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ANNUAL REPORT 2017

Foreword

Dear friends and supporters,

I am glad to present to you the annual report for 2017.

Women Now celebrated half a decade since its foundation as an organisation and we are very proud to see what we have been able to achieve in these 5 years.

We have reached thousands of women with our work, brought more Syrian female voices to the forefront and have shaped the conversation on Syria with regard to gender and women's roles.

We faced a multitude of challenges in 2017: the ongoing war and violence, the lack of safe spaces for women and girls, the inability of the international community to move the conflict to a sustainable peace. But in the face of these challenges, we continue our commitment to the communities we work for and with.

We look back on a year that saw our programs grow, more women involved in our centers and other projects, and new ideas being born, like the Families for Freedom, the Syrian Women's Justice Network for Syrian Women. I would like to thank all of you for the continued support and solidarity.

Dr. Maria Al Abdeh Executive Director of Women Now for Development



Our Fight for Women's Rights

Our fight for women's rights:

- Defines women as changemakers, not victims.
- Is integral to the fight for peace & democracy.
- Recognizes that inclusion of men & of the youth is essential.
- Is built on a needs- and rights-based approach.
- Is a wide-ranging, multi-layered and gradual process.



Theory of Change

- We recognise that Syrian women, during this time of war crisis in the region, have the potential to be dynamic agents of change.
- They are brave, resilient, and can rebuild harmony and prosperity back into a society ravaged by extremism and violent militarization.
- Our programs unleash their potential by investing in their education, economic empowerment, civic participation and leadership, and social & cultural awareness.



Our vision for Syrian society is one in which human rights, freedom, and justice are secured to all, Syrian women and men play equally meaningful roles in political, social, and economic lives, and children are protected from all harm as they grow up in a peaceful, inclusive society.

Our mission is to initiate programs that empower and protect Syrian women and children across socioeconomic backgrounds. We strive to amplify women's political voices and their role in building a peaceful Syria anew-Syria that safeguards equal rights for all citizens.



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Created for Syrian women by Syrian women.

Women Now empowers Syrian women economically, politically, socially, and intellectually so that they can spearhead the creation of peace and prosperity. PMEN

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Protectio

Participati

Cultivating self-reliance in conflict areas means equipping women with the tools they need to express themselves freely, to defend their rights, and to exercise agency.

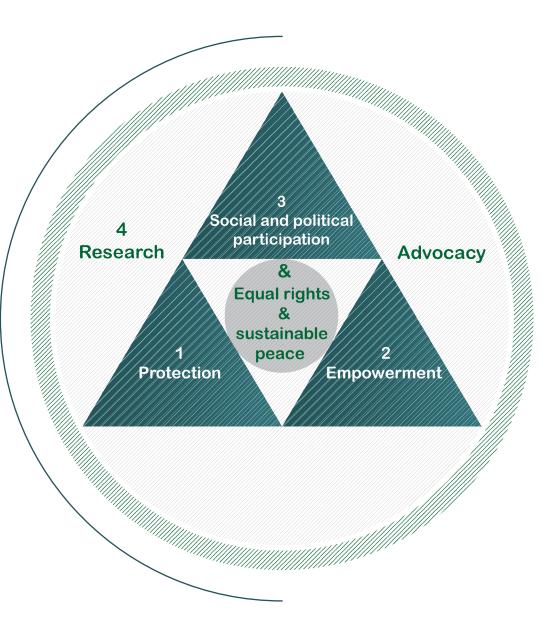
A stable and peaceful future for women involves creating an organized social and political movement, one which is vital to the peace building process and putting an end to war conflict and crisis.

In the long run, this process will build a new, brighter future for Syria where freedom and human rights are recognized as invaluable and inalienable for all. **1. PROTECTION:** Protect women who have survived war and its accompanying gender-based violence (rape, child marriage, domestic violence, etc); ensuring safe spaces for building resilience and psychologial support.

