public service passenger vans. This is a new phenomenon that appeared five or six months ago*'. A woman in Dana sub-district described that '*the absence of law, the deterioration of education as well as abject poverty pushed many towards crimes of kidnapping and robbery*'.



*Participant (3): Girls are being kidnapped then they are found dead.*

*Participant (8): There is a gun in every house.*

*Participant (2): They knock on doors. If a girl opens, they kidnap her.*

*(Women from Kafr Nobol sub-district, Idleb governorate)*

Fear of abductions clearly has a major impact on the movement of women and girls, with families not allowing them go out of the house alone, nor letting them to go school anymore and even locking them in when leaving the house. A woman mentioned marrying her 15-year-old daughter because she was afraid of her being abducted. Fear of abductions was also described as a barrier to accessing services, as families would not allow girls to go anywhere far from their homes.



*As for us girls, the greatest challenges are commonplace problems such as abduction and fighting amongst militias. This greatly affects my everyday life. Going out is limited to a specific time for fear of abduction.*  
(Adolescent girl from Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idleb governorate)



*Some accidents related to sexual violence occur in our community. A young man kidnapped a girl because she refused to marry him.*  
(Adolescent girl from Ma'arrat An Nu'man sub-district, Idleb governorate)



*There are many abductions in the city of Maarrat. A while ago, girls were kidnapped and there was a big problem because of that.*  
(Man from Ma'arrat An Nu'man sub-district, Idleb governorate)

Organ trading was mentioned in two FGDs with men and adolescent girls in the Kafr Nobol and Salqin sub-districts respectively. Fear of abduction linked to organ trading was said to be a reason for limiting movement restrictions.



*Women and children are exposed to human organ trafficking and exploitation.*  
(Man from Kafr Nobol sub-district, Idleb governorate)

## Affected population groups

Social Groups reported to be at high risk of violence included women, adolescent girls, widows, divorcees/separated women, IDPs (in camps), children (and in particular orphans) and people with special needs. Almost half of all examples given by FGD participants with regards to vulnerable groups were widows. Girls that study at universities and do not live with their families were also mentioned.



Widows are the most vulnerable to domestic, social and economic violence as well. (...) Most of the women and widows that suffer from violence cannot access the service centres because of the husband's refusal and the community's view about these women that they are disclosing their marital secrets. (...) Most of the widows have to abandon their children and get married again because they do not have income in order to provide a living for them and for their children. Or they must make their children work or work degrading jobs themselves in order to provide a living. (Woman from Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate)

## Coping mechanisms

### Reported Coping Strategies in Response to Violence and Unmet Needs



**Fig. 4.10.3 Idleb**

## Restriction of freedom

Several forms of restrictions of freedom for women and girls were mentioned in the data from Idleb governorate, in particular movement restrictions, the denial or restriction of education, denial of inheritance and dowry, and loss of decision-making (e.g. with regards to marriage, education, movement, visiting family and friends). Widows and adolescent girls were reported as being particularly at risk, with the lack of education often related to child marriage.

**“** My uncle's wife is deprived of everything because she is a widow. (Adolescent girl from Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate)

**“** Boys have authority over girls. A boy can prevent his sister from going to school. Whatever a girl says is considered shameful. (Adolescent girl from Ma'arrat An Nu'man sub-district, Idleb governorate)

**“** Women have no rights. They are seen as worthless in society. (Woman from Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate)

**“** Boys are free to do everything whereas girls aren't. (Adolescent girl from Ma'arrat An Nu'man sub-district, Idleb governorate)

## Movement restrictions

97% of FGDs discussed movement restrictions for women and girls in Idleb governorate. It was the most mentioned coping mechanism. Adolescent boys in Idleb city reported that '*everybody can move freely except women*'.

**“** Where I work in Idleb women and girls have limited movement. (...) Boys and men move freely. Girls, unmarried women, widows and the divorced are the most limited. (GBV expert from Syria)

The main reason given for movement restrictions for women and girls were societal '*customs and traditions*', the deteriorating security situation and rules by extremist groups in control of the area. While movement restrictions for all sex and age groups were often mentioned linked to safety issues, such as fear of cars or gatherings being targeted, and high transportation costs, movement restrictions for girls were specifically put in relation to fear of abductions and harassment. This was often linked to denial of education and access to other services, such as protection services, for these girls. In the city of Idleb, an adolescent girl also mentioned '*being afraid of strangers*' in the community as a reason for movement restrictions. In several discussions, participants gave examples of women and adolescent girls being locked into their homes '*for protection*' when their husbands or other family members left the house.

Widows and unmarried women were also mentioned as being particularly at risk. That said, all women and

girls in Idleb governorate were said to be affected. GBV experts reported that '*married women would work outside the house but that this was the only reason for which they would leave the home*'.

**“** Everybody can move freely except for women, who move less because of local traditions. (Man in Idleb city, Idleb governorate)

**“** The lack of lighting on the road leading to the bathrooms at night caused a severe reluctance to go to the bathroom or to refrain from going, resulting in the emergence of many diseases that greatly affected their health. (Adolescent girl from Badama sub-district, Idleb governorate)

**“** Since the abduction of the girls, my parents no longer allow me to go out alone. (...) In the past, we would come out more freely to visit our friends in the other camp, but now we are prevented from leaving except for necessity. We cannot meet up and this bothers us a lot. (Adolescent girl from Badama sub-district, Idleb governorate)

**“** My friend is a 16-year-old girl. She is a widow, and her parents prohibit her from going in or out, and even from going to the doctor. (Adolescent girl from Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate)

**“** Some camps have tightened security, especially for widows, and it is forbidden for any person to exit or enter without getting permission from the camp manager. (Man from Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate)

In camp settings girls and women were reported to be accompanied by a chaperon to bathrooms '*for fear of harassment*'.

**“** We are extremely afraid of harassment. Therefore, we cannot apply for courses, as we fear coming back alone. We have cancelled attending these courses. If we found someone to accompany us, we would go in groups, and if we did not, we would be obliged to cancel going. (Adolescent girl in Idleb city, Idleb governorate)

In this context, special camps and camp-sections for widows and divorced women and girls in the countryside of Idleb governorate were mentioned. In these women and girls would, according to GBV experts, '*not be allowed to leave without authorisation and a curfew*'. Boys over the age of 12 would not be allowed in these camps and would be '*forced to leave*'. One GBV expert told of '*patrolling guards*' when visiting a woman in one such camp.

Across the governorate, women and adolescent girls reported being '*very frightened*' when leaving the house without someone from the family, often the brother or a parent, accompanying them, or generally not being allowed by their family to leave the home alone. Men and adolescent boys echoed these reports in the FGDs, with adolescent boys emphasising in discussions that they would '*not let her go anywhere alone*' or '*not let her work outside the house at all*' or '*would always go with*

*her'.* Some adolescent girls said they tried to cope with the situation by always walking in groups and carrying weapons for self-defence.

“ There are things that I need to go outside. My brother does not allow me leave the house. When I go out alone, I get extremely frightened. (Woman in Idleb city, Idleb governorate)



## Dress restrictions

Dress restrictions for women and girls, in particular adolescent girls, were reported from various parts of Idleb governorate and echoed by GBV experts. Adolescent girls and women perceived these restrictions to have increased. A woman in Saraqab sub-district observed that '*more girls started wearing a niqab because they wish to avoid harassment in the street*'.

“ There is Al-Nusra Front and we are forced to wear a veil. There are many pressures. (Adolescent girl from Kafr Nobol sub-district, Idleb governorate)

GBV experts reported that women and girls would be exposed to curfews and dress restrictions by armed groups, which was echoed by adolescent girls in Dana who reported being forced to wear a veil by the armed group in power of the area. '*Female police would stop them if they were not covering enough*' and they would then be '*forced to stay at home*'. Very strict dress codes ('*with abbaya*') were also reported to be enforced by religious camp managers of special camps and camp-sections for widows and divorced women and girls.

“ We used to live comfortably, and now we are monitored and have to wear a veil and they stop us from leaving the house. (Adolescent girl from Kafr Nobol sub-district, Idleb governorate)



## Non-disclosure

Non-disclosure after experiencing violence was the second<sup>32</sup> most-mentioned coping mechanism for women and girls, in particular adolescent girls, reflected in the data from Idleb governorate. Widows and divorces were mentioned as particularly affected.

Reasons given were linked to the perpetrators being in positions of authority and/or linked to armed groups, pressure from the community and fear of 'scandal' and 'gossip' ('*because the community never allows such things to be revealed*') and the absence of legal redress mechanisms. FGD participants also explained non-disclosure because of fear of being harmed by their family and in particular parents (honour killings), fear of divorce by the husband and consequently children being taken away and because of fear of being forced to marry the perpetrator.

<sup>32</sup> The most-mentioned coping mechanism of women and girls was the restriction of movement in Idleb governorate.

“ There is no legal care or courts, and if I get harassed, I cannot talk about it for fear of gossip and scandal. (Adolescent girl from Saraqab sub-district, Idleb governorate)

“ If the rapist has authority, a girl can do nothing nor ask anybody's help. (Man from Idleb city, Idleb governorate)



## Victim blaming

Men, women, adolescent girls and boys reported the blaming of victims of sexual violence in Idleb governorate. FGD participants discussed victims of sexual violence being punished by local Shari'a courts and the community '*not accepting victims*'.

“ As for sexual violence, the community's education is weak and it does not accept victims. (Man from Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idleb governorate)

“ It is difficult to use the judiciary because the people in the judiciary are difficult to deal with. I heard about a case in which the girl was whipped in a hideous way, although she was not guilty, so people hesitate a lot before going to the judiciary. (Adolescent girl from Badama sub-district, Idleb governorate)

## Civil documentation

All sex and age groups were reported to be affected by the lack and loss of civil documentation in Idleb governorate. Participants in several FGDs described that official documentation could be obtained in Idleb governorate, but that the safety risks and costs related to obtaining them were too high for most people. Others reported that groups in control and local council would give out alternative documents in order for e.g. displaced people to obtain humanitarian assistance.

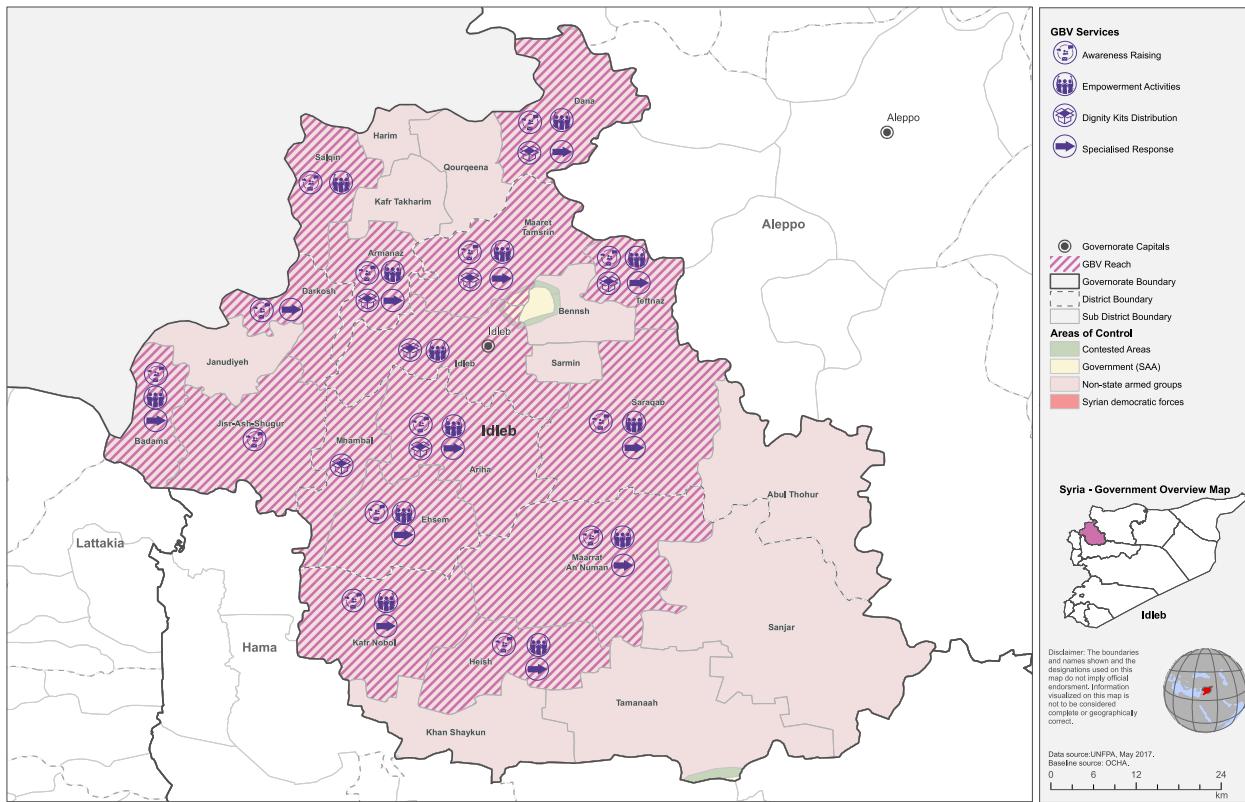
“ I cannot get an identity card except from government-controlled areas, and I cannot go there for fear of getting into trouble. Many things depend on the documents. I keep thinking: if I continue my studies, how can I get my certificate? Or if I get married, how can I register my marriage? (Adolescent girl from Saraqab sub-district, Idleb governorate)

Women were reported to be particularly at risk of losing their financial rights without any official documentation after the death of their husband or a divorce.

