

Women Now  
For Development  
النساء الآن للتنمية



# MY PROPERTY IS MY RIGHT

RESEARCH PAPER ON PROPERTY RIGHTS  
VIOLATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF WAR AND  
DISPLACEMENT, AND THEIR IMPACT ON  
SYRIAN WOMEN IN NORTHWEST SYRIA

Feminist Research Unit  
Women Now for Development



# My Property IS My Right:

Research Paper on Property Rights Violations in the Context of War and Displacement, and Their Impact on Syrian Women in Northwest Syria

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Women Now For Development  
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## About Women Now for Development

Women Now for Development is a feminist organization led by women, dedicated to deepening and strengthening the role of women in shaping a democratic future for Syria. Founded in June 2012, it is now the largest women's organization in Syria, reaching thousands of women and girls annually inside Syria and in neighboring countries through three integrated program areas: Protection, Empowerment, and Participation and Leadership. The organization's work encompasses feminist research, knowledge production, advocacy, and campaigns at both local and international levels. The organization's research primarily focuses on producing feminist knowledge, including documenting and collecting women's experiences and testimonies, in-depth qualitative and quantitative research and analysis. Advocacy and local and international awareness campaigns center on women's rights, women-led activist movements, feminist civil society initiatives, gender-based violence, and the living conditions of women in Syria.



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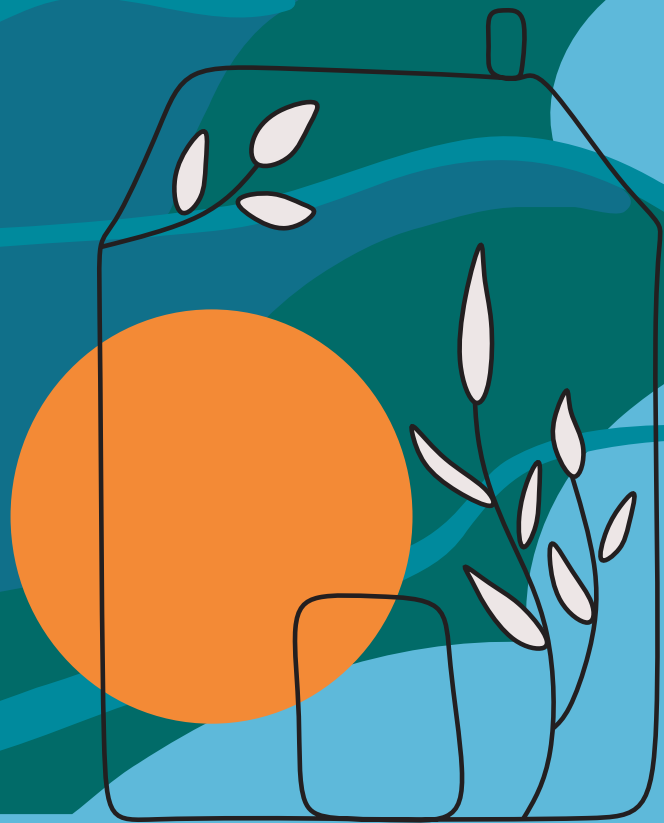
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

-  Many Syrian women have been exposed to numerous violations since the beginning of 2011, including displacement, siege, shelling, and arrest. Women continue to face the extended and intersecting effects of these violations, affecting every aspect of their daily lives, as well as their families and children. This research paper focuses on one of the most significant violations: the inability or loss of the ability of women to access property and land in the places they have been displaced from.
-  It is important to emphasize that this violation intersects with a range of other violations that these women have experienced. Most of the participating women have been forcibly displaced by the Syrian regime or other parties to the conflict, and some have experienced sieges, detention, shelling, loss, or a combination of these experiences.
-  Additionally, many of the women participating in this study were affected by the earthquake that struck Turkey and northern Syria on February 6, 2023. The impact of this natural disaster on displaced women and their families, who have not yet reached stability, has had a profound effect on their physical, psychological, and economic well-being.

-  All the analyses presented in this research paper are based on dialogues with 93 Syrian women who have been forcibly displaced from Damascus and its countryside, Homs city, Idlib countryside, Hama and its countryside, Hasakah, Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, Aleppo and its countryside, and Latakia. These women participated in 16 dialogue sessions, each comprising 6 to 8 women. The lead researcher and facilitators of these sessions are also displaced Syrian women. This enriches the research in two ways: by understanding the context and the sensitivity of the subject, and because property rights and women's ability to access them are also their own issues.
-  This paper focuses on various aspects that illustrate the different contexts experienced by displaced women in northwestern Syria, including the available resources, challenges and difficulties they face, the psychological and economic impact on them, adaptation mechanisms they resort to, their suggestions for improving their situations, and effective advocacy for their rights to property and land, either owned individually or by their families.
-  All of this highlights that the effects of violations in conflicts and wars, particularly in Syria, have a gender dimension that cannot be overlooked if we aim to achieve comprehensive justice for all individuals.
-  While all segments of Syrian society have been subjected to violations or suffer their consequences, the situation of Syrian women, who have been subjected to varied and intersecting discrimination based on their community, region, religion, ethnicity, and class since before the revolution and the war, imposes additional, compounded obstacles and effects that uniquely affect women.

-  The participating Syrian women mentioned that the most significant reasons for losing property are related to political factors that forced them to be forcibly displaced from their areas. Fleeing and fearing the brutality of the Syrian regime and the pursuit of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) for them and their families pushed them to leave their areas.
-  In addition, military factors, including the shelling with various weapons, the siege of houses, the destruction, and burning of homes, as well as the takeover of many houses in military contact zones by armed forces, have added to the difficulties.
-  The women stress that the **new laws** related to the properties of the displaced, both men and women, that were enacted by the Syrian regime have further complicated their ability to access their properties or have them transferred in their names.
-  The women also find that **security conditions** prevent many of them from going to the areas controlled by the Syrian regime to claim their properties due to fear of arrest by the regime. This is the main reason for them relinquishing those properties and not pursuing their claims.

In addition to the above challenges, many women have lost identity documents for individuals and properties, which hinders any attempt to regain their rights and places a financial burden on them, as they are forced to pay substantial sums to reissue these documents or some of them, often encountering fraud in the process.

-  **Social and community traditions** compound these difficulties, as many women mention that they cannot assert their rights due to divorce, widowhood, or male relatives seizing their rights and threatening them to desist from asserting them. This leads to many women engaging in bitter family battles with other family members who try to prevent them from obtaining their rights. In some Syrian communities, demanding women's rights is considered a social stigma, as many women mentioned in the dialogue sessions.



Regarding the **mechanisms** that women have tried to employ to reclaim their properties or transfer them to their names, most have not yielded practical results. Therefore, 88.23% of the women participating in the dialogue and consultation sessions do not attempt to claim their properties. Only 2.6% returned to family members who reside in the house or followed up on properties through them. Meanwhile, 9.15% attempted to claim their properties and the family's properties.



Despite the low percentage of women actively attempting to claim their properties, they are the ones who shoulder the burden of these claims, which can entail risks of going to areas controlled by the Syrian regime, giving power of attorney to female family members in those areas to handle the legal proceedings, or selling gold jewelry to afford legal representation, as women believe that having men handle these operations would increase the risk of arrest or mandatory or reserve military conscription. Women often rely on going to regime-controlled areas granting power of attorney to female family members there or appointing lawyers to handle legal procedures. Unfortunately, women often face obstacles related to the lack of knowledge of the necessary legal procedures for claiming their rights, the lack of clarity of the procedures themselves, and a lack of knowledge by many women on how to pursue and follow up, which exposes them to fraud and extortion by mostly male lawyers.



Women confirm that the convergence of all these conditions and challenges and their loss of properties or properties of family members have placed them in a very dire economic situation. Many of them are seeking employment or working for modest wages to cover the rent for the homes they live in, sometimes under conditions that do not meet even the most basic human standards. This financial burden of rent and moving from one house to another has also had an impact on the education of their children.



As for the psychological effects, all women experience a persistent sense of fear, anxiety, insecurity, a lack of belonging, rejection, and social stigma related to the identity of being displaced or a refugee, as well as the loss of social status and previous support networks from family, relatives, friends, and acquaintances. All of this places most of them in a state of continuous worry, tension, and ongoing instability, which affects their health, their communication with their children, and their family and marital relationships.



Many women have shared with us some mechanisms or situations they adopt to escape from reality, such as drowning in nostalgia for the past, rejecting the present reality, or struggling to adapt to the new society. On the other hand, some women mentioned that they try to arrange each house they move to and add a personal touch to it to feel a sense of belonging. Others attempt to help people solve certain problems, as the feeling of participation alleviates their psychological burden. There are also women working on self-improvement through education, training, and participation in available activities.



## RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Here, we mention the recommendations shared by women during the dialogues, which could help support their demands for their rights, and the most important ones include:

### 1- At the local level:

- Establish a recognized local governing authority with the involvement of all parties to handle the documentation of civil records and real estate records and facilitate individuals' transactions in northwest Syria.
- Form joint and impartial committees consisting of male and female lawyers to facilitate transactions, issue identification papers and property documents, and legally register them without the need for security approvals or exposure to the risks of agencies or the risks of going to areas under the Syrian regime.
- Enact laws and legislation that ensure the rights of displaced individuals in northern Syria, and guarantee the right to decent housing, equal opportunities, and social integration to mitigate the effects of displacement on them, their children, and their families.

- Establish legal committees to defend the rights of displaced individuals in international conferences and forums, and exert pressure on the Syrian regime's government to cancel all laws that violate property rights and land.
- Conduct legal training for women and the entire community under the supervision of legal experts to expand knowledge and the ability to claim ownership and provide free counseling services on property protection and maintenance.
- Women emphasized the importance of monitoring the work of local councils, avoiding discrimination, ensuring equal services and opportunities, focusing on the presence of female representatives of displaced women in local councils, and establishing dedicated offices for displaced individuals.
- There is a need for an international body to document property rights violations with the hope of holding violators accountable.
- Some women highlighted the importance of economic support for displaced women, property loss survivors, and those who have survived detention as a mechanism for healing and helping them continue their pursuit of their rights.
- Develop projects that focus on the mental health of women and their families through various joint activities that they can access.

## 2- At the international level:

- Provide financial, logistical, and educational support for women to conduct continuous advocacy campaigns and media campaigns, focusing on highlighting property rights violations and raising awareness of the importance of this right.
- Establish committees and entities responsible for organizing the reconstruction process in Syria.
- Call for the implementation of UN Resolution 2254, which calls for an end to the conflict in Syria.

We, in the organization (Women Now), emphasize the recommendations made by women and add to them the need to establish local and internationally supported alternative mechanisms that adopt a feminist, critical, and gender-sensitive approach to assist and support affected women as essential actors in organizing their efforts to demand their rights and ensure their participation in any justice process or mechanism they seek.

This study provides a window into the situations of some Syrian women, and it should not be the only study but a foundation upon which we build and develop practical steps in the interest of women, aligning with their aspirations. This is particularly important because we have found a shortage of in-depth feminist studies related to the situations of displaced Syrian women, in areas where we have been able to work and in various regions, such as northeastern Syria and the Afrin region.

We call on ourselves and all friendly, partners, and concerned parties to continue research, documentation, and programmatic efforts to encompass the contexts of women in Syria as a whole and advocate for their rights and justice.





During the years of revolution and war in Syria, starting in 2011, many Syrians, both men and women, were forcibly compelled to leave their properties, including homes, lands, and real estate, amidst massive waves of displacement. This was due to bombings, arrests, the Syrian regime's utilization of internationally prohibited weapons, as well as numerous systematic violations committed against the Syrian people by all parties involved in the conflict, each within different contexts.

Violations of property rights and real estate, coupled with gender-based discrimination, especially against Syrian women, all have roots dating back before 2011. These factors contributed to the exacerbation of subsequent violations during the wartime period and brought to light the gender discrimination pertaining to women's rights in property and inheritance and their ability to demand these rights.

