

Women's Empowerment in Syria between Recovery and Development

A comparative study of men's and women's views
between 2022 and 2025

Research Report

2025

Prepared by the Researchers

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Authoring Organisations and Partners

This research report was prepared by the Advancing civil Society (GLOCA) in collaboration with the Nour Al-Hayat Charity Association (NHCA), on the basis of joint fieldwork aimed at supporting recovery and development programmes and empowering civil society and youth in Syria.

Advancing Civil Society - GLOCA.

A non-profit organisation working to enhance the roles of youth and women, and to embed the concepts of citizenship, human rights and social responsibility through empowerment programmes, community participation and dialogue—thereby contributing to more inclusive and sustainable local development and supporting recovery and development initiatives in Syria.

Nour Al-Hayat Charity Association (NHCA).

A humanitarian, non-profit and non-political charitable association that serves the community through more sustainable medical and service projects, with the aim of giving hope and building a better future for all, with a particular focus on those most vulnerable and in need in the local community.

Executive summary

This report offers an in-depth field reading of women’s empowerment in Syria between recovery and development, in the context of a protracted conflict that has reshaped women’s roles within the household and society, increased the burdens of breadwinning, work and care, and left in place norms and traditions that restrict their presence in the public sphere, especially in leadership and political positions. The report adopts a mixed-methods approach combining a survey administered to women (46 participants) and a parallel survey of men (28 participants) in 2025, two women’s dialogue sessions held in 2022 and 2025, and a selective review of local and international literature on women’s empowerment in contexts of conflict and recovery.

The findings point to a clear gap between the household sphere and the public sphere: many women enjoy a degree of empowerment within the family in terms of participation in decision-making, but have a much weaker presence in the local community and the political sphere. In parallel, men show broad initial acceptance of women’s right to education, work and economic participation; however, this acceptance declines markedly when it comes to women assuming leadership or political roles, sharing power within institutions, or taking part in public affairs—reflecting a pattern of conditional empowerment. Social norms and traditions, weak family support, fear of stigma and criticism, and domestic care burdens, alongside low self-confidence, form an interlocking system of barriers that limit women’s participation in the public sphere and the local economy. Economic empowerment ranks as the top priority for women, with a particular focus on microfinance for projects, followed by vocational training, then childcare services and legal and marketing support, amid practical obstacles including limited finance, difficulties in mobility, family refusal and weak demand for products. A difference in priority-setting also emerges between women and men: women tend to envisage empowerment as an integrated package that includes finance, training and participation in public life, whereas men focus more on awareness-raising and education before finance. The data also show that practical factors—such as the distance to activity centres, time constraints due to family responsibilities and the absence of safe transport—are no less consequential than value-based and cultural constraints in limiting women’s cultural and community participation. A comparison between 2022 and 2025 indicates a relative shift: rising awareness among women of the importance of leadership roles and participation in public affairs, and increased

use of digital platforms for expression and influence, alongside continuing risks of digital targeting and stigma.

On the basis of these results, the report proposes an integrated intervention approach that works in parallel at the levels of the individual, the family, the community and institutions; engages men and young people as partners in change; and links economic, social and political empowerment, with priority given to female-headed households and to women in the most affected areas. The approach includes programmes to build women's capacities in life skills, leadership and entrepreneurship; joint training for women and men on equality and sharing of roles; and psychosocial support. At community level, the report calls for establishing or supporting gender-responsive community centres and financing women-led or mixed local initiatives in social cohesion, peacebuilding and economic empowerment. At institutional and legislative level, it encourages the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the policies and practices of civil society organisations and government institutions, strengthening networks and civil coalitions concerned with women's issues, and supporting initiatives to review legislation and local policy dialogues to enhance women's representation and facilitate their economic ventures. In this way, the report provides a practical evidence base that donors can use to design multi-level programmes responsive to the needs expressed by women and men, translating the commitments of relevant international frameworks into concrete interventions within the Syrian context..

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1. Introduction

Since 2011, Syrian society has undergone profound transformations at the social, economic and political levels, with women bearing a disproportionate share of the impact and responsibility. Conflict, displacement, the loss of breadwinners and the deterioration of basic services have reshaped women's roles within the family and society, pushing many to shoulder the burdens of breadwinning, work and care simultaneously, amid a continuing system of norms and traditions that restrict their participation in the public sphere, particularly in leadership and political domains. In this context, women's empowerment has become an essential component of any serious vision for recovery, development and peacebuilding in Syria.

This report forms part of the work of the Organisation for the Advancing Civil Society -GLOCA to produce field-based, evidence-based knowledge to support the design of programmes and policies, in collaboration with the Nour Al-Hayat Charity Association. It complements the report 'Map of Syrians' Priorities for Recovery and Development'¹ by focusing on a specific axis: women's roles in public life, and how both women and men view women's empowerment and the opportunities and constraints associated with it, while highlighting the differences and intersections between the two perspectives. The report's added value lies in its combination of quantitative and qualitative data collected in 2022 and 2025, and in translating the findings into a package of intervention proposals that can be financed by donors and implementing partners.

The report proceeds from three interrelated main objectives:

1. To understand how women and men perceive the concept of women's empowerment and women's role in public life, and in the economic, cultural and political spheres.
2. To identify the principal structural, societal, economic and psychological barriers that limit women's participation, alongside the opportunities and enabling factors on which to build.

