



النساء الآن
WOMEN NOW
FOR DEVELOPMENT

ANNUAL REPORT 2018



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ANNUAL REPORT 2018

Foreword

Dear friends and partners,

It is my pleasure to present to you our annual report for 2018. This year was one of the most difficult years we have witnessed since we started working in 2012.

The severe military escalation in Eastern Ghouta and the forced displacement of the civilian population affected the women and girls we work with. After they bravely lifted their voices to the world exposing the horrors of this escalation, they were forced onto the infamous green busses. As a consequence, we had to close our centers in the Damascus suburb that we had worked in for years despite siege and lack of access. This was the darkest day in our history as Women Now and we are working to preserve the memory of our work and the women's achievements there.

Despite this difficult situation, the women in Idlib pushed on and took in many internally displaced families and tried to accommodate them as best as they could. Our centers in Idlib remained open throughout the year and were more active than ever as they now serve an even larger number of women. The women in Idlib indeed did their best to not only remain open to the public but also to find creative ways of working in an increasingly difficult context.

We also continued developing programs in Lebanon, where we work with local women in the Bekaa Valley. The safe spaces for women and girls became even more established and secured and offer a wide range of services to Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian women and girls. We managed to develop our partnerships and programs, including art as a tool of resilience. This report highlights our work both inside Syria as well as Lebanon. We look forward to continuing our efforts and keeping you as partners and friends as the situation becomes more and more challenging.

Thank you for all your solidarity and support!

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



WHO ARE WE?

Women Now for Development is a feminist, women-lead organization dedicated to deepening and strengthening women's role in shaping democratic future of Syria and responding to the humanitarian crises. Established in June 2012 by renowned Syrian author and journalist Samar Yazbek, it is now the largest Syrian women- organisation reaching thousands of women and girls annually, primarily through our unique Women and Girls Safe Spaces programme, (WGSS) and through our advocacy, research and campaigning for women human rights.

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, 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 across socioeconomic backgrounds. We strive to amplify women's political voice and their role in building a peaceful Syria anew - a Syria that safeguards equal rights for all citizens.



Our Approach

Women Now believes that the struggle for women's rights in Syria is a multi-layered and gradual process, which cannot be separated from the struggle for peace and democracy.

Building from the grassroots, and starting with the most vulnerable and marginalised women and girls, whilst also working with boys and men as allies, we see women as key actors rather than just victims.

They are the first responders to crises and resisters standing up against violence and violent extremism; they are also primary carers for their families and their communities; they are a powerful voice for peace and fearless advocates for justice.