Conversely, the "Rescue Government" was announced in northern Syria on November 2, 2017. It assumed control of water and electricity institutions, the civil real estate registry, local administration, and agriculture. Within the framework of the "Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham's" application of what it claims to be Islamic law, lawyers asserted that only Islamic inheritance law is applied in Idlib, and it does not recognize the law regarding the transfer of princely lands.<sup>1</sup>

At the onset of the revolution, and with the ongoing violations, including displacement, forced migration, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, and dire living, social, and security conditions, the situation became increasingly oppressive for many Syrian women, especially regarding property and land rights.

When examining the environment that influenced Syrian women before 2011, we find that the political, social, and economic systems converged to solidify the discrimination against Syrian women in terms of their property and inheritance rights. This discrimination is not uniform across all Syrian women; it varies depending on a woman's religion, ethnicity, class, and community. The laws related to inheritance and property are not uniform. Additionally, social and regional customs, in many contexts, coerced women to relinquish their property rights and stigmatized those who sought to assert these rights as a social disgrace rather than a legal right.<sup>2</sup>

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1. The Syrian Civil Law defines royal estates in Article (86) as follows: "Properties owned by the state with the right of disposal." This law has equalized inheritance rights between males and females, meaning that the transfer of inheritance is distributed equally among both genders.

2. [Mariam Yaghj, refugees in their homes until further notice, on the rights of Syrian women to housing, a partnered platform, November 14, 2022.](#)



## On the political level:

The escalation of violence against the Syrian people, both men and women, through bombings, sieges, forced displacements, and arbitrary detentions, along with the spread of extremist religious and political movements in Syria, did not merely limit the role of women but also led to their loss of property or properties from which they could benefit. Properties were seized or confiscated based on ideologies or affiliations alone:

- In areas controlled by the National Army, properties of Kurds were seized.
- In regime-controlled areas, the properties of opposition figures were taken over.
- In the self-administration areas in northern and northeastern Syria, properties of Arabs were seized.
- In areas under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham in northwestern Syria, the properties of supporters and individuals who worked with the regime were confiscated.

Hence, we observe that the common factor among the conflicting parties in Syria is the control over Syrian properties, justified by laws and pretexts that serve their interests exclusively.<sup>3</sup>



## On a legal level:

The Syrian regime has enacted laws that allow it to violate property rights in line with its interests. Over the past ten years, the Syrian regime has issued a number of laws and regulations that directly violate individuals' property rights.

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3. Women's inheritance rights are guaranteed by the laws and prohibited by social stigma (The Story of What Remains), in partnership with Syrian female journalists, May 30, 2020. Mariam Yaghi, refugees in their homes until further notice, on the rights of Syrian women to housing, a partnered platform, November 14, 2022.

In an unprecedented move in the history of laws, the Syrian regime enacted Law No. 10,<sup>4</sup> which granted the regime control not only over the properties of opposition figures but also over the properties of internally displaced persons, refugees, and those who were unable to register their properties in the real estate registry within a specified period. This law is in violation of the Syrian constitution.

The Syrian regime also introduced what is known as the Counter-Terrorism Law in 2012, enabling itself to seize the properties of Syrians under the pretext of terrorism. According to this law, Article 12 implicitly states that all crimes listed in this law, referred to as terrorism offenses, result in a court judgment of condemnation, including the confiscation of both movable and immovable property of those covered by the law.

To further restrict Syrians from disposing of their properties, the Syrian regime adjusted the tax rate on real estate sales in Syria within Law No. 15 of 2021<sup>5</sup>. Under this law, anyone wishing to sell their property must pay a 15% tax on the sale price. It was later amended through Decree No. 6 of 2022<sup>6</sup>, reducing the tax to 10%, under the label "Fees to Support Sustainable Development," and making security clearance a mandatory condition for the sale.

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<sup>4</sup>- [The new property law in Syria, Human Rights Watch, May 29, 2018.](#)

<sup>5</sup>- [Decision to settle 15% of the property sales value through banks, Enab Baladi, February 14, 2022.](#)

<sup>6</sup>- [Law No. 6 of 2022, which amends the cash contribution percentage for sustainable development support fees related to property vacancy, transfer, and registration, and the associated stamp duty, to be 10%, March 13, 2022.](#)



To underscore the Syrian regime's commitment to confiscating the properties of Syrians, it has issued or amended a series of laws and decrees to formalize the process of property seizure.

The Urban Planning and Construction Law,<sup>7</sup> Law No. 23 of 2015, aimed to clarify the future vision for urban development. However, it granted administrative units the right to expropriate privately owned properties in unregulated areas, setting an expropriation rate of up to 40% for properties outside provincial centers and in rural areas, and 50% for properties within provincial centers. These expropriation rates were justified as being for the public benefit.

## On an economic level

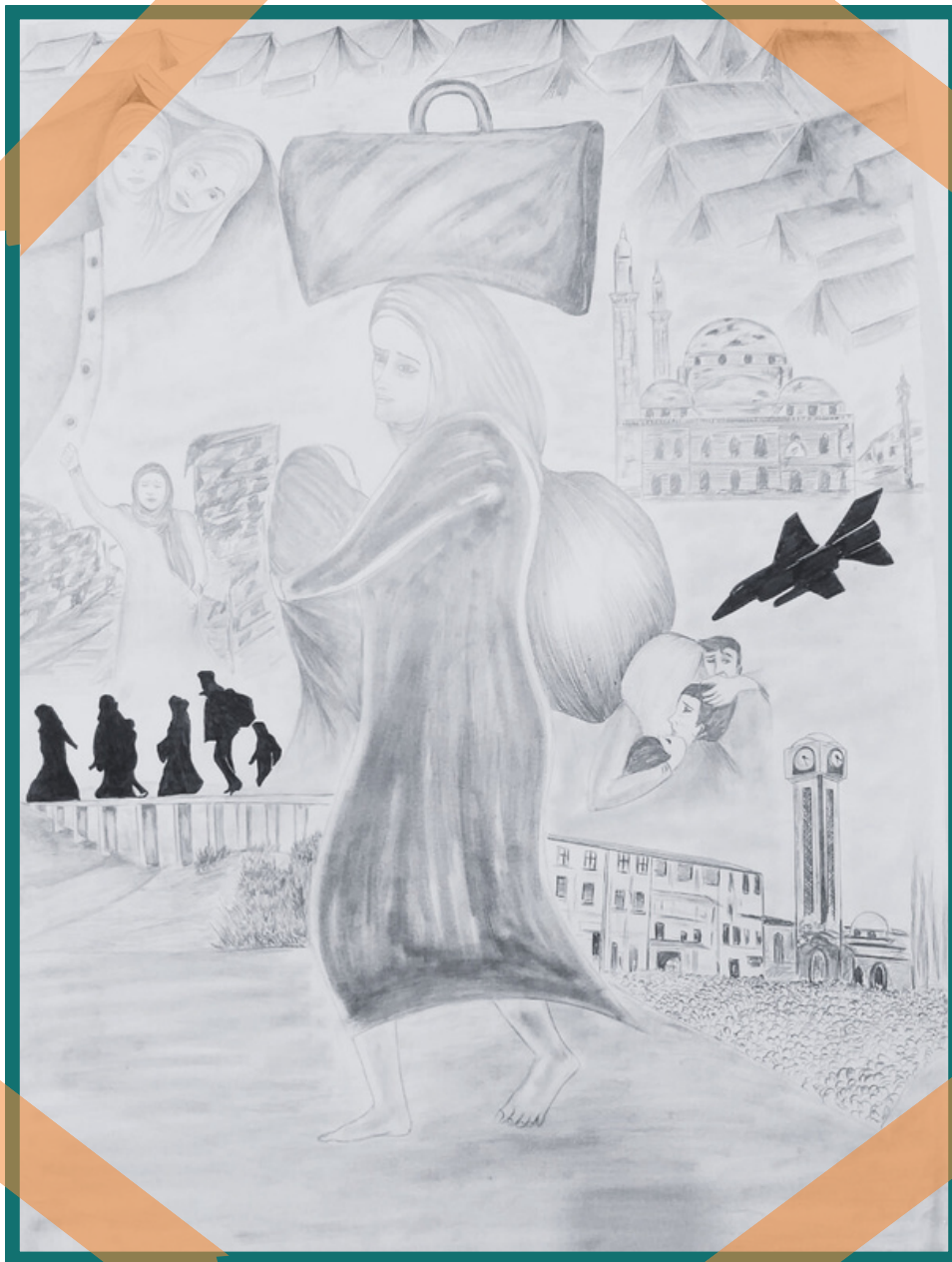
Syrian women often found themselves as the primary breadwinners for their families. The pre-war environment was not supportive of women to empower themselves. Women frequently did not possess significant capital; their main savings were often in the form of gold jewelry, which many women had to part with to support their families, thereby jeopardizing their financial security. These significant economic challenges had a profound impact on women's social and family lives, as well as their mental well-being. Additionally, the deteriorating economic situation, exacerbated by property and land losses, further burdened women.<sup>8</sup>

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7- Law No. 23 of 2015 on the seizure of properties in the name of regulation, Housing and Property Rights Platform, October 21, 2020.  
8- Reference: The discussions that took place among women in the dialogue sessions

## On a social level

The circumstances of war and the widespread violations that affected Syrian society in all its demographic groups and segments led to a breakdown of the social fabric. This had a particularly adverse effect on women. The loss of property and social exclusion in host communities caused women to suffer from discrimination and social stigma. These effects had psychological and economic consequences, which will be discussed in this research paper.



A drawing from the My Property My Rights exhibition, held in the city of Azaz in the Aleppo countryside



## Study Context and Objectives

### Study Significance:

In this study, which is part of an integrated project encompassing various activities with Syrian women who have experienced property rights violations, we shed light on the violation of property rights among groups of displaced Syrian women in northwest Syria. We also explore the impact of these violations on the lives of Syrian women and their communities. The significance of this study lies in demonstrating the differing gender impacts of property rights violations, particularly on women. This is achieved by highlighting property rights violations practiced against Syrian women, documenting their experiences in accessing and claiming these properties, and examining the economic and psychological consequences of their property losses. We also investigate their knowledge of the legal mechanisms for asserting or preserving these rights, as well as the difficulties they encounter in accessing this knowledge, the nature of these obstacles, and the impediments they face in utilizing this knowledge to reclaim or safeguard their properties. Finally, we spotlight the recommendations and solutions from the perspective of displaced women.

## Research Methods and Selection Criteria

Qualitative research methods were adopted as they provide a broader space for contributions to participate in the details, express opinions, and make suggestions within dialogue sessions. These sessions were prepared by the Programs team at the Women Now organization, totaling 16 dialogue sessions held in four areas: Azaz, Mare', Salqin, and Sarmada. Each session involved between 6 to 8 women. The goal of these dialogue sessions was to extract a common understanding, different experiences, and intersections between the factors of property rights violations for participating women.

After establishing research questions that were adopted as the agenda for the dialogue sessions, facilitators were trained on property rights in Syria to better understand the sessions and engage the participating women in meaningful discussions. Facilitators created an open space for women to speak in detail about their homes, communities, properties, displacement, and how all of these aspects affected them as women, considering the challenges they faced.

The researcher attended the sessions virtually via Zoom, and the sessions were recorded with the consent of the participating women. The recorded data were later transcribed, and information was coded based on the research topics. Since experiences of property rights violations and the mechanisms of claiming and the resulting impacts are diverse, the information was segmented and distinctions and intersections were highlighted when necessary, while respecting the privacy of each woman's lived experience.

The research data was further supported by listening to the participating women in consultative sessions, which constitute another type of activity within the project. The focus of these consultative sessions, in particular, was for the displaced women to guide the project's goals and equip them with the tools they need to work on property rights violation issues, conduct advocacy campaigns, and mobilize community and political activities.

