



Syria Civil Defence

The challenges faced by women in northwest Syria



Introduction

Women in Syria make vital contributions to society, serving as breadwinners, primary humanitarian responses, peacebuilders, leaders in camps for Internally Displaced People (IDPs), teachers, medical professionals, mothers and carers. The political and humanitarian situation in Syria weighs heavily on women. Humanitarian needs in Syria have only increased in the 11 years since the conflict began. More than 6.9 million people are displaced inside the country, with 3.7 million displaced in the northwest alone. Formal camps in the northwest of Syria shelter around 400,000 women according to the Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster, in addition to tens of thousands of women who live in informal camps.

The suffering of Syrian women, especially the women supporting their families after losing their husbands, has increased over the past 11 years. The spread of the coronavirus in northwest Syria and the economic hardship associated with the soaring prices of commodities have stretched their capacity to support their families.

This report is based on surveys with women who use White Helmets Women and Family centres in northwest Syria. Within the limitations of this approach, it attempts to shed some light on the reality of women in northwest Syria, review the challenges they face, and provide recommendations to help White Helmets programmes to empower Syrian women and alleviate the difficulties they face.

Methodology

The findings of this study are drawn from a survey that was conducted in person with 1,746 women respondents in 160 villages in 32 sub-districts in Idlib and Aleppo governorates in northwest Syria in January 2022.

The survey was conducted by White Helmets volunteers. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants before conducting the questionnaire. Some of the participants preferred their responses to be kept anonymous, while others requested to be kept updated about the findings of the study.

The sample was also determined to be inclusive of all details related to the nature of the community in terms of sample size and diversity.

The study sought to include the sample on all age groups of women, as well as working women and housewives, as well as the various social situations of women (married, unmarried, widowed, and divorced.)

It also included the categories of the host community and the displaced, and it considered the educational levels of women within the selected sample.

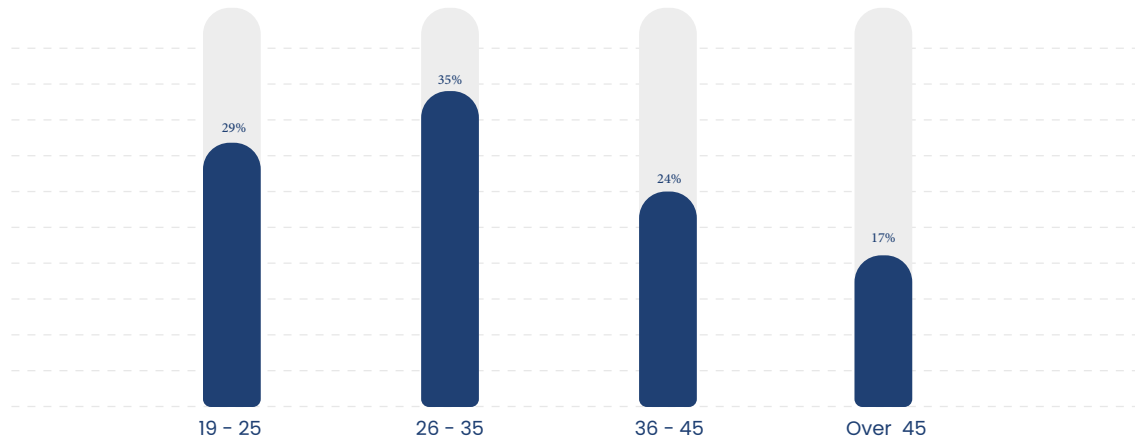
— **About the White Helmets work with women in northwest Syria**

The White Helmets has more than 300 women volunteers working in 39 Women and Family Centres across northwest Syria. The female White Helmets volunteers were able to reach this size of the female sample through their ability to reach the community and the confidence they enjoy, despite the social difficulties and obstacles that hinder or prevent conducting studies and questionnaires related to the reality of women.

— **About the sample**

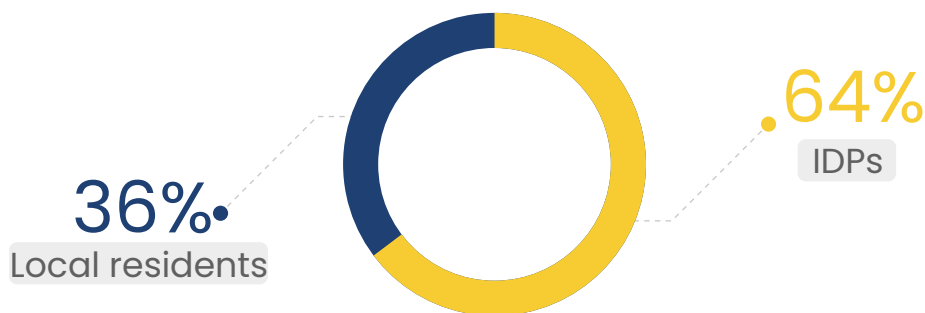
The age groups of the participating sample included 29% of women aged between (19 - 25) years, 30% of women aged (26 - 35) years, and 24% of women aged (36 - 45), in addition to 17 % of those over 45 years old.

Figure 1: Ages of interviewed women



The sampling methodology tried to ensure that the findings would be as representative as possible in terms of status as a resident of the local community or as a displaced person. Hence, the sample of female respondents also included both displaced and resident women. 64% displaced women and 36% women from the host community participated in the study.

Figure 2: percentage of displaced women



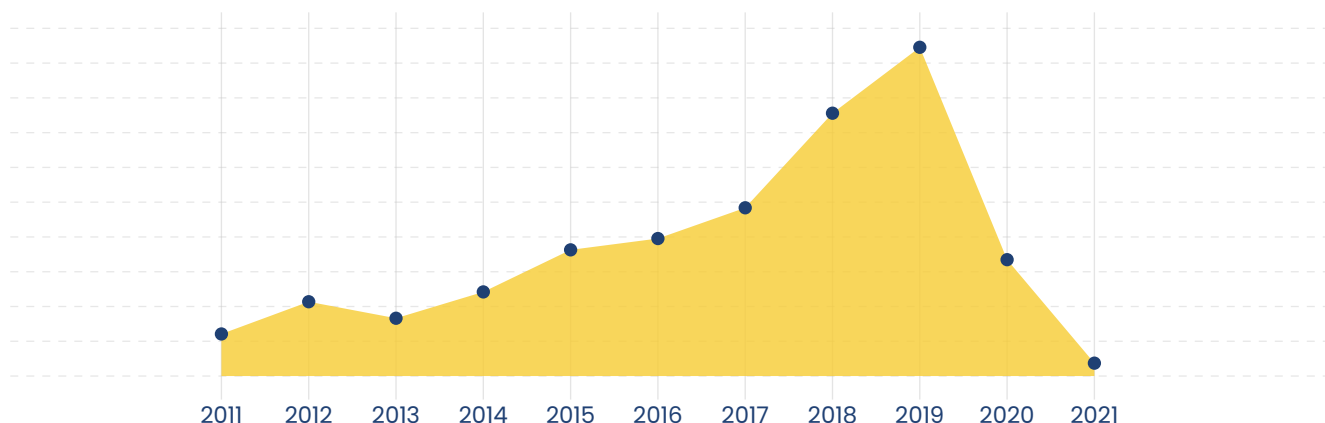
Displacement

Finding 1: 42% of women were displaced in 2018 – 2019 and have moved an average of four times since their initial displacement

The IDPs participants came from 11 governorates, meaning that the study included the perspectives of women from almost all of Syria's 14 governorates. The highest percentage of IDPs came from Idlib 37%, Aleppo 26%, and Hama 18%.

The participants were forced to leave their original homes during different periods of the conflict, distributed between 2011 and 2021. The largest percentage of participating women 42% were forcibly displaced during the years 2018 to 2019 due to the military operations by the Russian forces, the Syrian regime and its allies and the military attacks on Aleppo's southern countryside, Idlib governorate and Hama countryside.

