

# FACTSHEET HIDDEN, OVERLOOKED AND AT RISK: THE ROLE OF GENDER, AGE AND DISABILITY IN SYRIA



SYRIA RESILIENCE  
CONSORTIUM

## SYRIA CRISIS

People in need of assistance: 11.7 million



“In our society, men often don’t accept women working for pay. **If you have a disability, like me, it is even harder.** Women earn less than men and are also responsible for raising children and household chores. **As a woman I think it is important that we do not hide from society.** I really want people to change their idea and perspective on how they think about women and people with disabilities.”

Amira (name changed), 33

## SRC’S RESEARCH (Whole of Syria)

- 1,282 surveys
- 54 focus group discussions
- 45 key informant interviews
- 20 in-depth interviews
- In 9 governorates

## SURVEYED HOUSEHOLDS

- 24% are persons with disabilities
- 29% younger than 18 and 30% older than 55
- 59 % are female
- 17 % female-headed households

## KEY FINDINGS



[www.syriaresilienceconsortium.org](http://www.syriaresilienceconsortium.org)



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# WOMEN & GIRLS: NEW ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

**Women and girls are experiencing a change in their traditional role.** Since the beginning of the war, it has become more common for multiple family members to work, as living costs have increased and wages are low. As a consequence, **women are more visible as workers outside their home.** At the same time, many girls have to **drop out of school to take on greater household responsibilities.** Changes in roles are most significant in households where men are no longer present. Females across the generations are increasingly exposed to gender-based violence.

## TRADITIONAL ROLES

Before the Syria crisis, girls were expected to finish their education and then get married. They were supposed to show “good morals” and “obey their parents”.

## NEW ROLES

- Greater household responsibilities, especially when mothers work outside the house;
- Increasingly help take care of younger siblings.

## THREATS

- Lack of education;
- 20% of surveyed families have at least one daughter married before 18;
- Deterioration of psychological wellbeing.

Women were traditionally expected to take care of the children and the housework. They should “educate the next generation” and teach “community manners and morals”.

- ¼ women provide for their families financially;
- More visible in workspace;
- More likely to contribute to decision-making.

- Double burden of work and household;
- Women with disabilities most marginalized;
- “Traditions” and “customs” still key barriers.

Women older than 55 years traditionally took care of the grandchildren and helped around the house.

- Study did not identify distinct new roles;
- Opportunity to capitalize on traditional roles to balance household labor and increase skills transfer.

- Older women with disabilities are most likely to be verbally or physically abused.

# KEY COPING STRATEGIES



Myriad coping strategies are used by community members to reduce stress and tensions. Of the following most common activities, **50%** report using these more frequently than before the conflict.

## Praying

Especially older men and women and those with functional difficulties resort to their faith to deal with hardships.

## Quality time with family and friends

Particularly male youth and adults seek company and value speaking with someone they trust to manage their stress.

## Avoiding social time with others

Especially women (all age groups) and persons with disabilities choose not to speak with others and rather be alone, often because of limited support networks.



# MAIN CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN, GIRLS, BOYS AND MEN

## NO LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES



All family members feel some pressure to contribute financially to help their families. However, work and training opportunities are limited and many people face barriers working outside their communities.

Especially young people lack the necessary education and livelihood skills to find a suitable job. At the same time, **69% of young men aged 15-17 report having to work to contribute financially to the household.**

## LACK OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



Opportunities to influence community decisions or engage in public discussions are extremely limited for all, but in particular women, youth and persons with disabilities.

Only **8%** confirmed that they were able to influence local decision-makers such as elected officials.

Those with intellectual or cognitive disabilities are almost completely invisible in the public sphere.

## RETIREMENT? IMPOSSIBLE!



Older men – even those with disabilities – are still expected to work and provide for their families.

Many of them are well past the ages they were previously able to retire.

## HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES



Women and girls carry an unfair share of the burden for caregiving and household chores. Girls often have to drop out of school to help with the housework, especially if their mothers have to earn an income.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING



The conflict and changes in individual roles have increased levels of **stress, tension, and anxiety**. People across gender and age groups feel burdened and powerless, carry increased responsibilities and feel hopeless.

## STIGMA



Persons with disabilities face discrimination and strong stigma from community members, all while still needing to contribute to household needs. Especially women face isolation. Few workspaces are adapted to their specific needs.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## The SRC and other humanitarian response actors should ...

- Pair economic and livelihood activities with interventions aiming to increase equitable decision making in the home;
- Increase the provision of psychosocial support services;
- Better address the needs of older people, women, and people with disabilities, and better utilize their specific abilities and knowledge;
- Promote inclusive local governance by facilitating communication between local leaders and their constituents through outreach activities;
- Expand existing community engagement campaigns to promote inclusion, and ensure people with disabilities are sufficiently represented, including sharing positive stories.
- Facilitate and reinforce the consistent collection and analysis of sex and age disaggregated data, emphasizing better reporting on age. This should also apply to UN agencies and coordinating bodies.
- Focus on youth empowerment programs that meet both educational and social support needs.

## Donor agencies should ...

- Increase funding for programs aiming to support marginalized groups such as older women with disabilities or youth of school age who are instead working;
- Support the creation of a standardized marker for disabilities and ensure that funding of livelihood programs accounts for childcare and educational needs, to better increase women's participation and reduce burden for girls;

**The SRC, humanitarian response actors, and donors should** increase support for resilience programming that goes beyond traditional economic interventions towards the wellbeing of the community as a whole. This should incorporate analysis of interpersonal dynamics and ensure marginalized community members not only benefit from, but also drive resilience interventions.

**The SRC should** embed this study's approaches in its regular assessment and analysis practices. This will enable both consortium members and the wider humanitarian community to better measure social norm changes and track the impact of adapted assistance models to meet gender, age and disability needs.



“Both of my legs were amputated. My life is different from others, but this is my reality now and I have to face it. At the beginning, people used to look at me with pity, but after all my hard work many see me as a role model. **People with disabilities should not underestimate their capacities** and abilities, they can accomplish anything they set their mind to. Even the decision makers now listen to what I have to say.”

*Omar (not his real name), 34, lost is to a wheel chair after an accident ten years ago. When the war started, his brothers fled the country, leaving Omar and his father behind. In the beginning, they struggled, but then Omar started helping his father in his book shop, making it a successful business.*



**FOR ANY QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS OR FEEDBACK, PLEASE CONTACT:**  
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