“ There are women who get married on the basis of a contract issued by a Sheikh (without officially registering their marriages) and when the husband dies, she has no legal rights at all and she gets nothing from her late husband. (Man from Salqin sub-district, Idleb governorate)

## Access to GBV services

The following map highlights available GBV services in Idlib governorate, as of August 2017.



**Fig 4.10.4 Map of governorate services**

**“**We found a safe haven in this woman and girls safe space. It provides us with psychological support and rehabilitates women affected by the war. (Woman from Saraqab sub-district, Idlib governorate)

There are reports from GBV experts as well as FGD participants on increased access to GBV services in Idlib governorate, comprising psycho-social support services, case management, medical services for GBV survivors and functioning referral pathways. FGD participants also positively reported on vocational training sessions ('*my brother-in-law's wife received training at the women's centre and can now rely on herself and provide daily income for her family*'), awareness raising in women and girls safe spaces. There are also several reports on more well-functioning women and girls safe spaces and mobile teams with medical and psycho-social support staff. GBV experts also reported effective integration of reproductive health and GBV services in some parts of the governorate. Clearly, for some women and girls the existing centres were the only place to spend time besides their homes.

**“**I no longer went out of the tent except to the centre or to visit my relatives, accompanied by my mother

or brother. (Adolescent girl from Badama sub-district, Idlib governorate)

Saying this, there are also many communities where FGD participants reported being in dire need of GBV services, having no place to go with support for women and girls. Women in Ma'arrat An Nu'man sub-district said that more awareness raising should be done about the existence of centres. In a camp in Dana sub-district, men reported that only parts of the camp were provided with such services and the rest of the camp was in need of them. The same men perceived women and girls safe spaces being more effective than mobile teams. Women in Badama sub-district reported that the centres were sometimes too far away for women and girls to reach them. Sometimes families would also not allow adolescent girls to go to the centres for '*fear of bringing shame on the family*'. GBV experts also report having difficulties with local authorities in the context of GBV capacity training.

**“**Services are available for adolescent girls. Service and care centres are rare and we cannot go because our families do not allow us to present our psychological and social problems. (Adolescent girl from Dana sub-district, Idlib governorate)

“ We need to increase centres that provide psychological care for widows, girls, women and married women. I, as a schoolteacher, work on raising my female students' awareness and approaching them if I notice anything unusual in their behaviour. I cannot do more than providing advice and raising awareness. (Woman from Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate)

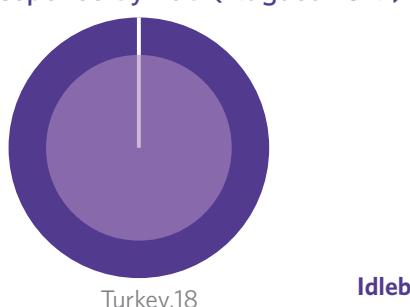
While some experts discussed that the communities are '*accepting the issue of GBV more*', FGD participants also reported denied access of women and girls to service centres because of the '*husband's refusal and the community's view about these women that they are disclosing their marital secrets*'. Widows were also reported as sometimes being denied access to services by their families. A woman in Salqin sub-district said that services were partially available but that a barrier would be the fact that the service delivery point was for both men and women.

“ The quality of services in our programmes in Idleb is increasing. Cases are referred to us and we have case management, PSS group activities and support groups. In some centres we have more adolescents and in some more women. We do not have many young girls. However, while we have more outreach and more beneficiaries, this also puts more stress on our services. The funding cycle is too short and one year is not enough to build trust in the community. (...) We feel the social impact of the services is big. (GBV expert from Syria)

“ There are no health and psychological centres to give support to girls and tell them what to do in case they are harassed. (Sigh). If only we had such centres in this community to give us awareness sessions! (Adolescent girl from Saraqab sub-district, Idleb governorate)

“ There are specialised services to support survivors of violence, such as the primary health care centre providing medical services and psychological and social support services. The centre has a psychologist who helps women and girls who have been subjected to violence. (Adolescent boy from Saraqab sub-district, Idleb governorate)

No. of organisations involved in GBV response by hub (August 2017)



**Fig 4.10.2 Organisations involved in response in governorate**

## Risks and barriers when accessing services and humanitarian assistance

Across Idleb governorate, access to services and humanitarian assistance for women and girls was closely linked to restrictions in movement, and in particular for adolescent girls the need to be accompanied by a chaperon when leaving the home. In many FGDs men, women, adolescent boys and girls mentioned that the community would often regard it as '*shameful*' if adolescent girls received aid distributions so parents would not allow them to go. This was linked, amongst others, to a '*male environment*' at distributions site, distributors usually being men and photographs being taken of women and girls at such sites. Women and girls also reported increased harassment at distribution sites, '*provocative treatment of distributors*' and sexual exploitation. An adolescent girl said that distributors were humiliating people who '*make them feel like beggars*'. Others reported '*shouting at girls*' and '*making fun of them*' at distribution sites.

Adolescent girls described how they would find ways to send someone else to pick up the aid for them instead in order to avoid the harassment and overcrowding. In one discussion in Dana sub-district, adolescent girls reported of a pregnant woman who had a miscarriage '*due to the crush during the distribution*'.

“ Our neighbour no longer goes to receive aid except with her brother or her father so that no one will bother her while waiting for her turn. There is also photography for women during the receipt of aid, which is hated by all women very much. (Adolescent girl from Badama sub-district, Idleb governorate)

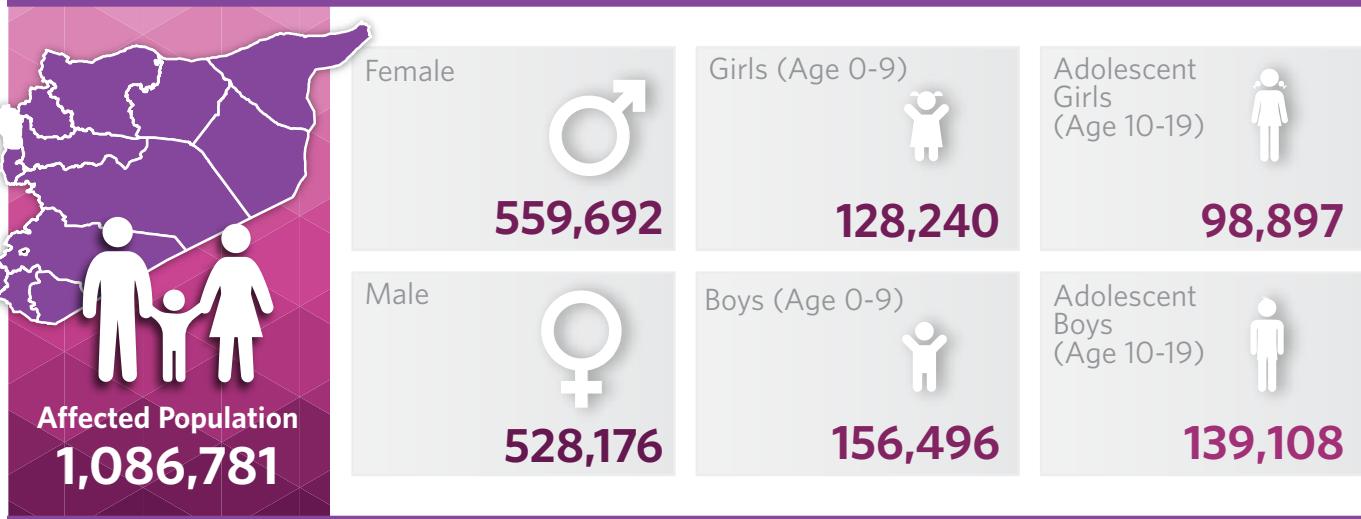
“ Some women face exploitation and they may have to make concessions in order to get care and distributions. (Woman from Salqin sub-district, Idleb governorate)

Women and girls without documentation were reported at being at particular risk of not receiving distributions. For all age and sex groups, the inability of accessing aid because of the spread of explosive hazards was reported in Saraqab sub-district.

“ Girls are criticised when they go out to receive aid. (Adolescent girl from Ma'arrat An Nu'man sub-district, Idleb governorate)

“ I am an IDP from Raqqa. Other than dates, I have not received any emergency assistance for a month. (Woman from Idleb city, Idleb governorate)

## Governorate Overview



## 4.11 Lattakia

### Types of GBV reported as protection concerns

Various forms of GBV were discussed by women and adolescent girls in Lattakia governorate. The main risk factor mentioned was displacement, namely IDP women and girls not having '*appropriate shelter*'. Secondly, women from the host community highlighted '*the high number of people with different customs*' from outside of their community as a concern.

**“** Violence occurs in the houses where more than one IDP family lives or in shelter centres. These shelters are usually large and house a big number of families. Violence also occurs in public places where IDP girls work, such as sewing workshops, restaurants, etc. (Adolescent girls from Lattakia city, Lattakia governorate)

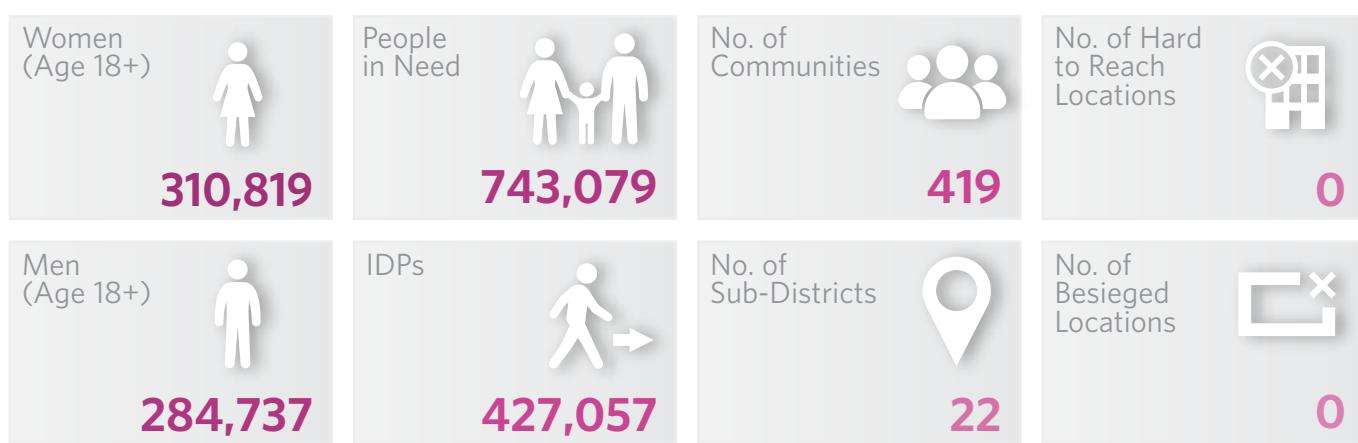
Homes, shelters, markets, overcrowded houses '*where several families live*' and places of work were reported as common sites for violence against women and girls.

**“** The home is the most likely place for violence to take place. (Women from Lattakia city, Lattakia governorate)



#### Child marriage

Adolescent girls in Lattakia governorate mentioned child marriages, linking them to the economic pressure on families. Quantitative data also reflected these findings with child marriage shown to be a protection concern in the majority of communities in Lattakia governorate. Adolescent girls were most affected, as well as girls under the age of 12 in some communities.



**Fig. 4.11.1: Population Data, Lattakia**

Economic reasons were deemed the main reason for child marriage as well as societal pressure and parents wanting to '*protect*' their daughters.

**“**Parents accept such marriages because of their bad circumstances, a desire to benefit from dowries, and to reduce the family's expenses. (Adolescent girl from Lattakia city, Lattakia governorate)



### Sexual violence

Adolescent girls and women mentioned rape, sexual harassment and sexual exploitation '*by either their relatives or co-workers*', which they said '*have recently taken place in Lattakia*'. They mentioned sexual violence in relation to abductions and theft, and identified IDP women and girls as being at particular risk. Sexual harassment was also mentioned in the context of aid distributions. Women in Lattakia city blamed the adoption of '*Western culture*' as a reason for the violence, which they perceived as being more '*impersonal*' and therefore ruthless.

**“**Women who left their homes because of the war (...) are the most likely to feel insecure and unsafe. They rarely have appropriate shelter. As for resident women in the local community, they also feel unsafe because of the many different foreign people living in their community. Cases of kidnapping, thefts and rape have recently taken place in Lattakia. (Women from Lattakia city, Lattakia governorate)

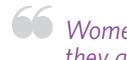
Quantitative data sources also indicate that sexual violence is a protection concern in the majority of communities, mainly affecting women, adolescent girls and girls under the age of 12. Sexual harassment was likewise mentioned as a concern for women, adolescent girls and girls under the age of 12 in 72% of communities

in Lattakia governorate.