¹ GLOCA (2025). Syrians' Priorities for Recovery and Development: A Civil Society Mapping Report. Aleppo: GLOCA. (Arabic title: خارطة أولويات السوريين من أجل التعافي والتنمية، أيار 2025).

3. To translate the results into practical entry points for intervention that can serve as a basis for designing medium- and long-term programmes in the economic, social and political empowerment of women in Syria.

The content of the report is organised as follows: a theoretical framework setting out the adopted conceptual bases (gender and development, empowerment, and the international normative framework); followed by the research methodology section; then a detailed presentation of the findings and a comparative analysis between women and men and the dialogue sessions; leading to the recommendations and the intervention approach, which presents practical, fundable packages; and a conclusion that summarises the key messages addressed to donors and partners concerning women's empowerment between recovery and development in Syria. The report is intended to serve as a practical reference for donors and implementing partners when designing interventions in the field of women's empowerment, whether at the level of preparing project entry points or developing monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

It should be noted that the samples used in this report are geographically and socially limited, reflecting primarily the situation and priorities in specific areas inside Syria and among some residents and returnees; they do not capture the full diversity of women's experiences across all governorates and contexts. The findings should therefore be read as indicative quantitative and qualitative insights to inform programming, rather than as a comprehensive picture of all Syrian women. In future reports, the organization intends to expand the scope of fieldwork to include additional areas and groups, in order to provide a broader basis for comparison and priority-setting.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Gender and empowerment in contexts of recovery and development

This report adopts the ‘gender and development’ (GAD²) approach, which views relations between women and men not as a natural given, but as relations of power and a socio-cultural construction³ that change through policies, institutions and everyday practices. In contrast to the ‘women in development’ (WID) approach, which focused on integrating women as beneficiaries into existing projects, GAD poses a fundamental question: how are resources, opportunities and power distributed between women and men? And how do laws, norms and institutions reproduce or alter this distribution?

In post-conflict recovery contexts, this approach enables an understanding of the changes that have affected women’s and men’s roles as a result of war and displacement—such as women’s simultaneous assumption of breadwinning, work and care—without this always being met by equivalent social and legal recognition. Accordingly, gender analysis becomes a tool for understanding who holds decision-making power and resources in the family, community and local economy, and whose participation is excluded from the outset.

The report also draws on empowerment theory, which understands empowerment as a ‘process’ through which power relations change, rather than as a set of discrete activities. Naila Kabeer’s⁴ framework is among the most widely used, linking empowerment to three interlocking elements:

- Resources: including income and material assets (tools, means of production), knowledge and skills, and social networks, as well as legal and institutional resources such as rights, protection and access to services.

² [Razavi, S., & Miller, C. \(1995\). From WID to GAD: Conceptual Shifts in the Women and Development Discourse. Occasional Paper No. 1. Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development \(UNRISD\).](#)

³ [UN ESCWA. \(n.d.\). Women’s Rights and Gender Mainstreaming in the Arab Region. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.](#)

⁴ [Kabeer, N. \(1999\). Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women’s Empowerment. Development and Change, 30\(3\), 435–464.](#)

- Agency / the capacity to act: a woman’s ability to define her goals and priorities and to take the associated decisions, and to negotiate within the family, community and institutions to realise these goals.
- Achievements: the tangible outcomes of this process, such as participating in paid work, launching an economic enterprise, assuming a leadership role, leaving a violent relationship, or influencing community and local decisions.

This framework guides the analysis in the report at two complementary levels:

- Reading the field data: not only in terms of the proportion of women or men participating in a given activity, but in terms of whether that participation reflects better access to resources, greater decision-making power and concrete results in women’s lives.
- Translating findings into programmes: ensuring that success is not confined to ‘income’ or ‘employment’ indicators, but also includes strengthening women’s decision-making power within the family and community and expanding their participation in the public sphere⁵.

2.2. International normative framework and the Syrian context after 2011

The intervention proposals in this report are grounded in a set of international frameworks governing women’s rights and participation in public life, most notably: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW⁶), Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals⁷, and the women, peace and security agenda (UN Security Council resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions⁸).

In the Syrian context, armed conflict, displacement, asylum and the collapse of a large part of the infrastructure and services have profoundly reshaped the roles of women and men. International and local reports document a rise in the proportion of female-

⁵ OHCHR. (2023). [The Gendered Impact of the Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on Women and Girls. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.](#)

⁶ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (1979). [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\).](#)

⁷ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (n.d.). [Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls.](#)

⁸ [United Nations Security Council. \(2000\). Security Council Resolution 1325 \(2000\) on Women, Peace and Security. S/RES/1325 \(2000\). UN Women.](#)

headed households and increased engagement by Syrian women in various forms of paid work and the informal economy, alongside their traditional roles in care and domestic labour. At the same time, women have faced high levels of poverty, vulnerability and gender-based violence, with wide disparities between regions and patterns of local control⁹.

Despite the shrinking of civic space across much of the country, recent years have seen the emergence of Syrian civil organisations and initiatives – inside the country and in countries of asylum – that have played an important role in delivering basic services, building social cohesion, and putting women’s rights and accountability on the agenda. Within this landscape, GLOCA and its partners’ work on women’s empowerment forms part of a broader trajectory that seeks to connect the field priorities of Syrians with international recovery and development agendas attuned to the Syrian context, through evidence-based programmes designed and implemented in partnership with local actors.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research design

The report employs a mixed-methods research design that combines quantitative and qualitative tools, with the aim of providing a composite picture of the reality of women’s empowerment in Syria as seen by both women and men, and of linking numerical data with narrative experiences and field insights.