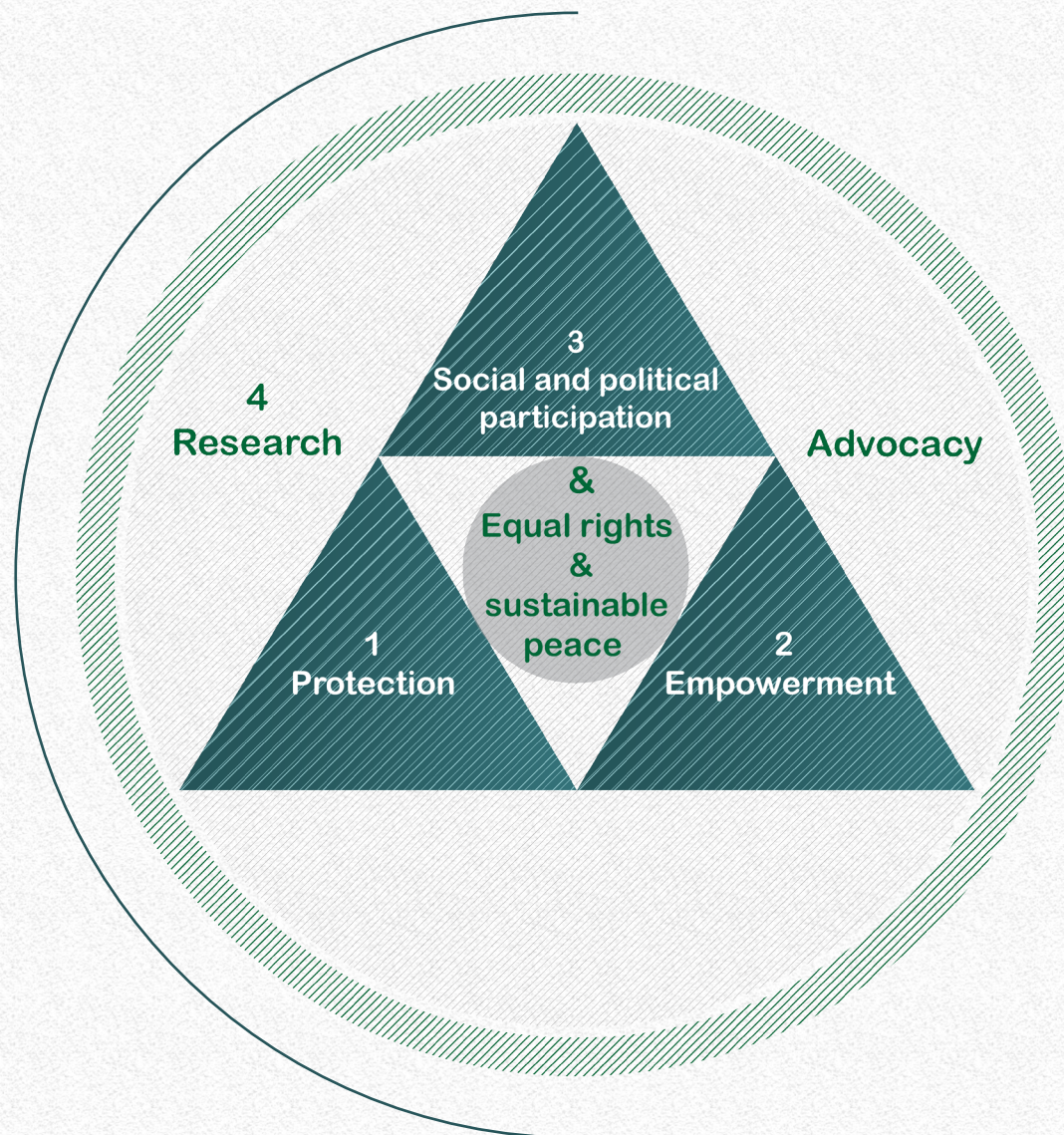
Focus Areas & Objectives

1. PROTECTION: We provide psychosocial support to women and girls through one-to-one case management and group sessions including on sexual and gender based violence, child marriage, sexual reproductive health and rights, and post-traumatic stress syndrome (PSS) coping skills.

2. EMPOWERMENT: We empower women and adolescent girls through education and vocational training, from literacy, English classes and IT skills, to basic nursing and small business management

3. PARTICIPATION: We work to increase women's participation in civil and political life by strengthening their leadership skills and providing platforms for Syrian women to lead or contribute to international campaigns and advocacy initiatives.

4. RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY: We support local advocacy campaigns, driven by women at the grass-roots, and amplify their voices through our own advocacy at the international levels, in transitional justice processes and rights monitoring mechanisms.





2018 in Numbers

5

Women centers

8,191
Beneficiaries

Our centers in Eastern Ghouta were closed sadly in spring 2018 due to the military escalation.

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.

EMPOWERMENT

Educational
empowerment

Economic
empowerment

PARTICIPATION

Leadership training

Awareness-raising
activities

PROTECTION

Psychosocial support

Girls' & Child protection

RESEARCH & ADVOCACY

Campaigns

Conducting research

Educational Empowerment

Syria/ Idlib

The constant military escalation inside Syria, combined with the other challenges that women face in their daily lives inside Syria, gave us a bigger motivation to keep working in a place where we are needed the most.

Our two centres in Idlib (Seraqeb and Maarat al Nouman) offered a variety of training in both educational and psychological support levels. Such as:

- self confidence, expressing emotions, self-awareness, family relations. The subjects that these sessions dealt with included marital problems, psychological stress, loneliness, low self-confidence, fear of marriage, and communication problems with parents.
- While we were holding reproductive health awareness sessions, our nursery teacher implemented activities for the beneficiaries' children so that mothers could attend and focus on themselves, their own well-being and learning coping skills.



We also started the “Young Mothers Club” for psychological and educational support for the young and adolescent mothers.

“This is due to the unfortunate circumstance that the war has exacerbated child marriage in Syria, which has made support of young mothers extremely necessary.”



Stories of Strength

Waed

Waed is 13 years old and was illiterate when she first came to our centre. She had not been accepted into the first grade in regular school because of her age. Within two months in our Arabic Literacy programme, she had learnt the letters of the alphabet and was able to read them aloud correctly and with confidence.



Rajaa is a young mother of three – an IDP, who wanted to learn despite her ailing health. On the day of the final test, she came to the centre to submit her work with the catheter still in her hand, an indication of both her determination and how important she felt the course was in her life.

