

Gender Assessment

**SAP072: WATER-RES - Enhancing the ability to
address the risks of water scarcity
in areas most affected by climate change and water
shortage in Syria**

Syrian Arab Republic | Acted | B.45/02/Add.03/Rev.01

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1. Introduction

1.1 Methodology

The objective of this gender needs assessment is to examine and understand the distinct roles, needs, vulnerabilities, and capacities of women, men, and other vulnerable groups in relation to education, employment, climate change, protection, and gender-based violence in Syria. It seeks to ensure that the project adopts a gender-responsive approach by identifying existing inequalities, evaluating related risks and opportunities, and formulating recommendations in line with the GCF gender policy. The assessment methodology combined an extensive review of secondary sources with primary data collection and analysis.

Primary data was collected in December 2025, through four key informant interviews (KIIs) and four focus group discussions (FGDs) in Eastern Ghouta, specifically in two sub-districts of Douma district, Rural Damascus governorate - Douma and Haran Al'Awameed. The KIIs included the head of the local council (man), local council representative (woman), municipality staff responsible for engineering plans and technical matters related to the maintenance of



water, sewage and road lines (man) and a school supervisor, representative of the Association of Editors and Detainees in Rural Damascus governorate (woman).

The FGDs were held with a diverse and inclusive group of 25 community members (56 percent women), comprising of farmers, youth, representatives of various local occupations, community leaders, and respected local notables. In each location a separated woman and men group discussion was carried out by Acted MEAL team. This broad representation ensured that multiple perspectives were captured, enriching the understanding of local needs, challenges, and opportunities for climate-resilient water management in the area.

While no specific vulnerable-group representative organizations were formally targeted during the consultations, individual participants from a range of vulnerable and marginalized groups were included. In Douma, female FGDs included young women, returnees, and a local council representative. In Harran Al-Awameed, female FGDs included older persons, IDPs, returnees, former detainees (who represented the majority of participants), and a representative of the Syrian Detainees Association. Male FGDs in Harran Al-Awameed included youth, older persons and a representative of the Charity & Benevolence Association, while male FGDs in Douma included youth and older persons. At the national level, FP design workshops were held primarily with line ministries and public institutions, meaning women-led CSOs/WLOs, youth organizations and other civil society actors were not directly involved at that stage.

To address these gaps, Acted's MEAL Unit will undertake targeted stakeholder consultations during the project inception phase, specifically engaging disability-focused organizations, women-led CSOs/WLOs, and other intermediaries representing persons with disabilities and marginalized groups, alongside CBOs and CSOs. At the national level, targeted consultations with women-led CSOs/WLOs will complement the institutional inputs gathered through ministry-led workshops. Where direct engagement is constrained by contextual sensitivities, perspectives will be captured through trusted representative bodies or intermediaries.

Findings will be systematically integrated into project implementation, informing updates to the Gender Action Plan and Logframe indicators to ensure underrepresented groups are reflected in project planning and results frameworks.

1.2 Context

The Syrian Arab Republic (henceforward Syria) has established a constitutional and institutional framework that affirms the principle of equality before the law and recognizes the role of women in public life. Syria continues to face significant humanitarian and socioeconomic pressures resulting from years of conflict, economic decline, and infrastructure degradation. While national institutions are pursuing stabilization and recovery, many regions still experience challenges related to service delivery, displacement, and constrained economic opportunities.

The population is estimated at approximately 25.6 million in 2025, with a young demographic profile. Roughly a quarter of the population are aged 0–14.¹ However, due to the absence of recent census data, most demographic indicators rely on modelling and indirect estimation. Current estimates suggest a life expectancy of around 72 years, with women living slightly longer on average than men.² Maternal, infant, and under-five mortality rates have reportedly improved over time but remain influenced by gaps in service access and weakened health systems.^{3,4} Decades of conflict and displacement have reshaped population distribution, with

¹ United Nations World Population Prospects, (2025), Population Syrian Arab Republic. Available [here](#)

² World Health Organization, (2025), Syrian Arab Republic - WHO data overview. Available [here](#)

³ World Bank, (2024), Maternal mortality ratio (modelled estimate, per 100,000 live births) – Syrian Arab Republic. Available [here](#)

⁴ World Health Organization, (2024), Syrian Arab Republic – Country health data overview. Available [here](#)

high levels of urbanization⁵ and significant return movements since late 2024.⁶ Approximately 30 percent of the population is estimated to live with some form of disability,⁷ highlighting the importance of inclusive service provision. Literacy rates remain high, 97 percent for men and 92 percent for women,⁸ reflecting strong educational foundations despite challenging circumstances.

Long-term economic stress, population movements, and damage to essential infrastructure have contributed to increased social and economic vulnerabilities for many households. After more than a decade of conflict, the country ranks among the lowest worldwide in human development: its Human Development Index (HDI) was estimated at 0.564 in 2023, placing Syria 155th out of 193 countries in 2023.⁹ According to the 2025 Global Humanitarian Overview, an estimated 16.7 million people require some form of assistance. Female-headed households, people with disabilities, displaced families, and youth often face additional barriers to livelihood opportunities and access to services.^{10,11}

According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2021, Syria ranked 152nd out of 156 countries assessed, indicating areas where progress can be strengthened in economic participation, education, health, and political representation.¹² UN Women's regional comparisons suggest that Syria is achieving around 57 percent relative gender parity across selected indicators compared with other Arab States.¹³ The Economic Participation and Opportunity sub-index shows room for improvement, with women facing constraints in accessing employment, skills development, and leadership pathways. However, it is important to note that these challenges are common across many countries undergoing prolonged crisis and economic transition.

Agriculture continues to play a vital role for rural households, particularly for women involved in small-scale farming and home-based production. Climate-related shocks, especially drought, water scarcity, and declining irrigation infrastructure, have however reduced yields and impacted household food security. As such, recent assessments indicating that over 1.4 million people are severely food insecure while an estimated 5.4 million people face difficulty meeting basic nutritional needs. National data shows that many families, particularly in rural areas, have adopted coping strategies in response to rising food prices, reduced incomes, and the effects of recurrent drought.¹⁴ These pressures can have particular implications for women, children, and persons with disabilities, who may be more vulnerable to nutritional stress.¹⁵

The project is located in the Barada and Awaj water basin, a critically important but highly stressed hydrological system in Syria, which supplies nearly all the freshwater for the Damascus metropolitan area and supports surrounding agricultural communities. This basin is home to approximately 30 percent of Syria's population, yet it faces severe water scarcity, with

⁵ United Nations World Population Prospects, (2025), Population Syrian Arab Republic. Available [here](#).

⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, (2025), A million Syrians have returned home by September 2025. Available [here](#).

⁷ United Nations Development Program, (2025), The Impact of the Conflict in Syria: A Devastated Economy, Pervasive Poverty and a Challenging Road Ahead to Social and Economic Recovery. Available [here](#).

⁸ World Bank Gender Data Portal, (2021), Syrian Arab Republic – Adult literacy rate, female 15+. 91.8% in 2021. Available [here](#)

⁹ The Global Economy, (2025), Syria: Human development data. Available [here](#)

¹⁰ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, (2025), Global Humanitarian Overview. Available [here](#)

¹¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, (2024), Humanitarian needs overview: Syrian Arab Republic 2024. Available [here](#)

¹² World Economic Forum, (2021), Global Gender Gap Report 2021. Available [here](#)

¹³ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, (n.d.), Syrian Arab Republic - Gender data and SDG indicators. Available [here](#)

¹⁴ World Food Programme, (2024), Nourishing Syria's Future: WFP nutrition and food security overview. Available [here](#)

¹⁵ World Food Programme, (2025), Impact of cuts on WFP beneficiaries in Syria – April 2025 Monitoring Update. Available [here](#)

water availability representing less than 5 percent of the country's total renewable water resources. The area, particularly Eastern Ghouta, is further vulnerable due to its semi-arid climate, depleted groundwater, and high dependence on a limited number of water sources, making it highly susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including rising temperatures and reduced precipitation. Eastern Ghouta, a key agricultural hub for Damascus, now struggles with extensive water shortages, damaged infrastructure, and declining agricultural productivity, all of which have been exacerbated by years of conflict. The area is home to a mix of host populations, internally displaced and, since late 2024, also an increasing number of returnees from displacement camps and neighbouring countries. The area is also marked by a high number of female-headed households, largely linked to widowhood,¹⁶ a consequence of the protracted conflict. This is making women in the area particularly vulnerable to the compounded stresses of water scarcity, limited economic opportunities, and damaged infrastructure. Given these challenges, the project focuses on strengthening local water management systems and promoting climate-resilient practices, with an emphasis on the most vulnerable populations, including women and displaced households.

1.3 Institutional framework for gender equality

Syria has established a constitutional and institutional framework that affirms the principle of equality before the law and recognizes the role of women in public life. The 2025 Interim Constitution reaffirmed equality for all citizens without discrimination and underscored Syria's commitment to enabling women's participation in political, social, cultural, and economic spheres.¹⁷ At the same time, the Constitution does not provide an explicit definition of gender equality or a comprehensive prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sex across all areas of law, which has implications for the interpretation and application of related legislation.

Syria acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2003, reflecting its engagement with international frameworks on women's rights. Reservations remain in place to selected articles, particularly those related to family relations, nationality, and legal capacity, which shape the way CEDAW provisions are applied domestically.¹⁸ The country has not ratified the Optional Protocol to CEDAW or regional instruments such as the Maputo Protocol.¹⁹

At the institutional level, the Syrian Commission for Family and Population Affairs (SCFPA), established in 2014 under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour,²⁰ has served as the primary national mechanism for coordination on family- and gender-related issues. A National Strategy for Women in Syria, addressing women's empowerment, gender equality, and the prevention of violence against women, has been developed, and past cooperation between SCFPA and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) contributed to the formulation of a national strategy on violence against women.²¹

In parallel, UN agencies operating in Syria, including United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), continue to work in coordination with national counterparts to support gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response and strengthen women's access to health and social

¹⁶ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

¹⁷ The Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic, (2025). Available [here](#).

¹⁸ United Nations Treaty Collection, (2024), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: Syrian Arab Republic - Status and reservations. Available [here](#)

¹⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, (2024), Syria: Status of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Available [here](#)

²⁰ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (n.d.), Syria - National Women Machineries: Syrian Commission for Family and Population Affairs (SCFPA). Available [here](#)

²¹ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2022), National strategy to combat violence against women in Syria - Workshop information. Available [here](#)

services.²² Within the humanitarian coordination architecture, GBV Sub-Cluster platforms co-led by UNFPA and national partners support service delivery, referral mechanisms, and data collection.²³

Notwithstanding these legal and institutional arrangements, prolonged conflict, economic pressures, displacement, and damage to infrastructure have significantly affected service delivery and institutional capacity across the country. Available humanitarian and UN reporting indicates that these conditions continue to constrain effective implementation of gender-related policies and GBV response mechanisms.^{24,25} International monitoring bodies have previously noted challenges related to institutional capacity and implementation, with the most recent publicly available CEDAW concluding observations dating to 2014.²⁶

At the governorate level, including in governorates Rural Damascus, differences in women's and men's participation and access to services can be observed in areas such as public engagement, justice mechanisms, and asset management. The stakeholder consultations revealed, participation is largely dependent of education level with highly educated women in Eastern Ghouta participating in sector-specific discussions. Final decisions are however typically taken by men.²⁷ Persons with disabilities were consistently identified as facing challenges in participation in community decision-making processes. Communities often rely on informal or community-based dispute-resolution mechanisms, particularly for personal-status and property-related matters. This reliance reflects the practical challenges faced by households and institutions in contexts affected by prolonged crisis, including pressures on judicial capacity and limitations in access to formal public services.^{28,29} In this context, local governance and dispute-resolution processes in Eastern Ghouta rely primarily on informal or customary mechanisms, including tripartite arrangements involving local councils, peace committees, and community notables. While these structures are generally perceived to operate on principles of fairness and merit, they do not have dedicated mandates, monitoring systems, or targeted measures to systematically address gender-specific barriers to participation and protection.³⁰

2. Power and gender relations

2.1 Women's participation in politics

At the national level, Syria does not apply a formal electoral quota for women, and women's representation in the People's Assembly has historically remained modest in comparative terms. Women held approximately 10.4 percent of parliamentary seats in recent years, reflecting a combination of social, institutional, and contextual factors influencing political participation.³¹ October 2025 parliamentary processes indicate that women's representation

²² United Nations Population Fund, (n.d.), Country profile and mandate. Available [here](#)

²³ Global Protection Cluster, (2025), Syria Protection Sector Mid-Year Report. Available [here](#)

²⁴ United Nations Population Fund, (2025), Syria Situation Report #2. Available [here](#)

²⁵ United Nations Population Fund, (2024), An Overview of Gender-Based Violence in Syria. Available [here](#)

²⁶ United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, (2014), Concluding observations on the second periodic report of the Syrian Arab Republic. Available [here](#)

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ United Nations Resident Coordinator's Support Office, (2024), Violence Against Women and Girls in Syria: Legal, Policy and Humanitarian Gaps. Available [here](#)

²⁹ Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), (2025), Syria: Alternative Committees for Property and Personal-Status Disputes – response to power vacuum or judiciary marginalization? Available [here](#)

³⁰ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

³¹ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, (2024), UN Women country fact sheet. Available [here](#)

continues to be limited, with final outcomes shaped by a mix of electoral, appointment, and administrative arrangements, as well as prevailing security and operational considerations.³²