2. EMPOWERMENT: Fight illiteracy amongst Syrian women of all ages; educate them socially and culturally; train them professionally and enable their financial independence; increase employment and entrepreneurial opportunities available to them.

3. PARTICIPATION: Strengthen the social and political participation, representation, and influence of Syrian women locally and internationally in accordance with UNSCR 1325; include their voices in the peacebuilding process.

4. RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY: Document experiences and conduct in-depth qualitative and quantitative research and analysis; raise awareness about Syrian women's conditions and their tireless efforts, about broader issues pertaining to women's rights, women-led activist movements, feminist civil society initiatives.





Programs & Activities

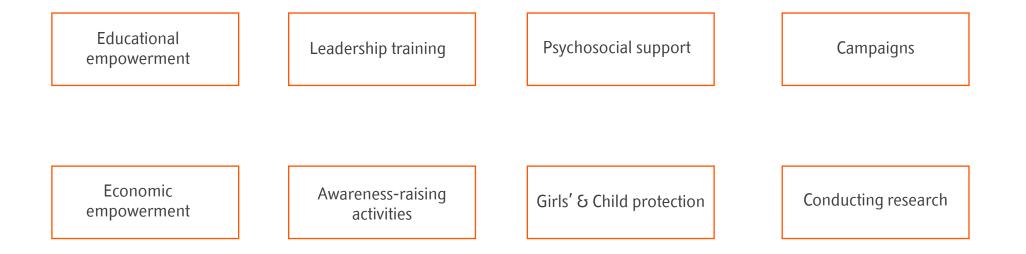
The curricula of our programs and activities have been designed to meet the diverse needs of women on several levels, no matter their nationality or religious background.











Educational Empowerment

Because of conditions of war and gender discrimination, many women and girls in Syria have been denied education.

Female illiteracy is widespread and is augmented by displacement, destruction of school buildings, absence of schooling centres in refugee camps, and gender-based violence, which is aggravated during times of conflict.

Educational empowerment is one of our pivotal programs - gateway to several others.

We believe that without knowledge of the alphabet or of basic modern-day skills, without awareness of vital issues that are simultaneously political and personal, a woman cannot truly be empowered.

Academic success. International connectedness Better knowledge of events that influence their welfare. Growing skills and knowledge necessary to influence civic life. Greater self- confidence. Autonomous & sustainable futures.

As part of the program, we organised the following: Courses to educate women & girls in local and foreign languages - <u>Arabic, English, French.</u> Classes in mathematics, IT application, and technology relevant

to everyday use.

Small libraries within centres.

Employment:

At our centres, we provide capacity building opportunities to women so that they can actualise their potential to create, to innovate, and to support themselves and their families. We offered them trainings in the following fields:

- Making handicraft items, and activities such as sewing, embroidery, knitting, and crochet.
- Hairdressing.
- Nursing and first-aid.

• Navigating computer applications including digital accounting softwares, Photoshop, and various applications in Microsoft Office. Many women obtain the globally-recognised International Computer Driving License.

Economic independence of Syrian women continues to grow.

Less as a deliberate choice and more as the inevitable consequence of the arbitrary arrest, detention, and killing of men.

This makes these women sole financial provider for their families while staying the primary caregiver.

Women Now is here to support these women as they tread into this unchartered territory during volatile times.

- Capacity building of the community.
- Women's financial independence.
- Economic prosperity of families.

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Capacity building of the community Women's financial independence Economic prosperity of families

Leadership Training

The fear, violence, and oppression brought by the long-drawn war stifled Syrian women's voices. Women's participation in civic affairs was thwarted, their role in society was diminished to fit rigid patriarchal mandates. All sense of agency was extorted from them. However, these women's resilience endures, unyielding, surmounting all odds. Women Now has been here to support them in their endeavours to reclaiming their personhood and to recreating national identity.