The design proceeds from the two theoretical frameworks adopted in the report—namely the gender and development (GAD) approach and empowerment theory, in particular the resources–agency–achievements triad—and translates these into practical axes in the surveys and dialogue sessions that cover:

- access to economic, educational and social resources;
- patterns of decision-making within the family and the community;
- participation in public life and civil society;
- perceptions and attitudes towards women’s roles in the public sphere and in local leadership.

This design aims to:

⁹ [OHCHR. \(2023\). The Gendered Impact of the Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on Women and Girls.](#)

1. measure, quantitatively, women's and men's attitudes towards empowerment issues;
2. understand the interpretive contexts behind these attitudes through group discussions;
3. compare the 2025 results with the outputs of a dialogue session held in 2022, to illuminate potential changes in awareness, experience and practice.

3.2. Research population and sample

Target population

The study targets two main groups:

1. Syrian women engaged in, or interested in, community/economic/civic participation—whether through civil society organisations or local initiatives, or through small and medium-sized economic projects;
2. Syrian men from different age groups and professional backgrounds, in order to explore their perceptions and attitudes towards women's empowerment and women's role in public life.

Geographically, the report includes participants from a number of governorates and areas significant to displacement and recovery pathways, including: Aleppo, Idlib, Raqqa, Homs, Damascus and Latakia.

Sample

The study adopts a purposive sample based on criteria linked to the research topic, chiefly: sex, age group, experience in community or economic work, and geographical distribution of residents and returnees.

- Women's survey 2025: 48 women participated, from diverse age groups (young, middle-aged and older) and including residents and returnees from varied professional and cultural backgrounds (employees of civil society organisations, salaried employees, owners of small enterprises, heads of households, etc.).
- Men's survey 2025: 28 men participated from different governorates and areas, each with at least a basic familiarity with issues concerning women's roles in the family and society, whether through work, civic activity or life experience.

- Dialogue session 2022: 13 participants drawn from women working in civil society and active in public affairs; it focused on women’s roles in public life and the related obstacles and opportunities.
- Dialogue session 2025: 14 women active in civil society and in the public sphere; discussion centred on topics such as digital platforms, narrative and storytelling for influence, rights claims, political culture, freedoms, and peacebuilding and civil coalitions.

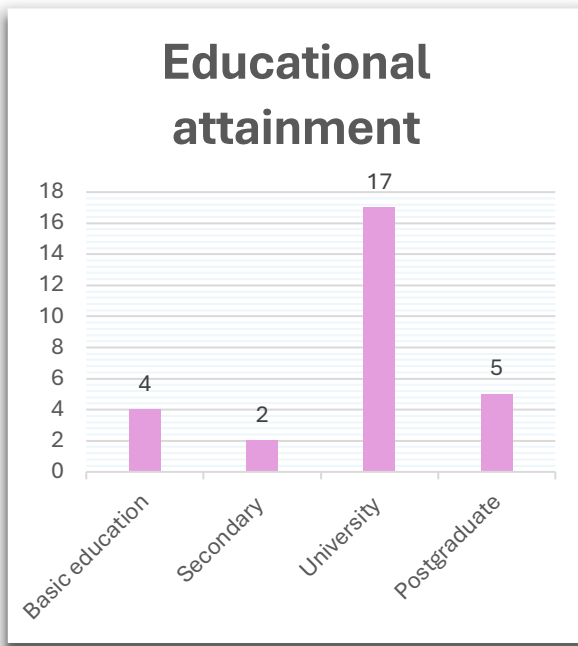


Figure2 : The figure shows the number of respondents by level of education.



Figure1 : The figure shows the number of respondents in each employment category.

Taken together, these samples provide a multi-dimensional picture of women’s and men’s views, and of the lived experience of active women. They do not purport to be statistically representative of all women and men in Syria; rather, they offer a qualitative, segment-based representation of the groups targeted by the study.

Sampling approach. A purposive sample was used to target women and men engaged to varying degrees in community and civic life, identified through local organisations and community networks in Aleppo, Idlib and other governorates, in addition to some participants in countries of asylum. This reflects the study’s orientation towards groups able to articulate their experiences and views on empowerment and participation, without any claim to statistical representativeness of Syrian society.

Ethical considerations. Informed consent was obtained from all survey and dialogue participants, with an emphasis on voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Personal information was kept confidential, and the data were used solely for research and programme planning purposes. No information that could lead to the identification of individuals was disclosed.

3.3.Data collection tools

Women's survey (2025). The survey combined closed and semi-open questions organised around axes derived from the empowerment model (resources–agency–achievements) and from the gender and development approach, and covered, for example:

- participation in cultural and community activities;
- access to employment, training and income opportunities;
- decision-making within the family (education, work, marriage, expenditure, etc.);
- self-perceptions of confidence and ability to influence;
- assessment of social, cultural, economic and psychological barriers;
- assessment of required forms of support (services, legislation, programmes).

Parallel survey for men (2025). Structured around similar axes, with wording adapted to men's position and perspectives. It included questions on:

- perceptions of women's roles in the family, at work and in civil society;
- the extent of acceptance of women's participation in public and leadership activities;
- assessment of barriers limiting women's participation;
- willingness to support women's empowerment programmes or to engage in mixed initiatives.