Figure 3: IDPs according to the date of the 1st displacement



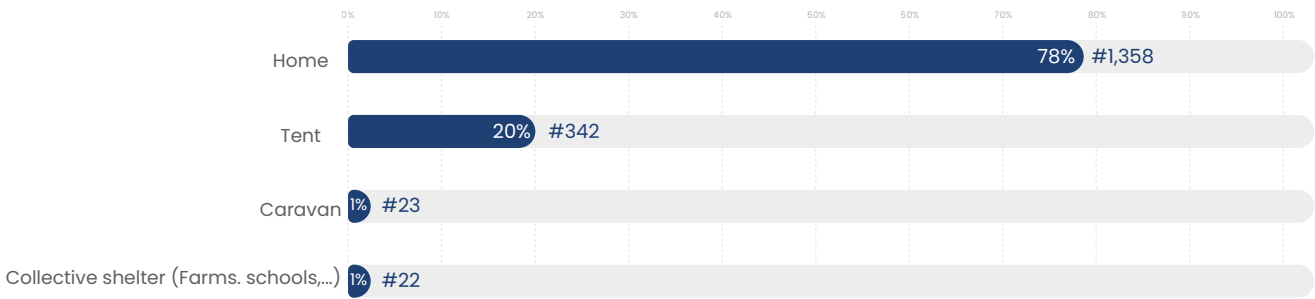
The frequency of displacement varied among participants: the highest frequency of displacement for some participants was 15 times, while the average was four. Repeated and frequent displacement is attributable to many factors, including: the continuation of military attacks by the Syrian regime and its allies, the difficulty of securing housing due to high population density, the scarcity of shelter, the high cost of housing and the overcrowding of camps in northwest Syria.

Living conditions

Finding 2: 34% of women participants live with more than six persons

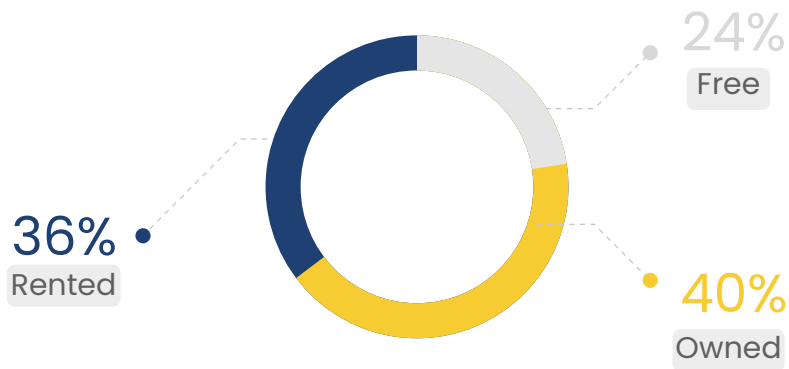
The shelters in which the participants live varied. 78% of women live in homes, while 20% of them live in tents, and 2% live in caravans or within collective shelters such as farms and schools.

Figure 4: No. of women according to current place of residence



Forty percent of women live in owned accommodation, while 36% women live in rented accommodation, and 24% women currently live in free accommodation at camps, schools and collective shelters.

Figure 5: Ownership of the places of residence



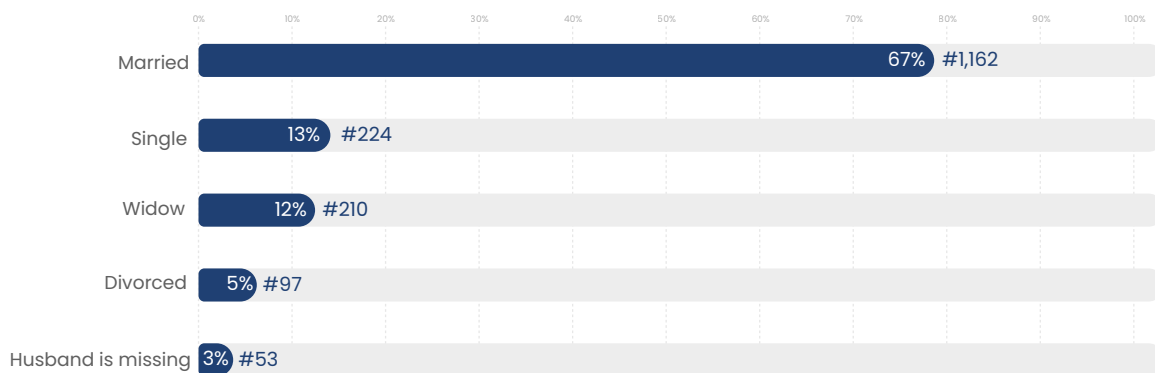
In answering a question about the number of family members living in the same house, it was found that the largest percentage of women 46% live in a dwelling in which 4 to 6 persons live, and that 20% live in a dwelling in which less than 4 persons live, while 34% live in a dwelling in which 7 or more persons live, of whom 6% live in a dwelling in which more than 10 people live. These numbers refer to the huge overcrowding experienced by families in their places of residence in northwest Syria.

Civil status

Finding 3: Early marriage is the norm. 67% of women participants are married, 51% marrying before the age of 18. With 16% of them married before of 16.

The study included the civil status of women within the local communities, where the majority of the participating women 67% were married, and the sample included 13% unmarried women, 12% widows, 5% divorced women and 3% women whose husbands are missing. It is worth noting that a large percentage of widows are those whose husbands were killed as a result of attacks by the Syrian regime and its allies, and most of the women whose husbands are absent, their husbands in fact were subject to enforced or involuntary disappearance by the Syrian regime.

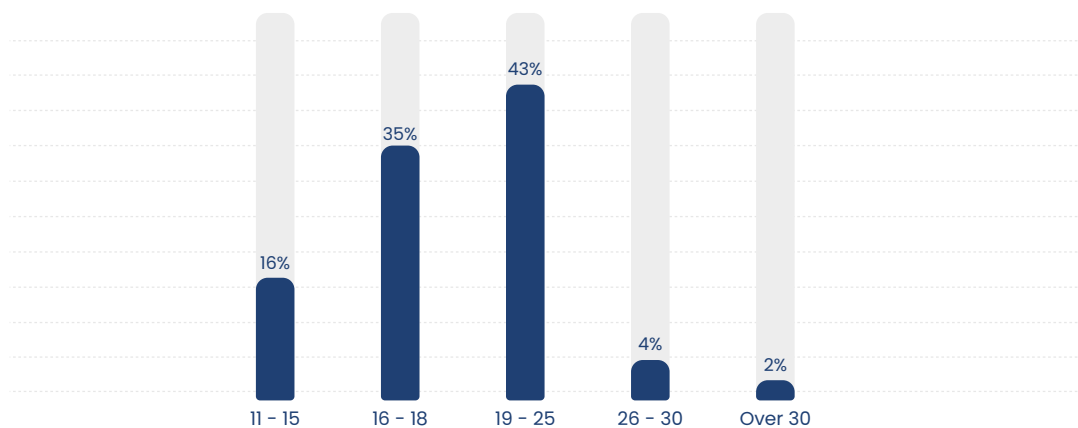
Figure 6: Civil status



Marriage age

The age of marriage for the women included in the study varied, as the percentage of women who got married above the age of 18 was 49%, while 51% of the women got married at 18 or younger, including 16% under 16 years old.

Figure 7: Age at marriage



Legal situation

Finding 4: 19% of respondents had unregistered children

This study analyzed the legal reality of families, as it showed that the marriage of 92% of the participants is legally registered and they have official papers proving the marriage, while the marriage of 8% is not registered, while the percentage of women who have unregistered children is 19% of the total respondents with children.