Amplification of women's voices in civic and political life Strong involvement of women in building post-war community Robust women-led civil councils leading way to a more just future

Psychosocial support:

We believe that a positive state of women's mental health is indispensable to attaining peace, growth, and unity at a communal leve. Our psychosocial support program caters to needs of several women with markedly different lived experiences and aspirations. We provided:

- One-on-one therapy sessions and group counselling
- Workshops to explore ways of better managing stress and resolving interpersonal conflict
- Sessions wherein families with fraught relations discuss tensions and learn effective methods of communicating and parenting
- Discussions wherein women are encouraged to be self-confident and assertive

Leadership Development:

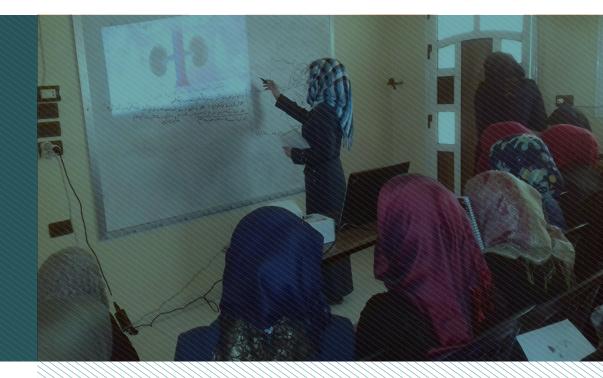
Women Now continued to be a platform for dynamic, motivated women to meet, speak freely, network, and find resources. We designed and organised our Leadership Program wherein we regularly organised:

- Workshops where women practiced communication and negotiation skills, decision making, team-management, lobbying, negotiation, and advocacy
- Workshops on international law, human rights, and citizenship policies
- Opportunities for women to help in local councils and advocacy campaigns for their communities

Awareness-Raising Activities

The war has had devastating impacts on various facets of life. Violence rises, human rights and dignity continue being abused. Inevitably, circumstances are more grim for women. Perhaps the most terrifying and disheartening truth is the normalisation of and resignation to this state of widespread oppression and injustice.

Women Now is here to support these women as they tread into this unchartered territory during volatile times.



Enabling awareness of simultaneously-personal and -political issues Facilitation of knowledge and motivation to actualise change Eradication of submission to systemic injustice

Awareness Raising Activities

Our centers held activities to raise awareness around crucial issues, foster action, and eliminate apathy. We initiated conversations around topics that deeply impact women's experiences and yet are shunned as taboo. We organised:

- Lectures on health issues, especially sensitive subjects surrounding sexual and reproductive health, breast cancer, pregnancies
- Discussions on gender-based violence (GBV), violence against children, children's rights, and early marriage
- Discussions on marital relations, tensions, and positive parenting skills
- Conversations on women's roles under circumstances of armed conflict
- Film-screenings and book circles to foster dialogue on political and personal issues

Girls' and Child Protection

We worked closely with the children on their emotional and intellectual growth and skill development by providing:

- Arabic, Math, English, and other classes to supplement, or in some cases, deliver school education
- Psychosocial support activities for children where develop stress management skills and strong self confidence
- Recreational activities where students explore arts and crafts, music, theatre
- A mobile library where children can continue language learning beyond the classroom
- Social peace workshops with discussion on current political affairs and the way of peace forward
- A crèche, a safe area where young children can stay as their mothers work or participate in Women Now programs

Psychosocial Support

Syrian women have endured acute psychological trauma. Circumstances have been harsh - some have had to flee from their country, others have been internally displaced, while others have had to stay in their homes, now under extreme military vigilance, with former physical and social environments destroyed. They have lost loved ones, survived bombing or chemical attacks, witnessed their properties being demolished, and have had to leave everything behind in search of refuge.

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Workshops to explore ways of better managing stress and resolving interpersonal conflict.

Sessions wherein families with fraught relations discuss tensions and learn effective methods of communicating and parenting. Discussions wherein women are encouraged to be self-confident and assertive.

Recovery from trauma

Strengthened self-confidence and stress-management abilities Stronger interpersonal skills Healthy personal, family, and community lives

Girls' & Child Protection

Over half of all Syrian refugees are children. War has stolen from these children their parents and it has denied them their childhood. Physical safety, good health, and growth opportunities have been snatched from them. If the skills of these children, who will soon be the leaders of society, stay limited, the future of Syria gets severely jeopardised.