Women's dialogue sessions (2022 and 2025).

- The sessions served as a qualitative tool to explore the experiences of active women and the details that cannot be fully captured by surveys.
- They were guided by a semi-structured question protocol covering: norms and values; violence and discrimination; tools for participation in the public sphere;

digital platforms; building civil partnerships; and the role of family and community in supporting or restricting women.

- Sessions were facilitated by GLOCA team members, with systematic note-taking and strict confidentiality for participants.

Desk review. A selective review was conducted of reports and studies issued by UN and local entities such as UNDP, UN Women and ESCWA, GLOCA's Map of Syrians' Priorities for Recovery and Development, and the relevant international normative frameworks (CEDAW, Goal 5, and the women, peace and security agenda).

3.4. Data analysis methods

Quantitative analysis (surveys).

- Descriptive analysis (relative distributions and means) of responses by women and men across the survey axes.
- Comparison of results between women and men and, where possible, between age or geographic groups, to reveal differences in perceptions and attitudes.
- Numerical results were used to produce tables and charts summarising the main trends, barriers and opportunities reflected in the responses.

Qualitative analysis (dialogue sessions and open comments).

- Principal contributions in the dialogue sessions were transcribed and subjected to thematic coding using axes derived from the theoretical framework (resources, agency, achievements; norms and values; structural barriers, etc.).
- This analysis helped identify recurring patterns in women's experiences and highlight illustrative quotations used in presenting the findings to clarify the meanings behind the numbers.

Integration across methods.

- Quantitative and qualitative results were integrated in the final analysis: qualitative data were used to interpret numerical trends, and figures were used to support conclusions derived from narratives and experiences.
- Findings were also compared with data reported in international and regional studies, to situate the field results within a broader context relevant to empowerment in Syria and the region.

3.5. Study limitations

Sample size and nature. The sample is purposive and limited in size, with a focus on groups of moderate educational attainment and relative engagement in the civic or economic sphere; the findings therefore cannot be generalised statistically to all women and men in Syria.

Social desirability bias. Some participants—particularly men—may tend to provide more ‘socially acceptable’ responses regarding their support for women’s empowerment; results should be read with this possibility in mind.

Time gap between 2022 and 2025. The comparison between the 2022 and 2025 dialogue sessions is useful for tracking tendencies, but remains a limited qualitative comparison and does not constitute a regular time series at the level of the quantitative samples.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1. Cultural and community participation of women

Responses to the women’s survey indicate that approximately half of participants take part regularly in cultural, artistic or community activities in their areas (ratings of 4–5 on the scale), while about one third of the sample expressed disagreement or neutrality (ratings of 1–3), which points to a clear variation in the levels of community engagement among women. Figure 3 illustrates women’s level of participation in cultural and community activities in their areas. When asked about equality of opportunity in learning and cultural participation, only about one third agreed that ‘women in my area have equal opportunities for learning and cultural participation’, with a higher proportion expressing disagreement and others remaining neutral. This suggests that the participation of some women does not necessarily translate into a general sense that opportunities are fairly distributed at the level of the local community. Figure 4 shows women’s assessment of the fairness of available opportunities.

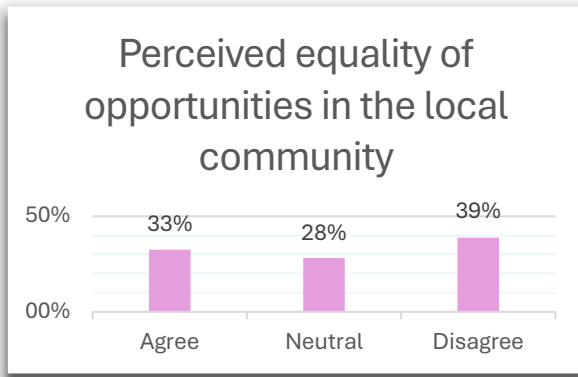


Figure 3: Extent to which surveyed women agree that women and men enjoy equal opportunities in their local community.

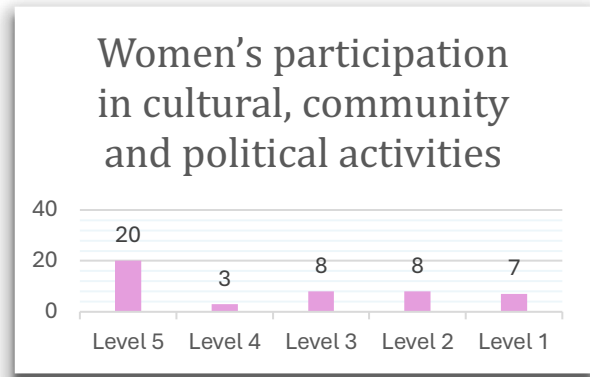


Figure 4: Illustrates the self-reported level of women's participation in cultural, community and political activities in their local areas.

As for difficulties associated with community participation (with multiple responses permitted), four principal barriers emerged:

1. the distance to cultural activity centres (mentioned by about half of the participants);
 2. time constraints due to family responsibilities (a proportion close to the first);
 3. social customs and traditions;
- lack of awareness of the importance of participation.