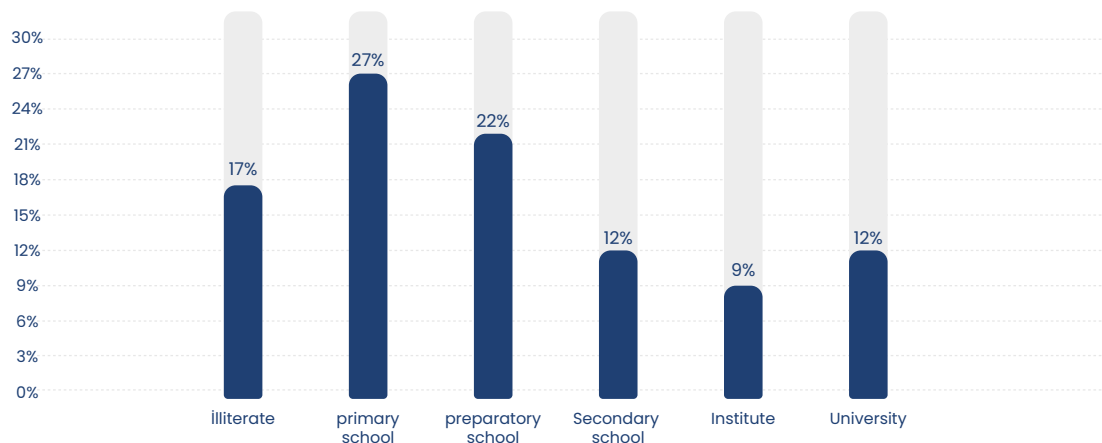
Women's educational reality

Finding 5: Young women have ambitions to learn, with 77% of women under the age of 36 expressing a desire to continue their education. However, they are held back by lack of financial means and the absence of transportation options to educational facilities. Societal and familial views of women's education and by extension the lack of employment opportunities for educated women, also create obstacles.

The right to education is considered a basic human right but many women and girls around the world are deprived of it due to poverty, early marriage, or some economic and social controls based on gender, among other factors.

In a review of the educational reality of the participants, we obtained the following results: The illiteracy rate reached 17% within the assessed sample, while the percentage of educated women reached 83%, with 21% of the participants having obtained higher education (university or institute), and the percentage of those who obtained a secondary certificate was limited to 12%, and the preparatory stage to 22%, while 27% of the participants have finished only the primary stage.

Figure 8: Women's educational level



Several studies have also proven that women's access to education reflects positively on many personal, social, and economic aspects. Education enhances women's capabilities and helps them create an understanding and respectful society ¹.

43% of participating women expressed their desire to continue their education, while 57% of them did not want to continue their education. The percentage of those wishing to continue their education was distributed according to age groups, with the largest percentage of those wishing to learn 77% under the age of 36.

¹ <https://www.right-to-education.org/girlswomen>

In a question asked to the participants about the educational levels they aspire to reach, the results showed that 52% of the women expressed a desire to obtain a university degree, and 16% of the respondents aspire to obtain an intermediate institute certificate, while 22% of them want to obtain the secondary school certificate.

Figure 9: Desire to continue education

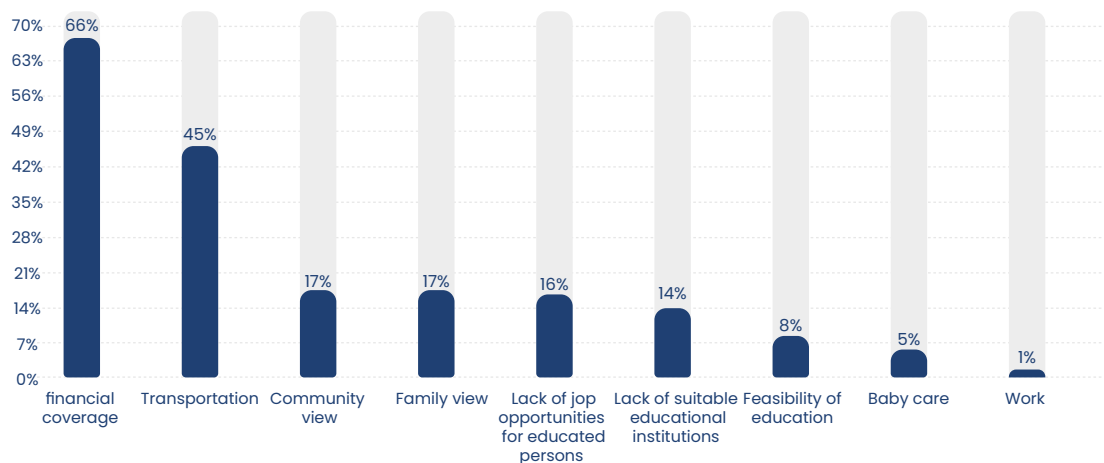


Obstacles to education

There are many difficulties and obstacles that impede women's education in local communities, and this study sought to classify and rank these difficulties according to the opinions of the participants.

Lack of financial resources was the main obstacle for women's education at 66%. Difficulty of movement and the absence of transportation and qualified road networks emerged as a second obstacle in the pursuit of completing education by 45%. Other factors that prevent women from continuing their education in northwest Syria included the society's view, the family view, and the lack of job opportunities for educated women.

Figure 10: Obstacles to continuing education



Children's education

Finding 6: 52% of respondent's children had dropped out of school

The education system in Syria suffers from considerable stress, underfunding, disintegration, and the inability to provide safe, equitable and sustainable services to millions of children.

According to UNICEF, "there are over 2.4 million children out of school, nearly 40 per cent are girls. This number has likely increased in 2020 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic which exacerbated the disruption to education in Syria."²

UNICEF also reported that the number of children who showed symptoms of psychological and social distress doubled in 2020, as continued exposure to violence, intense fear and trauma has a significant impact on children's mental health, with short- and long-term effects.

The results of the study showed that 48% of the children of participating women continue to receive education within the various educational institutions, while the percentage of school dropouts reached 52% of the total children within the families of women responding to this study, which portends an imminent danger to the next generation if a quick solution to the education problem was not found.

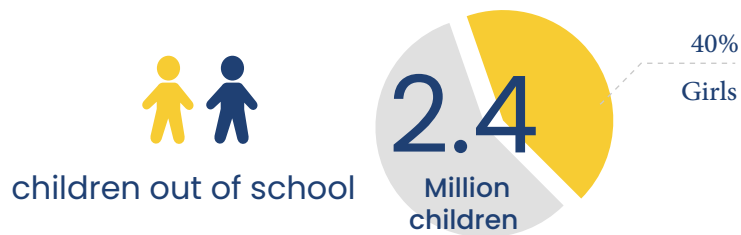
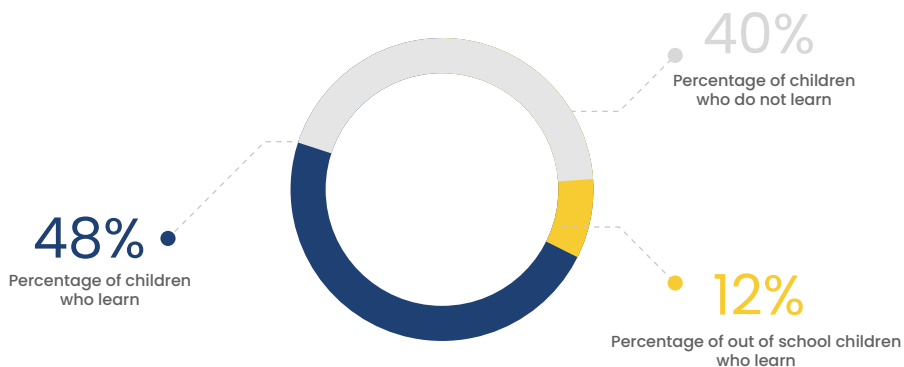


Figure 11: Percentage of children according to educational status



² <https://uni.cf/3wUNati>

Women's work

Finding 7: 71% of women were not employed, despite 58% expressing a desire to work. 38% of non-working women are widows and depend on humanitarian aid and support from their families to survive

International covenants recognize the right of women to work on the basis of full equality with men, as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates in Article 23 that: "Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment."³

Article 6 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states: "The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favorable conditions of work."⁴

Women's work brings many benefits to the society in which they live, as women's economic empowerment contributes to the growth of the society's economy, support its productivity, diversify economy. Women participate in the labor force to improve their standard of living and overcome difficult life conditions.

Women's work also usually improves the financial level and social status of her family, especially when she can achieve a balance between work and family, so most women work to get a fair wage in return for what they accomplish.

Regardless of whether women are forced to work to support their family or are willing to work to empower women's role in society, economic life has witnessed a remarkable growth in women's work and their participation in various areas of life.