> Safe space for learning and self-development Brave space for acting upon personal and political challenges Academic success and prevention of school drop-outs Investment into the future leaders of Syrian society

in 2017, our five Women Now centers maintained their activities inside Syria, despite growing challenges facing the civilian population in our areas of operation. The three centers in Eastern Ghouta experienced a tightening of the siege on the Damascus suburb and therefore the population was struggling to meet even basic necessities.

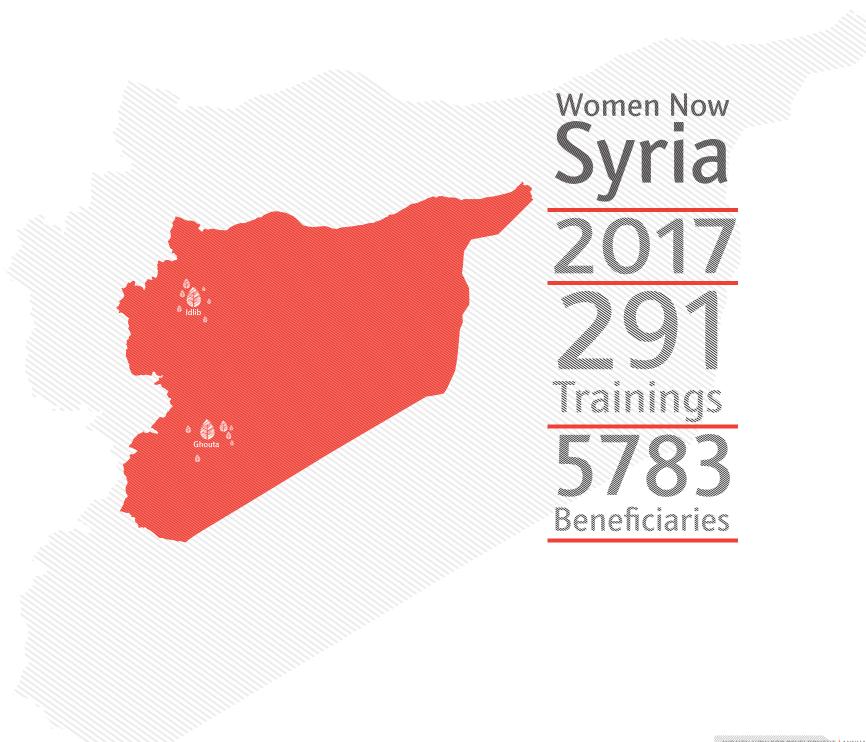
The two centers in Idlib, in the north of Syria, were not under siege however military attacks were frequent. One of the darkest days was the chemical attack that took place in Khan Shaykhun on 4 April 2017. Our team was directly affected as the area is close to our center and people were rushing to help the victims of the chemical attack.

Despite these hardships, bombing, shelling and sieges, the women pushed on and kept their activities going. The following pages will show some of the programs implemented in our centers inside Syria. They do not reflect the full breadth of activities but aim to give an insight into some main areas of focus.

2017 also saw a heightened effort by our team to amplify local women's voices, especially about the worsening conditions on the ground. We collected testimonies from our team in Idlib after Khan Shaykhun in order to let the world know what really happened.

Among these efforts was a letter championed by Syrian women on the situation in Idlib, which we help draft and publish and which was picked up by Syrian media.

We aimed to highlight the women's activism and their peaceful engagement with their communities to show the important civilian life. Unfortunately, these voices receive less and less attention in a highly securitized and militarized discussion about Syria. Women Now aims to continue highlighting the women's realities in order to provide a counterweight to this narrative.