Rajaa

Empowerment and Vocational Training

In our centres inside Syria we build skills, and we teach the women how to become owners and producers of their own talents.

Graduates from the Empowerment courses produced many beautiful handicrafts. We held numerous exhibitions showcasing their work in the centre to support them in marketing. One of the exhibitions was visited by more than 165 women. The women who had produced the handicrafts sold approximately 80% of their work.

These courses are an opportunity for women to learn skills which enable them to support their families financially. Many are faced after years of war with the challenge of having to provide for their families as a breadwinner.



Nursing and First Aid Training

In 2018, we also held trainings in Basic Nursing, First Aid, and Health Awareness inside Syria. These activities cut cross the Protection and Empowerment fields as they enable women to administer basic care safely to their families in the absence of affordable healthcare and in some cases to obtain paid work.

Due to the escalation of violence against civilians inside Syria, women find themselves in situations where they need to provide emergency care to wounded people and need to work in health facilities as the numbers of doctors and hospitals are dwindling.



Empowerment - Lebanon

This year we significantly increased our reach to the most vulnerable women and adolescent girls living in local refugee camps by providing activities within the camps and facilitating their access to our centre.

We implemented One to One Consultations for children, as well as women and adolescent girls.

We also held Women's Health Awareness Sessions, English and IT courses, as well as courses on Civil and Political Rights.

We started a Book Club and Film Club!



Women Theater

Staging Sisterhood performance

Over 9 months, we were creating a piece of theatre with a group of 30 women, half of whom live in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon, and half of whom are refugees and asylum seekers living in London. These women met every week over Skype to devise and create theatre together.

The project is a inpartnership between Women Now For Development, Seen-aryo and Women for Refugee Women in the UK.



Leadership Academy

We implemented the Women's Leadership Program under the title "Syrian Women Take The Lead" through four workshops with 18 Syrian women in Lebanon, which included the most important topics of women's rights, gender issues, communication, democracy and transitional justice, with local and international trainers.

The program was in partnership with the German organization elbarlament.



“We took a new step in 2018 in the context of gender awareness raising within Syrian civil society. For the Shaml coalition, that we are involved in since its inception, we proposed following up on program activities and seeking to make them gender sensitive.

We held training for the staff of partner organizations in the Shaml coalition and supervised the implementation of a youth focused program and provided them with the necessary knowledge tools to make gender-sensitive activities as far as possible. This was aimed at creating awareness among staff of partners in Shaml about the importance of gender mainstreaming in activities and programs of our partner organizations in the coalition.”



Dealing with loss

Resilience of women in the face of tragedy

In July 2018, the Syrian regime announced the names of people who had been killed in detention under torture. Several beneficiaries (and five members of our Lebanon team) received news that their loved ones - husbands, brothers and fathers were amongst the dead. This increased the need for psychological support sessions in the targeted community, but in addition Women Now provided additional moral support.

IT trainer We'am explained, 'I expected that people would stop coming to my sessions upon receiving this news, but I have 100% attendance and a waiting list of 40 - **women have told me that they keep coming despite everything because being with other women who understand what they are going through helps them.** I try to allow time before and after sessions for them to talk about their feelings and I have organised for them breakfasts and days out in addition to regular classes.'



Stories of Strength

Iman

Iman, a widow from Dera'aya, came to Lebanon with her four children. She took English and IT courses and participated in PSS Group sessions. She was coping with grief and the impact of war and displacement. After attending activities in the centre for approximately a year, she became more confident in herself and opened a clothes shop in Majdal Anjar, opposite our centre at the end of 2017. She is now supporting her family and meeting their needs with the income her shop brings.



" On 6 February 2018, the Women Now center in Kafr Batna was hit and destroyed by an airstrike. The Syrian regime targeted all of Eastern Ghouta with fierce airstrikes and shelling, including the locations of our centers. The attack occurred when the centre was closed so our team and the women who receive vital services there were unharmed but six civilians were killed, the owner of the building was wounded and the center was severely damaged. The people of Eastern Ghouta were facing some of the most dire moments since the start of the conflict. In order to protect our staff and beneficiaries, Women Now suspended all activities in Eastern Ghouta. In the same month, our colleagues were then eventually forced to close all our three women's centers and then they tried to stay alive with their families in the dark and ill-equipped shelters along with all other families of Eastern Ghouta. The shelters were not supplied with enough water or food, and children have not seen sunshine for weeks. They lived in this condition for weeks before they were forcibly displaced by the Syrian regime. We mourn the loss of loved ones, the centers and the homes of the civilians."