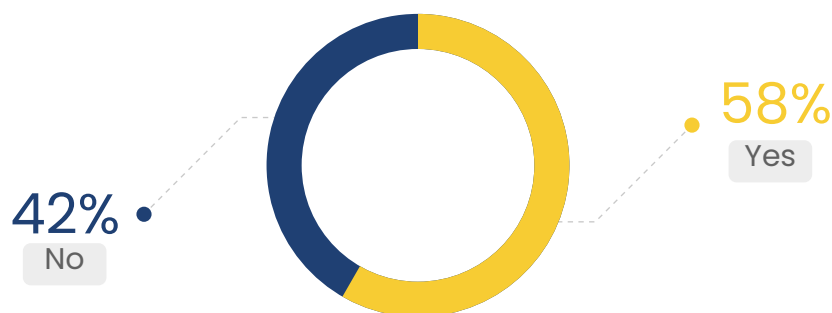
The current deteriorating economic and living reality in northwest Syria reinforces the need for work and family support as one of the solutions through which women seek to improve the reality of their families and society while bravely facing the current conditions and fluctuations.

The results of the study showed that the percentage of working women out of the total participants amounted to 29%, while 71% of women are not employed.

In an analysis of the social situation of non-working women to understand their need for work compared to the availability of job opportunities, the study showed that 6% of them are female heads of household, noting that the largest percentage of them 38% are widows and that the largest proportion of them depend on humanitarian aid and the aid from relatives as a source of income for their families.

In their answer to a question asked to respondents about their desire to work and participation in supporting the family, 58% of women expressed their desire to work, while 42% do not want to work.

Figure 12: Women's desire to work



³ <https://bit.ly/3ty4kLU>

⁴ <https://bit.ly/3DiGsPT>

Obstacles to women's employment

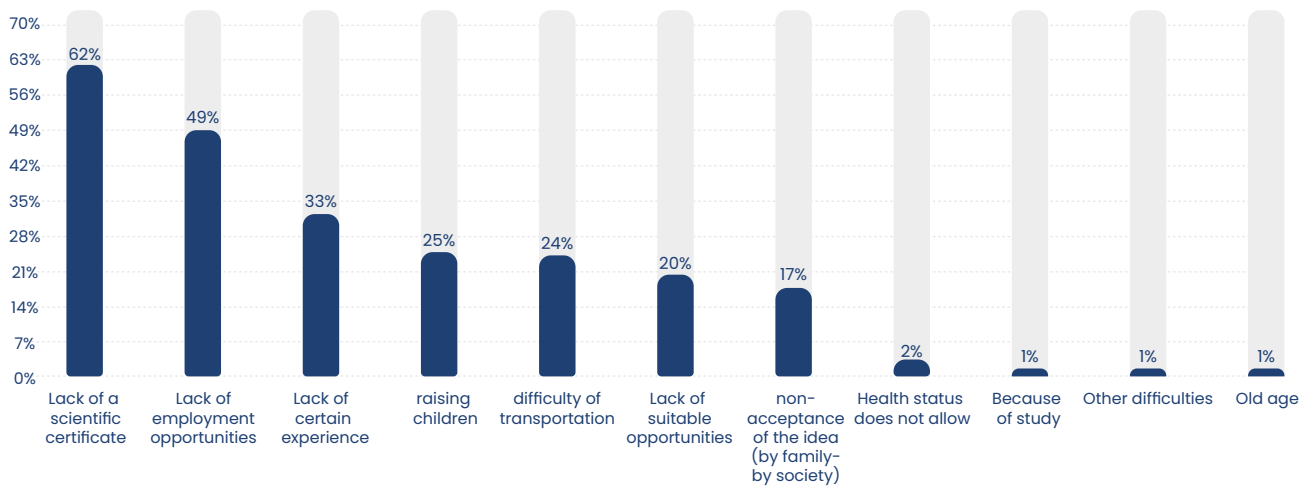
Finding 8: Women who want to work are held back by lack of education, opportunities and experience, as well as the difficulty in balancing family care and the lack of transportation options to places of work

Women face many obstacles that prevent them from joining the labor market and confine them to their homes. Although a percentage of women managed to overcome these difficulties and join the labor market, they still face many challenges based on stereotypes about the personality of women or their social environment. Unsupportive work environment and laws related to women, their rights, and duties also prevent women from working.

One of the biggest difficulties that working women face is that they are expected to reconcile their roles at home and at work.

The results of the study showed the presence of several obstacles to women's access to work, topped by the educational level of the participants and the lack of scientific certificates, and the lack of job opportunities ranked second, while the weakness of technical skills and the necessary experience emerged as another obstacle. Meanwhile, the participants classified in close proportions the following obstacles: family duties, women's preoccupation with raising children, and logistical difficulties related to transportation. Moreover, the social factors represented in the non-acceptance of the idea of women's work by the family or society due to customs, traditions, and the prevailing security and social conditions, also limit the possibility of participation women in the labor market.

Figure 13: Main obstacles to women's access to work



Harassment at work

Finding 9: Just 9% of women reported being victims of harassment at work, with widows and divorcees being most vulnerable

Women have long suffered from social acceptance, harassment, and gender-based discrimination in the workplace which have negatively impacted on their performance at work and affected their professional future and made them vulnerable to stress, psychological disorders, and health problems. Women's exposure to such hardships may affect their relationship with friends, their motivation, and, of course, their success.

This study sought to reveal the extent of the prevalence of discrimination and harassment and their most prominent causes, as the percentage of women who experienced harassment in their workplace was limited to 9%, while 91% of working women answered that they were not subjected to harassment.

Women who have lost their husbands and divorced women were the most vulnerable to harassment, especially women who work daily labor or within private sector.

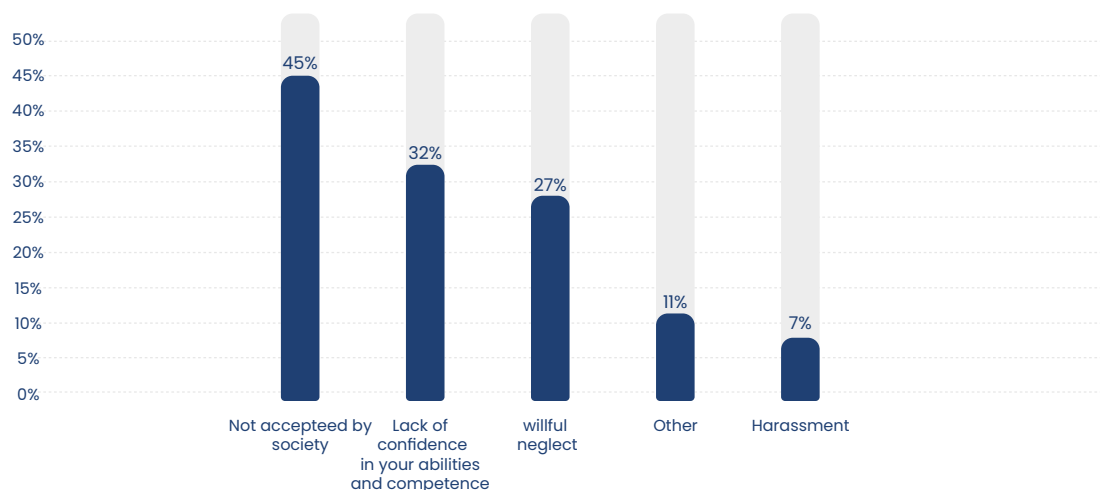
Figure 14: Percentage of women who have been subjected to harassment at work



Finding 10: The most common forms of harassment were a lack of societal acceptance of women in employment (45%), a general mistrust in women's competence and capabilities at work (32%) and deliberate neglect at work by employers and colleagues (27%). Seven percent reported having experienced sexual harassment at work. 17% of women say that this level of harassment has such a negative impact on their work that they are unable to complete their activities.

The women participating in the study indicated that society's lack of acceptance of women's work is one of the most prominent forms of harassment suffered by working women at 45%, while the feeling of mistrust in the capabilities and competence of working women ranked second at 32%, and the deliberate neglect by employers and colleagues at 27%, while sexual harassment ranked last at 7%.

Figure 15: Types of harassment faced by women who experienced harassment



In an attempt to reveal the impact of harassment on the workflow, 65% of the respondents confirmed that harassment has limited effect on their work, while 17% considered that it has a significant impact on their work, even that it prevents them from carrying out their work in certain cases.

Finding 11: Women are aware of their rights related to work and view complaints procedures positively.