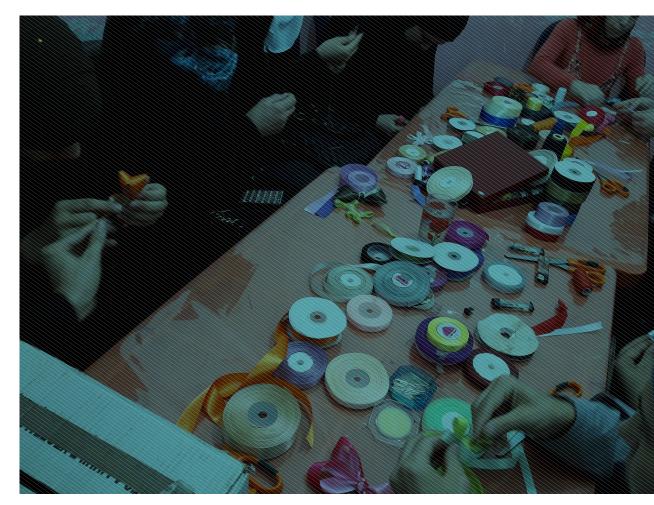


Handiwork Exhibitions

At Women Now, we work with a broad, comprehensive understanding of economic empowerment. Intervention does not end at skill transfer. We provide networks and expand markets available to our budding women entrepreneurs.

Over 2017, we held four exhibitions in Maarat al Numaan and two in Mesraba where we celebrated the women's hand-woven creations, their skill, and traditions. The handiwork was available for sale to the visitors (300-400 at Maarat al Numaan and 249 in Mesraba). The women were able to sit proudly by their labour, and get rightly recognised for their efforts. The area was also decorated with art work created by women and girls with special needs.

The exhibitions also served as opportunities for raising awareness on crucial issues. The Nursing Trainer and the PSS facilitator in Mesraba discussed topics such as health and malnutrition, stress management, gender-based violence and its psychological aftermath.



Professional Empowerment

We admire ambitious women, and love to see them defy expectation. We hope to see Syrian women occupy positions of authority in all spheres of society. In 2017, we organised multiple programs to help them reach these levels of influence in avenues they care about.

We partnered with Kesh Malek (also known as the Kafwa project) to provide training on CV writing. We also introduced women to access online job databases. The program involved multiple networking workshops where women discussed self-presentation around potential funders, employers, and partners. We recognise the culture of humility in Syria. While respecting this tradition, we strive to ensure that the women understand and communicate their worth.



Project Development & Management

Syrian women have long been excluded from all circles of influence in every sphere of society. The war only reinforced this marginalisation. We at Women Now are striving to help these women reclaim the positions of power that are rightfully theirs. In order to help them gain skills they may need along the way, we organised the Leadership Program which imparted trai ings in project development and management. The program helped them practice their skills in project planning, supervsion, documentation, and evaluation. The women were trained in management principles and then encouraged to formulate several projects related to communications and transportation development. They ideated effective ways of coordinating administrative work, reporting progress, and conducting evaluations. The program honed their ability to strategically plan and execute projects to further social justice.



Leadership Training Syria

Syrian Women's Justice Network

Equipped with experiences gathered, skills honed, and courage fostered at the Leadership Programme, its graduates set on their next journey: founding the Syrian Women's Justice Network.

We supported them fully, for our engagement spans far beyond skill development programs. With unmatched courage, determination, and leadership ability, these women mobilised Syrian women in Syria and Lebanon at the grassroots level.

They introduced the project to local women and women's groups, selected and trained facilitators, and established regular women's dialogues.

At these sessions dedicated to common women's political environment, women discussed current political situations, global conventions, and potential areas for activism and influence.

They held awareness sessions that covered topics such as constitutionalism, democracy, and citizenship. Multiple solidarity gatherings were organised and justice campaigns were supported.

One of the concrete outcomes of the network's efforts was a letter on the protection of civilians drafted and championed by the women of Idlib, which received attention in relevant Syrian media.



Awareness-raising Program Syria

Women-Led Civil Engagement

Women Now sees its participants as agents of positive, potent change. We believe wholly that they will be the leaders of a peaceful Syria. We promote programs led by them, thereby tapping into their potential for leadership and peacebuilding.