## Study Areas and Participant Categories:

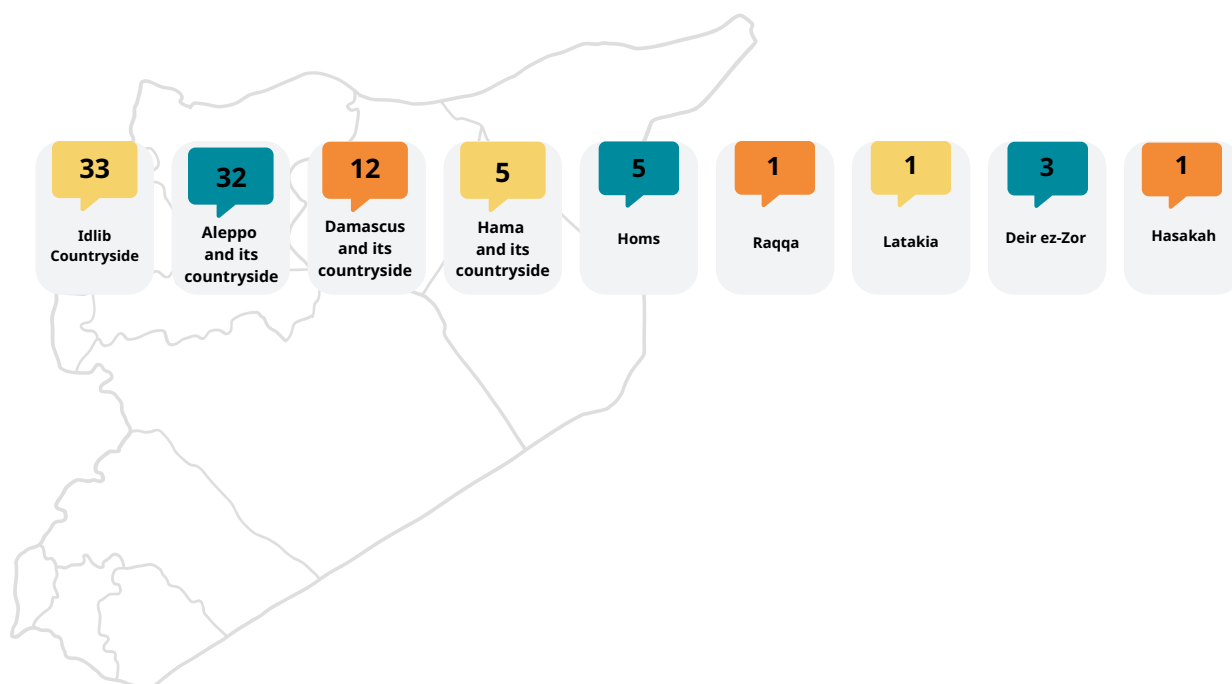
Based on the accessibility of the Women Now team to areas like Azaz, Mare', Sarmada, and Salqin due to the team's nearby center, the study sessions were conducted in these mentioned areas. The sessions were organized in collaboration with displaced women from various Syrian cities who arrived in these areas after 2011. Syrian women who had lost their properties were the primary source of information for this study.

To discuss their situations and property contexts, the participating women were selected based on several criteria, including:

1. The women should be displaced and have experienced property loss, either their personal property or family property, during the past twelve years.
2. The women should be residents in the research areas or in areas nearby.

It's important to note that the majority of participating women were displaced to rural areas in Idlib and Aleppo. However, they originally hailed from various regions before displacement. Some of them lost their properties because they were located in military zones in the countryside of Idlib.

## Geographical Distribution of Participants in the Dialogue Sessions:



The explicit names of the women participants in this study will not be mentioned in order to protect them, as requested and agreed upon by them regarding the confidentiality of information and personal data.

Consent was obtained to share the drawings and photos that women shared in the **“Every Piece Has a Story”** exhibition, which was held in the cities of Kafr Takharim and Azaz.



# CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The first challenge comes from addressing the issue of housing, property, and land ownership rights separately from the other violations women face. The reality that women experience is different from the terminologies and labels we use in the civil society space, its institutions, or international organizations. Therefore, we, as the research and program team, had to repeatedly consider how to present this topic in a way that resembles the women's reality and the challenges they face. This way, they could interact with it effectively and share their stories, experiences, suggestions, and demands enthusiastically.

**The participants and facilitators faced several challenges during the research period, including:**

## **Security Challenges:**

In the city of Azaz, the sessions were suspended until the end of the infighting between the factions in October 2022. In the city of Mare', sessions were also stopped due to security tensions caused by family conflicts and security operations conducted by controlling forces in August 2022. In Salqin, a security entity entered one of the sessions abruptly without prior notice.

## **Self-imposed Challenges:**

We also wanted the research to include displaced women in northeastern Syria, from Afrin or to Afrin. However, the self-imposed challenges of not being able to access these areas, which are beyond the scope of the current study, posed a significant obstacle.

## **Logistic Challenges:**

The absence of professional recording equipment led to stress for the facilitators during recording, and it made it difficult for the researcher to transcribe the data. However, this was later resolved by using filtering software by the IT team. Additionally, recurring internet outages resulted in a loss of communication between the researcher and the facilitators during some sessions. Nevertheless, this disruption was addressed by sending recordings to the researcher at a later time.





## **Natural Challenges:**

Due to the earthquake that struck Syria and Turkey on February 6, 2023, the organization's staff in Syria and Turkey suffered damage. The researcher was directly affected, causing a delay in submitting the research paper. This was done to incorporate the earthquake's impact on women who had lost their properties as an attempt to make the research more comprehensive.

## **Psychological Challenges:**

Some stories of the displaced women affected the facilitators, as they also suffered from the general conflict conditions. The researcher, myself, was greatly psychologically affected while transcribing the sessions due to being a displaced person and experiencing similar issues to those shared by many of the participating women. However, having psychological support was very positive. Furthermore, the nature of the work and the supervision of the Feminist Research Department in the organization, along with its continuous support, were significant motivating factors to continue working.

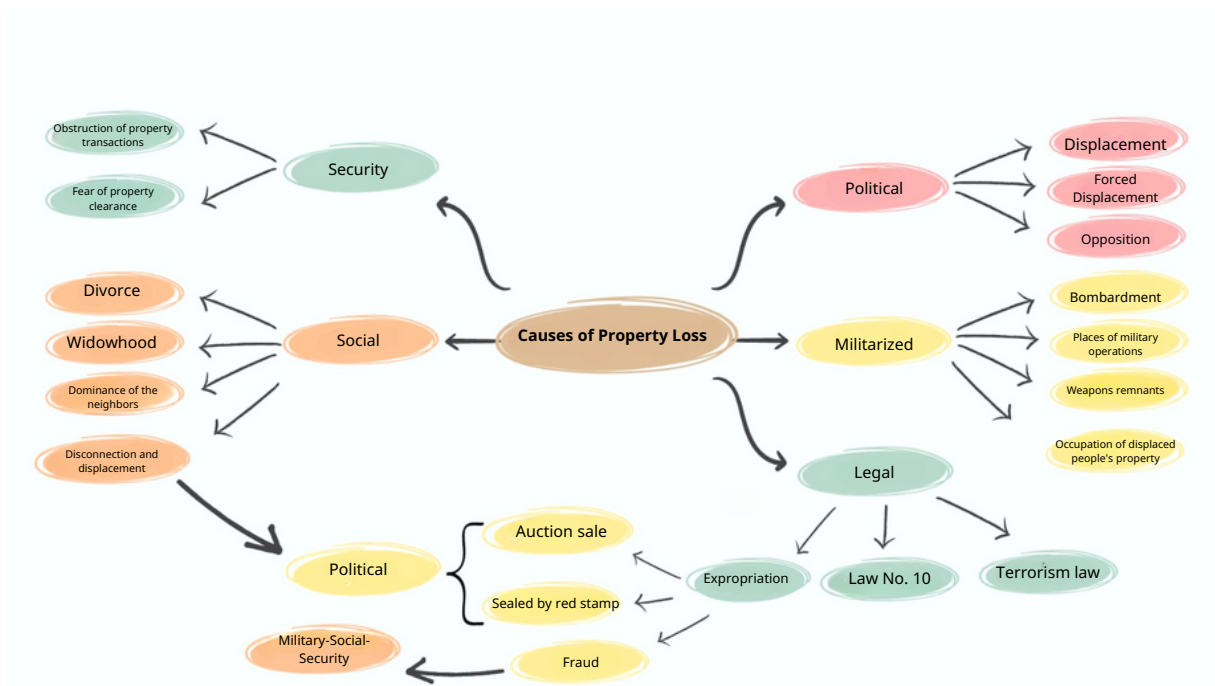
As for the participating women, there was a challenge related to sharing their stories of displacement and property loss, especially in recovering the emotions and memories associated with their homes and properties. In such cases, the facilitators usually referred them to the Protection Team in the Women Now Organization. This team supervised the follow-up and addressed the consequences of this challenge for them.

# DISCUSSION TOPICS AND DETAILS



## Reasons for Syrian Women's Property Loss:

There are numerous intersections that the women discussed, and we have detailed them as illustrated in the diagram:



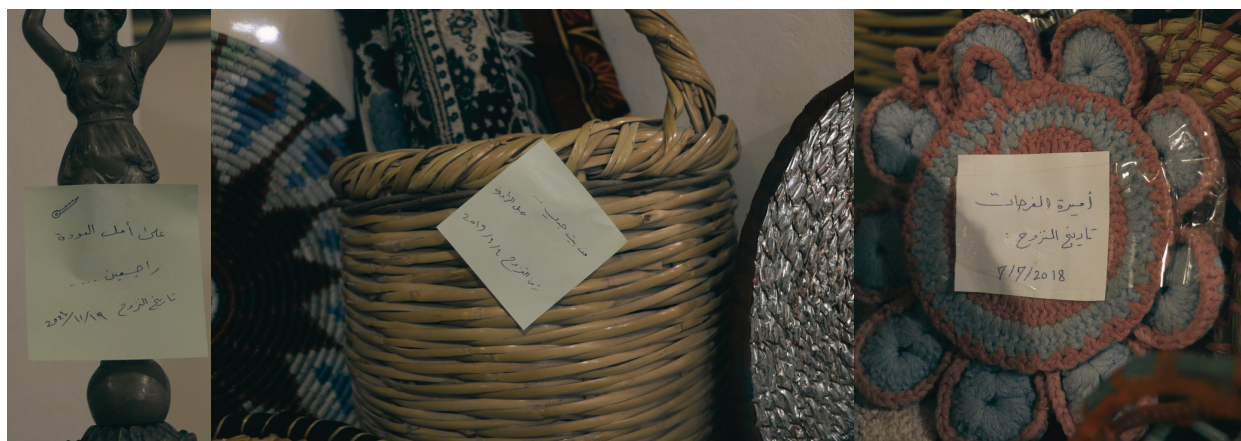
## Political Reasons:

The displacement and demographic changes pursued by the Syrian regime played a significant role in depriving Syrian women and their families of their properties. Several women mentioned that they would have never left their homes if it weren't for the forced displacement.

The fear of the Syrian regime's oppression and its militias was another reason for women leaving their properties, especially when a family member was "sought by the regime" for previous participation in the Syrian revolution. In cases where family members defected from the army, their homes were entirely seized. One participant said, **"Because my father defected, they occupied our home completely, and they burned it down<sup>9</sup>."**

While Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham adopted the same approach as the regime in pursuing the properties of its opponents, claiming to have properties in the city of Sarmada in Idlib, a participant with them says, **"Due to my husband's work in regime-controlled areas and his not leaving his job, I was forced to leave my home and take nothing with me<sup>10</sup>."**

This situation extended to Turkey, where one participant said, **"When the border wall was built between Turkey and Syria, Turkey confiscated part of my agricultural land in the Jisr al-Shughur area. Despite having property documents in my name, I wasn't compensated, and there is no mechanism for making a claim<sup>11</sup>."**



Pictures from the "My Property Is My Right" exhibition, which was held in the city of Idlib, where women shared personal belongings that accompanied them during their displacement journey.

9- A displaced woman from Latakia to Mare'

10- A displaced participant from Idlib to Azaz.

11- A displaced participant from the Idlib countryside to Sarmada.

## **Military Reasons:**

It is no secret that the shelling transformed many Syrian cities and homes into rubble, in addition to homes being looted by the regime and its militias to the point of demolishing them for the iron within their structure. Most women participants in the dialogue sessions agreed that the Syrian army and its allied militias intentionally destroyed properties after looting them.