Syria's decentralisation framework formally provides a role for local councils in community-level governance, which can create entry points for broader participation. However, at governorate level, available analyses suggest that local governance structures remain predominantly male-represented, reflecting longstanding gender norms and limited institutional mechanisms to promote women's inclusion.³³ Women's engagement in local decision-making bodies is therefore more frequently observed in consultative or community-based capacities, rather than in formal leadership or resource-allocation roles.³⁴ Findings from humanitarian and gender-focused assessments suggest that factors such as restrictions on mobility, care responsibilities, and safety concerns affect women's opportunities to engage in decision-making beyond the household, including participation in community forums or local governance structures.³⁵

Stakeholder consultations in Eastern Ghouta confirmed that women's participation in local councils, committees, and community leadership was shaped primarily by institutional capacity, economic conditions, and prevailing social norms, rather than by formal legal restrictions. Leadership and decision-making roles were described as open in principle to women and men on the basis of competence, education, and experience. In practice, however, men continue to occupy the majority of senior leadership and strategic decision-making positions, while women are more frequently represented in administrative, technical, supervisory, or service-oriented functions.³⁶ Leadership opportunities were commonly framed as merit-based and formally equal, shaped in practice by individual availability, education, economic circumstances, and household responsibilities, rather than by explicit exclusion. Customary norms, care burdens, mobility considerations, and limited access to public networks were frequently cited as factors influencing women's engagement, particularly in senior or public leadership roles. Economic pressures were also reported to affect the feasibility of women's participation in unpaid or voluntary governance activities. Where women do assume leadership positions, their responsibilities were described as comparable to those of men, although levels of acceptance and support vary by context and role.³⁷

Within this context, civil society organisations and community-based women's groups have contributed to efforts to strengthen women's participation through awareness-raising, livelihood support, and local engagement initiatives. In some cases, women's collectives have supported income-generation or mutual-aid activities, which may indirectly enhance confidence and social participation. However, the stakeholder consultations consistently reported the absence of programmes, or structured initiatives at the local level aimed specifically at promoting women's participation in governance or leadership. Cooperation between local administrations and civil society was described mainly in relation to general needs assessments and project planning, rather than targeted measures to strengthen women's representation in decision-making bodies.³⁸ Overall, available evidence does not conclusively demonstrate that these initiatives systematically translate into increased women's

³² Reuters, (2025), First results in Syria's new parliament show low share of minorities, women. Available [here](#)

³³ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2020), Women's political participation and leadership in the Arab region: Barriers and opportunities. Available [here](#)

³⁴ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2020), Women's political participation and leadership in the Arab region: Barriers and opportunities. Available [here](#)

³⁵ United Nations Population Fund's Arab States Regional Office, (2024), Voices from Syria 2024. Available [here](#)

³⁶ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

representation in formal political or decision-making bodies at scale.³⁹ A gender assessment therefore recognises both the potential contribution of civil society initiatives and the current limitations in available data regarding their long-term impact on women's political inclusion.

2.2 Social norms and cultural beliefs

The practical realization of institutionalized non-discrimination principles continues to be shaped by social norms, customary practices, and the broader effects of prolonged crisis. Traditional gender roles remain influential in many parts of the country, particularly in rural and more socially conservative communities, including areas of Rural Damascus governorate. In Eastern Ghouta, the stakeholders indicate that community norms continue to reflect differentiated roles across household, economic, and public life, shaped primarily by religion, customs, and social traditions and transmitted mainly through family and community structures, with limited influence attributed to formal education systems.⁴⁰ In such contexts, family structures and community expectations can affect women's mobility, educational pathways, and participation in paid employment.

Economic pressures, displacement, and return dynamics associated with the conflict have further shaped these patterns. The stakeholder in Eastern Ghouta indicated the attitude toward women's education and employment have evolved gradually, largely in response to economic hardship, drought, displacement, and livelihood losses, rather than as a result of a fundamental shift in underlying gender norms. Women's participation in administrative, professional, and service-sector employment aligned with educational attainment is more evident, alongside limited but increasing acceptance of women's engagement in community affairs.. However, in more rural areas of the project locations, roles were described as more traditionally structured, with men maintaining greater representation in public decision-making despite women's economic participation.⁴¹ In parallel, practices such as early marriage have, in some cases, been used by households as coping or protection strategies during periods of heightened vulnerability.^{42,43} National and UNFPA data indicate that 13 percent of women aged 20–24 were married before 18, with higher rates in rural and conflict-affected areas.⁴⁴

At the same time, women and girls also continue to carry a significant share of care and domestic responsibilities, which limits the time and opportunities available for education, livelihood activities, and engagement in community or public life.^{45,46} Stakeholders in Eastern Ghouta confirmed men's engagement in domestic tasks remains limited by prevailing social expectations.⁴⁷ Taken together, these social, economic, and care-related factors shape gender roles and opportunities, influencing women's ability to participate fully in household decision-making, economic activity, and civic processes.^{48,49}

³⁹ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2021), Gender Justice & Equality Before the Law: Arab States Regional Report. Available [here](#)

⁴⁰ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² European Union Agency for Asylum, (2023), Country Guidance: Syria - 4.11.3 Forced and child marriage. Available [here](#)

⁴³ World Vision International, (2021), Stolen Future: War and Child Marriage in Northwest Syria. Available [here](#)

⁴⁴ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, (2024), Syrian Arab Republic - country gender data profile. Available [here](#)

⁴⁵ United Nations Population Fund Arab States Regional Office, (2024), Voices from Syria 2024. Available [here](#)

⁴⁶ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2024), Arab Sustainable Development Report 2024 – SDG 5 Chapter (Gender Equality). Available [here](#)

⁴⁷ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2019), Rethinking Inequality in Arab Countries: Measurement, Perception and Policy Agenda. Available [here](#)

2.3 Decision-making within communities

Recent nationally representative data on women's participation in community decision-making in Syria remains limited, reflecting broader challenges related to data availability and access in a protracted crisis context. However, it is evident that women's representation in agricultural cooperatives, water-user associations, and farm-governance bodies remains limited across the Arab region, including Syria. In conflict-affected contexts such as Syria, qualitative assessments indicate that women's participation is shaped by limited control over productive assets, and constrained market access, factors that collectively weaken women's ability to assume leadership roles or secure sustained benefits from agricultural and water-related interventions.⁵⁰

Water governance in Syria, encompassing both domestic water supply and agricultural irrigation, is characterised by a combination of centralised oversight and decentralised, community-level management mechanisms, including municipal authorities, farmer cooperatives, irrigation committees, and informal water-user arrangements.^{51,52} These structures are primarily oriented toward technical management, infrastructure maintenance, and allocation efficiency, with limited institutional emphasis on inclusive participation. Publicly accessible information on their composition, decision-making processes, or accountability, particularly from a gender perspective, remains scarce.⁵³

Regional and international evidence indicates that irrigation committees and water-user associations are typically dominated by registered landowners, a status overwhelmingly held by men. Where women participate, their roles are often confined to advisory, administrative, or socially oriented functions, with minimal influence over technical and strategic decisions such as water allocation, irrigation scheduling, infrastructure investment, or cost-recovery mechanisms.^{54,55} Although Syria-specific empirical data are limited, the convergence between these well-documented regional patterns and Syria's structural gender inequalities in land ownership and rural governance strongly suggests similar constraints on women's participation in water governance, both for agriculture and domestic use.⁵⁶

Findings from the stakeholder consultations in Eastern Ghouta are consistent with this broader evidence base. Community decision-making structures were generally described as inclusive in principle, through mechanisms such as resident-initiated project proposals, local council committees, or organisational needs assessments. However, effective participation was reported to remain predominantly male-led in practice. At the same time, women's engagement was more commonly described as taking place through individual consultations or separate sessions, rather than through regular involvement in core decision-making processes. Social norms, patterns of representation within local governance structures, and prevailing perceptions of authority were identified as factors influencing participation.

⁵⁰ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2024), A Gender Snapshot of the Arab Region 2024. Available [here](#)

⁵¹ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2024), Arab Sustainable Development Report 2024. Available [here](#)

⁵² Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, (2012), Gender and water: Securing water for improved rural livelihoods – The multiple-use system approach. Available [here](#)

⁵³ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2024), Arab Sustainable Development Report 2024. Available [here](#)

⁵⁴ Meinzen-Dick, R., Zwarteveen, M., (1998), Gendered participation in water management: Issues and illustrations from water users' associations in South Asia. Agriculture and Human Values. Available [here](#)

⁵⁵ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, (2012), Gender and water: Securing water for improved rural livelihoods – The multiple-use system approach. Available [here](#)

⁵⁶ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2024), A Gender Snapshot of the Arab Region 2024. Available [here](#)

The community-level water management and governance arrangements in the area of intervention were confirmed by the stakeholders to be limited in scope and capacity, reflecting the combined effects of prolonged drought, infrastructure degradation, and constrained institutional resources. Existing water-related structures, such as water units, agricultural associations, and local committees, are primarily informal or semi-formal in nature and are predominantly composed of men. While irrigation oversight is linked to agricultural associations in areas particularly affected by climate change, the collapse of irrigated agriculture has resulted in the absence of agricultural water committees, with remaining structures focused mainly on household water supply. Women are under-represented in formal water governance bodies, with limited participation attributed to practical constraints, including voluntary modalities, time and mobility requirements, land tenure patterns, and prevailing social norms, rather than to formal exclusion.

Decision-making related to water use and allocation, such as irrigation scheduling or distribution of water turns, remains predominantly men led. Decisions are typically managed through agricultural associations or water units, with participation largely limited to men, reflecting land ownership patterns and perceptions of technical expertise. In the absence of active irrigation, the frequency of formal decision-making forums reduced. Nevertheless, where water-related decisions occur, they are generally taken by male heads of households or male technical staff. Across Eastern Ghouta, women play a more significant role in household-level water management, particularly in regulating daily consumption, but have limited influence over collective or institutional decision-making processes.⁵⁷

Similar dynamics shape women's access to the benefits of water and irrigation infrastructure investments. Although interventions such as borehole rehabilitation, canal repair, and irrigation upgrades are formally intended to serve entire communities, the absence of systematic gender-disaggregated monitoring limits assessment of equitable access and impact.⁵⁸ Regional studies consistently show that information flows and decision-making around water infrastructure are channelled through male-dominated governance structures, increasing the risk that women, particularly those without formal land titles, with limited mobility, or heading households, are less informed about projects and less able to access associated assets, services, and livelihood opportunities.^{59,60} Given comparable institutional arrangements and gender norms, these risks are likely to be present across rural Syria.⁶¹

In Eastern Ghouta, the stakeholders confirmed water-related projects, including borehole rehabilitation, canal cleaning, and network extensions, are generally communicated through local councils, water units, farmers' associations, neighbourhood mechanisms, and social media platforms. All residents are informed of these initiatives and are formally eligible to benefit, and that project benefits are perceived as collective in nature. However, participation in meetings, technical consultations, and project oversight remains largely men-dominated, particularly where activities involve infrastructure works, irrigation systems, or land-related decisions. Women's engagement is more frequently reported at household level or in smaller-scale, neighbourhood-based interventions, rather than within formal planning or technical decision-making processes.⁶²

⁵⁷ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

⁵⁸ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2024), Arab Sustainable Development Report 2024. Available [here](#)

⁵⁹ Meinzen-Dick, R., Zwarteveen, M., (1998), Gendered participation in water management: Issues and illustrations from water users' associations in South Asia. Agriculture and Human Values. Available [here](#)

⁶⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, (2012), Gender and water: Securing water for improved rural livelihoods – The multiple-use system approach. Available [here](#)

⁶¹ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2024), A Gender Snapshot of the Arab Region 2024. Available [here](#)

⁶² Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

Women's access to water-management training and agricultural extension services further reflects these systemic barriers. While programmes supported partners provide training on irrigation efficiency, water-saving techniques, and climate-smart agriculture, women's participation in technical water-related training remains comparatively low. Mobility restrictions, domestic and care responsibilities, limited childcare options, and gender norms that restrict engagement in male-dominated technical spaces continue to impede access.⁶³ Evidence from Farmer Field Schools shows that women's participation improves when training is delivered locally, scheduled flexibly, or organised in women-only formats, with stronger engagement in modules related to household water use, livestock watering, and small-scale production than in irrigation engineering or large-scale water-resource management.⁶⁴

The stakeholder in Eastern Ghouta confirmed opportunities for training and capacity-building related to irrigation, water-saving practices, or farm management are currently very limited or non-existent. This reflects ongoing water scarcity, inactive irrigation systems, and the broader disruption of agricultural livelihoods. Respondents consistently indicated that, in principle, any future training initiatives would be open to both women and men. In practice, however, participation is expected to vary by topic and practical considerations with men more likely to participate in irrigation- and farm-management-related activities, while women are more likely to engage in household-level water-use or water-saving sessions. Women's participation was confirmed to be shaped by caregiving responsibilities, scheduling, and accessibility of training venues.