67% of the participants expressed their conviction about the possibility of submitting complaints to local authorities regarding harassment, which reflects women's awareness of their rights related to work.

The largest percentage (84 percent) of female respondents indicated that they do not consider submitting a complaint regarding harassment, as a stigma or something defective, but rather as a procedure that must be followed to protect their rights.

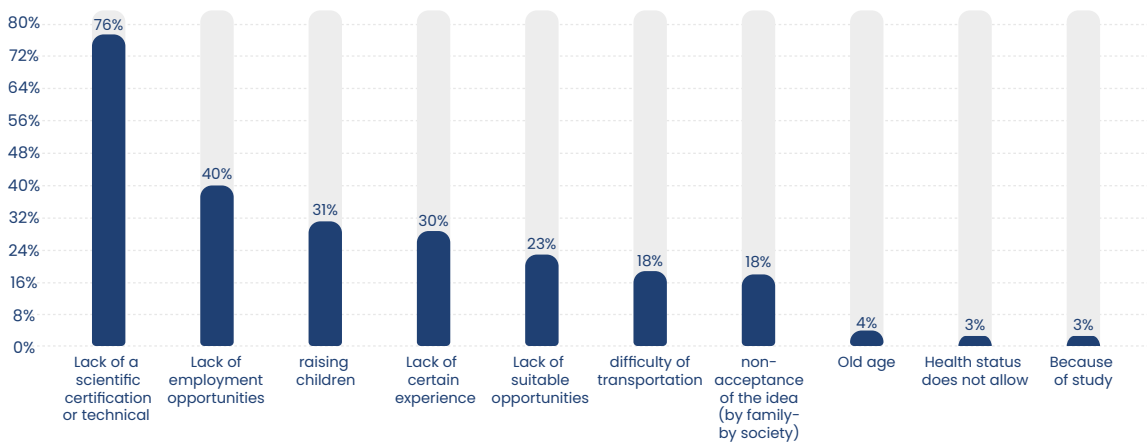
Employment opportunities

Finding 12: 47% of women believe that there are employment opportunities available for them and 60% of these women have taken steps to apply to available opportunities. However, women feel held back from applying by a plethora of reasons. Lack of educational and technical certifications was the most significant, with lack of employment opportunities, the needs of raising children, lack of transportation options and societal views of working women also playing an important role.

Results stated that almost half of the participating women 47% confirmed the availability of employment opportunities that they would like to obtain, while the other respondents do not believe that there are suitable job opportunities. 60% of the women who were convinced of the availability of job opportunities took practical steps and applied to the available job opportunities, while 40% of these women only expressed their desire to work without undertaking any initiative in this regard.

The most prominent obstacles that prevent women from applying for available jobs included the poor educational level and lack of the appropriate certificate. The reasons also included the lack of suitable employment opportunities, their preoccupation with raising children and their lack of certain required experiences, in addition to the difficulty of movement and community and family disapproval of women's work.

Figure 16: The most prominent obstacles that prevent women from applying for available jobs



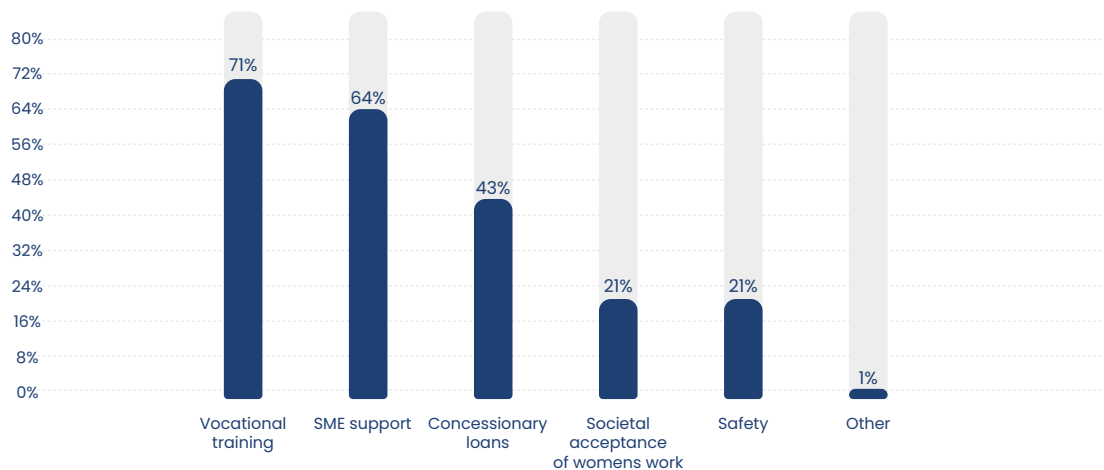
Additional support and skills required to secure employment opportunities

Finding 13: Women want vocational training and support for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, as well as concessorary loans. They also want to see increased acceptance of working women in society and an improved security situation to improve the environment for them to seek employment opportunities.

The study explored the most important needs, circumstances, skills, and types of support required by the participants to help them obtain suitable job opportunities and achieve their aspirations.

The need for vocational training topped women’s priorities due to the lack of needed skills and techniques, followed by the need for SME (financing and support of Small- and Medium-sized-Enterprises) by donors. The priorities also included concessorary loans that support women’s initiatives and projects in northwest Syria. These women also expressed their need to increase awareness and social acceptance of women’s work and to enhance security as most women expressed their fear of the unstable security situation which negatively affects stability and their participation in work activities.

Figure 17: Additional support and skills required by participants to secure better employment opportunities



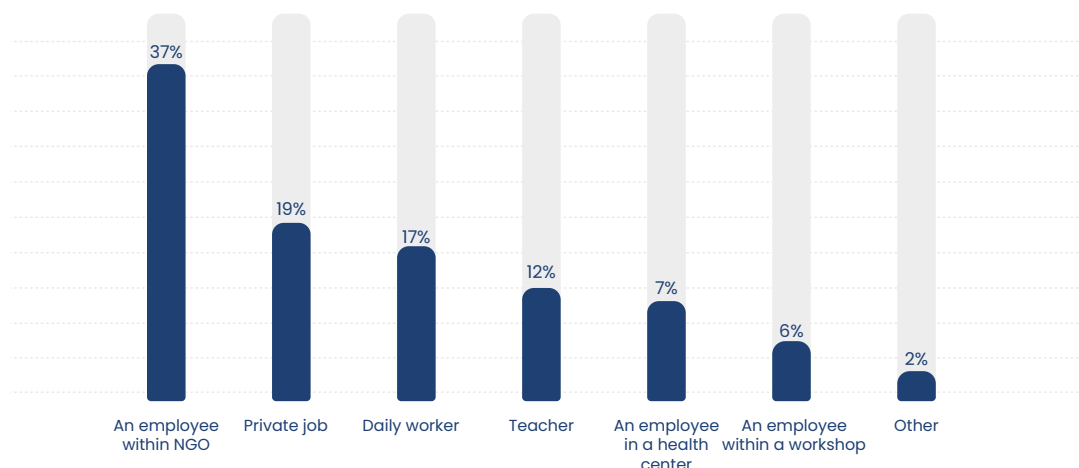
Women's work

Finding 14: Women who work are most frequently on temporary contracts (70%) in professional fields such as within NGOs and the private sector, as well as in education and health. 17% work as daily wage workers.

The fields of work of participating women varied, according to the nature of the area and the available opportunities, which commensurate with their capabilities and skills.

The largest percentage of working women 37% work in the humanitarian field within NGOs and organizations operating in northwest Syria, while 19% of the women work in the private sector and 17% are daily wage workers. 12% of female respondents work in the educational sector, and 7% work in the health sector within health centers.

Figure 18: Surveyed Women's fields of work



As for the nature of work in terms of continuity and job stability, 30% of the total participants occupy permanent jobs, while 70% of them obtained temporary jobs. Noting that most of the jobs in the area are temporary, including work within NGOs, schools, and clinics, as most of them offer temporary contracts for a few months or a year, not to mention the daily temporary work of course.

Figure 19: Temporary or permanent work among participating women



Legal protection for working women

Finding 15: 52% work on formal contracts, mostly with health centers, NGOs and schools.