In Maarat Al Numaan, 133 women and 53 girls helped lead events for the 16 Days of Activism Campaign to End Violence Against Women.

They reached out to wider communities, performed skits, and held awareness sessions and workshops.

This opportunity amplified their voices, recognised and challenged numerous normalised gender - based injustices.



Displacement brings about many challenges for Syrian women. They need to deal with obstacles they did not face prior to the conflict. Lebanon has become the country with the highest per-capita concentration of refugees in the world - Syrian refugees comprise one fourth of the Lebanon's population of 4.4m, and over 75% of these people are women and children (2017). The Bekaa Valley region is especially densely populated and suffers from a weak economic infrastructure.

Syrian female refugees are often without their husbands, fathers or brothers. A majority of refugees in Lebanon are women and children and therefore women face new challenges. They are often single heads of household, meaning they need to provide financially for their families. In addition, they need to deal with the host and refugee community alone, leaving them vulnerable to harassment, discrimination and violence.

These challenges have been at the root of the work of Women Now in Lebanon, since the women and girls facing them were keen on creating spaces for themselves in which they could learn and also receive psychological support.

The Women Now centers in the Bekaa Valley, Majdal Anjar and Chtoura, have been a resource of hope and resilience for thousands of women who once lacked the means to support themselves and their families.

The following pages give an insight into our programs in 2017 but do no represent the entire programing taking place in the centers. We aim to highlight areas of focus of our work in Lebanon.

We are proud to have the creative possibilities that cooperation with Lebanese and Syrian organisations held for us. This enabled us to develop our own programming as well. Women Now Lebanon Beneficiaries 1 European Commission 2017 https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/ factsheets/lebanon syrian crisis en.pdf

First Aid program

The First Aid program is primarily a component of the Educational Empowerment program, but is also considered to be highly economically beneficial and empowering to the women. In Lebanon, the First Aid program allowed for beneficiaries to seek opportunities in hospitals and clinics to volunteer and act as sources of information and advice amongst other women in the community.

Many women excitedly reported back to Women Now that they were able to give health guidance in their community as well as perform simple medical procedures and treatments for their families, neighbors and the community-at-large. They said that they have been able to convey information confidently about reproductive health to women in their communities.



Welcoming a psychotherapist and other local women

Both centers in Lebanon witnessed remarkable development of the psycho-social support program. Prior to a year-long project, we did not have a dedicated psychotherapist in our centers for the women, staff members, or girls. Lebanese women also comprised a substantial percentage of the beneficiaries in this program. The first phase of the psychological support involved conducting informal sessions in which the team assessed specific and diverse needs of the beneficiaries. The team then prepared sessions in coordination with the psychologist fitted exactly to those needs.

This helped to identify cases which required individual treatment. We managed to exceed our goals based on the study prior to the project regarding the number of beneficiaries. Our centers received many referrals and became more known to local women seeking psychosocial support. The team also began to develop a study program of life skills to handle the behavior of teenagers and adolescents, as this is a sensitive age group especially under harsh conditions of seeking asylum.



Theatre Therapy & "I Deal" program

Children have been left deeply traumatised by the atrocities of war. Even as they attempt to integrate into Lebanese society after being displaced, they are subject to xenophobic discrimination. Coping up academically is yet another challenge.

Women Now carried out the "I Deal" Program to provide psychosocial support to these children. Through discussions and activities, the project encouraged them to process difficult emotions, confront fears and challenges. Because of this brave space, many children were able to come to terms with their complex experiences, build community, and improve interpersonal skills.

Young participants also attended the Youth Theatre Programme (co-organised with Seenaryo). They reclaimed their voices and their strength while bringing powerful, heartrending art to life. Abir al Wawi, mother of one of the participants remembers, "It was absolutely amazing. First they spread energy. Second, they build them into strong personalities. What the play achieved was no small feat. I'd say it's about strength, character building, and self-confidence."