### Domestic violence

Women in Lattakia city mentioned domestic violence when talking about coping mechanisms for violence. They said that coping methods for abuse differs among domestic violence survivors from community to community. Some women even singled out married women as the group most at risk of violence.



**“**Women have the freedom to decide to be divorced if they are abused by their husbands. But this depends on the type of local community in which they live. Customs differ from one community to another. (Women from Lattakia city, Lattakia governorate)



### Abductions

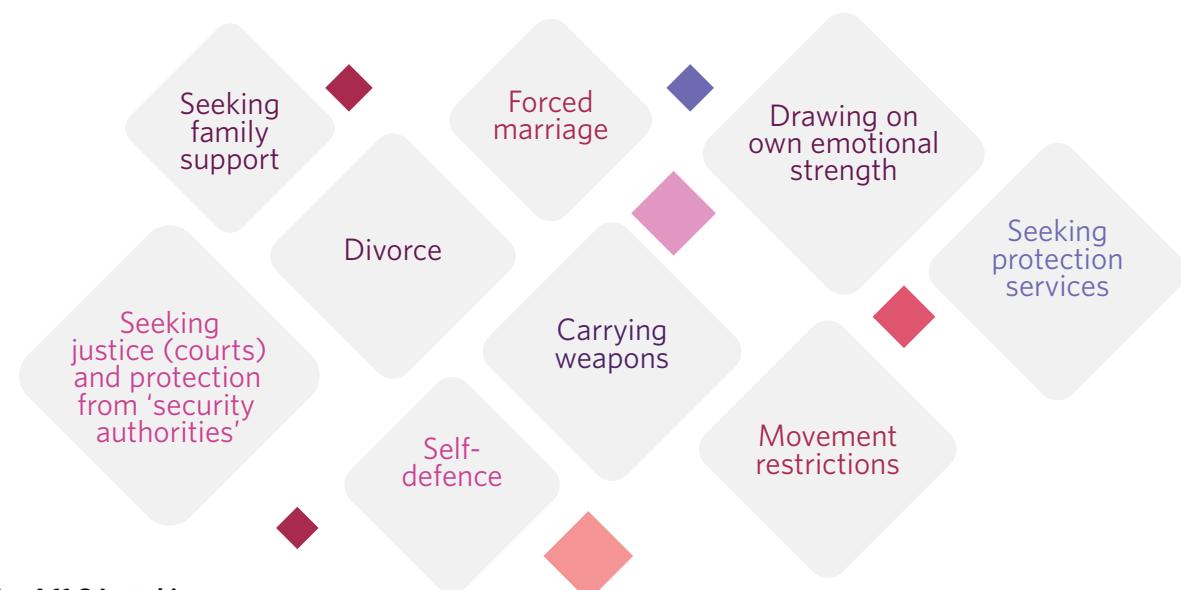
The fear of abductions was mentioned by women and adolescent girls in Lattakia governorate and echoed by GBV experts. Data sources do not add any context about these abductions, but they were mentioned several times, along with sexual violence and murder.



### Economic violence & exploitation

Adolescent girls in Lattakia city mentioned financial exploitation of girls in one FGD, as a wrong done '*by their relatives or co-workers*'.

## Reported Coping Strategies in Response to Violence and Unmet Needs



**Fig. 4.11.2 Lattakia**

## Affected population groups

**Social Groups reported to be at high risk of violence and marginalisation** included women and girls, in particular adolescent girls, IDPs, married, widowed, divorced and older single women, female-headed households, people with disability, and elderly people.

“ Widows or divorcees are treated badly by the community. In response to this harsh treatment, they work hard and refuse to marry again. (Adolescent girls from Lattakia city, Lattakia governorate)

“ Girls who have been displaced or who have experienced the war first-hand have more anxieties, such as the fear of kidnapping, rape, death, and financial or sexual exploitation by their relatives or co-workers. (Adolescent girls from Lattakia city, Lattakia governorate)

## Coping mechanisms

“ Some people think that girls should leave those places where violence occurs and move somewhere else. Other people think that girls should simply adapt to the painful reality. (Adolescent girls from Lattakia city, Lattakia governorate)

“ Girls only come to the centre to talk about their problems and sufferings. They have no hopes or expectations of finding a solution. They just want to talk. (Women from Lattakia city, Lattakia governorate)

## Movement restrictions

“ I carry a knife in my bag permanently. I scream (to ward off attackers) or stay away from places where I might get hurt. (Woman from Lattakia city, Lattakia governorate)

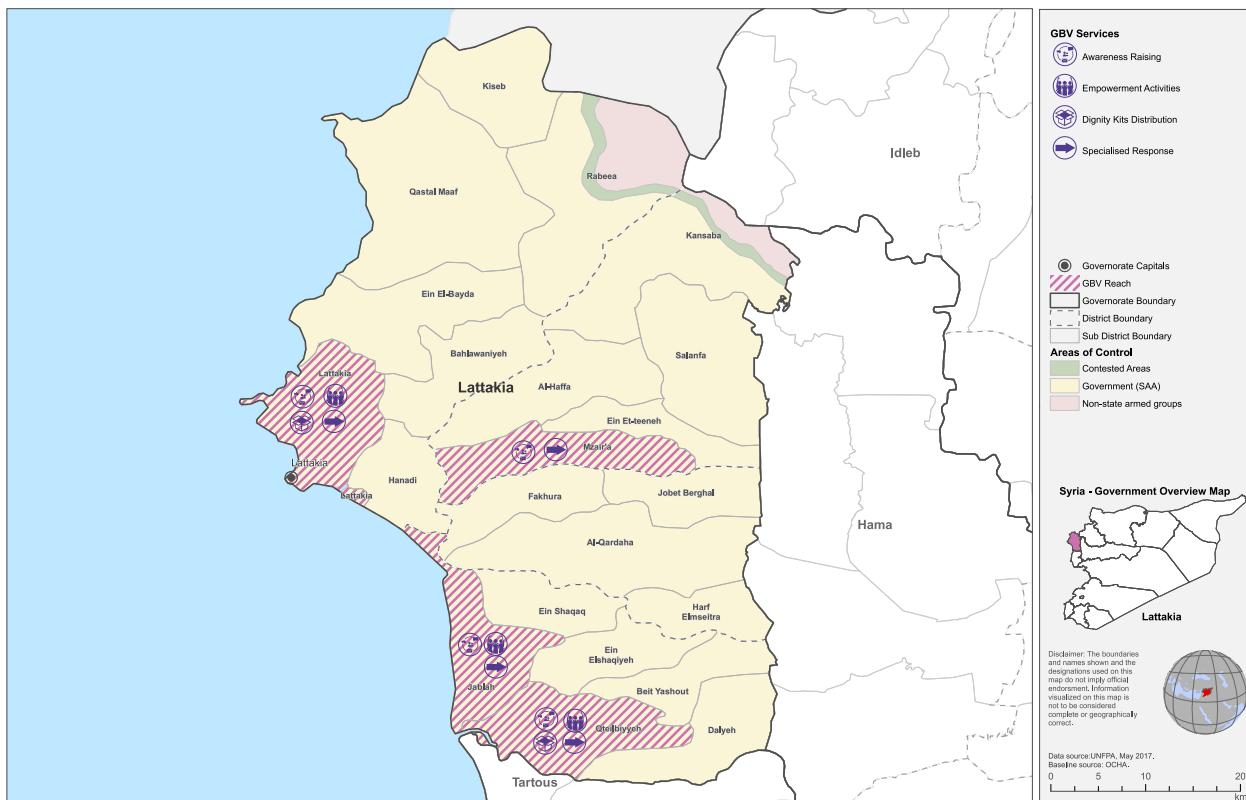
Movement restrictions were reported by women and adolescent girls as a coping mechanism to avoid the risk of violence. Women in Lattakia city otherwise perceived movement to be easier in Lattakia than ‘in the rest of Syrian cities’.

## Access to GBV services

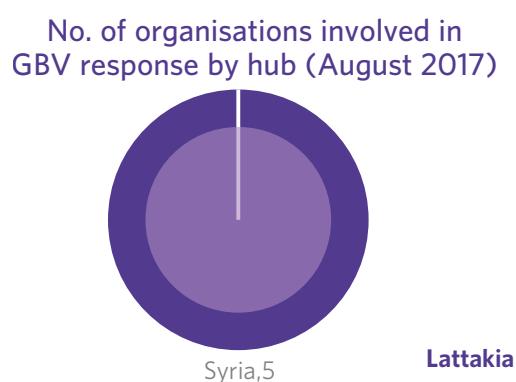
Women and adolescent girls reported very positive experiences at safe spaces for women and girls in Lattakia governorate. They mentioned that the centres had staff trained on GBV issues. Adolescent girls described the centres as offering them ‘psychological comfort’ and being places where they could build relationships, which again positively affected relationships with their own families. Vocational training was likewise mentioned as having a positive impact. However, adolescent girls also conceded that some girls ‘do not go to those centres or organisations because they are afraid of scandal, as somebody might see them entering’.

Quantitative data sources reported that psychosocial support, as well as medical treatment for survivors of sexual violence and/or domestic violence, were not existing in the majority of assessed communities in Lattakia governorate. Women and girls safe spaces were also reported as lacking and being needed in the majority of communities.

The following map highlights available GBV services in Lattakia governorate, as of August 2017.



**Fig 4.11.3 Map of governorate services**



**Fig 4.11.4 Organisations involved in response in governorate**

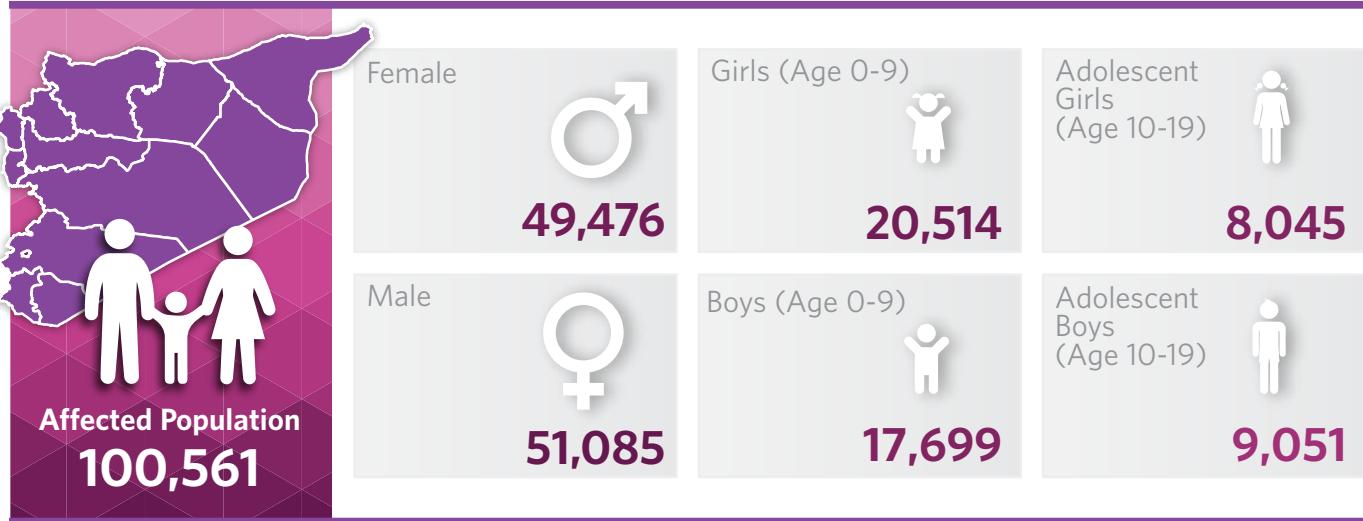
## Risks and barriers when accessing services and humanitarian assistance

FGD participants from Lattakia governorate said that receiving aid was sometimes difficult for women and girls. The reasons given were disrespectful treatment and sexual harassment.

“Receiving aid, such as food and money, is very difficult. You often need to wait a long time to get your share. You can be insulted by those responsible for distributing aid. (...) It is important to mention that there are separate distribution sites for women and men, but the way they treat people is inhumane. (Adolescent girls from Lattakia city, Lattakia governorate)

“They make us feel ashamed when we go and receive aid. (...) They make us wait for a long time under the hot sun. Why are they giving us things that are difficult to cook? (...) The aged and the women in particular suffer from maltreatment in centres that offer humanitarian assistance. This is because the people in charge of the aid harass them. (Women from Lattakia city, Lattakia governorate)

## Governorate Overview



## 4.12 Quneitra

### Types of GBV reported as protection concerns



#### Child marriage

“ I consider child marriage to be the worst kind of violence. (Woman from Fiq sub-district, Quneitra governorate) ”

Child marriage in Quneitra is reported to be linked with combatants, and may be related to higher rates of divorce. Child marriage was mentioned in 67% of FGDs in Quneitra.

“ Families are marrying their daughters off to non-Syrian combatants, from Al-Nusra Front for example. (Woman from Khan Arnaba sub-district, Quneitra governorate) ”

“ Child marriage is the main reason for divorce. (Woman from Khan Arnaba sub-district, Quneitra governorate) ”

Quantitative assessment data also indicates that child marriage is a protection concern in the majority of communities in Quneitra governorate. Adolescent girls are disproportionately affected by child marriage throughout the governorate, as parents arrange marriages for them for economic reasons, ‘to protect’ their daughters and because of pressure from the society.