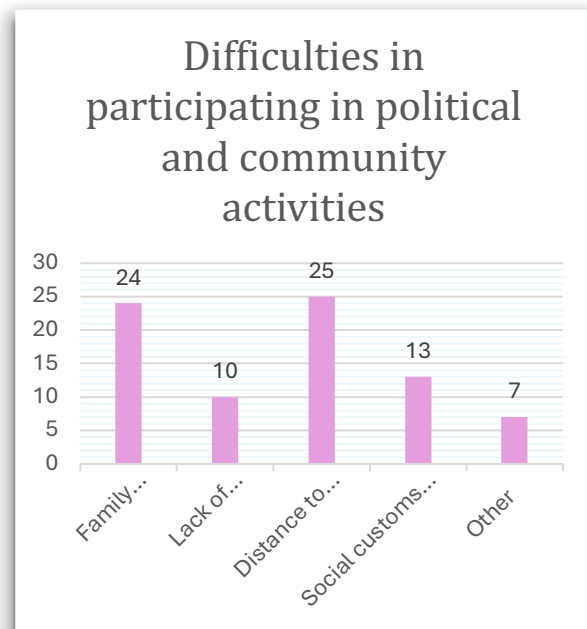


Figure 5: Main difficulties reported by women in participating in political and community life (multiple responses permitted).

Analytical Reading: These findings show that cultural and community participation is not merely a matter of 'will' or 'awareness'; it is strongly affected by practical and

structural factors (distance, time, the absence of supportive childcare services, and safe transport) alongside cultural and value-based factors. This aligns with the empowerment framework, which links the availability of resources (time, services, spaces) to women's ability to exercise agency and engage in the public sphere. Programmatically, this means that the design of cultural and community activities should take into account the location of centres, the timing of activities and the provision of supportive services, in parallel with efforts to change stereotypes surrounding women's participation.

4.2. Men's attitudes towards women's empowerment

Responses to the men's survey indicate a high level of initial support for women's rights to education, work and public participation, with a marked decline when it comes to leadership and politics.

At the level of general rights:

- About four-fifths of participants agreed with the statement: 'I believe that women have the right to work and to participate in public life like men.'
- Most men endorsed girls' and women's access to education and participation in cultural and community activities.
- The majority considered women's participation in economic activities beneficial to the family and society.

However, support fell in relation to leadership and politics. Only about two-thirds agreed that 'women's assumption of leadership or political posts contributes to justice and balanced decision-making within institutions', with a segment explicitly opposed. A similar proportion agreed that 'women's participation in public work contributes to family and community stability', while a non-negligible share remained cautious or opposed. Figure 7 shows the proportion of men supporting women's empowerment in the fields of work, education and community participation. Figure 8 presents men's attitudes towards women assuming leadership and political posts.

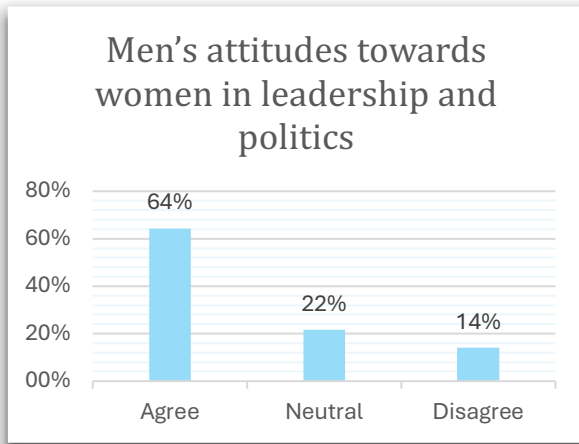


Figure7 : Men's attitudes towards women holding leadership and political positions. The figure shows the proportion of respondents who agree, are neutral or disagree.

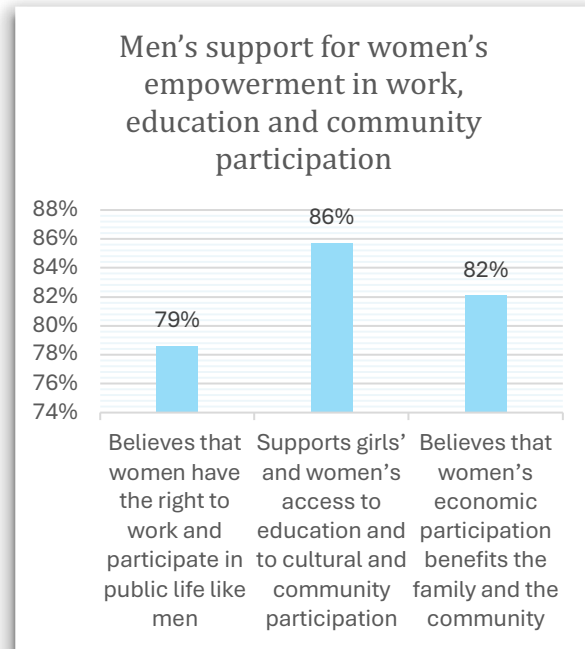


Figure6 : The figure shows the percentage of respondents who agreed with each statement..

At the family level, most men reported that they participate in decisions concerning the health and education of family members, including females, and most stated their readiness to support wives, sisters or daughters should they wish to work or enrol in training programmes. Most participants also agreed that awareness programmes directed at men are necessary to strengthen their understanding of the importance of women's empowerment—indicating a self-acknowledged need for change in knowledge and attitudes. Figure 9 illustrates men's attitudes towards supporting women's empowerment within the family.

