



SYRIAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS CIVIL SOCIETY CONFERENCE

Implementing the Common Agenda to Combat VAWG and Promote
Inclusive Peace Building in Syria

Brussels, 24th-25th of June 2025





INTRODUCTION

The Second Syrian Women's Rights Civil Society Conference: Implementing the Common Agenda to Combat Violence Against Women and Girls and Promote Inclusive Peacebuilding in Syria took place on the 24–25th of June 2025 in Brussels. It was organised in the frame of the project Implementing the Common Agenda to combat VAWG and promote inclusive peace building processes in Syria implemented by EuroMed Feminist Initiative (EFI) in partnership with Musawa, Dawlaty, and Zoom In, and funded by the European Union. The event brought together more than 60 Syrian and international stakeholders from the European Union, the European Parliament and the Office of the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary General for Syria, as well as international organisations to reaffirm the central role of women and women's rights in Syria's reconstruction and transition toward democracy, peace, and equality.

The conference provided a timely platform for representatives from over 35 Syrian women's rights and human rights civil society organisations to collectively articulate their vision for reinforcing women's participation and women's rights at all levels of the reconstruction process in and for Syria: one grounded in equality between women and men, accountability, equal citizenship and civic peace. The discussions were anchored in years of grassroots mobilisation, accumulation of legal and social expertise, and the ongoing implementation of the Common Agenda to Combat Violence Against Women and Girls as a Main Barrier to Women's Participation (The Common Agenda) developed in consultations with over 250 actors across Syria in the frame of the same project.

During the conference, participants discussed most urgent issues linked to the role and action of women's rights and women-led organisations in promoting and building civic peace, in addressing transitional justice and accountability from the perspective of women's needs, and in advocating for gender sensitive constitution and legislation as a pre-condition to effectively addressing Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), enabling women's participation and thus building sustainable peace in Syria.

The outcomes of the local community-led dialogues organised to discuss the Common Agenda were presented and discussed by Dawlaty, Zoom In, and Musawa, who shared a common concern that women participants in the dialogues expressed fear of voicing their opinions due to the bullying and backlash often faced by women who speak out on public issues. However, the Common Agenda was perceived as a tool not only to raise awareness but also to discuss local solutions to combating VAWG and address the widespread stigma surrounding survivors of violence, especially sexual violence.

Furthermore, Equal Citizenship Center (ECC), underlined that the ECC, together with a broader participation of the civil society has developed a policy brief on the need of developing and adopting a comprehensive legislation on VAWG and reminded that Syria now is included in the 2024 Regional Index of VAWG which has 9 countries in the Middle East and North Africa Region. Dawlaty emphasized that the advocacy work of the civil society for a gender sensitive constitution has a long history and underlined that now it is important more than ever that this work consolidates and goes to another level – dialogue and discussion with the transitional government, to make sure women's participation and women's rights are not absent. The Coalition of Syrian Women for Democracy (CSWD) underlined the long-term struggle of the women's rights activists and organisations to strengthen women's participation in all stages and levels for a democratic transition in Syria and stated that importance of engaging wider young activists.

One of the milestones of the conference was the presentation of the Handbook on Gender-Sensitive Reconstruction in Syria, published by EFI and developed in consultation with diverse Syrian experts. It outlines a roadmap for Syrian decisionmakers, donors and international organisations, and civil society organisations committed to building a peaceful, inclusive, and rights-based future. The handbook was presented by the two authors, Dr. Ibrahim Daraji, Constitutional Expert, Professor of International Law and Ms. Farah Hweije, Human Rights Researcher. They discussed the legal and institutional tools and practical steps the handbook offers for integrating a gender lens into the reconstruction process, addressing both women's and men's needs, and emphasized the role of legal and constitutional reforms in guaranteeing women's rights and participation in post-conflict governance.

Each session was followed by a lively open discussion which helped participants to develop during the second day concrete recommendations to the Syrian Interim Government, Civil Society and International Donors for ensuring that Syria's reconstruction is inclusive, accountable, and gender responsive. The recommendations are structured into three areas:

- Advancing international commitments for a gender-sensitive reconstruction of Syria.
- Promoting women's participation in decision-making in all aspects and levels of reconstruction.
- Creating an enabling environment for cooperation between women's rights organizations and decision makers.