**Fig. 4.12.1: Population Data, Quneitra**



### Domestic violence

Domestic violence was mentioned in 100% of FGDs in Quneitra. It came out strongly as a type of GBV experienced by many women that is both ingrained in the culture but also worsening due to the crisis. This included accounts of marital rape and even homicide. One of the places that women report feeling the least safe is at home.

“ My husband is an engineer and doesn't have a job. He stays at home and takes it all out on me - screaming in my face and such like. (Woman from Khan Arnaba sub-district, Quneitra governorate) ”

“ Our community is like that. A man always hits his wife. (Woman from Al-Khashniyyeh sub-district, Quneitra governorate) ”

“ I get physically and verbally abused by my husband both in the house and outside. When a man gets angry, he hits his wife with whatever is in his hand. (Woman from Al-Khashniyyeh sub-district, Quneitra governorate) ”

“ A type of violence is when a woman is tired and her husband wants to have intercourse against her will. (Woman from Fiq sub-district, Quneitra governorate) ”

“ There is a man who killed his wife on the street. (Woman from Fiq sub-district, Quneitra governorate) ”



### Sexual violence

Sexual violence was also mentioned in 100% of focus group discussions. FGD participants mentioned fear of rape and sexual violence in the streets. Quantitative data findings indicate that women and adolescent girls are particularly affected by sexual harassment.

“ We fear the lawlessness and getting raped. I went out of the house sometime last year, and even at my age, I got harassed. (Woman from Khan Arnaba sub-district, Quneitra governorate) ”



### Family violence

Linked with domestic violence, family violence was also reported as a consequence of the crisis in Quneitra.

“ Women get hit by their husbands. Women get hit by their brothers. (Adolescent girl from Al-Khashniyyeh sub-district, Quneitra governorate) ”

“ A man who is in a terrible financial situation because there is no work, will take it out on his family and wife, and beat them. (Woman from Fiq sub-district, Quneitra governorate) ”



## Abductions

Abductions were also mentioned strongly related to sexual violence for women and girls. In addition, many women fear the abduction of their children.

**“** There's a constant fear that women and girls will get harassed, raped or abducted. (Adolescent girl from Khan Arnaba sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

## Affected population groups

**“** Honestly, there isn't a woman who isn't subjected to violence. (Woman from Khan Arnaba sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

**“** I think all women here are subjected to violence. (Woman from Fiq sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

FGD participants mentioned that all women experience some form of GBV, with special attention on widows and divorcees related to the rights that are lost by being unaccompanied.

**“** Women are more at risk, especially those with no men to support them like a divorcee or widow, and young women. Sexual violence is happening and we hear about it, especially those who come from different areas, dress differently, and apply makeup. (Woman from Fiq sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

**“** If a woman gets divorced she loses all her rights. If she is subjected to violence, there is no one she can seek. (Woman from Fiq sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

## Coping mechanisms

The most frequently cited coping mechanism in Quneitra was non-disclosure - women and girls felt that they could not talk about the violence they experienced and could do nothing to cope besides crying.

**“** She only screams and cries.  
No one can be held accountable.  
We live in chaos. If it weren't so lawless, none of this would be happening.  
Traditions and customs dictate that a woman shouldn't complain to anyone about it.  
Reality forces a woman to stay quiet.  
(Women from Khan Arnaba sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

**“** She can't do anything. (Woman from Al-Khashniyyeh sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

Other FGD participants mentioned turning to family members or the elderly of the town for support, or to trying to defend themselves.

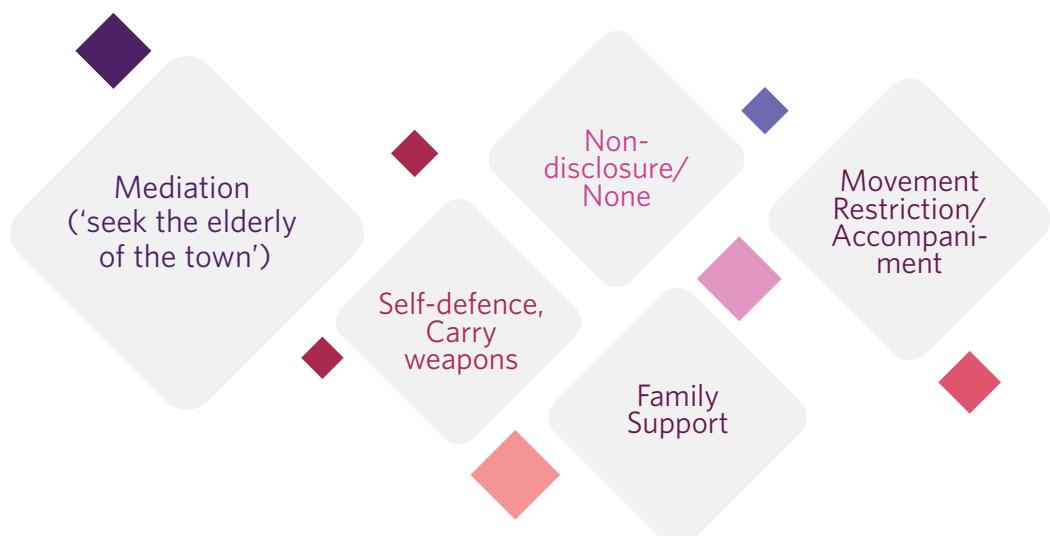
**“** Be quiet and don't cause a scandal.

Some would go to their family and make it an issue but most would just stay quiet.

There is no one we can complain to.

(Women from Fiq sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

### Reported Coping Strategies in Response to Violence and Unmet Needs



**Fig. 4.12.2 Quneitra**

## Restriction of freedom

Adolescent girls in particular highlighted restrictions of freedom related to dress, movement and education.

**“** They interfere with the way I dress and they don't let me leave the house by myself. (Adolescent girl from Al-Khashniyyeh sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

**“** Before the conflict, education was accessible to women. After the conflict, a girl can barely finish high school. (Adolescent girl from Khan Arnaba sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

## Movement restrictions



We used to go to the market with ease before the conflict. After the conflict, we stopped going to the market except with my brother or father. We used to go on trips and have fun. Now we can't leave the house because of the lack of safety. (Adolescent girl from Al-Khashniyyeh sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

Movement restrictions for women and girls in Quneitra are reported to have an impact on access to education and employment and livelihoods.



My daughter left her education so she doesn't keep going back and forth to Damascus. I used to go out alone and as I pleased, but now I can't. (Woman from Khan Arnaba sub-district, Quneitra governorate)



Girls don't work. They do not go out at all. (Woman from Khan Arnaba sub-district, Quneitra governorate)



Depriving her from getting an education and locking her in the house. (Adolescent girl from Khan Arnaba sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

## Access to GBV services

The following map highlights available GBV services in Quneitra governorate, as of August 2017.

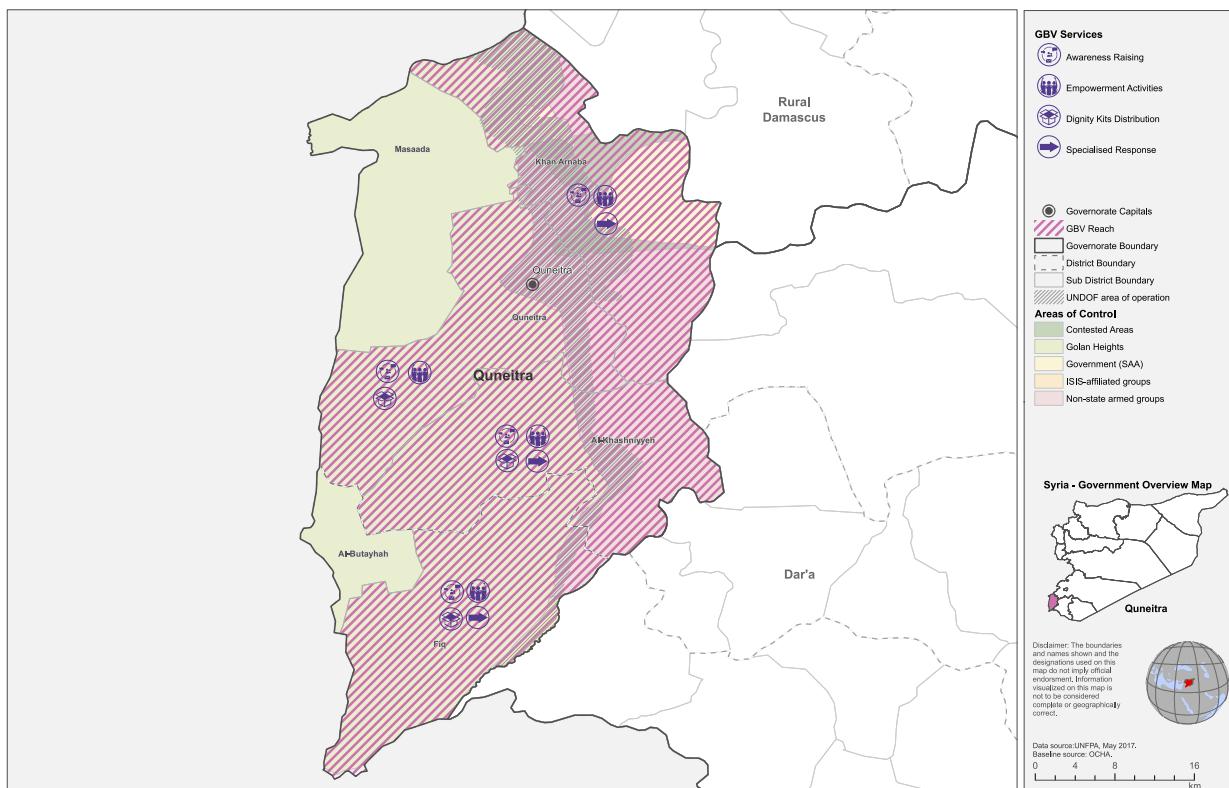
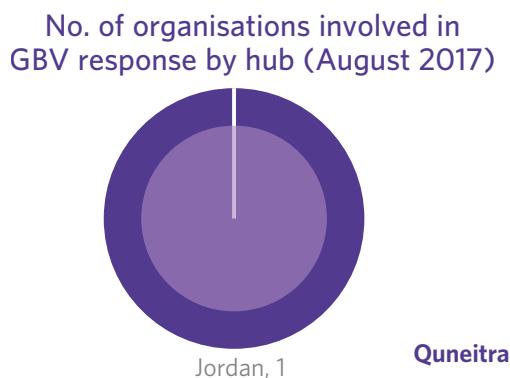


Fig 4.12.3 Map of governorate services



**Fig 4.12.4 Organisations involved in response in governorate**

PSS services are accessible through women's centres, though some FGD participants report that distance is a barrier to access them. However, there is a lack of reporting mechanisms for incidents of GBV.

“ There is no place she can report the incident. (Woman from Khan Arnaba sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

“ There is no official entity that a woman can turn to. (Woman from Al-Khashniyyeh sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

Child-friendly spaces are not available and they are needed.

“ A centre for children opened but closed because of lack of support. (Woman from Fiq sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

In quantitative findings, the vast majority of communities in Quneitra governorate reported further need for specialised GBV services, including the establishment of women and girls safe spaces as well as the provision of PSS for survivors.

## Risks and barriers when accessing services and humanitarian assistance

“ People do get taken advantage of and there are people who care for their personal interests. (Woman from Fiq sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

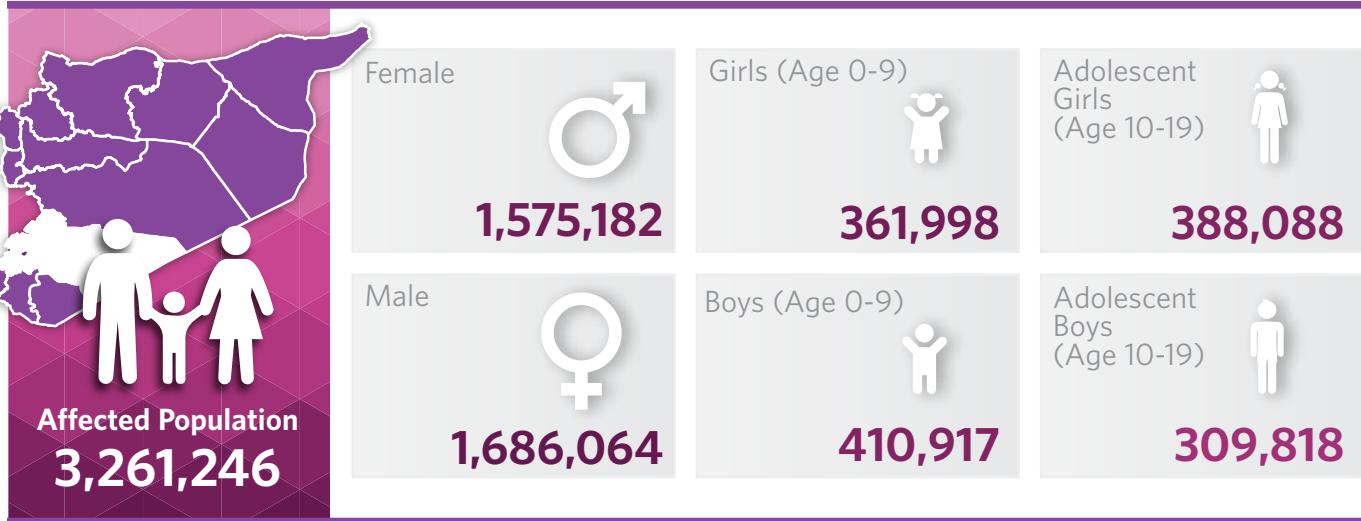
“ The service isn't free. The car that delivers the distribution takes a fee. (Adolescent girl from Al-Khashniyyeh sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

In Quneitra, there are some accounts of barriers to accessing humanitarian aid, such as exploitation or fees for delivering distributions. Participants reported that most aid distributions are received by men in the family, which may or may not actually reach the rest of the family.