In open-ended questions on the main obstacles facing women in participation and work, men focused on three principal themes:

- social norms and traditions (mentioned in most responses);
- childcare responsibilities;
- fear of criticism or violence;

alongside repeated references to a lack of training and skills, limited suitable job opportunities, and weak financing for small enterprises. Figure 10 shows the main challenges women face in obtaining employment or launching a business.

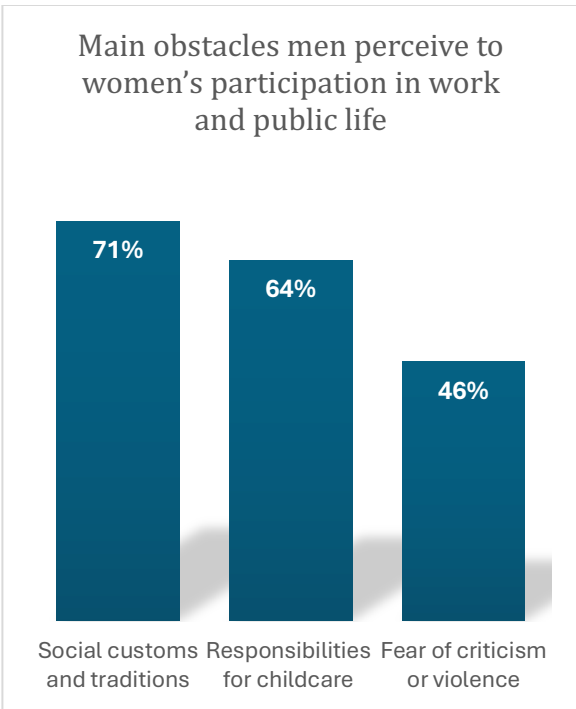


Figure9 : The figure shows the proportion of male respondents who identified each barrier (multiple responses allowed).

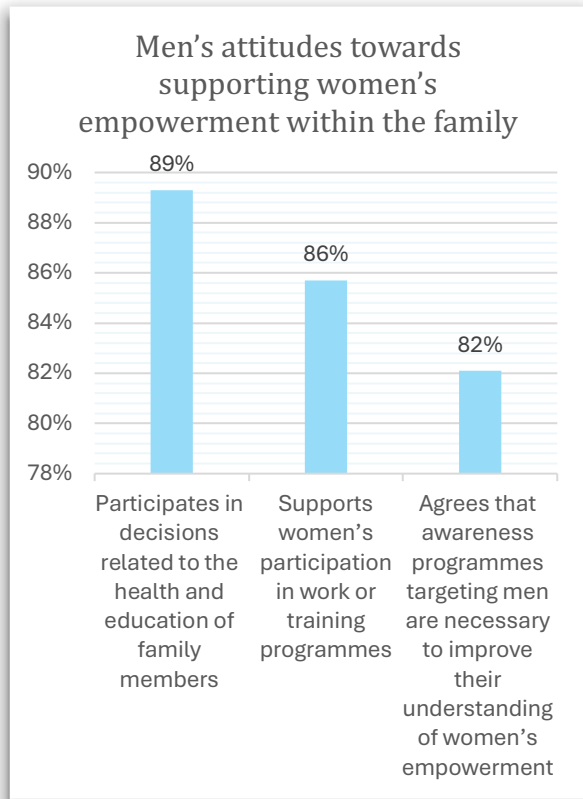


Figure8 : The figure shows the percentage of male respondents who expressed support for different forms of involvement in women's decision-making and opportunities.

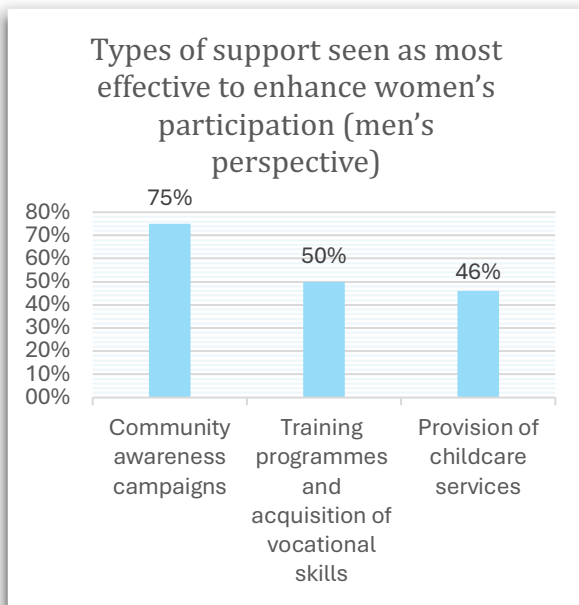


Figure10 : The figure shows the percentage of respondents who selected each form of support.

When asked about the most effective forms of support to enhance women's participation, a majority considered community awareness campaigns to be paramount, followed by training and acquisition of vocational skills, then the provision of childcare services, with microfinance for projects and the development of local policies seen as complementary elements. Figure 11 sets out these priorities as perceived by men.

Analytical reading. The results suggest that a considerable share of men go beyond a purely nominal endorsement of women's rights: they also acknowledge structural, cultural and familial barriers, and recognise the need for awareness efforts, care-burden alleviation, and economic and legislative empowerment programmes. At the same time, the drop in support for women's assumption of leadership and political roles points to a pattern of 'conditional acceptance' of empowerment—broad acceptance in education, work and income contribution, coupled with greater reservation where power-sharing and decision-making in public and political spheres are concerned. Programmatically, this underscores the value of initiatives that engage men and young people as potential allies, focus on shifting attitudes towards women's leadership, and link women's empowerment to the stability of the family and the community as a whole.