One woman participant, displaced from Maarat al-Numan in Idlib to Salqin, explained, **"The house is still there, but it's a mere skeleton now because of theft. Even the armored cement houses were broken into to take the iron inside, leaving nothing of the house but its walls."**

Another displaced participant from Aleppo to Azaz recounted, **"We have many properties. The houses that the army didn't inhabit were set on fire, and those occupied were seized completely, claiming they were terrorist houses. No one can question or inquire about them. We have two houses that were completely burned down, turned into piles of ash, as the regime resorted to burning down the houses after looting them."**

And a participant who had been displaced from Aleppo to Mare said, **"No one buys a destroyed and looted house. We lost our homes and have no right to dispose of them."**

Referring to the control of militias allied with the Syrian regime over the properties of displaced individuals, a woman, displaced from the Qalamoun region to Sarmada, says, **"The majority of those who were displaced from the Damascus countryside are young people, and there was nothing registered in their names regarding real estate; it was all in their families' names. The entire Qalamoun Mountains are controlled by the party, and it is inaccessible to both the displaced and the residents of the area. It has been transformed into marijuana farms and drug factories, with all the trees and crops being completely eradicated, and there's no way to claim them."**

The presence of some homes near military areas or what is known as the frontlines forced their inhabitants to leave, either out of fear of the conflicts within these areas or due to security forces taking control of the properties. For instance, a woman who was displaced from the Damascus countryside to Mare has properties in the town of Al-Mleiha near the Air Defense Administration, and the regime has taken control of all her family's properties. No one can approach them.

Another woman from the Aleppo countryside has her family's properties located near the 46th Brigade, which is also under the control of the Syrian regime, making it too dangerous for anyone to approach the area. Meanwhile, the house of a woman displaced from Kafr Nabl in Idlib to Salqin suddenly became a point of contact between opposition forces and Syrian government forces, exposed to shelling until it was lost entirely.

### ● **Legal Reasons:**

Several women have pointed out that they lost their properties due to the Syrian regime's confiscation of these properties under the pretext of anti-terrorism laws. A displaced woman from Aleppo to Mare mentioned that the family's properties, including several houses and shops, were all seized, and later they learned that two of the houses were put up for auction because they belonged to opposition members.

Another woman who was displaced from Damascus to Mare mentioned that her husband had a complete building sealed with red wax.<sup>12</sup> A displaced woman from Damascus to Salqin also said, **"Property owners were forced to sell their properties by force, or else they would be seized under the pretext of reconstruction. When they refused to sell, the family's property was confiscated."**

Here, political and legal reasons intersect because the Syrian regime authorities and the authorities in control of the situation have manipulated laws to gain control over the Syrian people's properties.

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12- This means that the place is under the control of the police or the judicial authority, and any action in it is strictly prohibited.

## ● Security Reasons:

Due to the presence of property documentation centers in cities controlled by the Assad regime, such as Damascus, Hama, Homs, and Latakia, many Syrian women are afraid to go to these areas due to frequent incidents of women being arrested on the roads leading to those cities. A displaced participant from Maarat al-Numan to Mare emphasized, **"Our properties are still under my grandfather's name, and we cannot carry out the inheritance and distribution process because the center is in Hama. When I suggested to my husband to go and handle this matter, he refused due to our neighbor being arrested on the road to Hama ... everyone knows that a woman's arrest is not the same as a man's arrest. So, we preferred to let all the properties go."**

Several participants have noted that the prevailing belief regarding property and housing rights, that the Syrian regime securely maintains property records, is a misconception. The transfer of property records from Idlib to Hama resulted in one of the participants losing her property. A displaced woman from rural Idlib to Salqin explained, **"When my uncle went to have his property registered, they reverted the property to my grandmother's name, canceling all the transactions that occurred after my grandmother's death, despite having documents proving ownership."**

The Syrian regime also imposed the requirement of obtaining **security approval** in any property sale, purchase, or registration process. This has been a fundamental reason for Syrian women losing their properties, or even for not claiming them.

A displaced participant from Aleppo to Mare said, **"Despite having relatives in Aleppo, they cannot inquire about the properties due to security concerns. However, the neighbors informed them that the house had been completely stolen, and even its outer door was stolen. As for the lands, they were taken over by people from Nubl.<sup>13</sup> When my uncle tried to cultivate the land, the person who occupied it from Nubl told him that the production would be shared equally, and the cost would be borne by my uncle alone, in exchange for allowing him to cultivate it. Therefore, my uncle left it due to fear."**

In contrast, similar to the Syrian regime, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham imposed a **"Positive Statement"**, known as the security approval, on real estate sales, allowing refugees outside Syria to work as agents for sales, while prohibiting agency work for individuals in regime-controlled areas. A displaced woman from rural Idlib to A'zaz recalled that Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham took over her relatives' house, and they were unable to obtain an agency because they were in regime-controlled areas.

### ● **Social Reasons:**

Due to displacement, family breakdown, and the social heritage previously mentioned, many Syrian women lost their properties. This can happen due to divorce, where they either receive their rightful share or are deprived of it, or due to widowhood, where they cannot claim their rights because social customs and traditions stand as obstacles to a woman's legal and rightful claims.

A displaced participant from Aleppo to A'zaz said, **"Due to problems between my husband and me, after the divorce, my husband transferred all his properties to his father's name, and due to granting general power of attorney to my husband for all my properties, my properties also passed to his father when my husband's father passed away, and they became the inheritors, even though a portion of those properties actually belonged to me."**

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13- The residents of Nubl and Zahraa took control of the properties of the displaced individuals, Alquds Alarabi Newspaper, December 28, 2020.

Another woman, who was displaced from Homs to A'zaz, mentioned that her husband's family took over her properties after their divorce. She was forced to sell her gold jewelry to hire a lawyer in order to reclaim her properties. However, as of writing this research, she had not received a court decision, and the lawyer was still demanding additional fees.

Many women have noted that their relatives or neighbors took over their properties, indicating the societal and ethical corruption accompanying the war.

### **Economic Reasons:**

Under these difficult economic conditions for the displaced, many Syrians, both men and women, have been forced to give up their properties or sell them at very low prices.

A displaced woman from Aleppo to Mare noted that the depreciation of the Syrian pound led to the loss of her house's value after it had once been quite high.

Another participant, displaced from rural Idlib to Salqin, said, **"We are trying to sell our house even at a low price because there is no hope of returning, and we need to improve our living situation."**





## Mechanisms of Syrian Women to Access Their Properties:

Due to the reasons that resulted in women losing their properties or their families' properties and because these reasons persist even at the time of this research, it is found that **88.23%** of the women participating in the dialogue and consultation sessions do not attempt to claim their properties. **2.6%** had a family member living in the house or overseeing the properties. While only **9.15%** attempted to claim their properties and those of their families.

Despite the low percentage of women taking action, they are the ones who bear the burdens of claiming properties and their attachments. This includes taking risks to go to areas controlled by the Assad regime, creating legal agencies for family women to conduct legal transactions, or selling gold jewelry to hire a lawyer. This is because from the women's perspective, if men undertake these processes, it increases the risk of their arrest or conscription.

A displaced participant from Aleppo to A'zaz mentioned that when her husband went through the property registration process, he was arrested for six months, and the property documents were seized while he was in prison. Consequently, after his release, they changed their minds about claiming the properties or even just inquiring about them.

Women claiming their property rights were not always met with tangible results due to dealing with a corrupt system, and the lack of knowledge among many women about the legal mechanisms for proving and handling property.

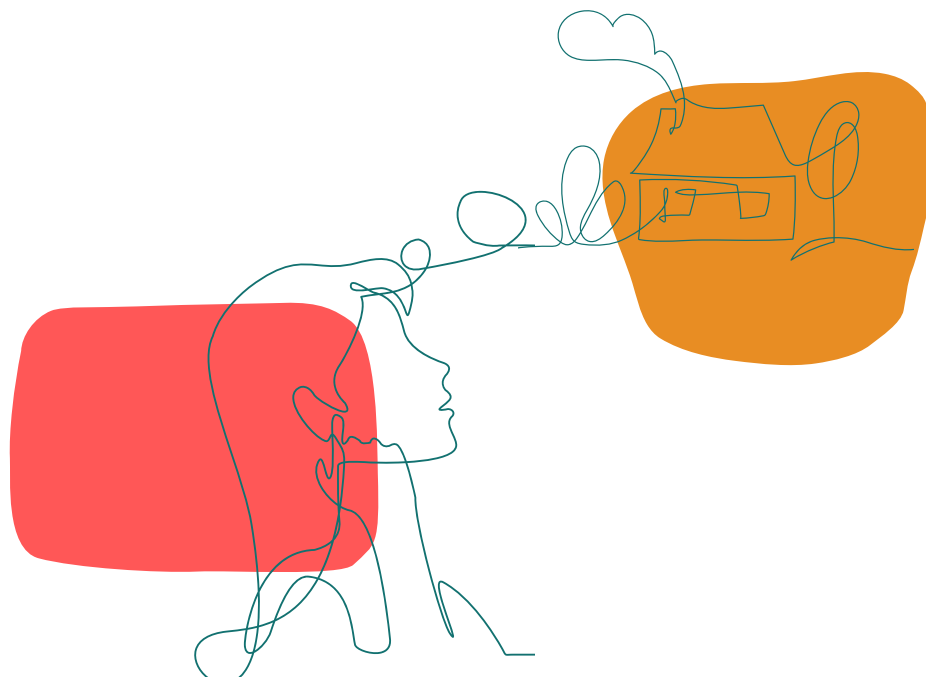
A woman who lost her family's properties in Latakia and was displaced to Mare said, **"When my mother tried to claim or sell items from the house, the neighbors intimidated her. So, she tried to hire a lawyer, but he disappeared after a while."** In this context, another participant, displaced from rural Idlib to A'zaz, added that her sister, who was studying at the university in Hama, attempted to process the property's registration, but she stopped because she didn't know how to follow the legal procedures, and the family was afraid for her.

Many displaced individuals, both men and women, who lost access to their properties, have tried to reach out to women in their families. They believed that women's movement in areas under the control of the Syrian regime might be easier than that of men. One woman noted that they created a legal agency for a female relative to handle the sale of their house in Raqqa.

However, this approach was not always fruitful. In some cases, even if women were in areas controlled by the regime and were capable of moving, they were unable to take these actions without their husband's consent. A woman displaced from Aleppo to A'zaz mentioned that they tried to create a legal agency for her sister, who was married in Damascus. However her husband insisted on obtaining half of the properties in exchange for her handling the property transactions. Consequently, the family refused, leading to a deterioration of the family relationship with her sister, and her husband forbade her from communicating with her family.

When relatives control the property, the process of claiming ownership turns into a confrontation with the family. A woman displaced from Homs to Azaz says that her husband's family were the ones who took control of her property after her divorce, and she was forced to sell her gold jewelry to hire a lawyer in order to recover her property. However, as of writing this research, the woman has not obtained a claim. Court decision and the lawyer is still demanding additional fees.

As a result, the claim mechanisms were not useful for the majority of women due to fraudulent lawyers and their demand for very large sums of money as legal fees. In addition to women's lack of knowledge and knowledge of property transactions and the ambiguity of these procedures. As the women mentioned, they sometimes face resistance from men in the family that prevents some of them from completing the process of transferring property to their names or the names of women in their families.



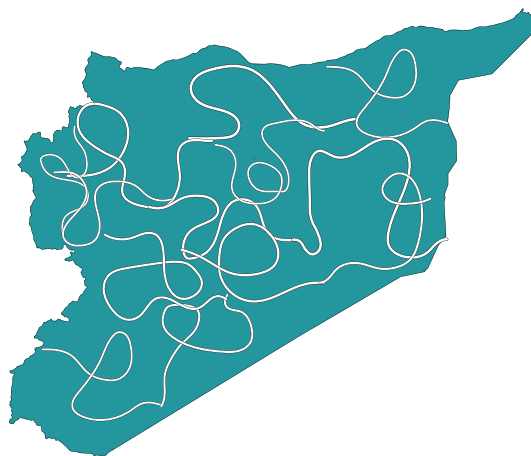


## Challenges Faced by Women in Accessing Their Properties:

The challenges for women were closely linked to the Syrian conflict's reality. The ongoing presence of the Syrian regime in power and the political deadlock in the country posed significant challenges to women's perception of the feasibility of claiming their rights and properties.