“ Some men sell it. Some men trade the distribution for bread or a gas cylinder. (Woman from Al-Khashniyyeh sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

“ Our father receives the distribution and saves it for the family. (Adolescent girl from Fiq sub-district, Quneitra governorate)

## Governorate Overview



## 4.13 Rural Damascus

### Types of GBV reported as protection concerns

Men portrayed the effect of GBV in communities in stark contrast to women in FGDs in Rural Damascus, indicating that many men are either unaware of the violence that women face, or do not consider it violence.

**“** [Violence] has really changed our lives and every girl's life, as it prevented us from practicing our activities and from living our lives as we want. (Adolescent girl from Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

**“** Sexual violence or harassment does not affect the daily routine of people, because it is very low. (Adolescent boy from Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

GBV takes place in shelters, camps (which are reported to be increasing in population<sup>33</sup>), modes of transportation, security posts, checkpoints, crowded places, dark or unlit places, schools, households (especially multi-family) and distribution points.

**“** One of the participants suggested lighting these places or putting a police outpost there. Another participant opposed this saying that she was sexually harassed by one of the security outposts, so she does not think that their existence provides any protection for her. (Woman from Sahnaya sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

**“** Participant 2: In shelters and refugee camps.

Participant 1: People exploit women to have sex with them.

Participant 3: At distribution points sometimes.

<sup>33</sup> Woman from Jaramana sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate



**Fig. 4.13.1: Population Data, Rural Damascus**

*Participant 4: On checkpoints, soldiers can call any girl to get off the car, and if people try to protect her, they will be hurt or arrested.*

*(Men from At Tall sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)*

“Sexual violence increases in shelters, places of interaction between boys and girls, and camps. (Adolescent girl from Harasta sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

FGD participants cited increased “mixing” of people as a risk factor for GBV, which seems to be related to a breakdown of previously existing social cohesion. Similarly, many FGD participants spoke of lawlessness, including the spread of weapons, in Rural Damascus and its links with GBV.

“There are a lot of problems that result from intermixing between the two sexes, and a disregard for customs and traditions. People have changed a lot and nowadays there is no shame at all. (Woman from Qudsiya sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

“There is no mechanism for protection. At the time of wars and crises, there are no longer laws applied to everyone. Nobody respected them in the first place. (Man from Qudsiya sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

“Society taboo of complaining against [sexual violence], absence of awareness, absence of observation, and the dramatic existence of weapons. For example, an armed person can rape a girl because she will be afraid of his weapon. Also bad living conditions, absence of morals and religious deterrent (as well as spread of drug abuse and prostitution). (Woman from Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

“The women have been exposed to harassment for a long time (even before the crisis). There was some restraint before, but nowadays the youth are shameless. (Woman from Qudsiya sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

“We are in a state of war. Those that harass others are not held responsible. Our neighbour had the same problem with his sister and he could not do anything. I mean, each house has experienced something like that. (Woman from Qudsiya sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

“Factors of exposure to sexual violence include loss of family, loss of parents and hunger. (Woman from Harasta sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)



## Child marriage

Child marriage was mentioned in 41% of FGDs in Rural Damascus, stemming from families' intentions to protect their daughters from harassment or reduce financial burdens. This was linked with domestic violence, and unaccompanied and separated girls.

**“**A participant said that institutions are the biggest cause for mixing between men and women and this might result in harassment. The participants reiterated the importance of marrying young people to reduce these crimes of sexual violence. (Adolescent boy from Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

**“**During the crisis, and to reduce the financial burdens, the phenomenon of child marriage has spread significantly. (Adolescent girl from Jaramana sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

**“**A girl (14 years old) was forced by her family to marry someone she does not like, to the extent she was hit in front of him. Her fiancé started to hit her too, and so she fled on her wedding day to Damascus. (Adolescent girl from Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

**“**There is also the problem of child marriage. A lot of girls are forced to get married by their parents or because of their father's death. (Adolescent girl from Duma sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

Quantitative assessment data findings also indicate that child marriage is a protection concern in the vast majority of communities in Rural Damascus governorate. Adolescent girls are disproportionately affected by child marriage across the governorate, as parents arrange marriages for them for economic reasons, because of pressure from the society and 'to protect' their daughters.

*husband and you have to endure for the sake of your children in case he divorces you". (Adolescent girl from Jaramana sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)*

**“***Also the married young women do not have any services (such as education) because of being married. (Adolescent girl from Harasta sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)*



## Sexual violence

Sexual violence against women and girls was mentioned in 86% of FGDs in Rural Damascus.



## Sexual harassment

Most commonly, this took the form of sexual harassment, including street harassment. There were also several mentions of harassment in terms of taking photographs of women without their consent and using this to blackmail or coerce women through fear of causing a scandal. Quantitative data findings also indicate that women and adolescent girls are particularly affected by sexual harassment in Rural Damascus governorate.

**“***Married women whose husbands are not around suffer most violence. In addition, those whose families are not around are the ones who men try to pick up the most. (Woman from Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)*

**“***Once a young man took a photograph of me and my friend because my friend refused to talk to him. But the son of our neighbours saw it on the mobile of this man and deleted it. I do not know what would have happened if he had not deleted it. (Adolescent girl from Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)*



## Rape

Rape was also commonly mentioned as a fear, and there was one account of a boy facing sexual violence in the context of conflict and hostilities.

**“**There is also violence by husband toward his wife when she refuses to give him money. (Adolescent girl from Duma sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

**“**When a husband exposes his wife to violence and beats her, she turns to her parents for help. However, the reaction of the parents might be unsympathetic. They could tell her: "it is okay, you have to live, he is your



## Sexual exploitation

Women and girls experience sexual exploitation from those in positions of power in exchange for housing, aid, or delivery of aid – according to reports.

**“ Girls may sacrifice the most precious thing they have, their honour, in return for getting a house. Women are the most at risk as they need to get money to feed their children. (Woman from At Tall sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)**



## Family violence

The dynamics of family violence show that men (fathers, brothers, uncles) are often the perpetrators, and that while children of both sexes may face violence from parents, it will still affect women and girls with more severity. FGDs mentioned accounts of girls being beaten by parents or brothers, especially if they challenged the social restrictions placed on them, with one account of a father beating his daughter to death.

**“ Girls and women may face physical violence by their husbands or fathers who are distressed. (Man from At Tall sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)**

**“ When the siege occurred, the economic suffering and concerns of daily life increased. The father began to get angry with his son and the husband with his wife, and the wife emptied her anger out on her children. (Man from Harasta sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)**

**“ I know a girl who tried to commit suicide because she faced physical violence by her parents. (Adolescent girl from Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)**



## Honour killings

**“ The men must be held responsible for this. The most important thing for the man is that nobody speaks badly about him. I mean even if his daughter is raped, he either kills her or forces her to shut up, and considers her responsible for bringing shame upon him. (Woman from Jaramana sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)**



## Abductions

Abductions of women and girls were mentioned by men, women and adolescent girls in FGDs. Adolescent girls reported restricting their movement because of fearing an abduction. In several FGDs it was related to sexual violence.

**“ Girls are at risk of being kidnapped more than boys are. (Man from At Tall sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)**

## Affected population groups

Women and girls are the main groups affected by gender-based violence. FGD participants brought attention to violence faced by adolescent girls or girls as young as six years old in one anecdote.

**“ The age of harassment is between (12-18) years, because girls at this age are unaware of what is going on. The reasons could be their weak nature, the fear of their parents, and their reaction. Parents tend to blame girls for it. (Adolescent girl from Jaramana sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)**

**“ Most of the violence is directed against adolescents, and mainly girls... Even if she is strong, they will still talk behind her back. (Adolescent girl from Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)**

**“ When it comes to schoolgirls, they always hit on them or harass them. (Woman from Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)**

Adult women also face violence, including street harassment. Those at most risk according to FGDs are women that are unaccompanied, such as divorcees and widows, because they are thought of as “*valueless*” in society.

**“ It is no longer an issue of a divorced woman or a widow. Rather, the problem is that she is without a husband and the way the society looks at her is that this house is empty and without a man... There are a lot of women whose husbands are arrested, died, are martyred, or immigrated. Therefore, a lot of women are left alone with their children in their homes ... For example, if the woman does not live close to her parents, she will be worried about the night time... She always feels under pressure. (Woman from Jaramana sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)**

**“ The only thing [the mosques] advise men to do after the crisis, because there are many divorced women and widows, is to marry two or three women. That is the only piece of advice. (Woman from Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)**

## Coping mechanisms

**“**We, girls, want solutions like the boys. I mean, a boy can take care of himself but, we girls, what can we do?  
(Woman from Qudsiya sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

FGDs revealed an important difference between the coping mechanisms available to women and girls compared to men and boys, principally due to links with honour and fear of scandal.

### Reported Coping Strategies in Response to Violence and Unmet Needs

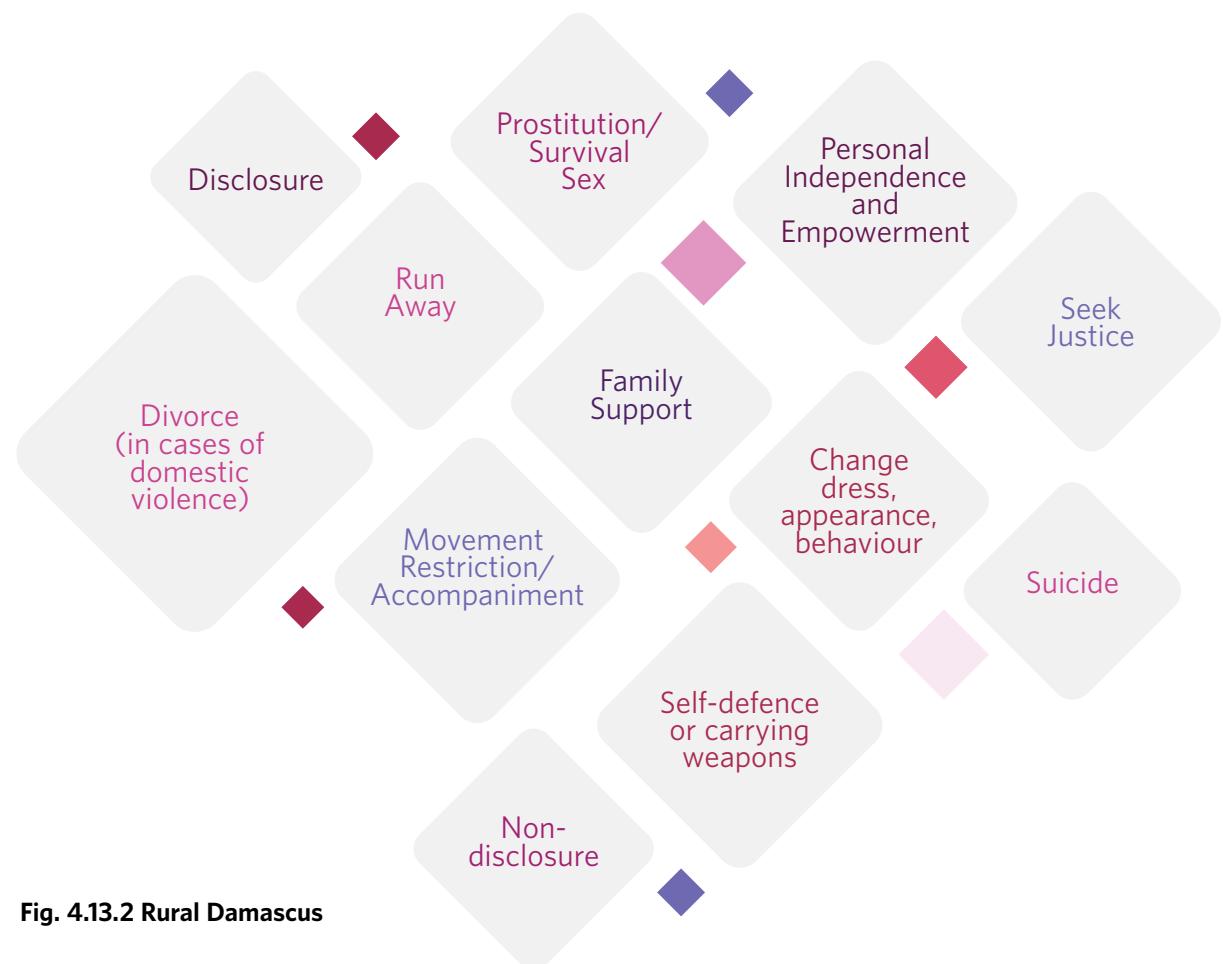


Fig. 4.13.2 Rural Damascus

“ Society will never tolerate a girl who has gone through such events. Also she will never talk about it for fear of the scandal. We shouldn't kid ourselves. (Woman from Jaramana sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

“ I depend on myself as I do not trust anyone else (she started crying). I cannot tell my father everything, and my mom and sister are not at home, as they work outside in the countryside. (Adolescent girl from Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

The most commonly-cited coping mechanism available to women and girls was to say nothing about their experience of violence. This is most strongly linked with honour, fear of scandal and fear of honour killing. It was also linked with the abuse of power of officials, lack of legal recourse and attempting to avoid movement restrictions and restrictions of freedom imposed by family members. Non-disclosure of the act of violence was mentioned in 45% of FGDs as a coping mechanism used by women.