Regarding greywater and wastewater reuse, stakeholders in Eastern Ghouta indicated that awareness and acceptance are primarily influenced by water scarcity and the functionality of treatment infrastructure, rather than by gender or displacement status. Both women and men reported increased acceptance of wastewater use for irrigation as a necessity-driven coping measure, recalling prior use of treated wastewater and noting current reliance on untreated sources due to non-operational facilities, alongside ongoing health concerns. In more rural areas of the project, perspectives are more differentiated: men described pragmatic acceptance linked to acute scarcity, while women expressed lower acceptance, citing perceived health risks and limited consumer demand for produce irrigated with wastewater. Overall, wastewater reuse is viewed as a conditional coping strategy, with continued concerns regarding safety, treatment standards, and public health implications.⁶⁵

While information dissemination and access to water-related project benefits are generally inclusive at community level, women's participation in water governance, planning, technical functions, and collective decision-making remains limited. Engagement is strongest at household level and frailest within formal or collective structures, reflecting the interaction of environmental stressors, institutional constraints, and established gender roles, rather than explicit policy or regulatory barriers.

2.4 Decision making within households

In many settings, men continue to play a leading role in decisions related to household finances, mobility, property, and public engagement, while women's responsibilities are more frequently associated with domestic management and caregiving.^{66,67} A 2021 Gender Equality

⁶³ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2024), A Gender Snapshot of the Arab Region 2024. Available [here](#)

⁶⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, (2021), FAO's farmer field schools improve animal husbandry practices for women in Syria. Available [here](#)

⁶⁵ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

⁶⁶ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2020), Women's political participation and leadership in the Arab region: Barriers and opportunities. Available [here](#)

⁶⁷ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2024), Arab Sustainable Development Report 2024 - SDG 5 Chapter. Available [here](#)

and Social Inclusion (GESI) assessment reported that approximately 36–38 per cent of women had control over household assets, while women's involvement in decisions related to routine household consumption was more common, with around two-thirds reporting joint or partial participation. Women's engagement in higher-level financial decisions, such as investments, borrowing, asset acquisition, or property transfer, was reported to be more limited.⁶⁸ Regional analyses and qualitative studies further suggest that women's autonomy and public participation tend to increase with higher levels of education, improved economic status, and residence in urban areas.⁶⁹

Stakeholder consultations in Eastern Ghouta broadly reflect these patterns. Household decision-making was commonly described as consultative, with men and women jointly discussing matters such as household spending, children's education, and healthcare. At the same time, roles were differentiated. Women were primarily associated with day-to-day household management, caregiving, and oversight of children's education, while men more often retained responsibility for income generation and decisions related to land, assets, or livelihood strategies. Stakeholders noted that joint decision-making tended to be more pronounced in households where both spouses had higher levels of education, and women were described as having a more visible role in education-related and, in some cases, economic activities. Female-headed households, particularly those headed by widows, were consistently described as assuming full responsibility for household decision-making, including financial management, caregiving, and livelihood-related choices, reflecting household composition rather than shifts in broader social norms.⁷⁰

2.5 Access to and control over resources

Across the Arab region, including Syria, women's access to and control over economic and natural resources is influenced by a combination of legal frameworks, social norms, and socio-economic conditions. Regional analyses indicate that while statutory laws often recognise women's rights to own and inherit property, variations in enforcement, customary practices, and social expectations can affect women's effective control over land, housing, and productive resources.⁷¹ UN ESCWA's 2024 Gender Snapshot highlights that women in the region typically undertake the majority of unpaid care work, which can limit the time and opportunities available to engage in income-generating activities or accumulate assets. Although Syria lacks recent nationally representative datasets, its legal framework, gender norms and socio-economic conditions closely mirror these regional patterns, making the broader Arab region evidence highly applicable to the Syrian context.⁷²

Before the 2011 conflict, around 62 percent of land in Syria was publicly owned and 38 percent privately held, yet large areas remained unregistered or informally occupied. This created a land administration system shaped by overlapping statutory, customary and religious laws, with limited coordination between national and local institutions.⁷³ Rapid population growth, rural-to-urban migration, and climate pressures in the 1990s and 2000s contributed to informal settlements around major urban centres. Many households, particularly low income, displaced and minority households, settled on unregistered or state land without formal tenure, leaving

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2024), A Gender Snapshot of the Arab Region 2024. Available [here](#)

⁷⁰ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

⁷¹ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2024), A Gender Snapshot of the Arab Region 2024. Available [here](#).

⁷² United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2021), Gender Justice & Equality Before the Law: Arab States Regional Report. Available [here](#).

⁷³ United Nations Human Settlements Programme, (2022), Land governance, natural resources and climate change in the Arab region. Available [here](#).

significant portions of the population vulnerable to exclusion from formal land-administration systems.⁷⁴ The protracted conflict has further affected land and housing systems through displacement, destruction of infrastructure, and loss of documentation, limiting formal proof of ownership or occupancy for many households.⁷⁵ These circumstances have particularly affected women, who may lack access to documentation or representation to act on their own behalf.⁷⁶ Evidence indicates that women often face practical challenges in accessing inheritance or marital assets, including reliance on customary or community-based dispute resolution processes, family mediation, or documentation requirements.⁷⁷

In Rural Damascus governorate, the situation reflects these national and regional patterns. Stakeholders in Eastern Ghouta indicated that access to land, livestock, equipment, and natural resources is determined mainly by ownership status, financial capacity, household structure, and prevailing social norms, rather than formal gender-based restrictions. Prolonged drought, declining groundwater, reduced grazing areas, and rising input costs have contributed to a marked decline in agriculture and livestock production across both locations, with urban expansion further reducing available agricultural land. As a result, many households have reduced or abandoned farming, shifted to wage labour or public employment, or relied on informal coping strategies such as private well use, reduced production, or livestock sales.

Men were generally identified as the primary managers and final decision-makers over land, livestock, income, and agricultural assets, reflecting customary roles and perceptions of physical capacity and technical expertise. Women's involvement was typically described as consultative and concentrated at the household level, particularly in day-to-day resource management. Exceptions were noted in female-headed households, especially among widows or women landowners, where women manage assets directly or through hired labour. In these cases, consultation regarding resources with male family member was often highlighted as optional but common.

Access to loans, credit, savings mechanisms, or formal livelihood support was consistently reported as absent. Financial institutions, agricultural credit schemes, cooperatives, and farmer associations that existed prior to the conflict were described as no longer operational or limited. Where access was discussed in principle, it was described as dependent on employment status or guarantees, which may pose additional constraints for women. Overall, financial exclusion was attributed to institutional gaps and economic conditions rather than explicit gender-based barriers.⁷⁸

Available evidence suggests that, in rural and conflict-affected areas, displacement, loss of civil documentation, drought, and asset depletion reduce livelihood options for women and influence their capacity to claim or inherit land.⁷⁹ Even when women contribute substantially to agricultural production or small livestock management, decision-making regarding land use, livestock sales, and household assets remains largely coordinated by male family members or local authorities, placing greater practical constraints on widows, displaced women, and women without stable income.⁸⁰ These considerations will be taken into account during the project to align with the local cultural norms while aiming to promote greater inclusion.

⁷⁴ Norwegian Refugee Council, (2016), Housing, Land and Property in the Syrian Arab Republic. Available [here](#).

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Norwegian Refugee Council, (2024), Facing an impossible choice. Available [here](#).

⁷⁸ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

⁷⁹ Norwegian Refugee Council, (2024), Facing an impossible choice. Available [here](#)

⁸⁰ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2024), A Gender Snapshot of the Arab Region 2024. Available [here](#)

3. Education

Syria's education system operates within a complex governance and socio-economic context, which has been shaped by over a decade of conflict. This has resulted in variations in education structures, standards, and access across different areas, particularly in regions with limited state administration.^{81,82} Higher education and certification pathways have similarly experienced disruptions, contributing to differences in system coherence and regional disparities.⁸³

Global SDG-4 indicators for Syria indicate persistent gendered disparities in educational outcomes. UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) modelled estimates for 2024 show that completion rates of female students decline beyond primary education, with approximately 46.9 percent of students completing lower secondary and 30.9 percent completing upper secondary education.⁸⁴ Early childhood education remains underdeveloped, with only around 8 percent of children aged 36–59 months enrolled in pre-primary programmes, which are largely private and less accessible to low-income or displaced households.⁸⁵ Disparities are greatest in rural areas, where insecurity and limited secondary education access constrain women's educational attainment.

Prolonged conflict has further undermined public education financing and service delivery. Education spending, which accounted for around 5 percent of GDP prior to 2011, has declined in recent years, reflecting fiscal constraints and broader service delivery challenges.^{86,87} Teacher shortages, limited instructional materials, and damaged or repurposed school infrastructure continue to affect the quality and continuity of learning.^{88,89} Donor-supported initiatives such as school feeding, take-home rations, and community-based education programmes help to support attendance and retention, particularly for vulnerable children, but coverage remains limited due to funding and access constraints.^{90,91}

Humanitarian actors have also expanded non-formal education, life-skills training, livelihood support (including TVET and small enterprise development), and emergency education interventions to help children and youth maintain or regain access to learning and skills development. While these initiatives have contributed to expanding opportunities for livelihoods and skills acquisition, coverage remains limited relative to the scale of need. Syria does not yet have a comprehensive system of accredited, labour-market-relevant vocational pathways to support smooth transitions into higher-value technical sectors.^{92,93} Strengthening

⁸¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, (2025), Humanitarian Response Plan: Syrian Arab Republic 2025 - Education Sector. Available [here](#)

⁸² United Nations Children's Fund, Whole of Syria Education Sector, (2024), Whole of Syria Education Sector Annual Report. Available [here](#)

⁸³ Milton, S., Barakat, S., (2019), Syria higher education post-2011: Immediate and future challenges. Available [here](#)

⁸⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics, (2025), UIS Data Browser - Education indicators for the Syrian Arab Republic. Available [here](#)

⁸⁵ United Nations Children's Fund, (2025), Country profiles - Syrian Arab Republic: Early Childhood Education Indicator (36–59 months). Available [here](#)

⁸⁶ United Nations Children's Fund Institute for Statistics (UIS), (2025), Repository of Education Expenditure Reports. Available [here](#)

⁸⁷ World Bank, (2024), Government expenditure on education, total (% of GDP) – Syrian Arab Republic. Available [here](#)

⁸⁸ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, (2024), Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 Humanitarian Needs Overview. Available [here](#)

⁸⁹ United Nations Children's Fund, (2024), Syria Humanitarian Situation Report – Year End 2024. Available [here](#)

⁹⁰ World Food Programme, (2025), The State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024. Available [here](#)

⁹¹ United Nations Children's Fund, (2025), Syria: Humanitarian situation - country overview and education sector brief. Available [here](#)

⁹² World Food Programme, (2024), Syrian Arab Republic - Annual Country Report 2024. Available [here](#)

⁹³ United Nations Development Programme, (2024), Gender Equality Strategy 2024–2026. Available [here](#)

a national, gender-responsive TVET framework would further enhance opportunities for women's skills development and economic participation.

Stakeholder consultation in Eastern Ghouta broadly align with national trends and provide additional local context. Stakeholders reported that a significant proportion of boys and girls have returned to school; however, school dropout persists, primarily linked to household economic constraints and the need for some children to contribute to family income. Boys were more frequently reported to leave school for income-generating activities, particularly following the decline of agricultural livelihoods. Girls were described as showing strong interest in education and, in some cases, higher attendance rates; however, early marriage was identified as a factor limiting girls' ability to complete schooling, particularly in more rural areas of the project area.

Boys and girls are perceived to have equal formal access to education, while continuation is influenced by household financial capacity and social factors. Children from lower-income households were more likely to interrupt schooling to engage in paid work, especially in households without alternative income sources. Respondents also noted gender-specific constraints affecting girls' educational continuity, including early marriage, safety-related mobility concerns, as well as limited access to nearby secondary schools in more rural areas.

Differences between rural and urban education pathways were also reported. Economic hardship was identified as a key constraint in both settings. Urban areas were described as placing greater emphasis on formal schooling, while rural areas were described as having traditionally prioritised agriculture and livestock-based livelihoods. At the same time, respondents noted that the decline of agricultural employment has increased interest among rural boys and girls in continuing education as a pathway to alternative livelihoods.⁹⁴

Similarly to formal education, access to TVET and skills-development opportunities for women and girls remains limited, particularly in rural or conflict-affected areas. National assessments indicate that training programmes are often concentrated in urban or conflict unaffected areas and focus predominantly on traditionally female-dominated trades such as handicrafts, sewing, and food processing, with limited pathways into higher-value technical sectors.⁹⁵ Context-specific findings from Acted's assessments reinforce these trends, showing that most female micro-entrepreneurs have not accessed formal training, and participation is constrained by mobility limitations, financial barriers, social norms, safety concerns, and limited access to start-up capital, tools, or professional networks.^{96,97} The absence of flexible, accredited pathways into non-formal learning, digital literacy, or technical trades limits educational and economic mobility for women, particularly those from low-income, rural, or displaced households.^{98,99,100}

⁹⁴ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

⁹⁵ United Nations Development Programme, (2023), Gender equality and women's empowerment – Syria. Available [here](#)

⁹⁶ Acted, (2025), TVET Assessment – Maarat Masrin.