Most of the participating women expressed their desire to organize and legalize their work within regulations that guarantee their rights and gains, to prevent exploitation and deprivation of their rights and to limit abuses that obstruct their work process. As formal legal contracts of employment are needed to organize and legalize the labor market.

This study results also showed that 52% of women work with formal contracts of employment, while the other 48% work without formal contracts of employment. As the largest proportion of official contracts 83% were organized within organizations and health centers, followed by schools at 67%.

Family income

Finding 16: 72% of families require double their current income in order to cover their expenses. Less than half (41%) have access to additional forms of income, such as humanitarian aid, support from family members or agricultural work.

The working woman has become a strong supporter for the husband in bearing part of the family's budget, since the new requirements of the family sometimes exceed the income of the man. Women have proved their competence and ability and occupied the highest positions. The coronavirus has also proved the society's need for women's work, especially in the fields of education and health. As the opportunities, and challenges of financial management in the family are affected by the status of working women.

Family income-to-needs

Study results showed that 72% of the total families of the participating working women suffer from a family budget deficit, while the income of only 28% of the families could cover their family expenses.

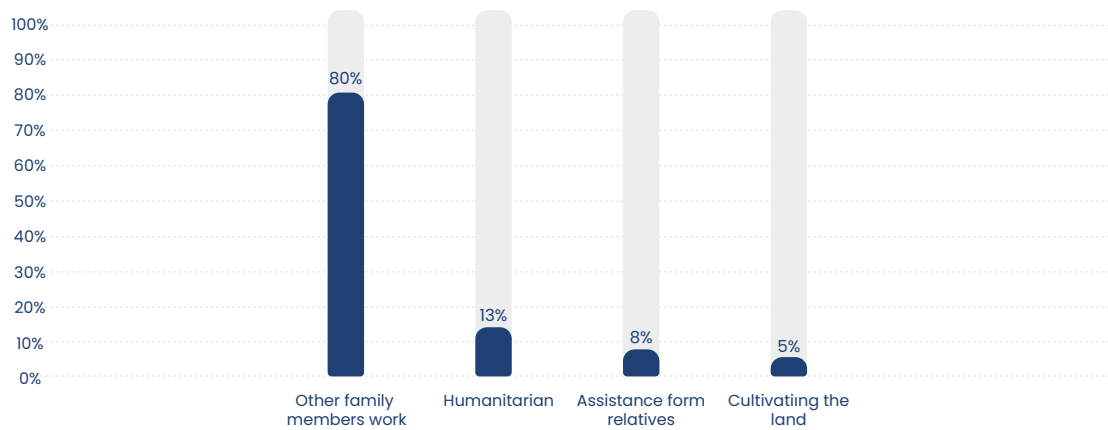
Figure 20: Family income-to-needs among participating women



A question about the percentage of the financial deficit of family income showed that the deficit amounted to 49% of the total income, which means that the families of working women need nearly double their current income to cover their family expenses.

The additional sources of income for the families of working women varied. The study aimed to form a clear picture of the extent to which the family's income corresponds to its needs. The results showed that 41% of working women's families had additional income, while 59% do not have any additional income. The work of another family member or other family members topped the sources of additional income that included humanitarian aid, aid from relatives, and agriculture working.

Figure 21: Additional sources of income for the families of working women

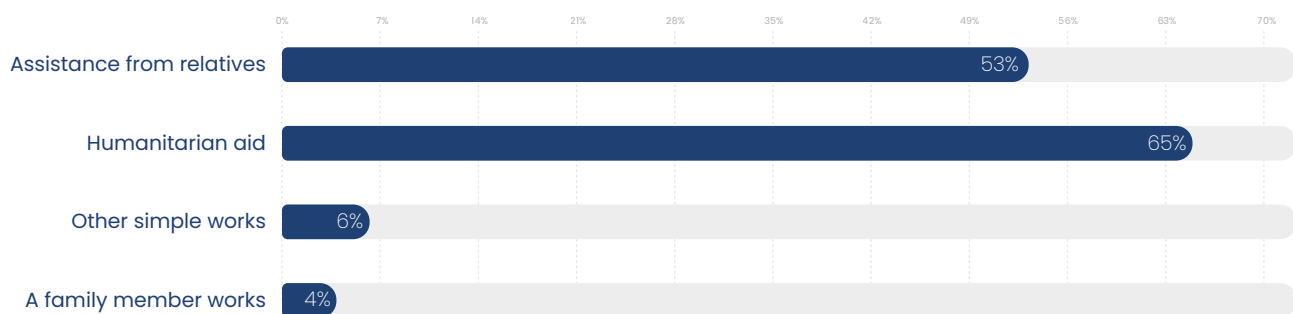


Sources of income for non-working female breadwinners

Finding 17: The most important form of income for non-working women breadwinners is humanitarian aid

Many Syrian families have lost their breadwinners in the last ten years, which made the burden of spending falls on the shoulders of women who took the role of breadwinners for their families and began to face many difficulties in the fields of work. Despite this, some women were unable to work for many circumstances. As the results of the study showed that the most important source of income for the non-working female breadwinners is humanitarian aid, followed by aid from relatives. The sources of income also included simple work and the work of a family member. Therefore, special attention should be paid to providing training and employment opportunities for the non-working breadwinners.

Figure 22: Income sources for non-working female breadwinners



Individuals with special needs within the families of the participating women

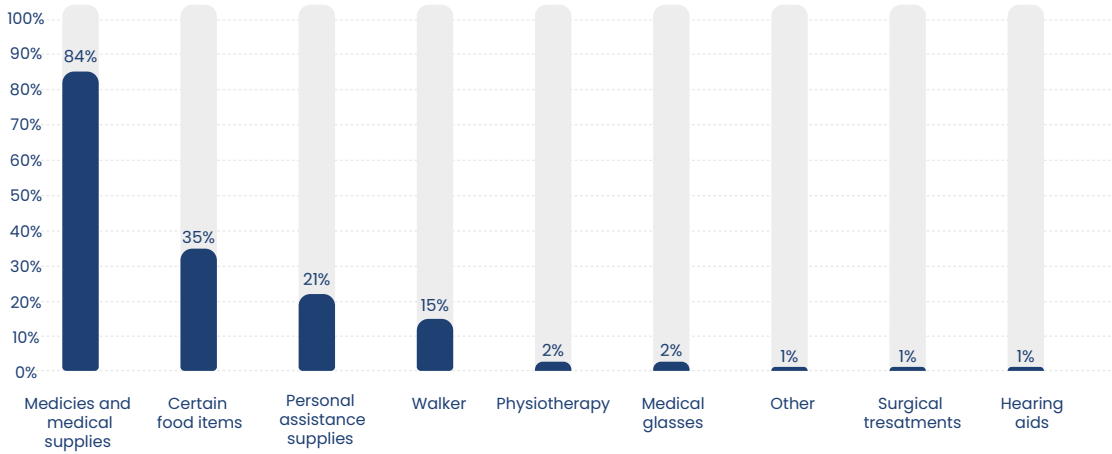
Finding 18: 12% of respondents indicated that there was a person with disabilities in their family and the vast majority (75%) did not receive any assistance from humanitarian organizations. Those who do receive humanitarian assistance report that it is sporadic and not well adapted to their needs.

Reports indicate high rates of disability in some parts of Syria, according to the World Health Organization (WHO): As the conflict drags on, the number of people with injuries and disabilities continues to grow. In some parts of the country, rates of disability have reportedly risen to up to 30% of the population - double the global average.⁵

Study results indicated the presence of individuals with special needs among 12% of the families of women surveyed. These figures reflect the increase in the percentage of people with special needs due to the hostilities by the Syrian regime and its allies. Knowing that 12% of the women confirmed the presence of more than a person with special needs within the family among the total families that include people with special needs. It is worth noting that 64% of women who have people with special needs confirmed their desire to work.

The study also surveyed the needs of individuals with special needs within the families of the women included in the study, where medicines and medical materials topped the needs of individuals with special needs. Other needs included certain food items and personal supplies such as wheelchairs and walkers.

Figure 23: Top needs of individuals with special needs within the families of participating women



⁵ <https://www.who.int/ar/news-room/feature-stories/detail/how-does-who-work-amidst-conflict>

The results of the study also showed that 75% of individuals with special needs do not receive assistance from non-governmental organizations, while only 25% of them receive assistance, and most of the participating women whose relatives receive the assistance stated that this scarce assistance is less than needed because it is not systematic at all and not useful to the beneficiaries.