“ Harassment has increased considerably during the crisis years, especially if the young man is wearing a military uniform. You can do nothing. You keep silent. However, before the crisis, we used to talk back and complain and had no fears, be it a soldier or anyone else. (Adolescent girl from Jaramana sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

“ Imagine you were in her shoes: if she returns home [after being sexually harassed], her parents will kill her. She does not know what to do: everyone in the community is armed. (Woman from Qudsya sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

FGD respondents also report non-disclosure linked with community attitudes that place the blame of violence, especially sexual violence, on the women that experience it rather than the perpetrators.

“ It is true, women are always the ones to be blamed. "If she had not dressed like that nobody would have looked at her... if she had not looked at him and laughed, he would not have followed her." Women are always the ones blamed. (Woman from Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

“ Some girls turn to their parents when they are subjected to harassment or sexual violence. Nevertheless, the parents' reaction is not always good. Some parents blame the girl instead of protecting her and tackling the problem. That is why many girls tend to remain silent and do not talk about what happened to them because they know that the community will not do justice by them. (Adolescent girl from Jaramana sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

Begging was brought up as a negative coping mechanism in Rural Damascus, particularly highlighting the risks that this poses for women and girls.

“ Some parents are sending their daughters out to beg because of the war and the very bad living conditions. So, some weak people accept sexual harassment for

money. One person raped a girl and gave her money. She bled but no one complained. (Woman from Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

Some FGDs mentioned women using self-defence or carrying a weapon as a way of protecting themselves when moving outside the home.

“ I think that I should always have a taser on me for self-defence. (Woman from Sahnaya sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

Despite the frequency of non-disclosure as a cited coping mechanism, some FGD participants spoke of being able to turn to their families for support after experiencing violence, though this was much less commonly reported.

“ There is a man in our camp who... was brave and strong enough to go to the police station and complain to the police and they caught the person who raped his sister. Isn't this better than giving him the opportunity to rape other girls just because we do not want to talk about it? (Woman from Jaramana sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

“ Women in this case do not resort to authorities because of ignorance, mistrust or fear. Women can confide in their relatives. (Man from Harasta sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

## Restriction of freedom

“ I am concerned of people's gossip because it affects the reputation of girls and limits their actions and life, i.e. it puts invisible shackles on girls. (Woman from Sahnaya sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

Gossip and community stigma founded on social restrictions for women and girls had an important impact, particularly on girls' education and their future aspirations.

“ I want to study and finish school, so I can change the idea of getting married directly after grade 12, and change people's mind that think this way. (Adolescent girl from Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

## Movement restrictions

“ Women do not go out at night. Women here do not leave home except for necessity. (Man from Harasta sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

“ We no longer feel safe these days, and so we never go anywhere. We are always afraid of the shelling and being kidnapped. We stay indoors and never do any work outside the home. (Adolescent girl from Duma sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

Movement restrictions specifically for women were

mentioned in 82% of FGDs. Women and girls, if they go out at all, report not going out at night and also report not going out without accompaniment, sometimes even feeling the need for weapons. While some FGD participants spoke of movement restrictions related to fear of the shelling or kidnapping, much of the driving influence and decisions around women and girls' movements depend on the permission of men in their family and are related to a lack of trust of women in the family.

**“Our society is dominated by males and does not accept that women can move freely. We ourselves do not allow her to go out alone, except with a companion. The most restricted category is the girls because at this age she is still not mature and her parents need to keep her away from violence and evil. (Adolescent girl from Kafra Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)**

**“Beneficiary No. 8: Some families do not allow their daughters to leave the house. (Woman from Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)**

Otherwise, movement restrictions were related to fear of harassment and lack of trust of people on the street, fear of abductions, fear of being searched at checkpoints, and fear of gossip and scandal.

**“Freedom of movement has become easier now, but in some regions you still need someone armed to accompany you if you want to travel and are worried about your safety. (Woman from Qudsiya sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)**

The impact of movement restrictions for women and girls was highlighted as related to poverty.

**“A lot people are below the poverty line. Women suffer more than men because they cannot come and go as they wish. (Adolescent girl from Qudsiya sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)**

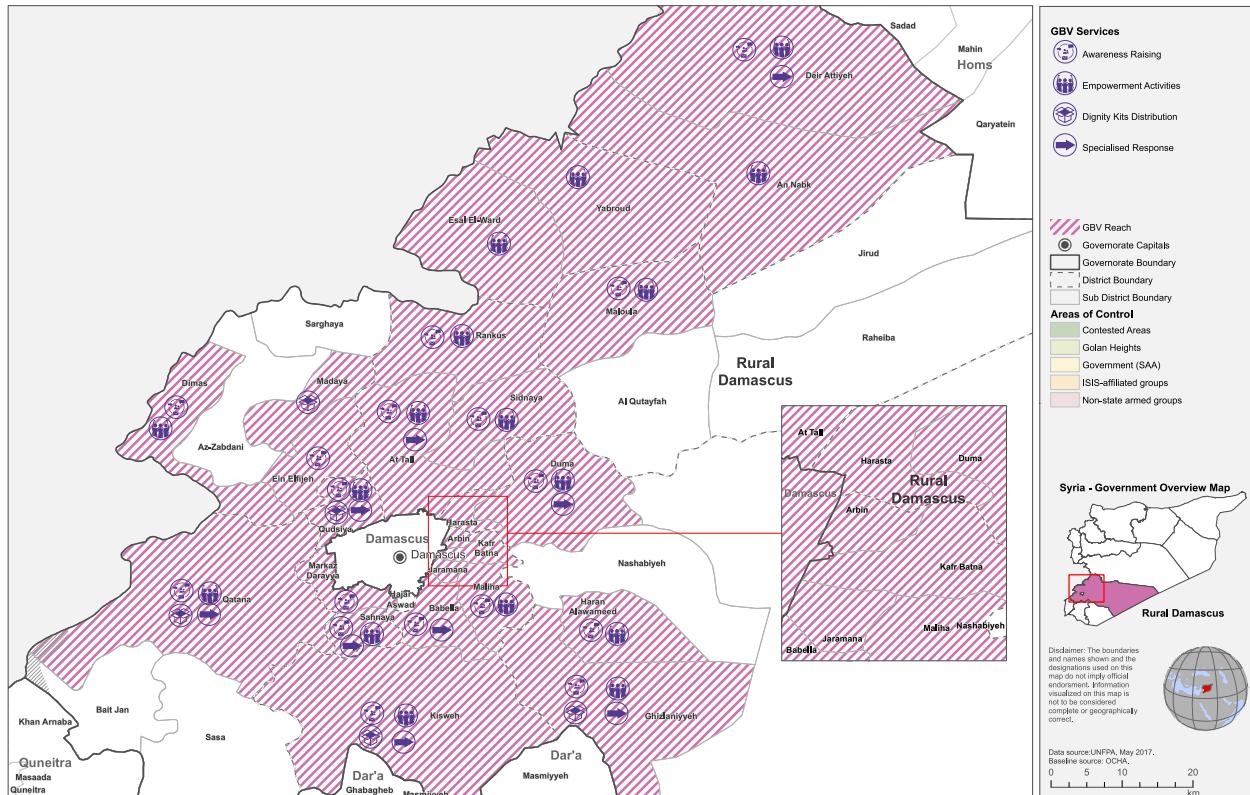
## Civil documentation

FGDs mentioned family documents as a constant problem for women and girls.

**“I got married and wanted to document my marriage, but every sub-district sends me to the other. Then I become pregnant and delivered the baby. I went to Hamouriyah to issue the birth certificate for him. They required my divorce paper from my ex-husband. My baby turned two years old and still neither my marriage nor my baby's birth is documented... Every freed region has its own rules. Rights are lost. (Woman from Kafra Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)**

## Access to GBV services

The following map highlights available GBV services in Rural Damascus governorate, as of August 2017.



**Fig 4.13.3 Map of governorate services**

Basic psychosocial support services seem to be available in some areas, mainly for children, though there are concerns that they are not widely known by the community. One respondent mentioned the existence of women's offices in local councils, but hesitated as to the actual impact for judicial access.

**“** In actual fact, many organisations and associations have appeared recently and more attention has been directed to women and children, and this specifically has mitigated the risk or concerns of women or children. (Woman from Jaramana sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

Some FGD participants spoke of the need for more awareness raising of the services available, and campaigns that speak out against GBV. Others insisted that awareness raising was not enough, and highlighted the need of specialised services for GBV survivors, without discrimination between IDPs and residents. In addition, education services, vocational training and employment opportunities were brought up as needs, especially for unaccompanied women and girls such as orphans, widows and divorcees.

**“** Brochures and awareness campaigns on this issue (violence) are not enough although they help a little bit... All of the participants agreed on the necessity of having places where people experiencing violence could recourse to and complain. These places should be safe and secure. (Woman from Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

Women and girls faced barriers to accessing GBV services related to the issue of non-disclosure of the act of violence due to shame and lack of accountability.

**“** I didn't know that there are such services, but I do not think that our society is so tolerant that a woman who is exposed to sexual violence can come over and speak about it. Our society has no mercy. (Adolescent girl from Qudsiya sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

**“** Yes there are many help and support centres, but many do not come to those centres as they are afraid of gossip if they were seen entering such centres. (Adolescent girl from Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

**“** If you want to encourage them to come, you can hold seminars to tell them that you can really help them... There are some who want to come but their parents prevent them. (Adolescent girl from Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

In quantitative findings, the vast majority of communities in Rural Damascus governorate reported further need for specialised GBV services, including the establishment of women and girls safe spaces as well as the provision of PSS for survivors.

## Risks and barriers when accessing services and humanitarian assistance

FGDs revealed accounts of sexual exploitation - aid workers making sexual advances or asking for sex in exchange for aid - when women were accessing humanitarian aid. Even the threat of harassment and the gossip or social stigma around it prevents women from accessing necessary aid. One adolescent girl FGD participant spoke of experiencing physical violence from a distributor.

**“** Distributions for women: people will start gossip like saying the woman is talking to the distributor. No one will believe she is not, and then she will give up and stop taking distributions, in order to stop the gossiping. (Adolescent girl from Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

**“** Participants agreed that distributions in most of the times are not received for free. Mostly they are distributed for money or for sexual services (such as marriage for a specific period of time) from the officials to receive a meal. (Woman from Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

Other risks related to accessing humanitarian aid include insufficient quality or the wrong type of aid, such as the lack of supplies for infants. On the other hand, a few participants mentioned that aid was accessible to women.

**“** Those who have infants are not allowed to get milk for them. (Man from At Tall sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

**“** There are no barriers, and many women get distributions unaccompanied by men. (Woman from At Tall sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate)

No. of organisations involved in GBV response by hub (August 2017)

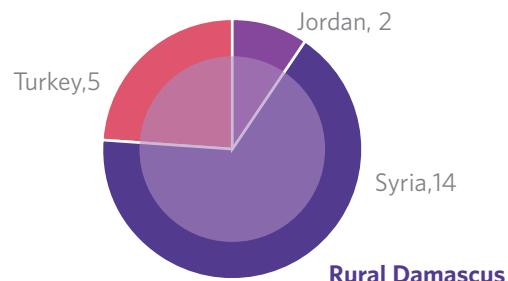
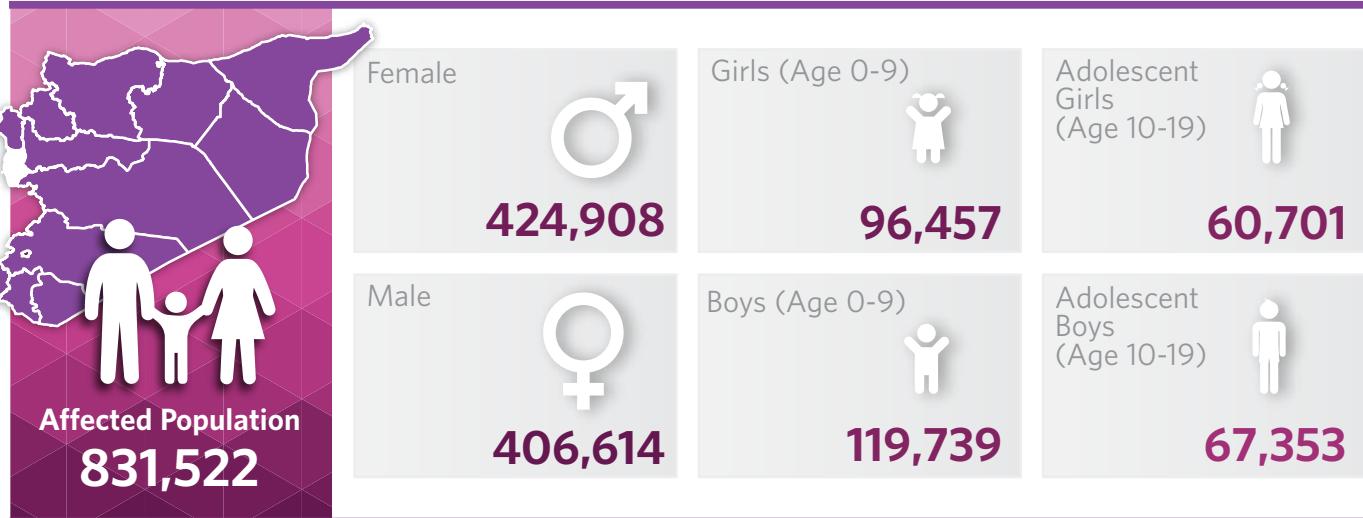


Fig 4.13.4 Organisations involved in response in governorate

## Governorate Overview



### 4.14 Tartous

#### Types of GBV reported as protection concerns

FGD participants mentioned public places, parks, schools, public means of transportation, IDP centres, and distribution centres as places where violence happens in Tartous governorate.