Women's voices at the UN Security Council

Before the violent displacement of all civilians from Eastern Ghouta, Women Now tried to have women's voices heard at the highest levels. Our colleague Nivin Hotary spoke at the UN Security Council hearing in regards to the implementation of Syria's cessation of hostilities from a Syrian's perspective inside Ghouta.

Nivin risked her life and faced the ongoing bombardment to make her intervention and testify about the situation of civilians, especially the mothers.

“

“My name is Nivin and I am 38 years old. I want to introduce myself as a mother of two children from besieged eastern Ghouta. My daughter Maya is five years old. Yes, she was born during the revolution. A few months after giving birth to her. The electricity was cut across all of Ghouta. And it still is to this day.

Maya hasn't been able to take all of her vaccinations. There are many children who haven't received a single one. Right now, medicine, baby food and medical supplies are part of the Syrian regime's red lines and they have categorically forbidden them from entering Ghouta.

”



Women`s voices at the UN Security Council

“

My daughter heard the sound of shelling for the first time while she was still inside me. I ran with her then in search for a safe place. And we are still searching for a safe place.

We have been besieged for three weeks in basements that I could only describe as below the standards of luxury of your council chambers. I will just speak briefly about these past three weeks. I testify that I have personally been exposed to shelling with cluster munitions, chlorine gas, mortars and what we call “elephant” missiles. And I have lived the moments of terror that accompany the sound of the bombing. The sound that leaves us deaf for seconds afterward. I won’t tell you about the injuries they leave behind so that I don’t fray at your emotions.

I testify that we are eating one meal a day on most days and most of the time this meal is single slice of barley bread. And I know there are people who dream of getting hold of a meal of a slice of barley bread and aren’t even able to secure that. Our children in their first years of life have not been lowering their hands off their ears because they have lived through the bombing and through the sounds and the fear that accompanies it. Please, this time, act with your humanity and do not use your veto to further our killing.

Thank you.”

”

Stories of displacement

A message from Raghda, our colleague, talking about her wish to go back to our center in the destroyed city of Maasraba in Eastern Ghouta:

“

I miss our participants of who I don't know whether they are still alive or safe

I miss planning lessons and writing reports

I miss the team meetings over a cup of coffee or tea

I miss seeing the logo of Women Now hanging on the wall

I miss my office where dust and debris now lays

I miss the safety that we were deprived of just because we want freedom

Even now, while I'm writing this message, the helicopter is roaring in the sky as if promising not to let me finish my words

As a result of all that, I decided to give up and to leave the cellar which makes my sufferings even worse, and live my coming days in my house and in my room

I don't know for how long I would be alive, so I'm talking to you because you represent my career life
and I really love you.. ”



Stories of displacement



The Green Bus

Rasha from Eastern Ghouta wrote these words before she was forced to leave her home on 9th April 2018:

“For 19 hours we were on a green bus. We did not know where we are going, no food, no sleep, no toilets, no movement. Even civilians were forbidden to come close to us or communicate with us.

The children were hungry and people were tired. At the same time, there were patients in critical health. Farewell Ghouta”

16 Days of Activism Against GBV campaign

We were so happy to welcome one of the founders of the 16 days of activism campaign:

Charlotte Bunch! She was delighted to see the activities Women Now was doing both in Syria and Lebanon and told us she was happy to see this campaign going strong all over the globe after starting it in 1991! She signed our poster in solidarity and we couldn't be happier.



“Ongoing fighting, thousands of names of dead detainees, and a stale mate in the Geneva negotiations, all of this impedes the peaceful solution to an end to the conflict in Syria. But even despite these adverse conditions, Syrian women push on to seek justice and truth and to keep making positive change in their communities. These change makers work on many issues from disappearance and detention to women empowerment and justice.

In the summer of 2018, Women Now for Development helped to facilitate an advocacy trip to the German capital Berlin for the Families for Freedom, a women-lead movement, looking for their missing loved ones has set out to let the world know about the fate of ordinary peaceful civilians being detained and forcibly disappeared by the thousands. In the search for justice, experts and lawyers are needed to ensure that proper demands are put in place to eventually hold the warring parties accountable.