⁹⁷ REACH, (2025), Dana City Labour Market Assessment: Microenterprises. Available [here](#)

⁹⁸ United Nations Development Programme, (2023), Gender equality and women's empowerment - Syria. Available [here](#)

⁹⁹ Syrian Centre for Policy Research, (2022), Hope under siege: Voices of adolescents on education and ICT during the Syrian conflict. Available [here](#)

¹⁰⁰ Overseas Development Institute, (2022). Adolescent girls in protracted crises: Evidence from the GAGE programme. Available [here](#)

Household economic pressures, food insecurity, travel distances, and safety concerns are key factors influencing school or training course attendance and retention.^{101,102} Girls face additional gender-specific challenges, including early marriage, adolescent pregnancy, mobility limitations, and exposure to protection risks, while boys are more frequently withdrawn from school to contribute to household income through agriculture or informal labour.^{103,104,105} Gender-based violence within and around schools, including risks during travel, can also affect attendance and learning outcomes.¹⁰⁶

Rural Damascus governorate reflects national trends, with structural and gendered barriers affecting educational access and progression. Adolescent girls, in particular, are at higher risk of educational exclusion due to domestic responsibilities, mobility limitations, and early marriage, while boys are more likely to leave school for income-generating activities.^{107,108} Evidence indicates that secondary-level retention remains fragile, with girls disproportionately affected. Remedial and non-formal education initiatives, including accelerated learning and community-based classes, provide alternative pathways, but their coverage remains below needs due to limited funding.¹⁰⁹ In Rural Damascus, stakeholders underscored how these structural and gendered factors influence educational opportunities for rural children, highlighting the need for continued support to promote equitable access and reduce the risk of long-term educational exclusion.

4. Labour

4.1 Labour force participation, employment and poverty

The absence of recent nationally representative household income and expenditure surveys means that current socio-economic estimates rely primarily on model-based projections, which are subject to a degree of uncertainty in a protracted crisis context.¹¹⁰ Data gaps related to conflict conditions affect the availability, precision, and comparability of labour-market indicators.¹¹¹ Within these limitations, International Labour Organization (ILO) models indicate that overall labour-force participation in formal economy declined from approximately 51–54 percent in 1990 to an estimated 37.4 percent in 2024, reflecting long-term economic pressures and conflict-related disruptions, alongside gender differences in participation pattern.¹¹²

Demographic changes associated with conflict and economic hardship have, in some areas, influenced women's engagement in economic activities, as women increasingly contribute to household livelihoods, including in situations where male household members are absent. World Bank estimates women labour market participation rising from an estimated 13 percent in 2010 to 31 percent in 2022,¹¹³ while ILO's models estimate more modest increase to 13.3

¹⁰¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, (2025), Humanitarian Response Plan: Syrian Arab Republic 2025 - Education Sector. Available [here](#)

¹⁰² United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, (2024), Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 Humanitarian Needs Overview. Available [here](#)

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ United Nations Children's Fund, (2024), Syria Humanitarian Situation Report - June 2024. Available [here](#)

¹⁰⁵ European Union Agency for Asylum, (2025), Country Guidance: Syria - Interim. Available [here](#)

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ United Nations Population Fund, (2024), Child marriage takes a brutal toll on Syrian girls. Available [here](#)

¹⁰⁸ Global Protection Cluster, (2025), Protection Landscape in Syria – March 2025. Available [here](#)

¹⁰⁹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, (2025), Syrian Arab Republic - Humanitarian Response Priorities January to June 2025: Education Sector. Available [here](#)

¹¹⁰ Redaelli, S., Guadarrama, I., M., Moreno Herrera, R., (2024), Assessing the extent of monetary poverty in the Syrian Arab Republic. Available [here](#)

¹¹¹ United Nations Development Programme, (2025), The Impact of the Conflict in Syria. Available [here](#)

¹¹² International Labour Organization, (2025), Syria: Employment and environment factsheet v5. Available [here](#)

¹¹³ World Bank, (2022), The Welfare of Syrian Households after a Decade of Conflict. Available [here](#).

percent.¹¹⁴ Women, however, continue to face high unemployment due to gender norms and legal barriers such as limited access to civil documentation. Unemployment rate of women has reached estimated 25 percent in 2025, in comparison to 11 percent of men.¹¹⁵ Despite these dynamics, women continue to experience higher unemployment rates than men, influenced by a combination of labour-market conditions, social norms, and administrative or documentation-related constraints. Modelled estimates suggest that women's unemployment remains substantially higher than that of men.¹¹⁶ These trends are consistent with UN Country Team analyses describing a labour market characterised by limited availability of decent work, declining real wages, high levels of informality, and ongoing challenges in expanding women's access to stable and productive employment, even in sectors experiencing labour shortages.

Stakeholder consultations in Eastern Ghouta reflect these broader trends at the local level. Since the conflict, women's participation in income-generating activities has reportedly increased, with women increasingly combining household responsibilities with paid work in education, health, services, factories, or informal activities. This is particularly true among widowed women and in other female-headed households. Increased labour participation of women is primarily described as an adaptive response to livelihood loss rather than a broader transformation of gender norms, with men continuing to hold primary responsibility for public roles and leadership.¹¹⁷

The World Bank's World Development Indicators report a Gini index of 26.6 for Syria in 2022, suggesting relatively moderate income inequality compared to many countries in the region.^{118,119} This reflects widespread poverty with roughly one in four Syrians living in extreme poverty unable to meet their basic needs, while around 67 percent of the population live below the lower middle-income poverty line.¹²⁰ Sex-disaggregated poverty data are unavailable, but multiple assessments show that women, due to reduced access to income, productive assets and safe employment, are overrepresented in lower-paid, less secure segments of the labour market.¹²¹

Informality continues to dominate Syria's economic landscape. Even prior to the conflict, two-thirds of workers and nearly 90 percent of private-sector workers were informally employed.¹²² Recent macro-fiscal analysis confirms that informality has expanded further, offering limited social protection and absorbing most labour supply.^{123,124} In general, women across Syria tend to be predominantly engaged in low-paid activities such as agriculture, domestic work, tailoring, home-based enterprises, and small workshops, while men retain relatively greater access to formal public-sector employment and higher-return informal activities in construction, transport, and trade.^{125,126}

In Eastern Ghouta, stakeholders reported that both women and men participate across similar income-generating sectors; however, patterns of engagement differ in practice. Skilled

¹¹⁴ International Labour Organization, (2025), Syria: Employment and environment factsheet v5. Available [here](#)

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ United Nations in Syrian Arab Republic, (2025), Country Results Report – Syrian Arab Republic. Available [here](#)

¹¹⁷ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

¹¹⁸ World Bank, (2024a), Gini index – Syrian Arab Republic [Data]. World Development Indicators. Available [here](#)

¹¹⁹ CEIC Data. (2024). Syria – Gini inequality index 1996-2022. Available [here](#)

¹²⁰ World Bank, (2022), The Welfare of Syrian Households after a Decade of Conflict. Available [here](#).

¹²¹ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2024), Inequality in the Arab Region: Crisis upon crisis. Available [here](#)

¹²² Arab NGO Network for Development, (2018), Informal labour in Syria. Available [here](#)

¹²³ United Nations Development Programme, (2025), The Impact of the Conflict in Syria. Available [here](#)

¹²⁴ International Labor Organization, (2024), ILO Brief – Syria 2012-2024. Available [here](#)

¹²⁵ North Press Agency, (2023), Syrian female workers face GBV, discrimination amid poor legal protection. Available [here](#)

¹²⁶ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, (2024), Data Hub – Syrian Arab Republic. Country Snapshot. Available [here](#)

industrial work, particularly vehicle repair, mechanical maintenance, and heavy crafts, remains largely men dominated. Women's employment is more visible in education, health, services, factories, and small-scale or home-based activities such as food processing, sewing, handicrafts, cleaning services, photography, retail, and online marketing. Traditional home-based activities such as embroidery were reported to have declined, while a range of informal and service-oriented livelihoods have emerged over time. Home-based work undertaken by women was described as more socially acceptable due to limited hours and reduced public exposure, while men's informal work was more frequently associated with skilled and outward-facing trades. Men's employment patterns were described as broadly stable, though increasingly characterised by longer working hours or multiple jobs in response to declining real incomes. Overall employment patterns were reported to be primarily shaped by economic conditions, labour demand, household responsibilities, and prevailing social norms rather than by formal gender-based restrictions.¹²⁷

With regard to remuneration and advancement, stakeholders indicated that pay and promotion for similar work are formally determined by qualifications, experience, productivity, and hours worked. Equality is more consistently reported in the public sector across both locations. In the private sector, however, respondents reported that men are more likely to be hired or to receive higher pay, particularly in more rural areas of the project location, reflecting labour-market conditions and work arrangements rather than explicit institutional rules.¹²⁸

Intersectional factors further shape these dynamics. Displaced and returnee women are more likely to depend on informal, low-capital livelihoods, with reduced access to land, assets, finance, and social networks.¹²⁹ Age-related differences are also evident, with younger women, particularly those with exposure to displacement or urban environments, showing greater engagement in income-generation and skills development, while older women are more constrained by domestic and care responsibilities and traditional livelihood roles. Women from socially marginalised communities may face additional barriers related to land access, market participation, and dispute resolution.^{130,131}

Gender disparities in working hours are significant, particularly in rural areas. Regional evidence indicates that women undertake a substantially higher share of domestic and care work, particularly in rural areas, which limits time available for paid employment, education, and skills development. ESCWA estimates that women in Arab States perform nearly five times more unpaid care work than men, a pattern that is especially pronounced among rural women responsibilities.¹³² Urban women also experience disproportionate unpaid care burdens, though they have comparatively greater access to small services and home-based enterprises.

In Rural Damascus governorate, including in Eastern Ghouta, labour-market conditions reflect heightened vulnerability. Only about 26 percent of households report steady income, while roughly 60 percent rely on daily informal labour, indicating widespread dependence on casual

¹²⁷ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, (2024), Data Hub – Syrian Arab Republic. Country Snapshot. Available [here](#)

¹³⁰ United Nations Population Fund, (2024), An Overview of Gender-Based Violence in Syria. Available [here](#)

¹³¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, (2024), Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic 2024. Available [here](#)

¹³² United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2024), A Gender Snapshot of the Arab Region 2024. Available [here](#)

work.¹³³ Household income is reportedly insufficient to meet basic needs, driving widespread reliance on negative coping strategies such as debt, reduced essential expenditures and asset depletion.¹³⁴

4.2 Division of labour

As outlined above, roles and responsibilities within Syrian households continue to reflect established social norms and the prevailing personal status framework, with men generally assuming primary income-earning roles and women taking primary responsibility for domestic and care-related activities.¹³⁵ In practice, this often results in men being more engaged in paid employment across formal and informal sectors, including construction, transport, agriculture, and trade, while women devote substantial time to household and care work, alongside informal or home-based income-generating activities such as tailoring, food processing, livestock care, and small service provision.¹³⁶ These patterns are generally more pronounced in rural and peri-urban areas (see Section 4.3: Women in Agriculture).

Conflict and displacement have, in some contexts, contributed to increased economic participation by women, particularly in informal or NGO-supported activities, although these shifts have not fundamentally altered underlying social expectations regarding household roles. Gender analyses conducted by Acted across Syria suggest that return dynamics may, in certain settings, be associated with gradual and context-specific adjustments in attitudes. Qualitative findings indicate that some returnee women draw on skills and experiences gained during displacement to engage more actively in livelihood activities and, in some cases, household decision-making. These developments appear incremental and uneven and are often concentrated in socially accepted forms of work.^{137,138} They nonetheless align with broader Syria-wide analyses indicating that displacement and return may create limited opportunities for the gradual adaptation of gender roles, without implying rapid or systemic change.

In Rural Damascus, gendered divisions of labour are particularly evident due to the predominantly agricultural economy, infrastructure damage, and prevailing social norms. Women carry nearly all domestic tasks, childcare, cooking, cleaning, and water and fuel collection, and simultaneously perform substantial agricultural labour. This combination often results in high overall workloads.¹³⁹ Men generally retain greater control over land and productive agricultural assets, which, together with structural constraints affecting women's access to resources, influences women's participation in higher-return agricultural and non-agricultural livelihood opportunities.¹⁴⁰ Limited access to mechanisation, childcare, and labour-saving services further affects women's economic participation.

Stakeholder consultation in Eastern Ghouta confirmed that household and productive roles continue to follow established gender-based patterns, with adjustments primarily driven by economic constraints rather than shifts in social norms. Across both locations, men are generally more engaged in income-generating activities outside the home, while women retain

¹³³ Welthungerhilfe, SARD, (2025), Joint Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment: Rural Damascus, Homs and Hama. Available [here](#)

¹³⁴ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, (2024), Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2024. Available [here](#)

¹³⁵ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2024), A Gender Snapshot of the Arab Region 2024. Available [here](#)

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Acted, (2025), Gender Profile: Maaret Masrin.

¹³⁸ Acted, (2025), Gender Profile: Deir Er Zor.

¹³⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, (n.d.). Mission report: Development of activities for women communities in Jordan and Syria. Available [here](#)

¹⁴⁰ Welthungerhilfe, SARD, (2025), Joint Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment: Rural Damascus, Homs and Hama. Available [here](#)

primary responsibility for household management and caregiving. Reduced livelihood opportunities have contributed to increased participation of women in paid work alongside domestic responsibilities, without a corresponding redistribution of household tasks. Women consistently devote more time to household chores and caregiving than men, in addition to any paid work undertaken. In urban areas women reported to work approximately eight hours per day outside the home and spend considerably more time on domestic activities. In more rural areas of the project area, the difference is more pronounced, with women spending the majority of the day on household and care responsibilities, while men dedicate comparatively less time to domestic tasks and remain primarily engaged in external employment.

With respect to paid employment, working hours are broadly similar for men and women in principle, with variations linked mainly to sector and occupation rather than gender or location. Across both communities, eight-hour working days are commonly reported for men and for women employed in public-sector, factory, or industrial roles, while women working in education, particularly in teaching positions, tend to have shorter working hours. In some cases, longer working days of up to 8-10 hours were reported, depending on the nature of employment. Rural women were occasionally described as working fewer paid hours due to limited employment opportunities rather than formal rural-urban distinctions.