##### Child marriage

Quantitative data identified child marriage as a protection concern in the majority of communities in Tartous governorate, mostly affecting adolescent girls as well as some girls under the age of 12. The reasons for child marriage were mainly of economic nature, being a result of poverty, as well as community pressure and parents wanting to 'better protect' their daughters and therefore choosing marriage for them.



##### Domestic violence

**“** There is domestic violence in all societies and regions. (Woman from Hameidiyyeh sub-district, Tartous governorate)

Although domestic violence is mentioned in one qualitative assessment as a pervasive GBV problem, there are few details on the risks, impact and vulnerabilities in Tartous.



Fig. 4.14.1: Population Data, Tartous



### Sexual violence

Sexual violence was mentioned as a problem by participants in 100% of qualitative assessments in Tartous. In particular, the daily exposure to sexual harassment and street harassment was mentioned by adolescent girls as a common type of GBV, related to non-disclosure and fear of going to school and leaving the house unaccompanied.

“ A young man pinched my sister when we were buying ice cream. (Adolescent girl from Hameidiyyeh sub-district, Tartous governorate)

“ When a girl keeps silent the young men think that she likes it and wants them to harass her. (Adolescent girl from Hameidiyyeh sub-district, Tartous governorate)

“ I am afraid to go to school alone because there are many young men. Even when school is over there are many young men on motorbikes outside the school door. (Adolescent girl from Hameidiyyeh sub-district, Tartous governorate)

## Affected population groups

“ Men are less exposed to violence than women and girls. (Adolescent girl from Tartous city, Tartous governorate)

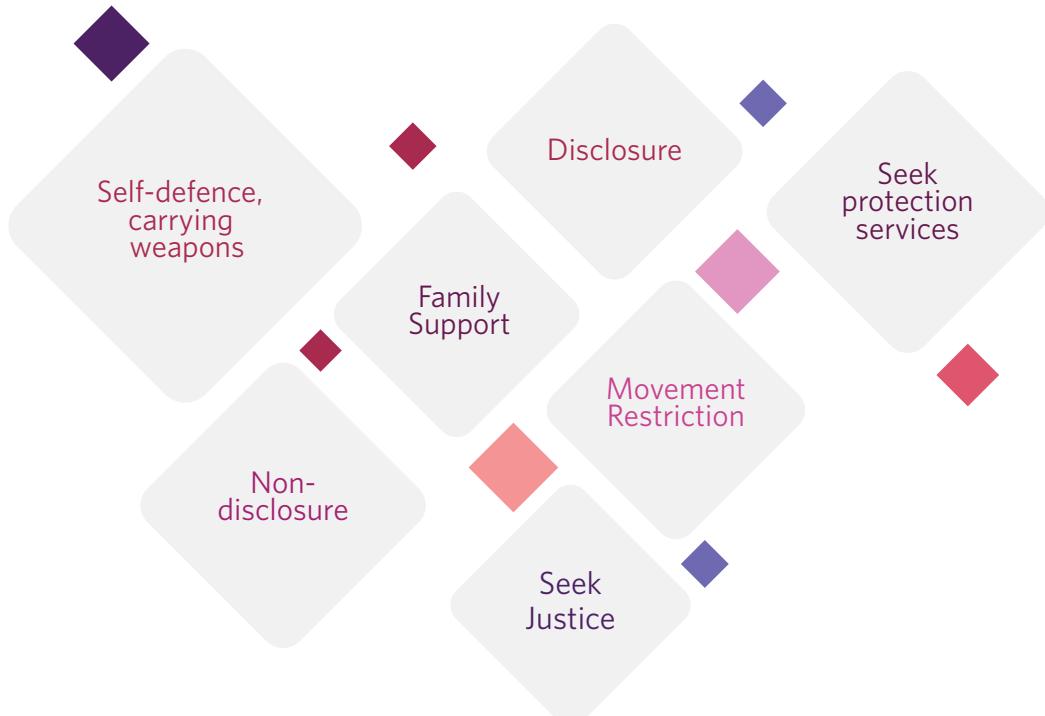
Women and girls, and particularly widows, divorcees, IDPs, homeless children and children with disabilities were all reported to be disproportionately affected by GBV in Tartous.

“ Displaced persons in Tartous, especially women, are the most vulnerable. (Woman from Hameidiyyeh sub-district, Tartous governorate)

“ Women in general are exposed to psychological violence in all societies regardless of the society's culture and nature. (Woman from Tartous city, Tartous governorate)

## Coping mechanisms

### Reported Coping Strategies in Response to Violence and Unmet Needs



**Fig. 4.14.2 Tartous**

“ A woman who is a victim of violence resorts to silence. (Woman from Tartous city, Tartous governorate)

Some assessments mentioned not speaking about the violence, others said that survivors may be able to seek support from their families, police or military.

“ Girls turn to parents when they face violence or ask for help. (Adolescent girl from Tartous city, Tartous governorate)

“ As for physical violence, they try to leave their husband's house and return to their parents' (for married women). (Woman from Tartous city, Tartous governorate)

“ Most women here, even men, turn to the nearest army barracks if a problem occurs and they will help them. Some people go to the police. (Woman from Hameidiyyeh sub-district, Tartous governorate)

In one qualitative assessment, participants mentioned reacting to violence with violence.

“ If they faced sexual violence, they might report the

perpetrator to the authorities. Or they might try to defend themselves, even if that means killing the perpetrator or the attacker. (Woman from Tartous city, Tartous governorate)

## Movement restrictions

“ - Men do not have fears, while women do.

- I cannot go out unaccompanied.

- When I go on a bus, I feel like all people are watching me, so I feel afraid.

- I go to school with my brother by bus because our school is far away. When my brother stays at home, I stay at home too because I feel afraid to go alone.

(Women from Hameidiyyeh sub-district, Tartous governorate)

Movement restrictions for women and girls were mentioned as a problem in all qualitative assessments in Tartous. Restrictions seemed to be linked to social gender

norms, such as asking permission from a husband or the family and fearing gossip and social stigma, along with sexual harassment. These restrictions disproportionately affect women and girls compared to men and boys. Girls reported that restrictions on their movement have inhibited them from going to school.

*“There are no restrictions to the freedom of movement of men, but there is restriction for the movement of women because of her status that demands consent from her husband or parents. (Woman from Tartous city, Tartous governorate)*

*“The environment we live in has obliged us not to leave the house. Sometimes, I feel afraid of people saying that I get out of the house a lot. (Woman from Hameidiyyeh sub-district, Tartous governorate)*

No. of organisations involved in GBV response by hub (August 2017)

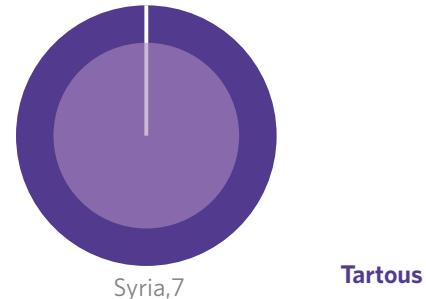


Fig 4.14.4 Organisations involved in response in governorate

## Access to GBV services

The following map highlights available GBV services in Tartous governorate, as of August 2017.

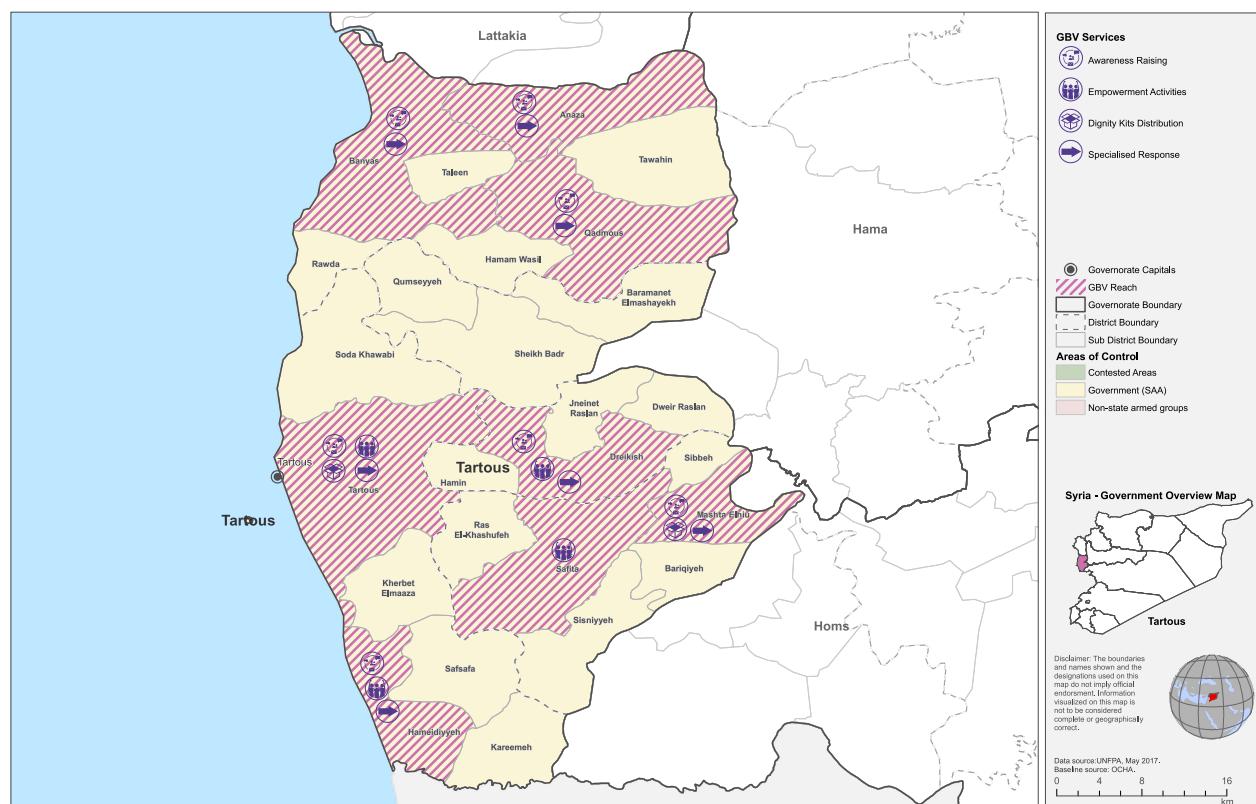


Fig 4.14.3 Map of governorate services

**“**The local community tries to protect [violence survivors] by providing psychosocial, legal, health assistance services, and safe spaces for women and girls. (Adolescent girl from Tartous city, Tartous governorate)

Qualitative assessments confirmed that GBV services were generally available and known in Tartous governorate, including legal and judicial services.

**“**The centre also has a group of lawyers who provide legal advice and help women in divorce cases. These lawyers are currently helping me to document my marriage. (Woman from Hameidiyyeh sub-district, Tartous governorate)

Barriers to accessing these services were distance or lack of transport, movement restrictions or lack of accompaniment, and also fear of gossip and social stigma.

**“**Centres like this one help ladies and provide them with all services, but the problem is that there is no centre nearby in the area... At first, some women would not come to the centre lest people would say they were getting help or services. They did not like to be seen by people asking for support or assistance from the centre. (Woman from Hameidiyyeh sub-district, Tartous governorate)

**“**I'm not used to going out of the house alone so I feel afraid a lot and do not come to the centre. (Adolescent girl from Hameidiyyeh sub-district, Tartous governorate)

## Risks and barriers when accessing services and humanitarian assistance

**“**The participants are of the opinion that there is sometimes discrimination in accessing aid especially for divorced women and widows. (Woman from Tartous city, Tartous governorate)

Although some participants in qualitative assessments report that widows and divorcees may experience difficulty in accessing distribution sites, overall qualitative data found that women and girls were able to access and benefit from humanitarian aid without facing much additional risk.