"I DEAL" Porgram



The "I Deal" program lasted for one month and was mostly carried out in the Women Now center in Majdal Anjar, Lebanon. The target is for adolescent girls to find themselves and deal with their emotions as well as listening to their dreams and hopes and define how to communicate with others and problem solving in a peaceful way. "I always feel that there are many differences between humans that cause a lot of conflict, but the only thing that brings us together is humanity, so I have expressed this idea by painting this picture."

Hanan Muslmany, a 15 year old girl from Housh al Arab in Syria who now lives as a refugee in Lebanon

Campaigns & Advocacy

Women Now is dedicated to working on issues that affect the lives of Syrian women, by tailoring program that fit their needs but also by advocating with them. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians are detained or disappeared, the majority of them at the hands of the Syrian regime.

The Families for Freedom were formed in 2017. They are a group of women who stand against enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention by the Syrian regime and all parties to the conflict. These women want to mobilize the public to pressure all sides to find the missing and free the unjustly detained.

Together with Dawlaty and The Syria Campaign, we are supporting the Families for Freedom, a women-led movement who all have relatives detained or disappeared themselves.

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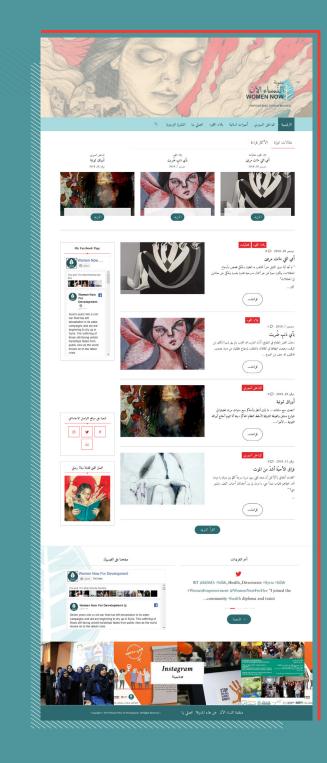


Amplifying local women's voices Creating strong alliances Building value coalitions Advocating for a new image of the Syrian woman

Our Blog

In 2017, Women Now launched its own blog. It is a platform for Syrian women to share their stories and have their voices heard. Since the launch, women from different backgrounds and from different countries have contributed.

Initially, the contributions came from our trainings in the centers in Syria which we then extended to include voices from anyone interested in publishing their stories. Women share their personal accounts of war, loss, displacement, hope and love. The platform is in Arabic and is the first genuine Syrian platform for women's voices of this kind. Please visit www.women-now.org/blog for more!



Research

Women Now contributes to various publications and reports with specific knowledge and information on Syrian women and girls.

One of the reports we collaborated on was the National Action Plan for the UK government https://women-now.org/syria-response-consultations-on-the-uk-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security/ together with Amnesty International and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

This report was used inter alia to inform the development of the UK's 2018-2021 National Action Plan (NAP) on women, peace and security.

We also contributed to documentations of Human Rights violations prsented to the Human Rights Council concerning Syrian women and girls.

This was done in cooperation with international women's rights organisations like MADRE.



Generating knowledge about women's issues Shaping conversations about gender Connecting the international to to the local Ensuring representation of Syrian women

Collaborations

One of the strategic aims of Women Now is to encourage civic engagement amongst Syrian women by funding and training local, grassroots, independent civil society initiatives and women's groups which are often unregistered and unable to apply for funding. This has been successfully done with initiatives both inside Syria and in Lebanon. Additionally, we aim to work with international organisations that share our values and help them understand the local context and provide access to the communities that we have build trust with over years.









Women Now supported Sadad, a smaller NGO that shares our vision for peace and women's rights, and is working in the more sensitive, war-torn regions of Syria. Collaborative intervention was delivered in these areas, where because of incessant bombing, immediate aid was direly necessary. We offered organisational support and helped them execute their program during testing times. We assisted with program design, staff employment, curriculum development, documentation, monitoring and evaluation, financial reports and financial transactions. Women Now and Sadad together held intensive courses to enable women in desperate conditions stand on their own feet. Together, we held courses in language literacy and in vital and marketable skills such as nursing, health, hairdressing, sewing for almost 300 women. Psychological counselling was also offered to 125 women and 116 children.