To understand these challenges from their perspective, we correlated these challenges with the reasons for the loss of properties and the inability to access them. We found that the primary challenge faced by all participating women in the dialogue sessions was the security challenge. Notably, women were greatly affected by the security status of their male family members, as women's fears were representative of their family's fears as a whole. These women's challenges were not personal but rather challenges for Syrian families who were internally displaced in northern Syria and everywhere.

Among the security challenges was the imposition of security approvals for any property-related transaction, such as buying, selling, and registration. The presence of a "deed of ownership" in opposition-held areas represented the most significant obstacle for them. The fear factor was the most considerable challenge for the participating women in general and particularly for those who had managed to escape arrest.



A woman displaced from Aleppo to Mare stated, **"The procedures are very costly, especially since my brothers have security files. So, the challenge for me is fear. We received threat messages written on the walls, saying that anyone from the family who returns will be killed because my brothers are wanted by the regime."**

One of the methods employed by the Syrian regime to confiscate properties is through arrest. Some women spoke about the arrest of family members and the demand for substantial amounts of money in exchange for their release. This forces families to sell their properties. When the arrest involves a woman, the cost is even higher.

A survivor of arrest, who is now displaced in Mare and originally from Damascus, said, **"No one can approach my husband's properties because he is wanted. When I was arrested with my children, they demanded 35 million Syrian pounds, which is equivalent to 300,000 dollars, for our release. Despite having my husband's sisters in Damascus, they cannot inquire about the properties due to fear of the Syrian security forces."**

Among the challenges that created obstacles for many women is the loss of property and identification documents during displacement or due to shelling. The destruction caused by shelling didn't just affect homes and properties but also created complex challenges for women trying to claim their properties with lost documents and damaged assets, which reduced their value.

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Furthermore, the loss or death of individuals during the years of conflict posed a barrier for women in accessing their properties due to the difficulty of settling inheritances, which is linked to civil registration and personal records. A woman displaced from Aleppo to Sarmada mentioned, **"Our house is in my grandfather's name, and we have the ownership papers, but we can't deal with them because my grandfather only verbally divided the property before his death. However, the official documents are still in his name. The challenge lies in obtaining signatures from the heirs and witnesses, the difficulty of appointing representatives, and the high costs involved in the procedures. The biggest challenge, however, is the presence of the regime."**

Instead of lawyers being a refuge for people to secure their rights, many lawyers in regime-controlled areas posed an unexpected challenge for women. This led to a state of mistrust among the majority of women participating in dialogue sessions.

One participant, who is displaced from Raqqa to Mare, described the challenge faced by her and her family as a **"victim of fraud and deception by the appointed lawyer. After taking the fees, he disappeared. The house was sold at a very low price, but out of necessity."**

Regarding cases of deception mentioned by women, some lawyers would request the transfer of property into their own names to facilitate legal procedures, and they often demanded exorbitant fees for their representation. This led many to give up on their property claims.

On the other hand, the absence of female lawyers in regime-controlled areas represented a significant challenge for women demanding their own or family properties. It left them vulnerable to harassment, extortion and being underestimated.

A woman who was displaced from the Idlib countryside to Sarmada mentioned that the scarcity of experienced female lawyers in property matters forced women to interact with male lawyers. This exposed them to harassment, extortion, or being taken advantage of.

Emphasizing the importance of having female lawyers and female employees working in the real estate registry, a displaced lawyer from Saraqib to Salqin said, **"The shortage of female lawyers specializing in property and real estate transactions, and their limited role in family law cases, has made knowledge of property laws predominantly a male domain. This has made women's dealings more challenging, especially if they come from conservative backgrounds."**

Some women mentioned a different type of challenge, namely social challenges that hindered their families' ability to deal with their properties. One participant, displaced from Eastern Ghouta to Mare, stated that due to **"pressure from relatives who believed that strangers should not intervene in the neighborhood"**, her father couldn't manage his property. In the context of social challenges, widowed women who participated in the sessions highlighted the absence of rights for widows and how it is considered a shameful act to claim their deceased husband's properties.

A displaced woman from Aleppo to Mare said, **"My husband had nothing, but the properties are in my mother-in-law's name, and no one can inquire about the properties in Aleppo. Even though my husband's family is in regime-controlled areas, I am not entitled to claim anything because I am a widow, and in liberated areas, it is considered shameful for a widow to claim her in-laws' property."**

## Summary of Challenges:

- 1** Security Challenges: Challenges related to the requirement of security approvals for property transactions, arrests, threats, and fear of the Syrian regime.
- 2** Legal Challenges: Loss of property and identity documents, and difficulties with legal procedures.
- 3** Geographical Challenges: Movement of official departments (real estate registry, civil registry, judiciary) to areas controlled by the Assad regime, while property owners are in opposition-held areas.
- 4** Defense Challenges: Fraud, deception, extortion, disappearances, and exorbitant fees.
- 5** Property Destruction: Through shelling, looting, deliberate damage of opposition property, and burning of trees.
- 6** Lack of compensation mechanisms for destruction or vandalism.
- 7** Social Challenges: The social stigma associated with widows or divorced women claiming their property, and social pressure from relatives.





## The Economic Impact of Women Losing Their Properties:

The impact of women losing their properties and financial resources affects both women and men, albeit in different ways. Many studies have indicated that the deterioration of living conditions due to conflict and the absence of male providers had a positive impact on increasing the percentage of working women.<sup>14</sup>

However, this increase came with economic burdens placed on women, forcing them to work, either in partnership with men or independently, to secure their family's needs.

A displaced woman from Maarat al-Numan to Sarmada stated, **"I had to work to secure household needs, which caused physical and psychological pressure."**

Another woman, displaced from Aleppo to Mare, noted that the burdens were doubled on the father, who is the family's breadwinner: **"The most significant impact was financial hardship, living with the minimum essentials of life, and pressuring the father to work extra."**

In reference to varying unemployment rates, a participant from Jisr al-Shughur to Azaz said, **"I resorted to work to support my family, while my husband, despite being a lawyer, became unemployed."**

To further understand the economic impacts, it's necessary to point out that the participants in the research, whether they had properties in their names or were beneficiaries of property and financial resources, included agricultural land, seasons, factories, shops, or livestock. Reports indicate that **10.04%** had properties in their names, while **89.96%** had properties in the name of a male family member.

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14- The war has made the job market more feminized in Syria, Qantara, October 16, 2022.

As a result of the loss of properties and the ability to manage them, both movable and immovable, there were negative economic effects on their lives and the lives of their children. The most significant of these effects was the deterioration of their living conditions, transitioning from relatively comfortable or acceptable lives to more challenging ones in new areas. **The common factor among the participating women was the significant impact of their deteriorating living conditions, which forced them to adapt to difficult lives and seek employment. They had to do so in a labor market where discrimination existed between displaced women and resident women, that is, women from the same region.**

Due to displacement and the population density crisis experienced in northwestern Syria, women talk about the difficulty of finding alternative housing for the properties they lost. This is exacerbated by the absence of laws regulating the rental process and safeguarding the rights of both parties. Their primary concern has now become housing and rent.

One participant, who was displaced from Saraqib to Salqin, narrated her experience: **"I suffered from deteriorating living conditions, high rents, and frequent changes of residence."** She added: **"The landlady kicked us out in the middle of December, in the cold, and we had nothing. When we found another house, the owner decided to marry his son after a short period, so we had to look for a new house again. Now, we live in a ground-floor house that lacks even the basic amenities, and the rent is in dollars. The phrase 'if you don't like it, leave' is something we often hear."**

Due to the high cost and scarcity of housing, many families have been forced to live together in a single house. A woman displaced from Aleppo to Sarmada mentioned, **"There's a significant difference between being in your own home, where you control every corner, and living with your husband and children in a room in someone else's house, sharing bathrooms, kitchens, and everything with others."**

Those who cannot afford the high rents compared to the living conditions of the displaced, suffer in camps or unprepared houses. They often live in extremely basic conditions, despite paying rent. A woman displaced from Aleppo to Salqin mentions her inability to rent, and she lives in an unprepared house, with the constant fear that the house owner may ask them to leave. This fear becomes a constant concern for her and a source of marital discord.

There are no contracts to protect the tenant's rights, and even if a contract is in place, there is no authority to protect the tenant or resident if the homeowners decide to evict them.

The economic impact and deteriorating living conditions extended to include **the loss of educational opportunities for women and children**. Some women shared their struggles in securing basic educational needs for their children. In many cases, they were forced to withdraw their children from school due to the inability to cover the costs of education. In some instances, children were compelled to work to help their families sustain their educational pursuits. Some women were forced to discontinue their children's education due to financial constraints.

A woman displaced from Aleppo to Salqin describes her ordeal, emphasizing that the most significant impact was on her children, who lost their educational future and childhood dreams. The lack of employment opportunities had a significant effect on her life after displacement, especially given her husband's six-year absence after being detained by Jabhat al-Nusra. This situation left her feeling vulnerable, under societal pressure, and responsible for providing for her children.

Another woman, also displaced from Aleppo to Mare', spoke about her parents' struggles to support her and her siblings' education. Both her father and mother worked to cover the rent. Her father, who used to be a teacher, had to become a vegetable vendor, which negatively affected his health. Her mother, despite suffering from disc-related health issues and other ailments, worked as a teacher. This compelled the young girl to seek employment to alleviate the financial burdens of her education. Her mother told her, **"I sell my clothes so you can learn."**

In an effort to improve their living conditions or provide their children with an education, some women discussed selling their gold jewelry, often the first property that women lost in the family.

On the other hand, some women had to enter the job market due to men's inability to secure sufficient income sources. These women found themselves in an unfair, discriminatory job market. They were generally unprepared to enter this field due to their limited experience, psychological condition, and lack of familiarity with the market dynamics.

Women described the impact of men losing their responsibilities. His inability to fulfill his role is a disability for the family as a whole. A woman displaced from Rural Damascus to Marea said: **"My husband became depressed, which affected the family as a whole and made me responsible for everything."**

Women also described the psychological impact of circumstances that forced them to work. A woman displaced from Maarat al-Numan to Azaz said, **"I had no desire to work. I needed a period of tranquility and rest, but necessity was the reason. This affected my psychological and physical well-being."**

As a result, the consequences of women's property loss intersect with and compound the general effects of wars, such as deteriorating living conditions, rising unemployment, loss of education, child labor, devaluation of properties, and the inability to manage them.



## **The Psychological Effects of Violating Women's Property Rights**

The loss of properties and the associated causes and challenges to obtain or manage them had various psychological effects on women and their families. Women are uniquely tied to their communities and homes. Each woman's experience is specific due to the differences in displacement circumstances and property loss. Therefore, we aimed to collect all the impacts and indirect effects mentioned by women, analyzing what was not explicitly stated.

### **Fear and a Sense of Insecurity:**

Throughout the years of war in Syria, women have borne the greatest share of fear, psychological distress, and trauma. The loss of property has added deep and complex psychological effects on women, associating feelings of fatigue and insecurity with the loss of their homes, sometimes coupled with the constant fear of ongoing shelling in northern Syria as of the time of this study.

A displaced woman from rural Idlib to Sarmada mentioned that after witnessing her house being completely destroyed by shelling and fleeing to a new area with her children, what scares her the most about the shelling is not just hearing the sounds but even hearing the news about it.

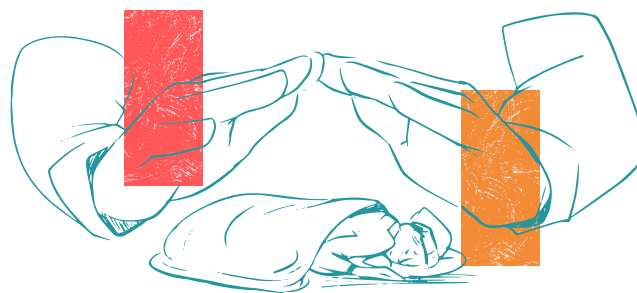
Another displaced woman from Maarat Harma to Salqin shared that due to a bomb falling on her house, she developed a fear of aircraft and shelling, which even affected her choice to rent a new house.