Stakeholder noted that damage to water and sanitation infrastructure in Eastern Ghouta has increased the domestic workload associated with water management, as women and girls remain primarily responsible for water collection, food preparation, cleaning, and household hygiene. When piped supply is unreliable or groundwater levels decline, households adopt coping practices such as manual water storage, additional collection trips, rationing, or the reuse of lower-quality water, which are largely managed at household level and therefore increase the time and labour demands placed on women and girls.¹⁴¹

4.3 Women in agriculture

4.3.1 Women in crop production

In Syria, women and men participate in agriculture in complementary ways, shaped by social norms, asset ownership, and access to productive resources. Evidence from regional and Syria-specific assessments indicates that women's engagement is concentrated in labour-intensive, small-scale, and household-based activities, including planting, weeding, harvesting, small livestock care, and household-level food processing. Men more frequently participate in land ownership, mechanised operations, irrigation management, and higher-value segments of agricultural value chains, such as commercial farming and input supply.¹⁴²

Stakeholder consultation in Eastern Ghouta align with national-level trends, indicating that agricultural production relies on the contributions of women and men, with task allocation shaped by customary practice, physical requirements, and household labour needs rather than by formal gender-based restrictions. Across both communities, men are more commonly engaged in physically demanding and externally oriented activities, including land preparation, tillage, irrigation, and market engagement, while women are more frequently involved in routine farming tasks and household-proximate agricultural activities. In practice, women contribute labour across multiple stages of the production cycle and, in some households, undertake tasks similar to those performed by men in response to labour availability and economic pressures.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

¹⁴² United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2023), Gendered economic inequalities and labour market dynamics in the Arab States. Available [here](#)

¹⁴³ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

Assessments by REACH and Acted show that women's agricultural work is predominantly informal and localised, with limited access to mechanised equipment, certified inputs, agricultural credit, extension services, or formal training. Women also contribute substantially to household-level food processing, such as drying, pickling, and dairy preparation. However, these activities are often unpaid, informal, and constrained by limited equipment, storage, packaging, and quality-control facilities, which restricts profitability and scalability.^{144,145,146} While these assessments are location-specific, the consistency of observed patterns across multiple governorates suggests strong relevance for rural Syria more broadly, including Rural Damascus, which shares similar smallholder farming systems, infrastructure constraints, and rural livelihood dynamics.

Female agri-entrepreneurs are less likely than men to access finance, tools, or formal training, relying instead on self-financing and informal knowledge transfer. Employers in agribusiness sectors tend to prioritise skills and labour modalities more accessible to men, reinforcing gendered segmentation along value chains.¹⁴⁷ Women's productive activities are further constrained by extensive domestic and care responsibilities, including childcare, cooking, cleaning, elder care, and collection of water and fuel, which limit their time for agricultural training, farmer cooperatives, or market engagement.^{148,149} In some cases, women balance labour on male-controlled household land, cultivation of their own small plots, and domestic work, reducing opportunities to diversify production or increase yields.^{150,151}

Gender disparities become more pronounced along the commercialisation chain. Women's market engagement is typically limited to small-scale, localised sales near the household, influenced by transportation constraints, safety considerations, and social expectations.^{152,153} Men, in contrast, more often participate in district-level trade, wholesale marketing, transportation, and price-setting, enabling greater access to higher-return markets.¹⁵⁴ Women's limited market presence heightens their exposure to price fluctuations, particularly during periods of seasonal scarcity when intermediaries exercise greater control over pricing. Evidence from REACH and Acted's assessments indicates that women predominantly rely on informal, community-based, or digital sales channels, which provide flexibility but limit bargaining power and exposure to higher-value markets.^{155,156,157}

Consistent with broader assessments, stakeholder consultation in Eastern Ghouta indicated that women's participation in agricultural marketing is primarily informal and individual rather than institutionalised. Women engage in the processing and sale of food and agricultural products, often home-based, within local markets, contributing to household income,

¹⁴⁴ REACH, (2024), Labour market Assessment: Raqqa City. Available [here](#)

¹⁴⁵ REACH, (2024), Labour market Assessment: Tabqa City. Available [here](#)

¹⁴⁶ Acted, (2025), TVET Assessment: Marrat Masrin.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, (2024), Humanitarian needs overview: Syrian Arab Republic 2024. Available [here](#)

¹⁴⁹ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2025), Women economic empowerment in the Arab region: Guidelines to advance care policies. Available [here](#)

¹⁵⁰ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2024). Gender snapshot of the Arab region 2024. Available [here](#)

¹⁵¹ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, (2021), Enhancing resilience and women's empowerment in the Arab States: Regional report. Available [here](#)

¹⁵² Whole of Syria Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility, United Nations Population Fund, (2023), Voices from Syria 2023: Assessment findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview. Available [here](#)

¹⁵³ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2024), A Gender Snapshot of the Arab Region 2024. Available [here](#)

¹⁵⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, (2011), The State of Food and Agriculture 2010–11: Women in Agriculture. Available [here](#)

¹⁵⁵ REACH, (2024), Labour market Assessment: Raqqa City. Available [here](#)

¹⁵⁶ REACH, (2024), Labour market Assessment: Tabqa City. Available [here](#)

¹⁵⁷ Acted, (2025), TVET Assessment: Marrat Masrin.

particularly in female-headed households. However, no evidence was identified of women's systematic representation in agricultural cooperatives, producers' associations, or formal market governance structures, which limits their participation in collective decision-making and access to higher-value markets.¹⁵⁸

4.3.2 Women and livestock

The livestock sector exhibits similar gendered patterns of participation. Women are primarily engaged in small-scale livestock keeping and household-level dairy production, including animal care, milking, and processing dairy products for home consumption and local sale. These roles are labour-intensive, largely informal, and often lack formal recognition or remuneration.^{159,160} Men, in contrast, are more involved in activities requiring mobility, capital, and market integration, such as herd management, fodder procurement, veterinary decision-making, ownership of larger livestock, and the transport and sale of animals at district or inter-governorate markets.¹⁶¹

Stakeholder consultation in Eastern Ghouta indicated that prolonged drought and water scarcity have significantly reduced cultivation and contributed to the sale of livestock in many households due to increased input costs. Among households that continue livestock rearing, women remain primarily responsible for day-to-day livestock management, including feeding, milking, and dairy processing, particularly where men are engaged in external employment. These patterns underscore women's central role in sustaining household livestock activities, while strategic decisions related to asset management and market engagement remain limited.¹⁶²

Women's capacity to increase livestock productivity is constrained by structural barriers. Rural women have limited access to agricultural extension services, veterinary care, training, and inputs, which reduces productivity and income potential.¹⁶³ These constraints are reinforced by gendered patterns of market participation: women's engagement is generally limited to small-scale, local sales of dairy and poultry products, while men capture higher-value income through large-animal sales and integration into commercial livestock networks.^{164,165}

In Rural Damascus, including Eastern Ghouta, these patterns are consistent with nationwide trends. Women contribute substantially to daily livestock care, poultry rearing, and dairy processing but face barriers to accessing land, agricultural assets, training, and market opportunities.^{166,167,168} Men continue to dominate higher-value livestock activities and decision-making, limiting women's ability to benefit economically from the sector. Overall, livestock

¹⁵⁸ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

¹⁵⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, (2021), *FAO's farmer field schools improve animal husbandry practices for women in Syria*. Available [here](#)

¹⁶⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, (2023), *Women lead dairy production in Deir Ez-Zor*. Available [here](#)

¹⁶¹ Elias, M., Zaremba, H., Tavenner, K., Ragasa, C., Paez Valencia, A. M., Choudhury, A., & de Haan, N., (2024), *Towards gender equality in forestry, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture*. Available [here](#)

¹⁶² Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

¹⁶³ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, (1995), *Improving the relevance and effectiveness of agricultural extension activities for women farmers – An André Mayer research study: Women's role and access to agricultural extension services in the Near East*. Available [here](#)

¹⁶⁴ International Fund for Agricultural Development, (2023), *Gender and livestock*. Available [here](#)

¹⁶⁵ Assessment Capacities Project, (2024), *Syria: Livelihoods and market constraints - Thematic analysis*. Available [here](#)

¹⁶⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, (2021), *FAO's farmer field schools improve animal husbandry practices for women in Syria*. Available [here](#)

¹⁶⁷ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2024), *Arab Sustainable Development Report 2024*. Available [here](#)

¹⁶⁸ International Fund for Agricultural Development, (n.d.), *Southern Regional Agricultural Development Project – Phase II*. Available [here](#)

systems in the governorate rely heavily on women's labour while providing them limited access to assets, services, and income-generating opportunities.

5. Climate change

5.1 Vulnerabilities and differentiated impact

In Syria, climate change has differentiated impacts on women, men, girls, and boys due to entrenched gender inequalities. National and regional analyses recognise that women, particularly those in rural, conflict-affected, and agriculture-dependent areas, are among the groups most vulnerable to climate variability and environmental degradation.¹⁶⁹ Climate-induced stress on water resources affects both productive and domestic water systems, with growing scarcity forcing women to spend longer hours securing water for household consumption, hygiene and caregiving. This reduces time available for education and income-generation, increases health and protection risks, and reinforces harmful coping strategies.^{170,171} Additionally, climate change heightens risk of exposure to gender-based violence, and domestic abuse due to displacement, resource scarcity, and deteriorating living conditions.^{172,173} Climate-related vulnerabilities intersect with broader inequalities linked to displacement, age and poverty; internally displaced people, returnees, older persons, female-headed households experience higher levels of food insecurity, weaker social protection, and reduced access to services, including safe and reliable drinking water, which further constrains adaptive capacity.^{174,175}

Stakeholder consultation in Eastern Ghouta indicated that climate-related pressures, including prolonged drought, reduced rainfall, disruptions to water systems, and declining vegetation cover, have influenced livelihoods, access to resources, and daily living conditions. Across both locations, respondents reported a decline in agricultural and livestock activities, linked to water scarcity, reduced availability of wells, and increased irrigation and feed costs. In response, many households reported shifting from farming toward trade, industrial activities, day labour, or other non-agricultural income sources. Livestock ownership was described as decreasing in some households due to constraints related to pasture availability, animal health, and feed affordability, with reported implications for food availability and household expenditure.¹⁷⁶

Despite institutional efforts in Syria, the effective integration of gender into climate change strategies remains limited, particularly in ensuring women's equal participation in decision-making and equitable access to climate-adaptation benefits, including water-service planning and management.

In agricultural areas of Rural Damascus, households depend heavily on irrigated agriculture while the Barada and Awaj basin faces water stress due to limited water governance and

¹⁶⁹ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2022), Mainstreaming gender in climate action in the Arab region (Policy Brief No. 11). Available [here](#)

¹⁷⁰ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, (2022), How drought is shifting gender dynamics in northeast Syria. Available [here](#)

¹⁷¹ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2022), Mainstreaming gender in climate action in the Arab region (Policy Brief No. 11). Available [here](#)

¹⁷² IMPACT Research, (2023), The overlooked crisis: The effects of climate change and environmental pollution on women and girls in Syria. Available [here](#)

¹⁷³ United Nations Population Fund, (2024), Taking stock: Sexual and reproductive health and rights in climate commitments in the Arab States. Available [here](#)

¹⁷⁴ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, (2024), 2024 Syria needs overview. Available [here](#)

¹⁷⁵ International Organization for Migration, (2025), Syrian Arab Republic – Communities of Return Index, Round 1. Available [here](#)

¹⁷⁶ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

climate change induced shocks. The outdated irrigation practices expose farmers to risks linked to soil degradation, poor water quality, and reduced ecosystem productivity, undermining agricultural yields and increasing reliance on costly coping strategies, particularly among smallholder farmers and labourers with limited assets.^{177,178,179} At the same time, water scarcity and damaged infrastructure also undermine domestic water supply systems, affecting the quantity, quality and affordability of drinking water, especially in displacement-affected and informal neighbourhoods.