Working with Sadad, we have actualised growth on multiple fronts. Their organisational capacity has been amplified, the local women's self-reliance has been augmented exponentially, and we too have learnt about mobilising the strength of other smaller organisations to achieve our common goal of empowering Syrian women.



Women Now in Lebanon cooperated on several occasions with Ettijahat-Independent Culture, an independent organization that supports cultural projects and empowers Syrian artists in exile, and Seenaryo, an NGO working to enable and encourage young/adolescent Syrian and Palestinian refugees to participate in artistic culture-building and find their voices through theatre, singing, and dance.

In the fall and winter seasons, Women Now participated in a joint theatre project named "Our Stage", as well as an event titled the "Create Syria Showcase". Both events fostered senses of creativity, resilience, and freedom - spaces were created for children to find an artistic voice, and platforms were opened up for collaboration, problem-solving, and innovative thinking amongst children, regional/international artists, and cultural activists.



In 2017, Women Now continued its collaboration with Gharsa, a local organisation in Bekaa Valley with a center for refugee women and who live in camps. Our partnership focussed on providing education to refugee children because currently, around half of them in Lebanon do not go to school.

High illiteracy rates increases risk of the children being forced into child marriage or having to work. We hold intensive English classes because the lack of the knowledge of English is one of the primary reasons for Syrian students' dropping out of Lebanese schools. We offer courses on Arabic language and computer skills, along with general classes to supplement school learning. We hold awareness sessions to discuss sensitive gender issues and women's health. Furthermore, we organise workshops to open conversation on the traumas of war and its complex psychosocial impact.



At Women Now, we are constantly looking for ways of doing better. We are constantly evaluating our work and considering how we can improve effectiveness and efficiency. In 2017, we sophisticated strategies pertaining to communications, finance, fundraising, human resources, emergencies, etc. We consulted many external experts on these areas, such as Citizen for Syria CFS, and simplified procedures.

Women Now also cares deeply about the welfare of its staff. We recognise that they work constantly under conditions that can severely strain their emotional and physical wellbeing. We thus delivered psychosocial support resources to all members. We also organised events to build community and trust within the staff so that they are stronger together as they set off to accomplish missions together.



"When my husband was arrested, I didn't think that I lost our breadwinner" she smiled. "I thought that I would miss him, I was afraid of loneliness" Nouseiba, the cultural activity coordinator at Women Now For Development, believes that her work at the organisation offers her an opportunity and enables her to raise her two children which is her main duty in her eyes. It also makes her aware of the different roles she can play to benefit herself, other women and her home country from where she is displaced.

Building resilience

The growth Women Now seeks to actualise is mutual. We hope that our participants benefit from our programs, but we endeavour, to the best of our abilities, to learn from them. Resilience is one of their qualities that we aspire to inculcate in ourselves. Despite facing countless hurdles again and again, these women possess unshakeable grit to keep moving forward.

Like these women, we too faced multiple challenges during the past year. For instance, work was often disrupted in Syria due to heavy shelling, bombing, and raids. Physical movement became extremely dangerous, especially for women, and our centres had to pause operations. During these testing times, we had to bear in our minds the example of these women, and had to draw inspiration from their perseverance and courage.



We faced other obstacles, and here's how we strive to surmount them and to build organisational resilience:

- Improving attendance by providing for transport costs to and from the centres.
- Sophisticating Monitoring and Evaluation tools to better assess learning outcomes.
- Raising awareness about the legitimacy of mental health issues to improve attendance by supporting women who refuse to recognise their trauma
- Introducing fitness activities including sports and aerobics to improve health while challenging stigma around women's physical activity.

Thank you for your trust and support !





www.women-now.org