Women also suffer from fears related to finding a new home and fearing the power of homeowners, as well as the constant movement and forced evacuations from houses.

A displaced woman from Maarat al-Numan to Salqin said, **"The hardest thing a displaced person, especially a widow caring for children, can face is the forced eviction from a rented house, or even from the camps, without compensation or an alternative. The rising real estate prices are a significant barrier to stability and have a psychological impact on the entire family."**

A woman from Khan Shaykhun who was displaced to Sarmada talked about her constant fear of the homeowner requesting them to leave or vacate the house, which has affected her family life and the stability of her children.

Another participant, a displaced woman from Aleppo to Mare', expressed that her fears center around the moment when the homeowner asks them to leave the house. This situation causes anxiety for her and becomes a point of contention in her marital relationship. There are no contracts that protect the tenant's rights, and even if there is a contract, there is no executive authority to safeguard the rights of the tenant or the resident in non-equipped houses.





### **Instability and a Sense of Displacement:**

One of the common psychological effects shared by most of the participating women is a longing for their lost homes and an inability to form a connection with the residents of the houses they currently inhabit.

A participant from Maarat Harma who was displaced to Salqin described her emotional state by saying, **"I constantly feel that this place is not my place, that this land is not my land, and that I am living in the past. I remember details of my home, even the smallest things... even the broken tile; I remember it."**

The impact on one woman, who was displaced from Saraqeb to Azaz, was evident as she said, **"When I fled my hometown fearing the security forces because I have a young daughter, I found myself living in a room in the countryside of Atarib. Previously, I lived in a house where each child had their own room and independence. Starting from scratch was very painful".** She continued, **"My dream is to return to the house, even if it's just the walls and the walls because the memories of the house cannot be replaced."**

Another woman who was displaced from Aleppo to Idlib remembered that when she escaped due to fear of the security forces since she had a young daughter, she ended up living in a room in rural Atarib. She had previously lived in a house where each child had their room and independence. Starting from scratch was very painful for her. She added, **"My dream is to return to the house, even if it's just the walls and the walls because the memories of the house cannot be replaced."**



One woman, who was displaced from the villages in rural Idlib to Mare', said with tears and sorrow, **"The thing I miss the most is the garden next to the house where I used to plant roses and flowers, and how I wish I could go back to see them again."** Losing her home was not easy for her and her family. She recalled that, in the words of her mother, her situation was the same as that of all the women. They recount the details of their lost homes in their conversations. She said, **"My mother never tires of recounting the memories of the house and its details, as if her memory cannot accept any additional memories."**



### **Loss of Social Status:**

The social status of women within their communities, along with the respect and appreciation they receive, is closely tied to their properties and homes. When they lose these properties and are uprooted from their communities, transitioning from relative affluence to hardship, they feel a loss of social status. This has a significant impact on them and their families and can lead to depression in both men and women, affecting the entire family.

A woman who was displaced from Aleppo to Idlib likened the loss of property to losing one's life and the exhaustion of life and family. The sense of loss never leaves her. Similar sentiments were echoed by her peers. She said, **"Starting from scratch is very painful, and the social impact is also important. Besides the economic impact that makes you only think about your day and livelihood."**

Another woman who was displaced from Damascus to Sarmada shared, **"When we left our homes, we left with them our family and sisters and everything related to us. We used to have the family's ancestral house, and gatherings were usually held there. My children have now lost all these things, feelings, and relationships."**

Some displaced women suffered the loss of husbands, relatives, and siblings, which had severe psychological effects that, at times, led to depression and isolation.

A woman from Maarat al-Numan who was displaced to Mare' recounted her losses, saying, **"I suffered from depression after the death of my brothers, whom I considered my support after God. The loss of our properties made me feel an overwhelming sense of loneliness and extreme helplessness."** This dramatic shift and change in social and economic status led to family conflicts that negatively affected some women.

A woman who was displaced from Aleppo to Salqin revealed, **"My marital relationship deteriorated due to the differences in our social and economic status, which created immense psychological pressures that manifested as physical conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure."**

On the other hand, a woman displaced from Homs to Azaz tried to forget all her family relationships to avoid being weakened by nostalgia, saying, **"Losing everything had a significant impact. Displacement severed the ties between me and my family, so I will try to erase my memories because they weaken me, and I don't like to appear weak to anyone."**



### **Social Stigmatization of Displaced Women:**

Stigmatization refers to the social rejection of a person or a group of people based on discriminatory criteria, resulting in the classification and categorization of individuals or differential treatment, leading to social non-acceptance, isolation, and vulnerability.<sup>15</sup>

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15- Social stigmatization: What you need to know, UNICEF, July 20, 2020.

The journey of women in their new communities typically starts with a question that shapes their relationship: **"Where are you from?"** This question, as described by a young woman displaced from Idlib villages to Mare', **"is critical as it determines how the community will interact with you, indicating whether you are a displaced person or not."** She stressed that being repeatedly asked this question with every move takes **a severe toll on one's mental well-being.**

Expressing her feelings, a displaced woman from Hama countryside to Sarmada stated, **"You are a displaced person, you've lost your home, and there's no place that accommodates you."** She always feels that her family ranks lower in the host society.

Another participant, who was displaced from Deir ez-Zor to Azaz, pointed out that the feelings that accompany social stigmatization are feelings of humiliation, degradation, and helplessness, which have repercussions on the entire family.

The danger of social stigmatization for women lies in the exposure to violence and harassment solely because they are displaced. This has caused some women to stop pursuing education or work, refrain from going out in public spaces, hinder their self-development, and limit their ability to earn income.

A young woman displaced from rural Aleppo to Mare' shared her perspective: **"The community here looks at displaced girls as easy, cheap prey. They look at their daughters and wives, and they perceive us as worthless."** She added, **"Whenever there's a dispute in the area, young men in the markets shout loudly, 'Oh stranger, behave yourself.' We wonder if we are strangers to our own homeland and if we lack manners."**

Another young woman, a displaced person from rural Idlib to Mare' said **"My sister and I stopped studying because of harassment and societal stigma, even though we were among the top students."**

Referring to the impact of social stigmatization on the ability of displaced women to adapt and start a new life, another participant from rural Damascus to Mare' said, **"Stigmatization in employment is lethal. To get employed, you must be a local; it's as if being displaced labels you as a lost cause."**

For survivors of detention and displacement, social stigmatization is exacerbated, leading to a compounded psychological impact. A woman who survived detention and was displaced from Damascus to Mare' said, **"The loss of social status is linked to property loss, and you are not just a displaced person but a displaced and detained one, isolated in a new place with no family or relatives."**

Despite the harshness of displacement and property loss, some women have mentioned the positive effects they experienced in terms of personal development, as they broke free from social constraints in their original areas. A woman displaced from rural Damascus to the city of Salqin shared that displacement had a positive impact on her life. She honed her skills, developed herself, and became a stronger, more empowered person, saying, **"When I remained alone, I felt that I embarked into the world and developed myself."**

For another woman, who was displaced from Aleppo to Mare', the journey was undoubtedly challenging. However, she managed to overcome it and found positives in her development when she observed the changes in her personality, stating, **"Displacement and the loss of property have many negative effects, but I can't deny the positive impact, such as self-development and the formation of successful and strong new social relationships."**



## Psychological Effects Extending to All Family Members and Increasing Pressure on Women

The effects and burdens placed on women due to the circumstances faced by the entire family lead to increased responsibilities and psychological pressure on them.

Some studies indicate a close connection between the loss of home, play spaces, and other material aspects for children and their development of psychological disorders. However, the symptoms of these disorders tend to be stronger than those stemming from the loss of people.<sup>16</sup>

Children have difficulty understanding the intricacies of the war in Syria and the changes in lifestyle, which have led some to discontinue their education and turn to child labor. This has a psychological impact on mothers who feel helpless in providing for their children.

A woman displaced from rural Idlib to Sarmada mentioned that what pains her the most is her sense of helplessness when her children have to halt their education due to the challenging living conditions they face as a family.

Another woman displaced from rural Aleppo to Mare' described how the loss of years of her children's education became a burden at home. She tried to compensate for what her children had lost due to their inability to comprehend educational materials properly.

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16- Samer Assaf, [the psychological impact of migration and asylum, a challenging path filled with shocks](#), Believers Without Borders platform, September 2, 2017.

Furthermore, a woman displaced from rural Idlib to Salqin recounted that her children lost their desire to learn as a result of the constant displacement from one area to another. She quoted her daughter as saying, "I don't want to go to school, and I don't want to meet anyone (every time I meet someone, I lose them)."

Children have also lost safe spaces to play and the freedom to move due to social stigmatization. They are subjected to an inferior gaze that perceives the people in camps as having no homes or dignified lives. The woman continued, saying, "Even my children have lost a safe space to play in, and the tent lacks privacy." A woman displaced from rural Hama to Azaz said that some people tell their children, "These are displaced people; don't play with them." She questioned, "What shame or disgrace did the displaced commit?" This was a question posed by one of the children to her mother, who was participating in dialog sessions.

These are the effects experienced by women and their children as a result of the loss of property and displacement. One of the social consequences on women is the increase in domestic violence. The suffering of men due to property loss, unemployment, and the need to work in difficult conditions for low wages, to provide for their families, results in cases of depression among men, feelings of helplessness and weakness, which can lead to anger outbursts or domestic violence, or complete withdrawal and a lack of desire to participate in any activity or work. Both scenarios have a negative impact on women.

A participant, displaced from Aleppo to Azaz, emphasized the significant impact of property loss on her husband and family life. She said, **"The significant change in our lives is that we were not accustomed to living in tents. My husband became depressed due to the loss of his job and the lack of suitable employment, as well as the constant feeling of helplessness in providing for the family's needs. As for me, I am always trying to adapt, but I don't want my children to experience this state of instability."**





## Resources Needed by Women to Advocate for Their Rights

A displaced woman from rural Aleppo to Sarmada said, **"I didn't know that property ownership is a personal right; I used to believe it was a family right linked to the family. Now, I need knowledge to assert my rights."** Starting from this perspective, the majority of participating women emphasized the importance of the need for knowledge and education regarding their rights. They also stressed the importance of legal training to assert their property rights and other rights. From the women's perspective, the significance of knowledge resources lies in encouraging them to claim their rights and empowering them to do so through available legal means. These knowledge resources have motivated women to engage in advocacy campaigns, expressing their desire to participate in them because they are the primary stakeholders in these issues.

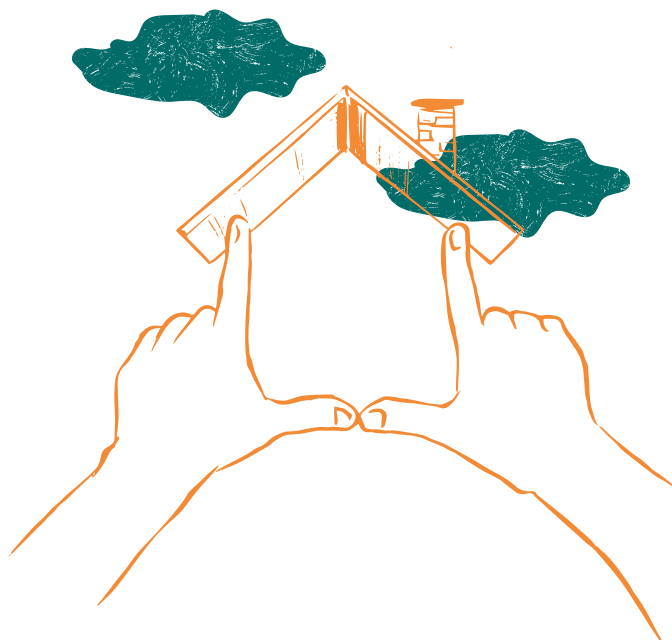
They also discussed ideas for documentaries that illustrate property violations, physical publications for knowledge dissemination, books that narrate the stories of displaced women who lost their properties, and short videos that can be shared on social media.

Women did not disregard the importance of financial resources and material support. They emphasized its utmost importance in any property claim process, the issuance of required official documents, or the securing of property rights and their management. A woman, displaced from rural Idlib to Salqin, stated, **"With money, I can hire a lawyer and manage my property."** She had suffered from the loss of property, which remained registered under male family members' names only.