Figure 24: Evaluating assistance of individuals with special needs according to regularity

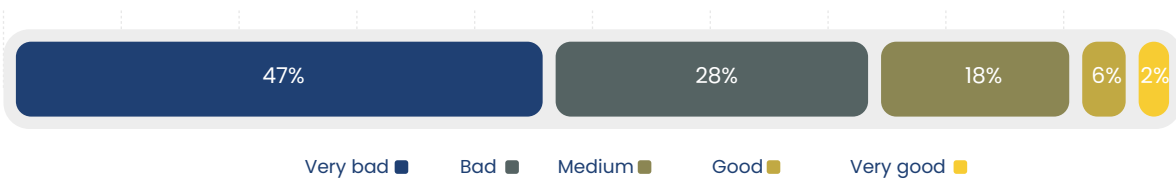
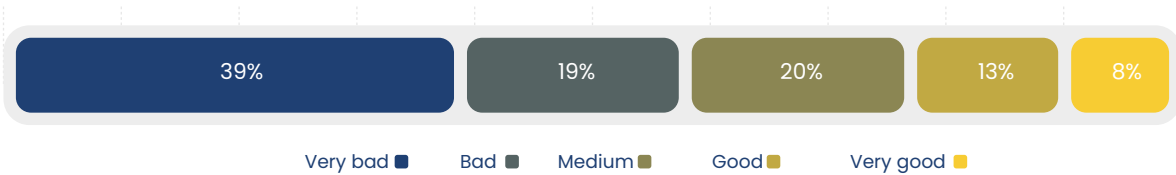


Figure 25: Evaluating assistance of individuals with special needs according to benefit

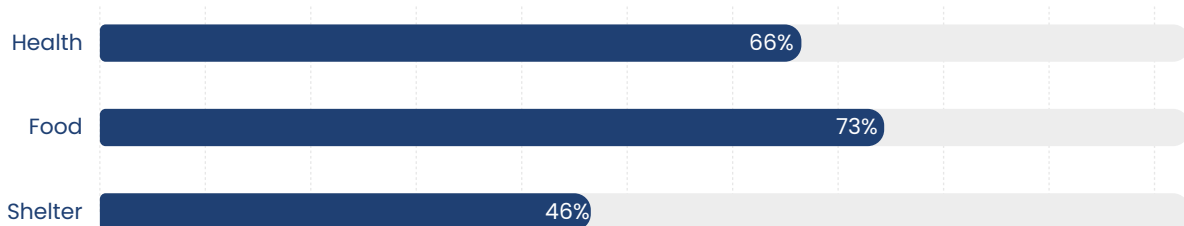


Family needs according to the priorities identified by the participants

Finding 19: The basic needs of families in the northwest are not being met by current assistance or local supply.

The food needs ranked first among family needs, followed by the health, and then shelter and accompanying supplies.

Figure 26: Top family needs according to the priorities identified by the participants



Family's nutritional needs:

The main nutritional needs of families were as follows:

providing basic foodstuffs at reasonable prices and providing food baskets and suitable drinking water.

Shelter needs:

The percentage of displaced people in most areas of northwest Syria exceeds half of the total number of residents within these areas, which reflects the crisis and the current population density within these areas, and thus it increases the needs within the shelter sector.

The need for adequate housing emerged as the most important need for women participating in the shelter sector, while the need to secure basic needs within housing ranked second.

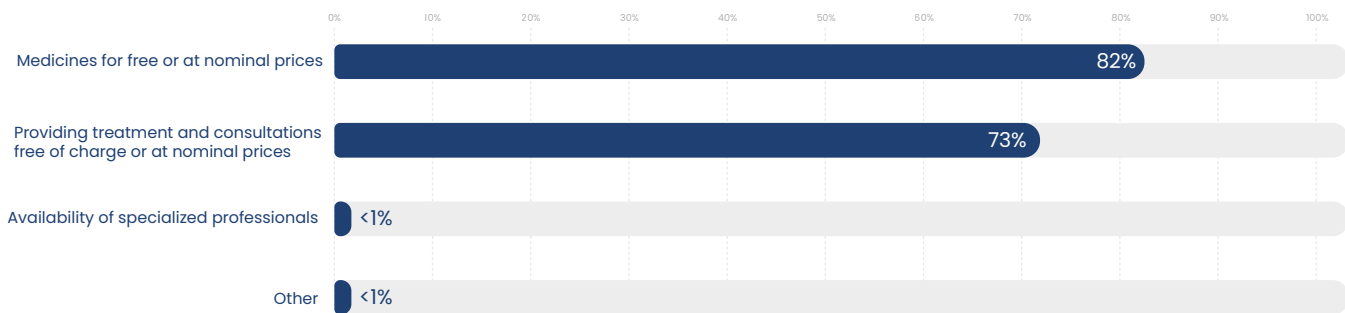
Health care needs:

The health sector has witnessed a significant decline in the field of health services, health facilities and specialized health centers in recent years, considering the deliberate targeting and destroying of civilian infrastructure in general and the health facilities by the Syrian regime and its allies.

In an attempt to identify the most prominent needs of the women participating in this field, the following needs were identified as the most important topics:

- Providing free or subsidized medicines.
- Providing free treatment and appropriate health services.
- Addressing the shortage of specialized health cadres.

Figure 27: Top needs in health sector according to participants

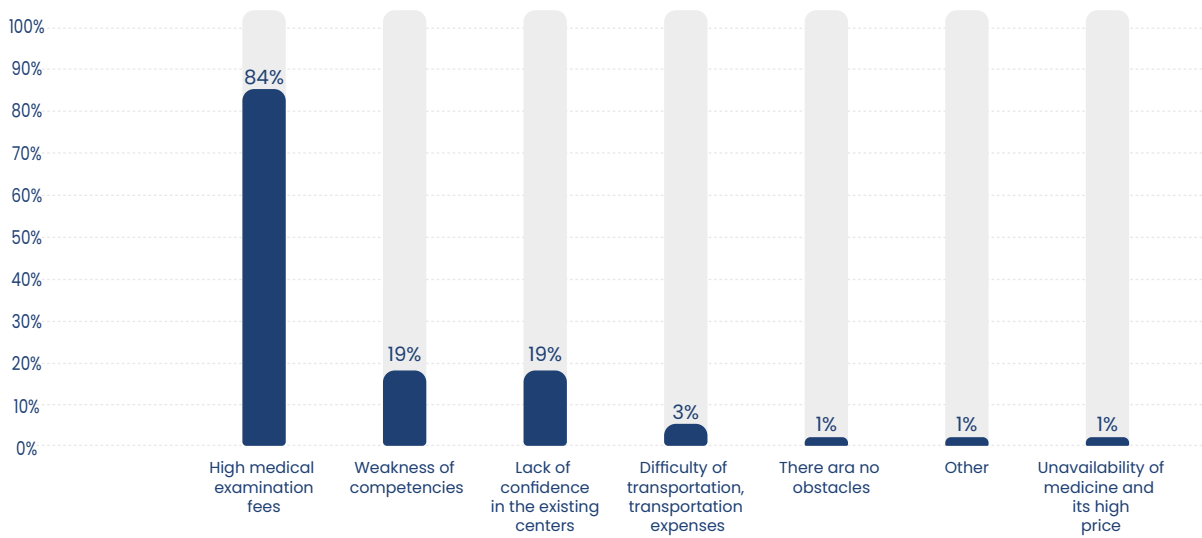


Addressing a question about the possibility of the participants' access to the medical points and health centers within their areas, the participants confirmed that 73% of them can reach the health centers, while 27% of them cannot reach these centers easily, and the difficulty of movement, distances, and the lack of suitable means of transportation were the most important difficulties. that impede women's access to health centers.

Obstacles that hinder women's access to health care

The main obstacles that impede the access of participating women and their families to appropriate health care and services included the high medical examination fees that do not commensurate with the level of per capita income in northwest Syria. Other obstacles also included low competence of health personnel and available health facilities in general.