Stakeholder consultation in Eastern Ghouta described a range of coping practices, including reliance on purchased tanker water, water rationing, and adjustments to household water use. Financial capacity was commonly identified as an important factor shaping households' ability to cope, with those able to afford tanker water, private wells, or alternative inputs reporting greater flexibility in managing shortages. Women were more frequently associated with responsibilities related to household water management, adaptation of daily routines, care activities, and food preparation under constrained conditions. Female respondents reported increased psychological, physical, and financial pressures, particularly in households previously reliant on agriculture, where agricultural activity has declined substantially due to limited access to water.¹⁸⁰

These pressures are compounded by high levels of displacement and return, with households in damaged or informal neighbourhoods facing insecure tenure and unreliable water access that constrain their ability to adopt climate-resilient practices.¹⁸¹ Climate variability is also intensifying competition over scarce water and grazing resources, heightening localised tensions between farmers, pastoralists, and newly returned families. Within this context, women and girls are disproportionately affected, as structural barriers limit their access to land, irrigation infrastructure, household water infrastructure, agricultural services, and decision-making spaces.^{182,183,184}

Stakeholder consultation in Eastern Ghouta identified certain population groups as facing greater challenges in adapting to climate-related stressors. These groups included displaced households, widows, female-headed households, landless or smallholder farmers, and low-income families. Reported constraints included limited income, lack of access to land or productive assets, reliance on purchased water, and reduced access to social support networks. Widows and female-headed households were described as managing multiple responsibilities related to income generation, household management, and caregiving, which may affect their ability to recover from climate-related shocks.¹⁸⁵

While women in Rural Damascus consistently prioritise drought-resilient seeds, small-scale irrigation solutions, and climate-smart agricultural training in assessments, their influence over

¹⁷⁷ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, (2024), The unjust climate: Measuring the impacts of climate change on rural poor, women and youth. Available [here](#)

¹⁷⁸ International Federation of Red Cross, (2025), Syria: Drought – Emergency appeal and situation update. Available [here](#)

¹⁷⁹ United Nations Human Settlements Programme, (2023), Syria country profile: Damage assessment and urban analysis for Duma and Rural Damascus. Available [here](#)

¹⁸⁰ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

¹⁸¹ International Organization for Migration, (2025), Syrian Arab Republic – Communities of Return Index, Round 1. Available [here](#)

¹⁸² The Cairo Review, (2023), Climate change, conflict, and gender inequality in the MENA region. Available [here](#)

¹⁸³ Islamic Development Bank, (2025), Resilience Report 2025: Climate, Conflict and Resilience – Pathways to Sustainable and Inclusive Solutions. Available [here](#)

¹⁸⁴ IMPACT Research, (2023), The overlooked crisis: The effects of climate change and environmental pollution on women and girls in Syria. Available [here](#)

¹⁸⁵ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

resource allocation, adaptation planning, and resource-related conflict-resolution mechanisms remains minimal, further weakening their adaptive capacity and resilience.^{186,187}

Acted consultations further indicate that access to water, land, irrigation, and agricultural inputs is largely shaped by private arrangements and household-level resources. Households reported reliance on private wells (where affordable) and purchased tanker water, while irrigation, where still practiced, depends primarily on privately owned sources. External agricultural support was not widely reported. Although access was described as equal in principle across genders and population groups, affordability was identified as a key determinant of effective access. Decision-making over resource use was commonly described as led at household level, often by men, with some KIs noting gradual shifts toward more consultative practices between spouses.¹⁸⁸

5.2 Institutional response to climate change

Syria's institutional response to climate change comprises a mix of long-standing national frameworks and more recent commitments introduced by the new administration. Key national frameworks remain applicable, including the National Adaptation Action Plan (2010), which outlines priority actions across water, agriculture, health and infrastructure and emphasises awareness-raising and integration of climate risks into development planning.¹⁸⁹ Syria's First Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Paris Agreement) in 2018 continues to guide national commitments on drought management, climate-resilient agriculture, health-sector adaptation and disaster preparedness.¹⁹⁰ In parallel, Syria participates in the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Land Degradation Neutrality Target-Setting Programme, which provides targets for restoring degraded land and enhancing ecosystem resilience.¹⁹¹ Regional policy guidance from ESCWA highlights the importance of gender-responsive climate action, water-system rehabilitation and climate-smart agriculture, underscoring the need to prioritise vulnerable groups in adaptation efforts.¹⁹²

The new administration has introduced revised political commitments signalling a shift toward green recovery and climate-resilient reconstruction: at COP30, the President reaffirmed Syria's climate commitments and called for investment in renewable energy and sustainable urban development as part of the country's recovery agenda.¹⁹³ At the 2025 Nouakchott Forum, the government further outlined a strategy centred on ecosystem restoration, renewable energy transition and circular-economy development, marking an expansion of the national climate framework beyond adaptation planning to broader environmental governance and green-economy priorities.¹⁹⁴ Together, these frameworks form Syria's current institutional architecture

¹⁸⁶ Mourad, A. K., (2012), Marginal and virtual water for sustainable water resources management in Syria (Doctoral dissertation, Lund University). Available [here](#)

¹⁸⁷ United Nations Development Programme, (2022), Women in Rural Damascus challenge gender stereotypes and take on climate action. United Nations Development Programme. Available [here](#)

¹⁸⁸ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

¹⁸⁹ Ministry of State for Environment Affairs, United Nations Development Programme (2010), Initial National Communication of the Syrian Arab Republic to the UNFCCC. Available [here](#)

¹⁹⁰ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, (2022), First Nationally Determined Contribution: Syrian Arab Republic. Available [here](#)

¹⁹¹ United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, (2018), Land Degradation Neutrality Target-Setting Programme: Syrian Arab Republic. Available [here](#)

¹⁹² United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, (2022), Mainstreaming gender in climate action in the Arab region (Policy Brief No. 11). Available [here](#)

¹⁹³ Al Jazeera Staff & News Agencies, (2025), Syria's al-Sharaa pledges commitment to climate goals at COP30. Available [here](#)

¹⁹⁴ Levant24, (2025), Syria outlines climate change strategy at Nouakchott Forum. Available [here](#)

for addressing climate risks and strengthening resilience, with increasing attention to vulnerable populations including women, returnees and displacement-affected communities.

6. Protection and gender-based violence

6.1 Gender- based violence (GBV)

Gender-based risks continue to affect women and girls in Syria, yet available evidence indicates that help-seeking and formal reporting remain limited. While national wide statistics are unavailable, the 2025 Humanitarian Response Priorities document highlights high prevalence of GBV with 93 percent of those requiring assistance being women and girls.¹⁹⁵ Assessments highlight that women and girls experience various forms of violence, including intimate-partner violence, emotional and physical abuse, sexual harassment, and early and forced marriage.^{196,197,198} Many survivors, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas, face obstacles to disclosure such as concerns about safety, social stigma, and limited awareness of or confidence in available services. Social pressures, concerns about safety, and reliance on family-based dispute resolution can discourage formal reporting, while the limited availability of confidential, survivor-centred procedures may further constrain access to support.¹⁹⁹ Ensuring safe reporting pathways, referrals to legal aid and protection services, especially in rural areas, would help strengthen national efforts.²⁰⁰

In Rural Damascus, community-level consultations indicated that protection risks are perceived differently by women and men, with broadly similar. Women respondents consistently identified early marriage, harassment, exploitation, child labour, and school dropout as key protection concerns affecting women, girls, and boys, with domestic or verbal violence mentioned to a lesser extent. Men generally reported fewer perceived protection risks, occasionally referencing public harassment or theft, and often emphasised community awareness and prevailing social norms as protective factors.

Economic pressures and poverty were identified across both locations as important factors influencing household tensions and protection risks. Women frequently highlighted the role of social norms, family dynamics, and displacement-related factors in shaping vulnerabilities, while men tended to focus on low income, limited employment opportunities, and education gaps, particularly among boys. Overall, the consultations indicated that protection risks are influenced by structural socio-economic conditions, education gaps, and local gender norms, with women and girls experiencing heightened exposure.

Household tensions were commonly described as linked to economic hardship. Men highlighted low-income levels and lack of employment as the main sources of disputes, while women additionally pointed to family interference and role-related dynamics. Disputes were generally described as arising from economic pressures compounded by intra-family dynamics.

¹⁹⁵ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, (2025), Syrian Arab Republic: 2025 Humanitarian Response Priorities. Available [here](#).

¹⁹⁶ Whole of Syria Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility, Unite Nations Population Fund, (2023), Voices from Syria 2023: Assessment findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview. Available [here](#)

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Unite Nations Population Fund, (2024), Voices from Syria and the region: GBV assessment 2024. Available [here](#)

¹⁹⁹ European Union Agency for Asylum, (2020), Syria: The situation of women. Available [here](#)

²⁰⁰ Unite Nations Population Fund, (2024), Voices from Syria and the region: GBV assessment 2024. Available [here](#)

Help-seeking for violence or abuse was described as predominantly informal. Stakeholder reported reliance on family members and community-based reconciliation mechanisms as the primary means of resolving disputes, with formal reporting uncommon. Women consistently cited concerns related to privacy, social judgement, stigma, and potential family consequences as influencing decisions around disclosure. Access to services for survivors of violence was reported as limited and uneven. So stakeholders referred to limited advisory, awareness, or psychosocial support provided through local associations, including women-focused initiatives, though access was described as gender-differentiated, with women having relatively easier access than men. In more rural areas, stakeholders consistently reported the absence of specialised services, safe spaces, or formal support organisations, aside from community reconciliation committees. Overall, support systems were described as relying primarily on informal or community-based mechanisms, with no dedicated survivor support services identified for women or men.²⁰¹

While national legal and strategic frameworks are in place, their full implementation can be affected by local institutional capacity and prevailing social norms.

6.2 Crisis-driven sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH) risks

Prolonged conflict, economic pressures, and displacement have increased the overall vulnerability of communities across Syria, including exposure to risks of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH), particularly in areas with high reliance on humanitarian assistance. Reduced service coverage, infrastructure damage, and limited resources have created conditions in which communities depend more heavily on external support for basic needs.^{202,203} Individuals involved in facilitating access to assistance, services, documentation or employment may, in some cases, hold significant influence over affected households, including displaced families and women-headed households, underscoring the importance of strong oversight and safeguarding standards across all actors. The humanitarian workforce in many areas continues to be predominantly male, especially in roles involving aid distribution and community engagement.²⁰⁴

A national inter-agency architecture for SEAH prevention exists in Syria, anchored by the Syria PSEA Network, which includes UN agencies, INGOs, and national NGOs and provides coordination, standard-setting, and capacity-building.^{205,206} Although inter-agency hotlines and email channels are referenced, there is no nationally harmonised hotline accessible across all regions, and reporting often relies on organisation-specific mechanisms. While many organisations have integrated SEAH messaging, trained staff, and developed internal complaint systems, implementation remains uneven.²⁰⁷

Available assessments indicate that under-reporting of SEAH remains common, influenced by social stigma, concerns about retaliation, and limited awareness of safe and confidential reporting mechanisms.²⁰⁸ Social norms may make it difficult for women and girls to report concerns or seek support. This gender imbalance can inadvertently increase vulnerabilities.

²⁰¹ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

²⁰² Whole of Syria Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility, Unite Nations Population Fund, (2023), Voices from Syria 2023: Assessment findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview. Available [here](#)

²⁰³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, (2023), Syria protection analysis update. Available [here](#)

²⁰⁴ European Union Agency for Asylum, (2020), Syria: The situation of women. Available [here](#)

²⁰⁵ Whole of Syria Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility, Unite Nations Population Fund, (2023), Voices from Syria 2023: Assessment findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview. Available [here](#)

²⁰⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, (2023), Syria protection analysis update. Available [here](#)

²⁰⁷ United Nations Population Fund, (2024), Voices from Syria and the region: GBV assessment 2024. Available [here](#)

²⁰⁸ European Union Agency for Asylum, (2020), Syria: The situation of women. Available [here](#)

Ensuring gender-responsive staffing, clear codes of conduct, and accessible, confidential reporting mechanisms would help strengthen national and partner efforts to reduce SEAH risks and promote safe, equitable access to services.

In Rural Damascus, households headed by women face heightened vulnerability due to unemployment, poverty, and reliance on informal labour, housing, and service arrangements, which can increase exposure to SEAH.²⁰⁹ Findings from stakeholder consultations indicate that SEAH-related risks are not always explicitly articulated, but are reflected in broader discussions around exploitation, harassment, economic dependency, and power imbalances, particularly affecting women and girls.²¹⁰ Male authority figures, including community leaders, landlords, and intermediaries involved in aid distribution, play a central role in determining access to assistance, while governance structures at institutional, customary, and community levels remain largely male-controlled, limiting women's influence over decision-making and complaint mechanisms. Although protection monitoring captures incidents of threats, violence, and GBV, many women report feeling generally safe, reflecting the normalization of insecurity and underreporting.²¹¹ Women respondents described limited comfort with reporting, particularly where resolution mechanisms are informal or community-based and disclosure may carry social consequences. Although many women reported feeling generally safe, this was accompanied by indications of under-reporting and reliance on informal mediation, consistent with broader national trends.²¹² Existing programmes can reduce risks when they embed gender-responsive safeguards, such as women-only groups, confidential referral pathways, and survivor-centred grievance systems.²¹³ Strengthening community-level outreach, harmonised complaint mechanisms, accurate service mapping, and gender-balanced staffing will support national efforts to enhance safeguarding, ensure equitable access to services, and mitigate SEAH risks in the governorate.

7. Gender-differentiated needs, priorities, and responses within the project

7.1 Differential needs and priorities of women and men

The gender analysis identifies differentiated roles, needs, and capacities of women and men in relation to climate change impacts and water scarcity, with implications for effective and inclusive water security, resource management and locally led adaptation climate adaptation outcomes. While both women and men are affected by increasing water stress, women often experience distinct constraints in accessing and influencing water and agriculture-related decision-making, information, and services, particularly at community levels. Women's participation in local governance and resource-management structures remains limited and strengthened or newly established community water and agricultural governance structures risk inadvertently reflecting existing social norms that influence participation patterns and access to information. At the same time, men generally continue to have greater access to land, productive assets, and formal decision-making structures, shaping patterns of resource use and management.

²⁰⁹ CARE International, (2024), Rapid gender analysis brief: Türkiye and northwest Syria. Available [here](#)

²¹⁰ Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

²¹¹ Unite Nations Population Fund, (2024), Voices from Syria and the region: GBV assessment 2024. Available [here](#)

²¹² Acted, (2025), Stakeholder consultation – Eastern Ghouta.