4.3. Barriers to women's empowerment from women's perspective

Women's responses depicted an interwoven set of structural, societal, economic and psychological barriers that limit their participation in public and economic life.

In response to the question, 'What are the main obstacles hindering women's participation in public life?', participants indicated:

- a large majority: social norms and traditions as a principal obstacle;
- about half: lack of family support;
- a proportion approaching half: weak local opportunities for participation due to the scarcity of initiatives or available platforms;
- a roughly similar share: lack of awareness of rights.

These findings align with the 2025 dialogue session, in which participants spoke of the continued dominance of masculinised power discourses in public and political spheres, and of women who voice political opinions being stereotyped, defamed or attacked on digital platforms, in addition to some families' fear of women appearing in the public sphere or in the media.

At the psychological and personal level, low self-confidence emerged as a principal barrier in the responses of a notable share of women. By contrast, the majority reported that they play an influential role in decision-making within the family (ratings of 4–5), whereas the proportion who feel their voices are heard in the local community is far lower. Figure 13 illustrates this contrast between a sense of influence within the family and a sense of influence in the community.

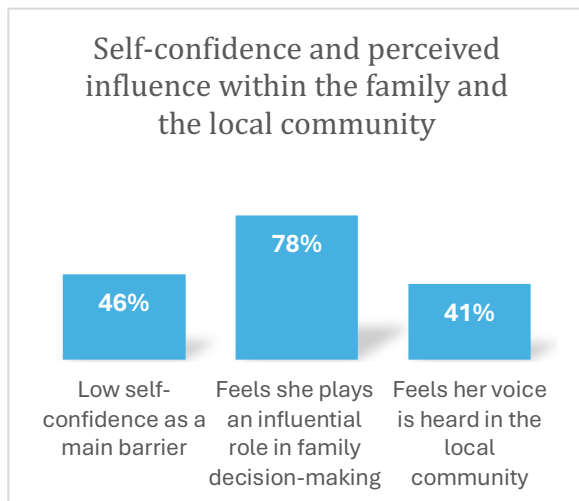


Figure12 : Self-confidence and perceived influence within the family and in the local community among women respondents.

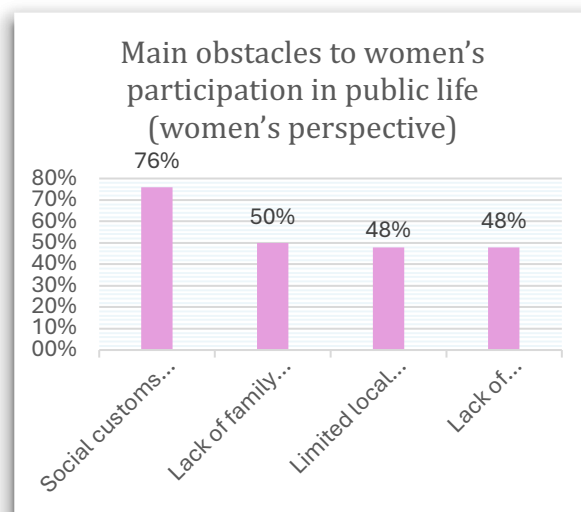


Figure11 : The figure shows the percentage who identified each barrier (multiple responses allowed).

This discrepancy indicates that many women's confidence within the family framework does not necessarily translate into a similar sense of influence in the public sphere—pointing to a gap between the level of empowerment in the private domain and the ability to exercise agency in the wider community space.

When asked, 'What are the main challenges facing women in obtaining work or launching private enterprises?', the top issues were:

- lack of finance as the most significant obstacle;
- unavailability of appropriate training;
- difficulty of mobility, especially in distant or insecure areas;
- family refusal or opposition;

alongside repeated references to weak demand for women's products and limited time due to family and childcare responsibilities.

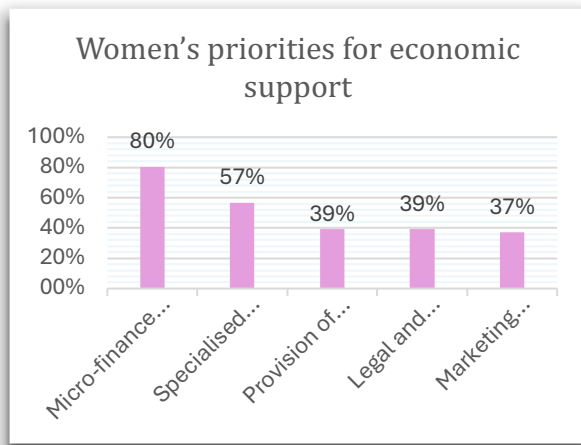


Figure13 : Women's priorities for economic support. The figure shows the percentage of women who selected each type of support.

When asked about the most important forms of support for women's economic empowerment, a clear ordering of priorities emerged:

- first: microfinance for projects;
- second: specialised vocational training;
- third: provision of childcare facilities for working women;
- fourth: legal and legislative support that protects women's rights;
- finally: marketing support for products.