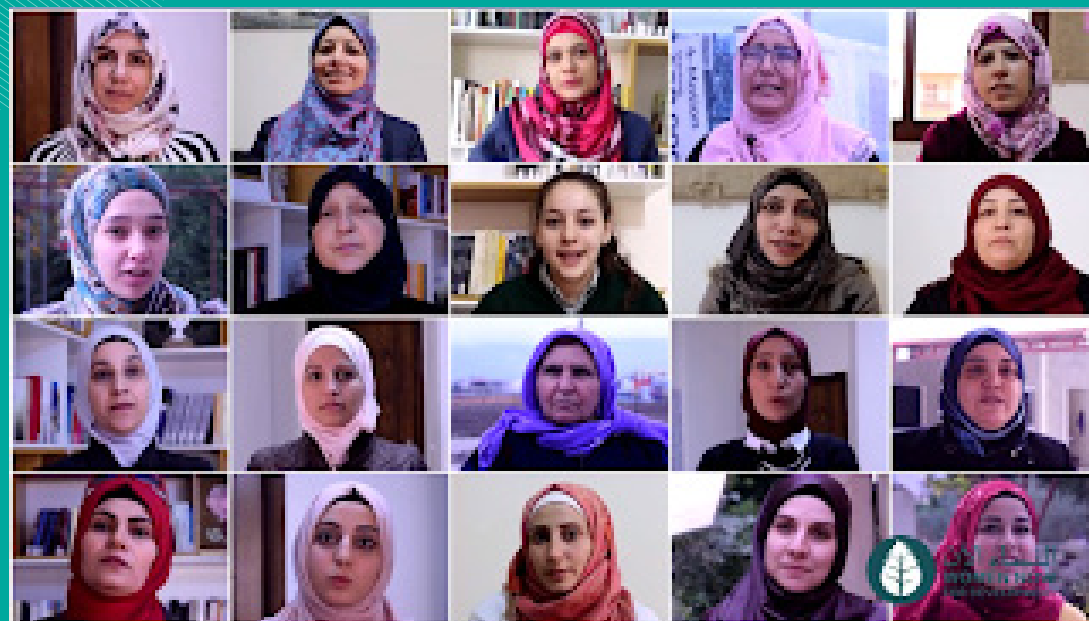
They met stakeholders, German activists, and held public events to raise awareness in the German general public.”



16 Days of Activism Against GBV campaign

Women Now For Development conducted an opinion poll on what violence against women means in Lebanon with the help of program participants. The results were presented in a video.

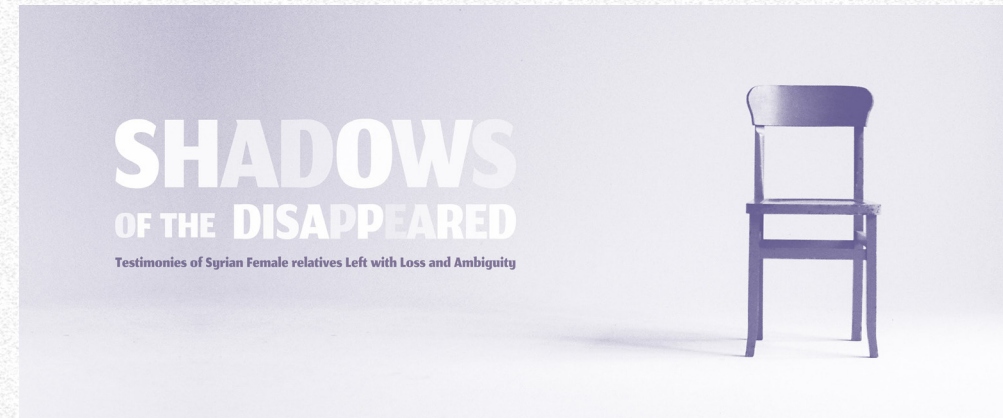
The idea for the survey came from our belief in the importance of measuring women's awareness of the forms of violence their societies inflict on them before any activity has been undertaken to counteract this violence.





Research

With more than 117,000 people missing in Syria since 2011, the myriad of effects on those near to disappeared persons are rarely chronicled. In 2018, Women Now in cooperation with Dawlaty published a report called **“Shadows of the Disappeared: Testimonies of Female Syrian Relatives Left with Loss and Ambiguity”** that tackles the multifaceted and profound impact of the disappearance of a loved one on Syrian women, as well as panel discussions that will draw a comparative approach to the Lebanese issue of the disappeared, through a gendered lens.



We also partnered with multiple organisations in efforts led by the ICTJ to highlight the attacks on schools in Syria. The jointly produced report, **“We Didn’t Think It Would Hit Us:’ Understanding the Impact of Attacks on Schools in Syria,”** examines attacks on schools from multiple angles: from the legal implications of such attacks to the everyday impact on the lives of students, teachers, families, and society at large. The findings leave no doubt that the impacts are as numerous as they are vast and, at best, will take decades to meaningfully address.



Thank you for your trust and support!



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