**“**Some arguments occur at the distribution centres, but there is a queue for women and another one for men. (Adolescent girl from Hameidiyyeh sub-district, Tartous governorate)

**“**But there are some young people working in the distribution centre that are kind. If they see a woman carrying a heavy food basket on her own, they help her and carry it to the house. (Woman from Hameidiyyeh sub-district, Tartous governorate)



5

# Annex

## **Annex 1: Methodological Approaches of Qualitative Assessments**

### **5.1 Focus group discussions (Jordan and Turkey hubs)**

FGDs conducted by the Protection Sector of the Jordan and Turkey hubs used the following sampling criteria for selecting sub-districts:

- % of IDPs in the sub-district in relation to overall number of IDPs in Syria
- Population size of sub-district
- Each hub reviewed the list of sub-districts and identified capacities of partners, access, feasibility of conducting FGD

The hubs conducted four FGDs per sub-district with participants disaggregated by sex and age, namely FGDs with adolescent girls (age 13-17), adolescent boys (age 13-17), women (age 18 above) and men (age 18 above). Each FGD included between 6 and 10 participants, constituting a representative sample of the sub-district, i.e. different types of people, professions and backgrounds within the sub-district.

A streamlined Arabic tool across hubs for joint analysis was developed, with an annexed glossary of terminology related to protection issues in English and Arabic. Facilitators were trained on the Arabic tool and glossary during preparation for the roll out, and a Training of Trainers (ToT) package in Arabic was provided, including tools, annexes and templates. FGDs were based on the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality and on the '*Do No Harm*' principle. Participants were told that by engaging in the discussion, humanitarian aid would not be delivered in exchange for information. Participants were given the opportunity to make an informed decision about their potential participation in the FGDs and informed consent was obtained by the facilitators. Privacy of participants and confidentiality of data was ensured. Moreover, it was ensured that facilitators and note-takers were of the same sex as the FGD participants and that facilitators were selected on the basis of having had training on protection issues, on how to respond to disclosures during or after the FGD and on guiding principles of respect, confidentiality, non-discrimination and safety.

Following data collection, the raw data in Arabic was sent by hub focal points to GBV AoR at WoS level for translation and data coding (using MAXQDA software). Minimum code taxonomy was provided by GBV, general protection, child protection, mine action in advance and also comprised geographical data points as well as age and sex disaggregation, if available. The analysis of FGD data was done by each protection sector (gender-based violence, general protection, child protection, mine action).

### **5.2 GBV expert focus group discussions**

The aim of the Expert Focus Group Discussions (FGD) was to agree upon several expert statements on the impact of the crisis with regards to GBV inside Syria. The expert statements complemented data coming from the quantitative assessments, Focus Group Discussions as well any other secondary literature data sources. One Expert FGD was conducted at Whole of Syria level as well as several hub-level GBV Expert FGDs in Syria (Damascus, Homs, Aleppo) and Turkey (Gaziantep). In addition, GBV experts from North-East Syria (NES) also provided feedback on same topics through a short briefing.

In all Expert FGDs the Delphi Method was used, which is a widely used technique for gathering data from respondents within their domain of expertise. It is a method which is especially well suited for consensus building and it has the objective of developing agreed-upon, joint statements of experts on specific issues. All Expert FGD facilitators were protection experts, in particular on GBV issues. They were all neutral in terms of the Syria Crisis, with an understanding of its context and previous experience in facilitation of this type of FGD. The WoS GBV Expert FGD included 3-4 participants from each hub, who were all GBV experts, including both national and international staff

from organisations working on the Syrian crisis. All discussions and information shared in GBV Experts' FGDs were anonymised. A first analysis of the GBV Expert FGDs was done by observers, note-takers and facilitators directly after the FGD had taken place, followed by further analysis by the GBV AoR at WoS level, taking findings from other data sources into account for triangulation. The analysis and coding of this data was streamlined with that of the other qualitative data.

## 5.3 Secondary literature data desk review

A secondary literature data review was carried out as a desk study in August and September with the aim of compiling all available 2017 data on GBV inside Syria. The data included only 2017 data to ensure up-to-date and thus relevant data that informs the analysis. Sources of information for the review included various assessment reports from partners working inside Syria, in particular from the health and protection sectors, UN Inter-Agency Mission Reports of convoys into besieged and hard-to-reach areas and OHCHR reports. The analysis and coding of this data was streamlined with that of the other qualitative data.

## Annex 2: Definitions of Key Terminology<sup>34</sup>

### Child or minor

Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as "*every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.*" The Committee on the Rights of the Child, the monitoring body for the Convention, has encouraged States to review the age of majority if it is set below 18 and to increase the level of protection for all children under 18. Minors are considered unable to evaluate and understand the consequences of their choices and give informed consent, especially for sexual acts.

### Child labour

The term '*child labour*' is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that:

- is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and interferes with their schooling by:
- depriving them of the opportunity to attend school;
- obliging them to leave school prematurely; or
- requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.

In its most extreme forms, child labour involves children being enslaved, separated from their families, exposed to serious hazards and illnesses and/or left to fend for themselves on the streets of large cities — often at a very early age. Whether or not particular forms of '*work*' can be called '*child labour*' depends on the child's age, the type and hours of work performed, the conditions under which it is performed and the objectives pursued by individual countries.

### Confidentiality

An ethical principle associated with medical and social service professions. Maintaining confidentiality requires that service providers protect information gathered about clients and agree only to share information about a client's case with their explicit permission. All written information is kept in locked files and only non-identifying information is written down on case files. Maintaining confidentiality about abuse means service providers never discuss case details with family or friends, or with colleagues whose knowledge of the abuse is deemed unnecessary. There are limits to confidentiality while working with children or clients who express intent to harm themselves or someone else.

### Conflict-related sexual violence:

*'Conflict-related sexual violence'* refers to incidents or (for SCR 1960 listing purposes) patterns of sexual violence, that is rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity, against women, men, girls or boys. Such incidents or patterns occur in conflict or post-conflict settings or other situations of concern (e.g. political strife). They also have a direct or indirect nexus with the conflict or political strife itself, i.e. a temporal, geographical and/or causal link. In addition to the international character of the suspected crimes (that can, depending on the circumstances, constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity, acts of torture or genocide), the link with conflict may be evident in the profile and motivations of the perpetrator(s), the profile of the victim(s), the climate of impunity/weakened State capacity, cross-border dimensions and/or the fact that it violates the terms of a ceasefire agreement'.

### Consent/informed consent

Refers to approval or assent, particularly and especially after thoughtful consideration. Free and informed consent is given based upon a clear appreciation and understanding of the facts, implications and future consequences of an action. In order to give informed consent, the individual concerned must have all adequate relevant facts at the

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<sup>34</sup> All definitions are based on: IASC / Global Protection Cluster (2015) Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing risk, promoting resilience and aiding recovery, 321-326.

time consent is given and be able to evaluate and understand the consequences of an action. They also must be aware of and have the power to exercise their right to refuse to engage in an action and/or to not be coerced (i.e. being persuaded based on force or threats). Children are generally considered unable to provide informed consent because they do not have the ability and/or experience to anticipate the implications of an action, and they may not understand or be empowered to exercise their right to refuse. There are also instances where consent might not be possible due to cognitive impairments and/or physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities.

## **Domestic violence (DV) and intimate partner violence (IPV)**

While these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, there are important distinctions between them. '*Domestic violence*' is a term used to describe violence that takes place within the home or family between intimate partners as well as between other family members. '*Intimate partner violence*' applies specifically to violence occurring between intimate partners (married, cohabiting, boyfriend/girlfriend or other close relationships), and is defined by WHO as behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours. This type of violence may also include the denial of resources, opportunities or services.

## **Economic abuse / Violence**

An aspect of abuse where abusers control victims' finances to prevent them from accessing resources, working or maintaining control of earnings, achieving self-sufficiency and gaining financial independence.

## **Emotional abuse (also referred to as psychological abuse)**

Infliction of mental or emotional pain or injury. Examples include: threats of physical or sexual violence, intimidation, humiliation, forced isolation, social exclusion, stalking, verbal harassment, unwanted attention, remarks, gestures or written words of a sexual and/or menacing nature, destruction of cherished things, etc. '*Sexual harassment*' is included in this category of GBV.

## **Empowerment of women**

The empowerment of women concerns women gaining power and control over their own lives. It involves awareness-raising, building self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control over resources, and actions to transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality.

## **Forced marriage and child (also referred to as early) marriage**

Forced marriage is the marriage of an individual against her or his will. Child marriage is a formal marriage or informal union before age 18. Even though some countries permit marriage before age 18, international human rights standards classify these as child marriages, reasoning that those under age 18 are unable to give informed consent. Therefore, child marriage is a form of forced marriage as children are not legally competent to agree to such unions.

## **Gender**

Refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/ time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context.

## **Gender-based violence**

An umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e. gender) differences between males and females. The term '*gender-based violence*' is primarily used to underscore the fact that structural, gender-based power differentials between males and females around the world place females at risk for multiple forms of violence. As agreed in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), this includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. The term is also used

by some actors to describe some forms of sexual violence against males and /or targeted violence against LGBTI populations, in these cases when referencing violence related to gender-inequitable norms of masculinity and/or norms of gender identity.

## **Gender-disaggregated data**

The collection of data on males and females separately in relation to all aspects of their functioning—ethnicity, class, caste, age, location, etc.

## **Gender roles**

A set of social and behavioural expectations or beliefs about how members of a culture should behave according to their biological sex; the distinct roles and responsibilities of men, women and other genders in a given culture. Gender roles vary among different societies and cultures, classes, ages and during different periods in history. Gender-specific roles and responsibilities are often conditioned by household structure, access to resources, specific impacts of the global economy, and other locally relevant factors such as ecological conditions.

## **Harmful traditional practices**

Cultural, social and religious customs and traditions that can be harmful to a person's mental or physical health. Every social grouping in the world has specific traditional cultural practices and beliefs, some of which are beneficial to all members, while others are harmful to a specific group, such as women. These harmful traditional practices include female genital mutilation (FGM); forced feeding of women; child marriage; the various taboos or practices that prevent women from controlling their own fertility; nutritional taboos and traditional birth practices; son preference and its implications for the status of the girl child; female infanticide; early pregnancy; and dowry price. Other harmful traditional practices affecting children include binding, scarring, burning, branding, violent initiation rites, fattening, forced marriage, so-called honour crimes and dowry-related violence, exorcism or '*witchcraft*'.

## **Perpetrator**

Person, group or institution that directly inflicts or otherwise supports violence or other abuse inflicted on another against his/her will.

## **Physical assault/ Violence**

An act of physical violence that is not sexual in nature. Examples include: hitting, slapping, choking, cutting, shoving, burning, shooting or use of any weapons, acid attacks or any other act that results in pain, discomfort or injury.

## **Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA)**

As highlighted in the Secretary-General's '*Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse*' (ST/SGB/2003/13), PSEA relates specifically to the responsibilities of international humanitarian, development and peacekeeping actors to prevent incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by United Nations, NGO, and inter-governments (IGO) personnel against the affected population, to set up confidential reporting mechanisms, and to take safe and ethical action as quickly as possible when incidents do occur.

## **Rape**

Physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration—even if slight—of the vagina, anus or mouth with a penis or other body part. It also includes penetration of the vagina or anus with an object. Rape includes marital rape and anal rape/sodomy. The attempt to do so is known as attempted rape. Rape of a person by two or more perpetrators is known as gang rape.

## **Separated child**

A child separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members.

## **Sexual abuse**

The term '*sexual abuse*' means the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

## Sexual assault

Any form of non-consensual sexual contact that does not result in or include penetration. Examples include: attempted rape, as well as unwanted kissing, fondling, or touching of genitalia and buttocks.

## Sexual exploitation

The term '*sexual exploitation*' means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. Some types of forced and/or coerced prostitution can fall under this category.

## Sexual harassment

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

## Sexual violence

For the purposes of these guidelines, sexual violence includes, at least, rape/attempted rape, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. Sexual violence is "*any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic a person's sexuality, using coercion, threats of harm or physical force, by any person regardless or relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.*" Sexual violence takes many forms, including rape, sexual slavery and/or trafficking, forced pregnancy, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and/or abuse, and forced abortion.

## Survivor

A survivor is a person who has experienced gender-based violence. The terms '*victim*' and '*survivor*' can be used interchangeably. '*Victim*' is a term often used in the legal and medical sectors. '*Survivor*' is the term generally preferred in the psychological and social support sectors because it implies resiliency.

## Trafficking in persons

"...the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs."

## Unaccompanied child

A child who has been separated from both parents and other relatives and is not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so. This means that a child may be completely without adult care, or may be cared for by someone not related or known to the child, or not their usual caregiver, e.g. a neighbour, another child under 18, or a stranger.

## Victim

A victim is a person who has experienced gender-based violence. The term recognizes that a violation against one's human rights has occurred. The terms '*victim*' and '*survivor*' can be used interchangeably. '*Victim*' is a term often used in the legal and medical sectors. '*Survivor*' is the term generally preferred in the psychological and social support sectors because it implies resiliency.

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