Analytical reading. Women view economic empowerment as an integrated package comprising finance, training, supportive infrastructure (childcare, transport) and a legal and marketing framework. Economic barriers are directly linked to societal and psychological ones: family opposition, low self-confidence and fear of stigma all reduce women's ability to benefit from available job opportunities, even when these exist. Programmatically, this implies that any economic empowerment programme should combine financial support with capacity-building, supportive services and legal protection frameworks, rather than relying on a single, isolated component.

4.4. Differences between women's and men's perspectives

A comparison between women's and men's responses, alongside the 2025 dialogue session, reveals several points of agreement and difference.

First: points of agreement

- Women and men alike acknowledge the importance of education and work for women: women see education and employment as the primary entry point to empowerment, while men express broad support for women's right to education and to economic and community participation.

- Both parties agree that social norms and traditions constitute a central barrier to women's participation, and both highlight the constraining effects of care responsibilities and family refusal or reservation.
- Both value training and capacity-building. Men, however, tend to emphasise community awareness campaigns and vocational training, whereas women stress the need to pair training with finance and institutional support.

Second: points of difference

- Many men express a willingness to support women within the family and consider themselves partners in decisions concerning the health and education of females, whereas a considerable share of women feel their voices are insufficiently heard in the local community, despite most feeling influential within the family. This indicates a gap between the level of empowerment in the private domain and that in the public domain.
- Men's support for women taking on leadership or political roles is lower than their support for women's right to work and education, while women in the dialogue session reported that those who voice political opinions are often stereotyped, defamed or attacked on digital platforms. This exposes a difference between theoretical acceptance of participation and practical acceptance of sharing power and influence in the public sphere.
- Women place microfinance for projects at the top of economic empowerment needs, followed by childcare services, specialised vocational training, and legal and marketing support. Men, by contrast, tend to consider community awareness campaigns the first priority, followed by training and then finance—reflecting a divergence in priority-setting between those who experience the challenges directly (women) and those who observe them from a relatively external position (men).

Analytical summary. These differences point to common ground for designing joint programmes that target women and men simultaneously, while also revealing critical gaps in the actual acceptance of women's participation in leadership and politics, and in the ordering of economic empowerment priorities. This makes it essential for proposed interventions to combine efforts to shift values and attitudes among men and society at large—especially with regard to leadership and political participation—with the removal of structural, economic and psychological barriers that women face when seeking to move from the 'family role' to active participation in the public sphere and the local economy.

5. Recommendations and Intervention Approach

This report sets out four principal funding pathways that donors and partners can build upon, grounded in core principles that include working in parallel at the levels of the individual, the family, the community and institutions:

- **At the individual level:** capacity-building programmes for women in life skills, leadership, negotiation and entrepreneurship; joint training for women and men on equality and the sharing of roles; psychosocial support sessions and women's support groups to strengthen self-confidence and the ability to speak in the public sphere.
- **At the family level:** dialogue and awareness sessions for spouses and families on the effect of women's participation on family stability and well-being; provision of supportive services such as community nurseries linked to training and employment centres; support for transport costs or the provision of safe transport for women.
- **At the community level:** establishing or supporting gender-responsive community centres; financing local initiatives led by women or mixed groups in the fields of social cohesion and peacebuilding; implementing media and community campaigns to dismantle stereotypes and showcase success stories, while leveraging digital platforms as a principal tool of influence among younger groups.
- **At the institutional and legislative level:** supporting civil society organisations to mainstream a gender perspective across planning, programming, monitoring and evaluation cycles; adopting gender-sensitive internal policies; strengthening networks and civil coalitions concerned with women's issues; supporting initiatives to review legislation related to work, property and political participation; and backing local policy dialogues to enhance women's representation and to adopt policies that support their economic ventures.

These interventions will address barriers at multiple levels:

- social and cultural barriers;
- economic and professional barriers;
- psychological and personal barriers;
- family and structural barriers;
- political and institutional barriers.

6. Conclusions

1. This report shows that women's empowerment in Syria is no longer a 'sectoral' or 'secondary' matter; it has become a structural prerequisite for any serious pathway towards recovery, development and peacebuilding. In many cases women bear doubled responsibilities that include breadwinning, care and community work, amid a system of norms and economic and security challenges that restrict their mobility and participation in the public sphere.
2. The findings reveal a clear gap between the relative level of empowerment within the family—where most women feel they play an influential role in family decision-making—and the limited level of influence in the public domain—where far fewer feel that their voices are heard in the local community or within political and representative frameworks. They also point to a pattern of 'conditional acceptance' among a broad segment of men: endorsement of women's right to education, work and economic participation, alongside greater reservation when power-sharing and leadership positions are at issue.
3. By contrast, women clearly articulate practical priorities for empowerment, headed by microfinance for projects, specialised vocational training, childcare services and safe transport, and legal and marketing support—that is, they view empowerment as an integrated package of resources, capabilities and supportive infrastructures, not as a standalone training programme. A comparison between the 2022 and 2025 data indicates rising awareness of the importance of leadership roles and the use of digital platforms for expression and influence, despite continuing risks of stigma and targeting.
4. Taken together, these elements confirm that effective interventions in women's empowerment must proceed on parallel levels—individual, family, community and institutional—and be designed in partnership with local actors, including GLOCA and its partners, and in harmony with the governing international frameworks (CEDAW, SDG 5 and the women, peace and security agenda), in ways that fit the Syrian context and simultaneously respond to the priorities of women and men as reflected in the field data.

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A comparative research report on men's and women's perceptions (2022–2025)

Research Report

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Aleppo – Syria, 2025

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