One of the important resources that women acknowledged was legal and official resources. Having recognized legal entities that document violations and property records was essential.

From the women's perspective, they emphasized the importance of strengthening the ethical system to protect people's properties in northwestern Syria, particularly considering the violations that have affected the properties of those who remained in areas controlled by the Syrian regime. A woman displaced from rural Hama to Azaz said, **"We need to uphold ethics to safeguard our properties and those of others."**



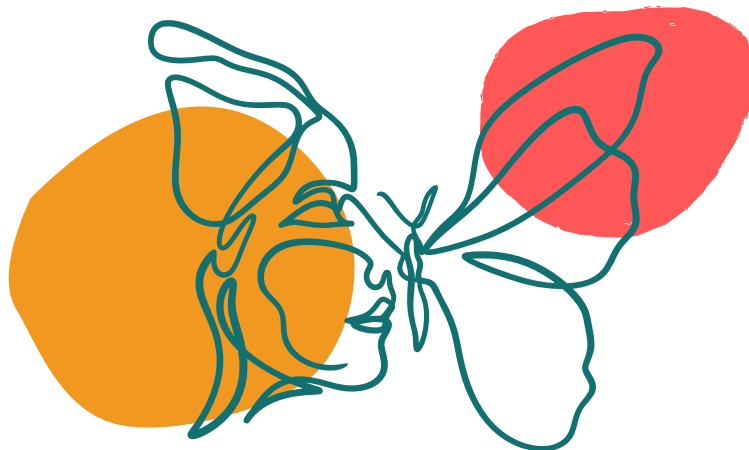


## Women's Adaptation Mechanisms in the Face of Property Loss

Psychology defines adaptation mechanisms as the ways in which individuals adjust to internal (psychological) and external (environmental) pressures to achieve comfort and stability. Typically, adaptation mechanisms are translated into conscious or unconscious actions. It is important to note that the majority of people choose their mechanisms unconsciously.<sup>17</sup>

It's worth noting that women were not explicitly asked about their adaptation mechanisms. Instead, their stories were analyzed to deduce the mechanisms these participating women used to cope with the pressures resulting from property violations.

The stories shared by these women revealed their strength, intelligence in dealing with various pressures, and their determination to protect their families. This drove them to develop diverse coping strategies in response to property loss. Nevertheless, it's important to recognize that different mechanisms were used by different women.



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17- Emad B. Algorani; Vikas Gupta, *Coping Mechanisms*, National Library of Medicine, 28 April, 2022.

One of the mechanisms linked to their old homes and the nostalgia for them, as mentioned by these women, is preserving the key to their homes, even though they have been damaged. A woman, displaced from Damascus to Salqin, said, **"I still keep the key to my house and always try to remind my children of our home so they know they have a foundation and a place."**

Some women attempted to alleviate their struggles in new places through innovative ways of cooking or organizing their homes to provide greater comfort for themselves and their families.

For instance, when "R," who was displaced from Aleppo to Mare, had to live in a single room with her family, she divided it with a piece of fabric to create separate spaces for herself and her children.

Women mentioned the shift to manual breadmaking due to difficult living conditions and the reliance on battery-powered sources of light or even using potato wicks in the worst cases for a slightly longer source of light than candles.

A **positive mechanism** shared by many women was pursuing their education despite the harsh circumstances. They found in education and knowledge a way to compensate for their losses and a source of strength to face challenges. A woman, displaced from Hama, spoke about her living situation in Idlib, saying, **"The only way for me to adapt to the current situation was to continue my studies after a ten-year hiatus."**

Another woman, displaced from rural Idlib to Sarmada, mentioned that completing her education was her only lifeline, making her believe she could assert her rights in the future.

Women did not stop at merely completing their education. On the contrary, there were stories of adaptation where women succeeded in overcoming life's challenges and the pain of property loss **by engaging in work**, despite the discrimination they faced in the workplace between residents and displaced individuals.

A woman displaced from Damascus to Mare, whose family's properties had been seized by security forces, found that work and forming new relationships with people and the community helped her get out of her isolation and adapt to her new situation. Another woman, displaced from Aleppo to Mare, stated that she couldn't work outside the home, so she worked within it to be able to stay with her children and meet the family's needs.

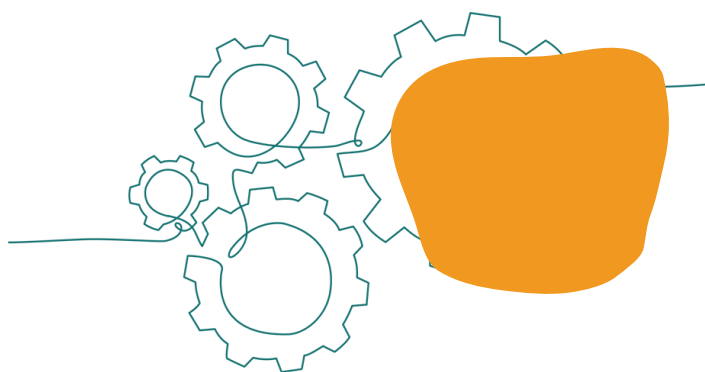
Interestingly, one mechanism women who were affected by property violations used to adapt to their challenging situations was helping others and contributing to alleviating their suffering.

A participant, displaced from rural Idlib to Salqin, mentioned that helping people was what helped her overcome depression. Feeling capable of assisting others relieved her burdens.

Women also pointed out that their ability to adapt was linked to their faith, believing that they were rightful owners and that those who violated their housing rights and confiscated their properties would be held accountable someday. This sense of faith helped many women cope with their situation.

A woman, displaced from rural Aleppo to Sarmada, stated that her faith in the fall of the regime and her return to her home was the only thing that kept her going and made her hopeful for a better future. On the other hand, there are negative adaptation mechanisms tied to the mental state of women and the support from their communities. For some women, the ability to adapt was challenging. A woman, displaced from rural Idlib to Salqin, struggled to adapt to every new home and area, describing each transition as a **"new death."**

Another woman, displaced from Ghouta to Mare, said, **"I still can't adapt to this situation, and despite years passing, I only live in the hope of returning to my home."**





## Women's Recommendations for Preserving Their Properties:

The following recommendations are formulated based on the dialogue sessions and are not recorded verbatim, where the participants advised the following:

- The presence of a local governing authority recognized by all parties, responsible for documenting civil records and property records and facilitating individuals' transactions in northwestern Syria. Additionally, the establishment of joint and neutral committees composed of lawyers, both men and women, to facilitate transactions, issue proof documents and property certificates, and legally register them without the need for security approvals or risking visits to Syrian government-controlled areas.
- The formation of a law that guarantees the rights of displaced individuals, both men and women, in northern Syria. This law should ensure the right to decent housing, equal opportunities, and social integration to minimize the effects of displacement on women, their children, and their families.
- The presence of legal committees to defend their rights at international conferences and exert pressure on the Syrian government to repeal all laws violating property rights. Moreover, it provides legal training to women and the community as a whole to enhance their knowledge and ability to claim their properties, as well as offering free consultancy services regarding property protection and preservation.
- Women emphasized the importance of having oversight for local councils, ensuring non-discrimination and equal service and opportunity access. This includes focusing on the representation of displaced women within local councils and the establishment of special offices for displaced men and women.

- The presence of an internationally recognized and authorized body to document property rights violations with the hope of holding the violators accountable, restoring legitimate rights to their owners, compensating for financial losses, and addressing psychological suffering.
- Some women highlighted the importance of economic support for displaced women, those who have lost their properties, and those who survived detention. This support serves as a mechanism for damage recovery and a means to help them continue advocating for their rights.
- The existence of projects focusing on the mental health of women and their families through diverse, collaborative activities among women, enabling them to access mental health support.
- Women supported logistically and knowledge-wise to engage in ongoing media campaigns and advocacy activities. These campaigns encompass shedding light on property rights violations and providing knowledge and awareness about the importance of these rights.
- The presence of committees and influential entities to organize the expected reconstruction process in Syria.
- Continuous demands and reminders to implement UN Resolution 2254, which calls for an end to the conflict in Syria.



## **The Impact of the Earthquake on Women Who Lost Their Properties:**

The earthquake that struck northern Syria and southern Turkey was no less merciful than the war that lasted for twelve years; however, its impact was entirely different. The human losses in Syria are estimated at 7,259 deaths, including 2,153 children and 1,524 women, with 2,534 in northwestern Syria.<sup>18</sup> Since our discussion revolves around the impact of property loss on women, we will present the key effects of the earthquake on women in northern Syria, as well as their most critical resources and needs, addressing various problems faced by women, in addition to men.

We contacted facilitators who, in turn, communicated with the women who participated in the sessions to check on their conditions and learn about their needs. Of course, we could not contact all the participating women due to the difficult circumstances faced by the facilitators following the earthquake. However, the information included represents 60 percent of the women who participated in the sessions.

Displaced women were particularly affected by the earthquake and experienced additional pain due to their already challenging living conditions, making the earthquake add new burdens and depriving them of even temporary stability in their properties.

Some women participants in the research mentioned the direct impact of the earthquake, the lack of essential services, and the failure of authorities on the ground to provide for their needs or secure shelters for them. This caused them to live in a state of fear for their safety and the safety of their families, as well as frustration and dissatisfaction with the way they were treated.

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<sup>18</sup>- The Syrian Network for Human Rights, February 28, 2023.



Women primarily suffer from the lack of private places, shelters, or separate tents in northern Syria. Some of them were forced to sleep outdoors or return to homes that were partially or completely unsafe. Others resorted to sleeping in transport vehicles or cars if they were lucky enough to have one. This situation has led to women feeling insecure, losing their privacy, and experiencing fear.

A woman, displaced from rural Idlib to Salqin, whose house was destroyed by the earthquake, said, **"We couldn't find a tent to take shelter in, so we had to move to our relatives' family in the camp, and to this day, three families are living in the same tent. Life here is extremely difficult and very cold."**

It's worth noting here the scarcity of healthcare services that cater to women's needs and the difficulty in accessing restrooms when available. Women experienced disruptions in their menstrual cycles, necessitating additional health and medical services.

Through questioning the participating women, the majority reported being surprised by their menstrual cycles occurring prematurely and with exacerbated symptoms, lasting longer than usual.



A woman affected by the earthquake, displaced from Saraqeb to Salqin, says, **"I had my period on the second day of the earthquake, and we were on the street. I didn't have any extra clothes or sanitary napkins with me, which made me feel very embarrassed to ask my husband to take me somewhere to change. In our customs, entering the mosque during menstruation is disliked or forbidden."** She added that sanitary napkins were scarce during that time, even in commercial stores; it seemed they had disappeared from the market.

The scarcity of healthcare services extends to the scarcity of water in general, particularly safe drinking water. This is due to the hasty construction of makeshift camps and shelter centers without considering the availability of adequate healthcare services for individuals. The psychological impact of the earthquake was undeniably significant for women in general and, especially, displaced women.

A displaced woman from Aleppo who lost her house in Sarmada says, **"Today, we only need a tent; this is the tenth house I've lost. I can't bear more loss."**

Displaced women affected by the earthquake suffer from significant psychological effects, linked to their past property losses, ongoing displacement, and anxiety. These effects include sleep disturbances, depression, concentration problems, earthquake-related phobias, and post-traumatic stress disorders.