Transitional justice that is transformative and inclusive was a crosscutting topic and recurrent throughout the conference due to its high sensitivity and urgency, especially in the aftermath of the coastal massacre in Syria. Therefore, the recommendation pertaining to it are summarised in the additional area of:

- Transformative and inclusive transitional justice and social cohesion.

During the second day, the recommendations, were presented to relevant stakeholders from the EU, UN bodies including the office of the UN Special Envoy to Syria, EU Members of Parliament as well as international organisations.

The recommendations underscore the importance of ensuring that Syrian women's rights activists' demands must not only be heard but also reflected in constitutional texts, legal reforms, reconstruction plans on all levels and in all accountability mechanisms, so that the transitional process does not replicate the same structures of exclusion and violence that brought Syria to collapse.



1. Advancing International Commitments for a Gender-Sensitive Reconstruction of Syria

A. Recommendations to the Syrian Interim Government

- Adopt affirmative action measures (e.g. quotas) guaranteeing no less than 30% women's representation in all elected councils and national institutions.
- Enact laws that support women's political participation, including reforms to the Syrian Political Parties Law requiring gender-inclusive platforms.
- Introduce legally binding provisions ensuring that reconstructed properties and land are equitably allocated to women.
- Guarantee gender parity in all phases of appointment and employment across public institutions and committees.
- Prevent the politicization of the reconstruction process by adopting a rights-based, victim-centred, and gender perspective approach that addresses the needs and concerns of both women and men.
- Develop and adopt a gender sensitive constitution in consultations with legal and women's rights experts and in participatory manner to be aligned with the international obligations of the State and the international instruments ratified by Syria which stipulate the obligation of States to ensure the equal rights of women and protect them from discrimination.
- Establish effective oversight mechanisms to ensure women's participation in the reconstruction process.

B. Recommendations to Civil Society Organizations

- Integrate a women's rights perspective into all projects implemented across Syrian regions, ensuring that the diverse needs of both women and men are fully examined and understood. Projects should be designed to adequately respond to these needs, avoiding any reinforcement of discrimination or harm at any stage of the reconstruction process. Strengthen the capacities of feminist and civil society organizations to advance women's access to adequate housing.
- Launch awareness and advocacy campaigns targeting security and justice institutions on human rights and international humanitarian law.
- Introduce a "reserved seats for women" mechanism within the legislative council.
- Build the capacities of the legislative council for inclusive and effective governance.
- Ensure fair representation of women in transitional justice mechanisms.
- Continue advocating for the establishment of gender-sensitive transitional justice mechanisms, including all-women committees mandated to address highly sensitive cases of violence and exclusion. These mechanisms should be grounded in international commitments and contribute to the development of a gender-sensitive constitution that guarantees justice, equality, and full participation of women in the transition process.

C. Recommendations for International Donors

- Recognize civil society as an essential partner in all international, regional, and governmental processes.
- Require the Syrian government to adopt a gender-sensitive approach to reconstruction, with mechanisms to monitor inclusive implementation.
- Introduce minimum 50% quota to ensure equal representation of women and victims in all relevant committees, thereby preventing exclusionary governance.
- Develop participation standards for civil society, survivors, and displaced persons rooted in civil peace and gender sensitive transitional justice principles.
- Apply an intersectional lens to all participation standards and link compliance to funding conditions.
- Condition civil society projects funding on the inclusion of women-led initiatives and consortia.
- Form joint technical and community committees to monitor reconstruction, ensuring representation from local women—not just central actors.
- Emphasize the role of the international community in enforcing compliance with gender-sensitive standards.
- Promote and support the development of a national action plan aligned with UNSCR 1325.
- Dedicate a specific fund for civil society-led, gender-responsive reconstruction projects.

2. Promoting Women's Participation in All Aspects of Reconstruction, with a Focus on Decision-Making

A. Recommendations to the Syrian Interim Government

- Prioritize reconstruction and engage in consultations with women and women's rights organisation in the most affected and marginalized areas.
- Develop environmentally sustainable public housing based on justice for both women and men and inclusive social cohesion principles.
- Ensure the inclusion of women in all reconstruction committees and at every stage—planning, implementation, and oversight.
- Integrate an agenda responsive to the needs of both women and men into all reconstruction-related bodies and processes.
- Commit to finalizing and implementing a national action plan on UNSCR 1325, ensuring women's participation at no less than 30%.
- Encourage political parties to adopt internal gender quotas and integrate women's rights into their political agendas, ensuring women's political participation in shaping Syria's future.