²¹³ Unite Nations Population Fund, (2024), Voices from Syria and the region: GBV assessment 2024. Available [here](#)

Women, including female-headed households and displaced women, may face practical barriers in accessing community-level accountability mechanisms, technical training, climate-resilient technologies, and financing opportunities. These barriers are often linked to time constraints, mobility limitations, caregiving responsibilities, and service-delivery models or financing modalities that are not fully adapted to diverse household circumstances. In addition, women's priorities are not always systematically reflected in climate-resilient water planning and climate-smart service delivery. Without appropriate affordability and inclusion measures, cost-recovery approaches may place additional pressure on low-income and female-headed households. These constraints, together with gaps in access to safe and confidential support and reporting mechanisms, can limit women's ability to participate safely and meaningfully in climate, livelihood, and resource-management systems.

The project responds to these differentiated needs through integrated, context-appropriate measures that support inclusive, locally led adaptation, strengthen institutional effectiveness, and enhance equitable access to climate-resilient water systems (inclusive of water for livelihoods). Gender considerations are embedded across project components to ensure that women and men can participate in, benefit from, and contribute to sustainable water management and climate resilience. Specifically, the project:

1) Strengthens women's participation in water, agriculture, and climate-governance structures through minimum participation targets, dedicated empowerment sessions, adapted consultation modalities, capacity strengthening of technical skills and planning tools (Activities 1.2.2, 2.1.2, 3.1.1).

2) Improves women's and female-headed households' access to water-efficient and reuse systems combined with training to reduce household cost and time burdens associated with water access (Activities 2.2.1, 2.2.2).

3) Strengthens women's access to technical skills, climate-relevant knowledge, and locally driven financing mechanisms through adapted, gender-responsive training and financing models that support climate-resilient agriculture and water user efficiency (Activities 1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.2.1, 1.2.2, 3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.1.4).

4) Strengthens climate-planning and service-delivery systems to better integrate diverse user priorities, apply affordability considerations within cost-recovery frameworks, and ensure inclusive accountability pathways for female-headed and vulnerable households (Activities 1.2.2, 1.3.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3).

5) Strengthens national and local capacities for climate finance development to support more inclusive investment pipelines over time, enabling future programmes to better address the adaptation needs of diverse users, including women and female-headed households while embedding inclusive approaches within institutional systems and regulatory recommendations. (Activities 1.2.1, 1.3.1, 1.3.2, 1.3.3, 2.1.3)

6) Ensures safe, confidential, and accessible reporting pathways for women and vulnerable groups through the Acted Feedback Mechanism (AFM), complemented by referral mechanisms and protection-actor mapping. These systems enable women, including female-headed and displaced households, to raise concerns, report sensitive issues, and access appropriate support safely across all project activities (see Section 7.2).

7.2 Gender sensitivity in Acted's grievance redress mechanism

Acted is committed to delivering the highest standards across its humanitarian and development interventions and to engaging affected communities in a transparent, respectful, and accountable manner that builds trust. Accountability is one of Acted's core organisational principles, and ensuring accountability to affected populations (AAP) is central to all



programming. Acted's approach aligns with the IASC's Five Commitments to AAP: leadership and governance, transparency, feedback and complaints, participation, and design, monitoring and evaluation, each operationalised across the project cycle.

Acted upholds the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, independence, and neutrality, and applies a strict "Do No Harm" approach. This includes proactive measures to prevent unintended negative effects, such as social tensions, exclusion, or conflict. Strong Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) systems and continuous engagement with stakeholders, including beneficiaries, community leaders, and authorities, support Acted in understanding how assistance interacts with local dynamics and in adapting programming accordingly.

To reduce tensions and foster trust, beneficiary selection criteria are communicated publicly and in advance. Acted coordinates closely with local authorities to mitigate security risks and aligns its vulnerability criteria with those widely used by humanitarian actors to minimise disputes arising from inconsistent methodologies.

Under the project, Acted will operate its established accountability framework, the Acted Feedback Mechanism (AFM): a safe, accessible, and reliable system through which community members, whether beneficiaries or not, can share comments, suggestions, compliments, concerns, or complaints. The AFM enables Acted to identify potential programme weaknesses, unintended negative effects, or misuse of resources, while strengthening meaningful community participation and trust.

To ensure accessibility for diverse groups, including women, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and individuals with limited mobility, multiple reporting modalities are provided and adapted to the local context. These include WhatsApp channels, complaint boxes, complaint desks, email, direct engagement with MEAL staff (including Accountability Officers), and verbal reporting through field teams. Sensitisation at project start and throughout implementation ensures communities understand their rights and available channels. All project sites display AFM information using accessible, gender-responsive materials, including visuals on unacceptable staff behaviour and reporting pathways. M&E surveys routinely assess communication accessibility and preferred channels.

All complaints are confidentially recorded in Acted's global COMPFU register, with restricted access and categorisation by the organisation's five sensitivity levels. Appropriate response pathways are triggered immediately, including referral of Level 5 cases (fraud, corruption, SEAH, child ill-treatment) to Country Coordination and Acted HQ's Investigation Unit. Acted handles complaints related to its staff, contractors, or activities and refers non-Acted-related cases to relevant protection actors with the complainant's consent. The maximum response time is 15 working days. Complaints are considered closed only after the complainant is informed, investigations are concluded, corrective actions implemented where relevant, and satisfaction confirmed. Anonymous complaints or cases lacking contact details are still followed up internally.

The AFM is managed independently by the in-country MEAL unit, with technical support from Accountability staff at HQ. To ensure a gender-sensitive mechanism responsive to the needs of women, men, girls, and boys, Acted establishes tailored communication pathways, including female focal points, accountability staff based in the implementation location, and gender-sensitive complaints committees. A dedicated hotline is also available for confidential reporting. Communication and outreach tools are adapted to ensure inclusivity for women, children, persons with disabilities, and illiterate community members.

Acted's safeguarding procedures encompass internal investigations and external referral pathways. SEAH-related complaints received through the AFM are immediately escalated to Country Coordination and referred to Acted's Transparency, Compliance and Investigation



(TCI) Department at HQ, which conducts formal investigations through professional investigators and SEAH specialists. The TCI Department also operates an independent Transparency Hotline for allegations involving Acted staff or programmes. When violations of Acted's Policy Against SEAH are confirmed, appropriate disciplinary measures are applied. Consistent with Acted's survivor-centred approach, complainants may pause or stop investigations at any stage, as all steps require informed consent. SEAH cases unrelated to Acted's operations are referred, only with consent, to relevant protection actors and, where feasible, national reporting mechanisms.

Confidentiality is strictly upheld throughout all stages of complaint handling. Information is shared internally on a need-to-know basis, with access to Level 4 and 5 cases limited to the grievance collector, MEAL Manager, Country Coordination, Gender and Safeguarding Specialist, and, where relevant, the TCI Department. Breaches of confidentiality constitute violations of Acted's Code of Conduct and trigger disciplinary action. All AFM cases, including follow-up and corrective actions, are recorded in the global platform and reviewed monthly through a global cross-check to ensure proper processing and escalation of all sensitive grievances.

7.3 Recognition of distinct vulnerabilities and response strategies

Building on the differentiated needs identified in Section 7.1, the project applies targeted and inclusive response strategies to ensure that climate-resilient water and agricultural interventions are accessible, effective, and sustainable for all users. Design choices across components reflect that women and men may experience climate change and water scarcity in different ways due to variations in access to resources, roles in water and agricultural management, mobility, adaptive capacities and participation in decision-making processes.

Gender analysis and stakeholder consultations indicate that some vulnerable groups may face additional constraints in accessing finance, technical information, and local governance structures, as well as practical limitations related to time availability and mobility. At the same time, men, who often hold primary responsibility for agricultural production and water infrastructure operation and maintenance, face increasing pressures linked to declining water availability, productivity risks, and the sustainability of water systems.

In response to these differentiated needs, the project integrates context-appropriate and inclusive strategies across its design (see *Table 1: Gender Approaches to Differentiated Needs*), including:

- Integrating labour-saving, water-efficient, and climate-smart technologies into household-level interventions, with a targeted focus on women and female-headed households to improve water use efficiency, decrease costs and strengthen adaptive capacity (Activities 2.2.1, 2.2.2).
- Establishing minimum participation targets, adapted training modalities, and inclusive consultation mechanisms to support balanced representation and informed engagement in water and agricultural planning and decision-making (Activities 1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.2.1, 1.2.2, 3.1.1, 3.1.2).
- Enhancing access to climate-resilient financing mechanisms through cost-sharing grants and revolving grant funds, supporting sustainable production, risk reduction, and investment in climate-smart practices, including for women-managed and smallholder activities (Activity 3.1.4).

- Reinforcing climate and water planning and service-delivery frameworks to better integrate diverse user priorities, apply affordability considerations within cost-recovery approaches, and strengthen accountability mechanisms, helping ensure that planning and implementation processes remain accessible to female-headed households, older persons, and persons with disabilities (Activities 1.2.1, 1.2.2, 1.3.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3, 3.1.4).

7.4 Anticipated roles of women and men

Women and men are anticipated to play complementary and active roles across governance, service delivery, and climate-resilient agricultural components of the project. Women are expected to participate in community and water-governance structures, farmer associations, consultations, and training on climate-smart agriculture, water-use efficiency, and locally driven financing mechanisms. These roles require time commitments alongside existing household and caregiving responsibilities; accordingly, women's participation will be supported through adapted schedules, decentralised and localised delivery, literacy-sensitive materials, and women-only sessions where appropriate to reduce mobility and workload constraints. Men are expected to continue engagement in agricultural production, infrastructure operation and maintenance, groundwater management, and institutional coordination, while increasingly supporting inclusive decision-making and shared governance through sensitisation and capacity-building activities. Participation may require periodic mobility for both women and men to attend trainings, forums, and meetings; however, mobility barriers will be mitigated through community-based venues, localised activities, and flexible delivery modalities. Women's engagement will be further facilitated through the active involvement of female project staff, and through continuous technical oversight from Gender and Safeguarding Specialist to ensure gender-responsive measures are consistently applied across locations and activities. Together, these roles support equitable contributions to climate-informed water management, resilient agricultural practices, and strengthened local institutions.

7.5 Challenging gender inequalities

The project identifies opportunities to strengthen inclusive participation, equitable access, and gender-responsive outcomes across water governance, service delivery, and climate-resilient agricultural activities. Gender analysis and stakeholder consultations indicate that participation in water and agricultural institutions is shaped by established gender roles, with women often carrying primary responsibility for household water management while remaining underrepresented in technical functions and decision-making related to water and land resources. These dynamics can increase women's time burdens, limit their influence over resource allocation, and constrain the effectiveness and sustainability of adaptation measures.

The project responds by integrating gender-responsive measures across all components, combining inclusive governance, targeted capacity development, and gender-responsive infrastructure design, including:

- **Ensuring minimum quotas for women's participation in water-governance structures**, farmer associations, and multi-stakeholder forums, enabling women to engage alongside men in planning, and knowledge-exchange processes (Activities 1.2.2, 1.3.1, 3.1.1, 3.1.2).
- **Providing gender-responsive technical training in water management, climate-smart agriculture, and planning tools**, using adapted delivery modalities (e.g. women-only sessions, visual materials, flexible scheduling) to strengthen technical capacity, confidence, and leadership in technical areas (Activities 1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.2.1, 1.2.2, 3.1.1, 3.1.2).

- **Promoting women's access to climate-resilient water infrastructure and financing mechanisms**, including water-efficient fixtures, greywater reuse systems, and revolving grant funds, to strengthen economic agency and support equitable participation in productive water use (Activities 2.2.1, 2.2.2, 3.1.4).
- **Applying gender-responsive design principles to water infrastructure and technologies**, to reduce women's workload, protect dignity and privacy, and ensure safe and practical use. This includes: 1) Consulting women and girls during the design and selection of water-efficient fixtures to ensure they do not increase labour (e.g. repeated filling, flushing, or maintenance) and meet functional needs while reducing water consumption; 2) Designing household-level greywater reuse systems to be located close to the home, use simple and low-maintenance technologies, and avoid additional water-carrying or cleaning burdens; 3) Ensuring that all household water and reuse facilities respect privacy, safety, and dignity considerations and are aligned with Sphere and WHO WASH minimum standards (Activities 2.2.1, 2.2.2).

These measures build on existing community capacities and support more inclusive engagement in local adaptation and resource-management processes. By combining inclusive decision-making platforms, targeted capacity development, and equitable access to climate-relevant services and financing, the project contributes to more effective, collaborative, and sustainable approaches to water, agriculture, and climate governance.

7.6 Equal access to information and opportunities

The project ensures that women and men from vulnerable communities have equitable access to information and opportunities necessary to participate in and benefit from project outcomes by:

- Integrating gender- and age-disaggregated data collection and analysis across climate, water, and agricultural assessments (Activities 1.1.1).
- Delivering tailored, gender-responsive training and information sessions adapted to women's and vulnerable groups' mobility, schedules, and literacy levels (Activities 1.2.2, 3.1.2).
- Establishing inclusive consultation and accountability platforms with minimum participation targets, accessible formats, and safe spaces to enable meaningful engagement (Activities 1.2.2, 1.3.2).