Figure 28: Obstacles that hinder women's access to health care



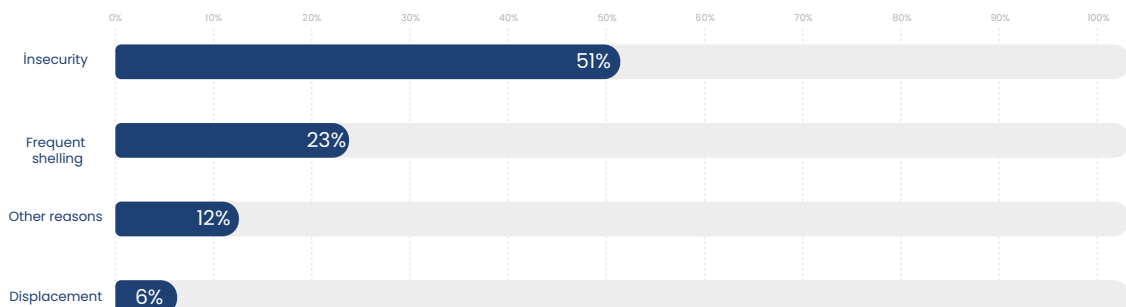
The results of the study also showed that 83% of women can access medical care before and after childbirth easily, while 17% of women cannot access it.

Feeling safety among participants

Finding 20: Most (84%) women feel safe in general daily life and when moving. Those who do not feel safe have concerns over insecurity, shelling and displacement, among other reasons

The study showed that 84% of women expressed their feeling of safety in general and safety while moving while 16% of women expressed that they do not feel safe neither in general nor while moving. The most prominent security concerns of the participants who did not feel safe were the bad security situation and the repeated military attacks on their areas.

Figure 29: Reasons of feeling insecure among participants



Women and Family Centres

Finding 21: women viewed the White Helmets Women and Family Centres positively

This study reviewed the reality of the Women and Family Centers affiliated with the Syria Civil Defense (White Helmets) from the participants' point of view and their evaluation of these centers in terms of their spread and services and the most prominent services and needs that they aspire to be provided within these centers.

The largest proportion of female respondents confirmed their access to Women and Family Centers run by White Helmets volunteers, which reflects the good geographical spread of these centers, and most responders expressed their satisfaction with their experience in these centers.

Figure 30: Easy access to Women and Family Centers

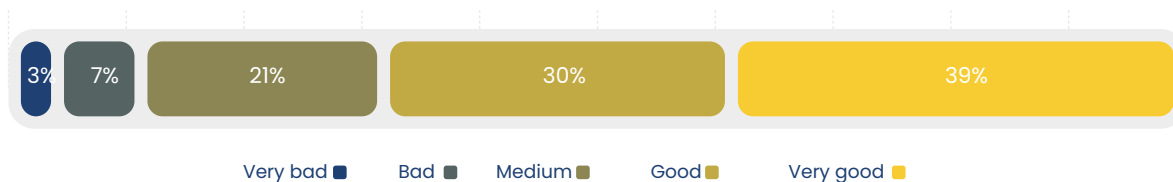
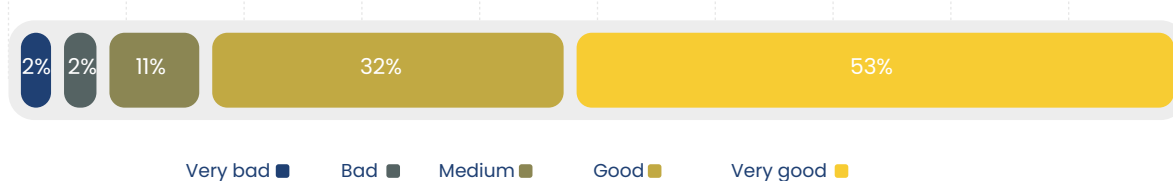


Figure 31: Evaluation of Women and Family Centers

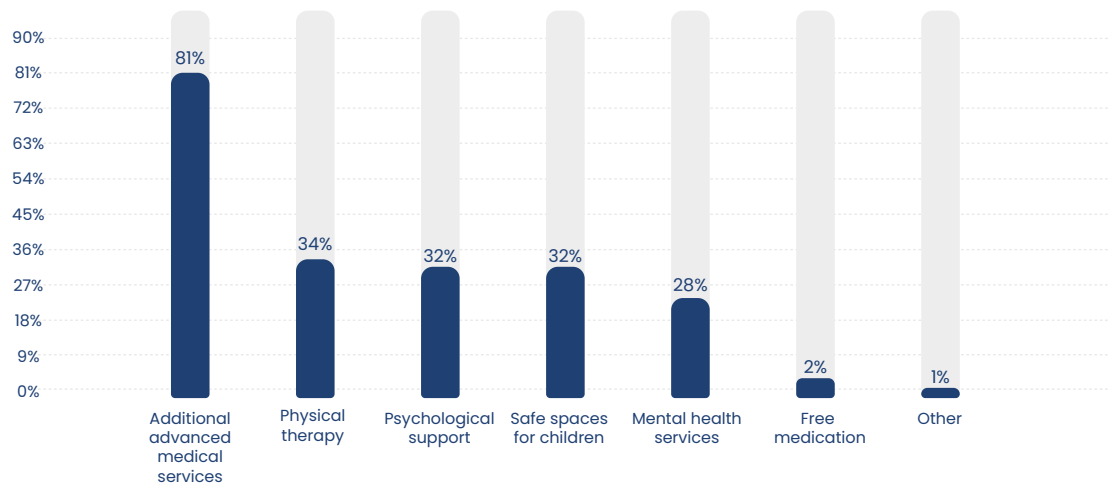


Additional services that the participants wish to be provided within the Women and Family Centers

Finding 22: Women need additional, advanced medical, psychological and social services.

The participating women expressed their desire that Women and Family Centers provide additional services. Advanced medical services topped these aspirations with 81% of the total of the participants. Other additional services also included physical therapy, psychological support, mental health services and safe spaces for children.

Figure 32: Additional services required by participants at Women and Family Centers



Likewise, 90% of the participants expressed their desire that these centers provide advanced vocational training and qualification programs concerned with raising the skills and competency of women in northwest Syria, which contributes to their participation in the economic life cycle in their society.

Conclusion

The findings of this survey paint a distressing picture of the status of women in northwest Syria today. This survey reveals many of the coping mechanisms of women and families facing difficulties in meeting basic needs and the scale of the problem. The rate of child marriage is well above global averages. The vast majority of women live with six or more people, indicating the systemic overcrowding in homes in the area. More than half of the children of the respondents were no longer in school, putting the aspirations of the next generation of Syrians on hold.

Within this context, however, women demonstrate a great desire to continue education, to work and to undertake vocational training. Two thirds of women under 36 want to continue their education and more than half of respondents indicated a desire to work. However, there are a wide range of financial, societal and physical obstacles that prevent women from taking this ambition forward.

The need to work has become ever more important due to the inability of families to meet their basic needs. Families require double their current income to cover their expenses for food, medical care and shelter. Less than half have access to additional income, including to humanitarian aid. Single women – including widows, divorcees and women whose husbands are missing – rely the most on humanitarian aid and support from other family members.

The needs of people with disabilities are severely underfunded and underprogrammed. The utility and effectiveness of available support is not well adapted and what care is provided to around one third of people in need is sporadic.

In all, this survey's findings chime with the key messages of Syrian civil society organisations and the United Nations in concluding that the level of assistance to northwest Syria is not adequate to meet the mounting needs.

Recommendations

- 01 All states must work towards a sustainable political solution and the implementation of UN Resolution 2254 to create an environment in which women, men and children can live with dignity and have access to essential supplies and services to meet basic needs and fundamental human rights. Only then will the population of the northwest have the opportunity to reach their potential and guarantee the future for the next generations.
- 02 Donors should support local organisations to invest in the rehabilitation of basic transport infrastructure through early recovery projects.
- 03 Donors and international NGOs should include support for vocational training for women in funding and programmes.
- 04 Donors should increase specific funding for organisations providing support to people with disabilities and ensure programs are aligned with needs and sustainable.
- 05 Special attention should be paid to providing training and employment opportunities for the non-working female breadwinners.



Syria Civil Defence

The challenges faced by women in northwest Syria



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