The earthquake imposed **additional psychological burdens** on women, such as their inability to express their fears, fearing their transfer to their children, being unable to listen to or address their children's fears, feelings of helplessness, and a lack of understanding of the overall situation. A woman displaced from Idlib to Ma'arrat al-Nu'man mentions, **"I couldn't comprehend what was happening on the sixth day of the earthquake; I was in a state of shock and incomprehension. The catastrophe was too significant for me to grasp quickly, making me unable to even comprehend it."**

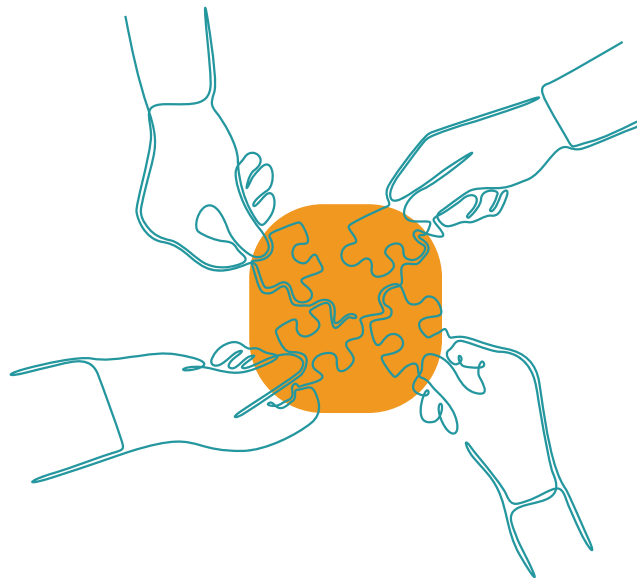
On the other hand, **the spiritual beliefs** of some women were a coping mechanism to alleviate the magnitude of the disaster and loss. A displaced woman from rural Damascus to Sarmada mentioned that her faith in God was what saved her and her family from the earthquake.

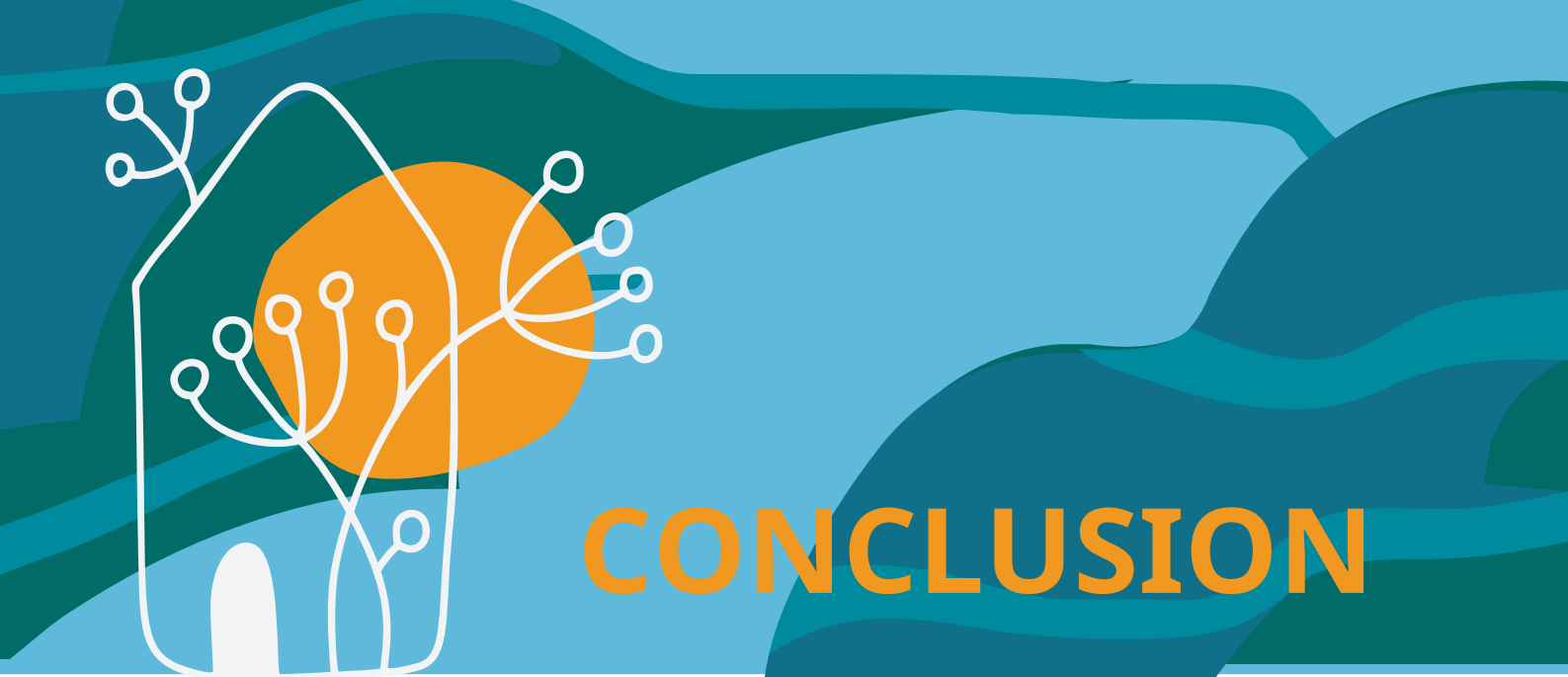
The pressure from the earthquake, coupled with the information circulated on social media, heightened anxiety in women, affecting their inner peace and their ability to cope with the disaster. A woman, displaced from Aleppo to Salqin, says, **"What I saw and heard on social media intensified my shock. I couldn't distinguish between what I saw on the ground and what I saw on Facebook. The disaster was larger than my ability to grasp it quickly, making me unable to even comfort my children."**

As an indication of the increased violence against women, a displaced woman from Hama's countryside to Sarmada mentions, **"My husband now constantly belittles me and vents his anger about everything at home. I can't even ask him for anything for the house and the children, as if no one but us was affected by the earthquake."**

The organization "Women Now" documented cases of harassment of all kinds in their initial response to women, even targeting women providing humanitarian services. "Women Now" conducted extensive awareness campaigns about the risks of these violations and educated women on how to deal with relief teams.

Despite the myriad challenges women face in northern Syria, from pre-existing pressures to those exacerbated by the earthquake, women emphasized their ability to take on active roles in the humanitarian response and help the community recover once more.





This study sheds light on the situations of some Syrian women, particularly those who have been displaced in northwest Syria. It highlights the impact of their loss of properties and housing on their daily lives. Moreover, it underscores how these violations related to housing rights and property impact women in conjunction with their existing challenging circumstances. These effects extend to encompass their physical and mental health, as well as negative economic consequences. Women also lose their social environment and their social standing, along with the support networks that used to surround them when they were in their original locations.

What we emphasize most is that a significant part of these difficulties and challenges are related to the fact that these women are women, especially since they are providers for their families or responsible for handling property and land-related matters. This places them under tremendous pressure, making them vulnerable to cases of fraud, extortion, and potential security risks, especially when they must travel to areas controlled by the regime or other factions.

These violations go beyond the personal impact, casting shadows on women's relationships with their children, families, and their social environment. Many still find themselves as strangers and socially stigmatized as displaced women, despite their attempts to develop themselves and their skills to find work or integrate further into these communities.

The earthquake disaster amplifies these challenges and difficulties, leaving women with no way out and subjecting them to catastrophic psychological, physical, social, and economic conditions. This instability causes them to lose their homes and the ability to continue their education or that of their children. It deprives them of the basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, housing, and a social environment.

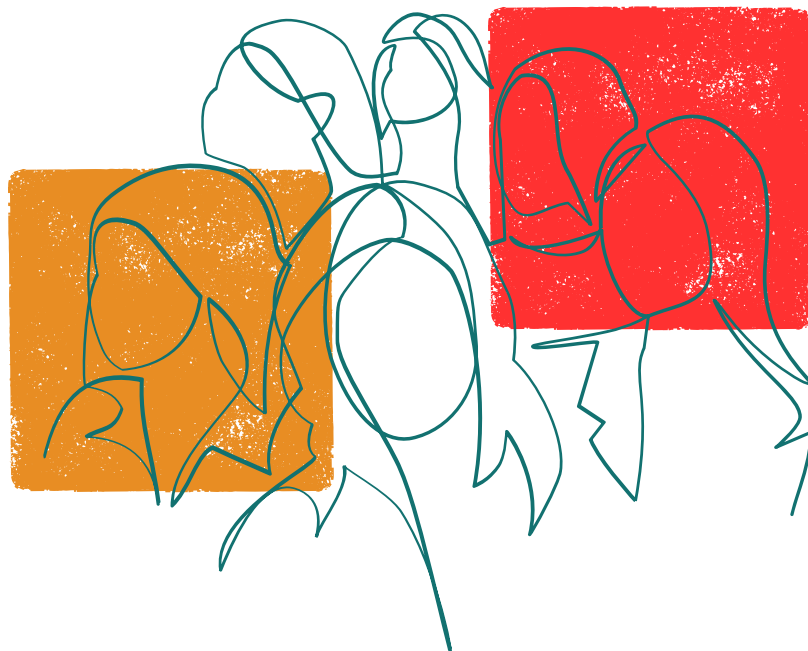
In "Women Now," we emphasize the recommendations made by the women, particularly the need to establish specific and unified entities for registering and documenting their properties, as well as setting up free legal entities with experienced female lawyers to provide free legal consultations and help disseminate legal knowledge related to property rights.

We also **stress** the need for continued international advocacy to regain their rights and positions and to find a comprehensive political solution that works for justice for them and their families.

In addition to this, there is a need for alternative mechanisms, both locally and internationally supported, that adopt a feminist, critical, and gender-sensitive approach to support affected women and empower them as essential actors in organizing their efforts to demand their rights. These mechanisms should ensure the inclusion of women in any process or mechanism of justice that they seek.

This study provides a window into the situations of some Syrian women, and it should not be the only one. Instead, we should build upon it, develop practical steps in the interests of women, and align with their aspirations.

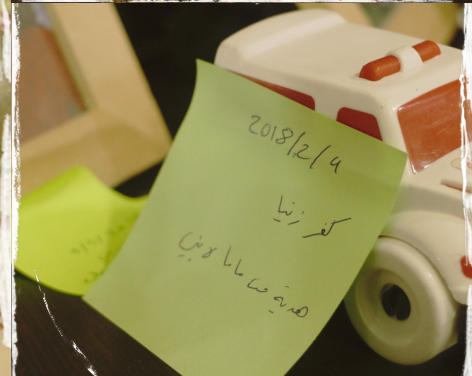
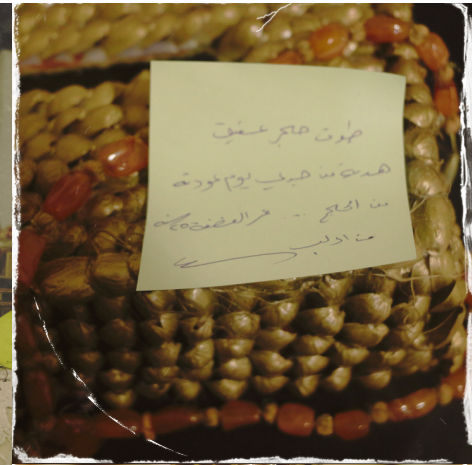
**In conclusion, through the desk research we conducted before writing this paper, we found a scarcity of in-depth feminist studies related to the situations of displaced Syrian women in the areas we were able to work in, as well as in other different regions such as northeastern Syria and the Afrin area. We call upon ourselves and all friendly, partner, and interested parties to continue research, documentation, and programmatic efforts to include the contexts of all women in Syria, advocating for their rights and justice with them.**



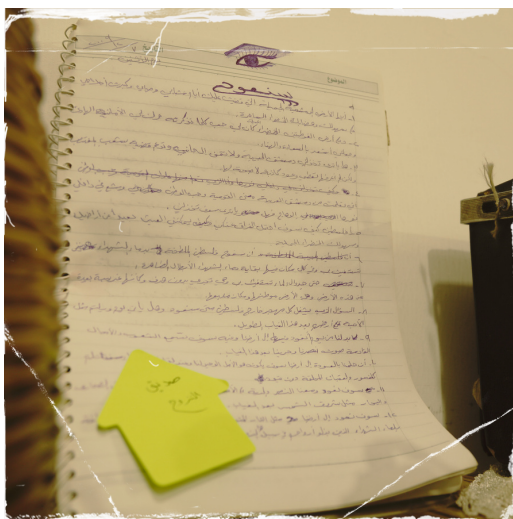


Graffitis created by women who participated in the "My Property is My Right" project in the cities of Azaz, Marea, Binnish, and Jisr al-Shughur.





Photos from the exhibition "Every Piece has a Story"



Photos from the exhibition "Every Piece has a Story"



Women Now For Development  
النساء الآن للتنمية