7.7 Needs of vulnerable sub-groups

The project systematically considers the needs of vulnerable sub-groups, including women and men with disabilities, the elderly, female-headed households, widows, and youth. Activities such as 1.2.2 (strengthening local community water-governance structures), 1.2.2 (building water-management accountability systems), 2.2.1–2.2.2 (installation of water-efficient fixtures and greywater recycling systems), and 3.1.1–3.1.4 (support to farmer associations, climate-smart training, and locally driven financing models) are designed to address differentiated vulnerabilities related to access, mobility, affordability, and decision-making. Consultations and monitoring data indicate that vulnerable groups, particularly women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, face disproportionate barriers to accessing water services, technical training, and climate-adapted livelihoods, which the project addresses through targeted quotas, adapted delivery modalities, prioritisation mechanisms, and inclusive accountability systems.

At the household and community infrastructure level, gender- and vulnerability-responsive design principles will be applied. For water-efficient fixtures and greywater recycling systems (Activities 2.2.1–2.2.2), women and vulnerable users will be consulted prior to final design and installation. This will ensure that fixtures reduce water use without increasing labour burdens,

such as repeated flushing, and manual refilling, system placement and design respect privacy, dignity, and safety, particularly for women, girls, elderly persons, and persons with disabilities, and systems are simple, low-maintenance, and appropriate for household capacities, avoiding designs that could increase economically burdensome care or maintenance responsibilities.

7.8 Use of women's and men's knowledge and skills

Women's and men's diverse knowledge, skills and professional expertise are systematically mobilised to inform project outcomes and locally appropriate, climate-resilient solutions. The project recognises that technical, operational, and contextual knowledge is distributed across genders and social groups, including within formal institutions, community structures, and households. Through structured consultation processes, data collection systems, and capacity strengthening, supported by formal coordination and decision-making structures, women and men contribute technical, analytical, and contextual expertise to groundwater assessment and modelling, climate-informed water management, infrastructure operation and optimisation, and climate-resilient agricultural planning. Particular attention is given to enabling the effective participation of individuals from vulnerable groups, including female-headed households, youth, older persons, and persons with disabilities, by tailoring consultation processes and expanding access to technical training and pathways for decision making. This approach ensures that climate-informed water management, agricultural practices, and resource-governance solutions are informed by a broad spectrum of professional expertise and locally grounded knowledge.

Table 1: Gender approaches to differentiated needs

Differentiated Needs	Risks	Opportunities (Gender Approach / Mitigation)	Response (Activities and Relevance)
Women are underrepresented in community decision making bodies	Newly created or strengthened Water User Associations (WUAs), farmer associations, and consultation platforms may reflect existing social norms and informal power structures, limiting women's effective participation and influence.	Gender responsive: Set minimum participation targets for women and youth in WUAs, farmer associations, and forums; mentorship and confidence-building programs; ensure accessible timing and locations with safe participation spaces; ensure accessible meeting times and locations; use female facilitators and targeted consultation modalities where appropriate; allow for capacity-building for technical roles	Activities 1.2.2 (strengthen local water governance structures and build water management accountability systems); 1.3.2 (multistakeholder forums for knowledge exchange and coordination of investments); 3.1.1 (Capacity-building for farmer associations) These activities ensure women quotas in local governance and community committees and strengthened technical capacity for meaningful participation and plan developments.
Women have limited access to community-level accountability mechanisms related to land, water, and natural-resource management	Strengthened/created water governance and accountability mechanisms may replicate existing social norms, potentially constraining women's access to information, participation and reporting.	Gender responsive: introduce minimum participation targets for women; ensure safe spaces and accessible consultation spaces; provide female facilitators, schedule meetings at times suitable for women; establish structured consultation mechanisms	Activities 1.2.2 (strengthen local water governance structures and build water management accountability systems); 2.1.2 (Establish a robust leak detection and response system) These activities include women in structures and systems that aim to monitor practices and promote transparency to promote shared roles. Inclusive design enables women to participate in oversight and use accessible channels to report issues related to resource use, service quality, and infrastructure performance, supporting equitable and effective water management.
Women have limited access to technical knowledge and training opportunities required to	Strengthening agricultural, water-management, extension, and climate-resilience systems may inadvertently limit women's access to project benefits, particularly for female-headed households, if service delivery and participation	Gender responsive: Minimum participation targets for women's participation in trainings; delivery of localized gender-responsive training	Activities 1.1.1 (integrated baseline assessments and establish groundwater monitoring network); 1.1.2 (Develop climate-informed groundwater flow models and decision-support tools); 1.2.1 and 1.2.2 (technical capacity strengthening of WUA and local technical department personnel); 2.2.1 (installation of water

adopt climate resilient practices.	modalities are not designed with inclusivity in mind. Provider networks, training schedules, and technical services that are not adapted to women's mobility, time constraints, or caregiving responsibilities could reduce their opportunities to access, technical knowledge, and capacity-building support. This may affect women's ability to adopt water-efficient, climate-adapted practices and to effectively respond to water scarcity and climate-related challenges.	models, adapt timing and venues, ensure safe, accessible learning spaces for women; use female trainers and women only groups where appropriate; adaptation of training curricula and O&M guidance using visual, practical, and easy-to-follow materials suitable for lower literacy (e.g. diagrams, pictorial guides, demonstrations);strengthen women's technical ,adaptive skills and leadership skills in water management and climate-adapted agriculture; prioritise FHH access through tailored eligibility mechanisms; ensure safe, accessible and accountability channels	efficient fixtures); 2.2.2 (installation of small greywater recycling systems); 3.1.1 (Capacity-building for farmer associations); 3.1.2 (Training on climate adapted agricultural practices); Together, these activities expand women's and FHHs' access to financing, training, and climate-smart technologies, support adoption of water-efficient household solutions, and strengthen adaptive capacity to climate shocks in a safe, accessible, and accountable manner.
Women have limited access to financing required to adopt climate resilient practices.	Women, particularly female-headed households, often face structural barriers to accessing climate finance, productive assets, and cost-sharing mechanisms due to limited asset ownership, income constraints, and informal decision-making norms. Financing models or eligibility criteria that are not gender-responsive may unintentionally exclude women from accessing water-efficient technologies, greywater reuse systems, or climate-smart agricultural inputs, limiting equitable benefit-sharing and adaptive capacity.	Prioritization of female-headed and vulnerable households within grants, revolving grant funds; tailored eligibility and selection criteria to reduce barriers related to income, collateral, or asset ownership; integration of affordability safeguards within financing and O&M models to avoid disproportionate financial burdens; support to women's informed participation in financing decisions through targeted orientation and accompaniment; continuous	Activity 3.1.4 (establish locally driven financing models)

		monitoring of women's access to financed assets and services, disaggregated by gender and household type.	
Low integration of women's needs into climate resilient water planning and climate smart service delivery	Strengthening climate planning and service delivery systems may not fully reflect the distinct needs and roles of women if gender considerations are not systematically integrated, including within the development of climate adaptation Concept Notes and investment pipelines. Without appropriate affordability measures, cost-recovery mechanisms or user-fee structures may disproportionately affect female-headed and low-income households, potentially limiting equitable access to climate-smart water services and reducing the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of these investments. Other interventions, such as water-efficient fixtures and household greywater reuse systems, could inadvertently increase women's workloads, time demands, or impact dignity if designs require additional operation, maintenance, repeated water collection, or complex handling.	Gender responsive: provide advanced technical and climate related skills; establish structured consultation mechanisms integrating women's priorities; expand women's access to services and climate finance; apply gender-responsive infrastructure design across water-efficient fixtures, greywater systems, and water-supply rehabilitation, ensuring technologies reduce water use without increasing women's labour, are simple and low-maintenance, protect privacy and dignity; develop gender-responsive Concept Notes and investment pipelines; design cost-recovery and O&M systems with affordability measures; engage community structures to support outreach, feedback, and grievance mechanisms; promote transparent communication with communities	Activities 1.1.1 (baseline and groundwater monitoring); 1.2.1 and 1.2.2 (technical capacity strengthening of WUA and local technical department personnel); 1.3.2 (multistakeholder forums for knowledge exchange and coordination of investments); 1.3.3 (strengthening of the NDAs capacity to catalyse climate financing); 2.2.1 (installation of water efficient fixtures); 2.2.2 (installation of small greywater recycling systems); 2.1.3 (Strengthen water resource directorate capacities for O&M and cost recovery); 3.1.1 (Capacity-building for farmer associations ; 3.1.2 (Training on climate adapted agricultural practices); 3.1.4 (establish locally driven financing models service) These activities ensure women's needs are embedded in climate planning and that climate-smart services, and technologies are delivered in an inclusive and affordable manner, strengthening women's adaptive capacity, particularly for female-headed and low-income households.



Women have limited access to safe reporting mechanisms.	Strengthening systems without a gender-sensitive lens may not fully account for existing social norms, concerns about confidentiality, and limitations in the accessibility and coordination of reporting and referral mechanisms, which can discourage disclosure and constrain access to appropriate, confidential, and survivor-centred support services for women and girls.	Gender sensitive: ensure safe and confidential reporting channels; establish female focal points; strengthen basic GBV/SEAH safeguarding measures and establish clear referrals pathways; enhance visibility and accessibility of reporting mechanisms	Addressed across all project activities through the Acted Feedback Mechanism (AFM), establishment of referral systems, and protection-actor mapping. These mechanisms ensure that vulnerable individual, including women and girls, have safe, confidential, and trusted avenues to report concerns, seek support, and access specialised protection services through clear pathways and coordinated safeguarding structures.
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8. Conclusion and recommendations

The gender analysis confirms that the project is positioned as **gender-responsive**, with gender considerations systematically embedded across climate-resilient water management, agricultural adaptation, governance, infrastructure, and climate-finance pipeline development. The design reflects a clear understanding of women's and men's differentiated needs, vulnerabilities, and capacities in relation to water scarcity, climate change, and access to services, and integrates targeted measures to promote equitable participation, affordability, accountability, and sustainability.

Across core components, groundwater data systems, water governance, climate-smart service delivery, agricultural resilience, and locally driven financing, the project moves beyond gender-sensitive approaches by sustaining women's meaningful participation within governance and planning structures, strengthening access to technical skills and financing, and embedding affordability safeguards within cost-recovery frameworks. At the same time, accountability mechanisms, notably through the Acted Feedback Mechanism (AFM), ensure that gender-related risks and barriers to participation are addressed through safe, confidential, and accessible reporting pathways.

As such, recommendations for strengthening gender-responsiveness focus on consolidating existing gender-responsive measures, addressing women's workload and time constraints, reinforcing women's collective action and access to resources, expanding technical and agricultural skills, and sustaining women's participation in governance and planning processes. Together, these priorities will ensure the project remains sustainable and fully aligned with the GCF guidelines, while providing a robust foundation for inclusive and durable climate adaptation outcomes.

- 1. Sustain women's meaningful participation in water, agriculture, and climate-governance structures:** Minimum participation targets for women in water-governance bodies, farmer associations, accountability mechanisms, and multi-stakeholder forums should be consistently applied and monitored. Continued capacity strengthening in technical skills and planning tools is required to support women's informed and sustained engagement in water planning, investment prioritisation, and resource-management processes, particularly at community level.
- 2. Improve affordability and accessibility of household-level water services:** Water-efficient fixtures and small-scale greywater reuse systems should prioritise female-headed and low-income households, with affordability safeguards embedded within cost-recovery and operation and maintenance (O&M) arrangements. At the same time, affordability and efficiency gains must not increase women's unpaid workload, time burden, or compromise dignity and safety, particularly in contexts of intermittent municipal water supply. To mitigate this risk, the selection, placement, and functionality of household-level water technologies will apply gender-responsive design principles, including consultation with women users prior to installation. This will ensure fixtures and systems reduce consumption without addition time burden, and respect privacy, dignity and ease of use for women and vulnerable groups. Monitoring will assess not only changes in household water expenditure and consumption, but also impacts on women's time use, water-related labour, and household management responsibilities, ensuring that climate-adapted interventions deliver net benefits for women and do not generate unintended burdens.
- 3. Strengthen women's access to technical and agricultural skills for climate adaptation:** Gender-responsive training across groundwater management, climate-smart agriculture, irrigation efficiency, and water-use practices should remain adapted to women's mobility and schedules.

- 4. Expand women's access to locally driven financing mechanisms for climate adaptation:** Supporting women's participation in cost-sharing grants and revolving grant funds, applying tailored eligibility and support mechanisms for female-headed households, and strengthening women's engagement in the design and management of financing models.
- 5. Embed women's priorities within climate planning and service-delivery systems:** Climate-resilient water planning, service delivery, and regulatory processes should continue to integrate women's priorities through structured consultations, gender-informed planning tools, and transparent communication service standards. This will help ensure that strengthened systems do not replicate existing social norms or exclusionary practices.
- 6. Ensure consistent gender integration within climate-finance pipeline development:** The consultant-led gender checklist for Concept Notes (CNs) should be systematically applied and documented to ensure that all climate-finance proposals reflect women's needs, affordability considerations, and differentiated vulnerabilities. This will strengthen the inclusiveness, quality, and sustainability of investment pipelines beyond the project timeframe.
- 7. Maintain accessible and trusted accountability pathways for women and vulnerable groups:** The Acted Feedback Mechanism (AFM), referral mechanisms, and protection-actor mapping should remain visible, accessible, and responsive throughout implementation. Continued sensitisation, female focal points, and adapted communication channels are essential to ensure that women, including female-headed and displaced households, can raise concerns and access support safely and without barriers.

Collectively, these recommendations provide a coherent framework for embedding gender-responsive approaches throughout implementation, ensuring consistency, institutional learning, and long-term sustainability. This strengthens the project's contribution to inclusive climate adaptation and aligns implementation with Green Climate Fund guidelines.