B. Recommendations to Civil Society Organizations

- Create and enable community-based oversight mechanisms over the reconstruction process.
- Engage in the development and monitoring of the National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325.
- Advocate at both grassroots and institutional levels to enhance women's participation.
- Transform societal perceptions of women's roles through media, arts, and community outreach to advance their leadership.
- Ensure the inclusion of local organizations while respecting the specific sensitivities of each community.
- Engage in discussions with the Syrian government regarding financial loans obtained from international donor, given their long-term impact on the population.
- Develop and deliver leadership training programs for women and girls to strengthen their political participation at local and national levels.
- Support women candidates and elected officials through mentorship networks, peer exchanges, and technical assistance on campaigning, policymaking, and advocacy.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

3. Creating an Enabling Environment for Cooperation Between Women's Rights Organizations and Decision Makers

A. Recommendations to the Syrian Interim Government

- Enact an associations law that guarantees independence and freedom of expression, organization, speech, and movement to CSOs and women's rights defenders.
- Provide a safe and enabling environment for CSO activities.
- Safeguard the administrative and financial autonomy of CSO-led projects.
- Involve and consult civil society actors in every stage of state-building, including constitution drafting, legislation, and strategic planning, while safeguarding the independent role and expertise of the women's rights CSOs.
- Ensure at least 30% representation of women in all institutions and committees.
- Promote transparency and accountability across public institutions.
- Allow legal entities, such as CSOs, to challenge legislation before the Supreme Constitutional Court.

B. Recommendations to Civil Society Organizations

- Build strong alliances between feminist and women-led organizations.
- Establish structured dialogue platforms with international partners to facilitate knowledge exchange and virtual participation in global events.
- Ensure the governance of coalitions is inclusive of geographic and gender diversity.
- Develop a shared database for transparent and efficient information exchange.
- Lead advocacy campaigns based on the "Handbook for a Gender-Sensitive Reconstruction", targeting Syrian decision-makers and the international community.

C. Recommendations for International Donors

- Support coalition building to advance a common goal of women's participation in the reconstruction processes.
- Design and fund projects aligned with the specific realities of the Syrian context and local communities.
- Maintain ongoing support for civil society organizations, allocating no less than 30% of funding to those advocating for women's rights.
- Prioritize the sustainability of funded projects.
- Link international aid to the meaningful inclusion and consultations of civil society in policymaking and implementation.
- Support Syrian organizations working on the education sector by facilitating cooperation with the Ministry of Education and incorporating their findings into citizenship-based curriculum reform.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Transformative and Inclusive Transitional Justice and Social Cohesion

One of the crosscutting topics that was recurrent through the conference was the need to urgently initiate a transformative and inclusive transitional justice process linked to social cohesion, equality between women and men and the unity of the country. Participants reiterated that any further delays in such a process can result in additional sectarian tensions and contribute to widening the rift among Syrians. They warned that unless the government takes serious measures, the acts of retaliation and personal vengeance will continue to increase. To prevent future massacres similar to the one that happened in Coastal Syria in March 2025, the government must invest resources and increase effort to hold all war criminals accountable. Social cohesion can only be attained through reparations and justice for the families of victims/survivors from all parties.

Moreover, participants underlined that transitional justice in Syria must be transformative and inclusive. This would demand a comprehensive approach and the joint efforts of all the actors who are engaged for a just, inclusive, and sustainable peace in Syria, and a recognition of the transformative role played by Syrian women, and their economic and social leadership during the military conflict. As underlined in the Common Agenda, "Gender-sensitive transitional justice and reconstruction is a necessary process towards the building of a democratic system and society which respects the human rights of both women and men."

Participants underlined that the transitional justice process in Syria should require addressing the root causes of the political, economic, social, and legal oppression and the power structures that have sustained and reproduced inequalities between women and men, which led to the escalation of VAWG during the military conflict. These structures include discriminatory legislation for women as well as their exclusion from meaningful participation in the social, economic, and political spheres. Therefore, the transitional justice process must encompass legal reforms and ensure that these laws and their application mechanisms are inclusive and address women's needs and concerns. This begins with a new constitution that guarantees legal equality for women and men and the adoption of laws that address and criminalise discrimination and all forms of VAWG.

The process of inclusive and transformative transitional justice in Syria should also recognize the deliberate use of conflict related sexual violence (CRSV) by all parties and the significant physical and psychological harm it has caused to women victims/survivors and their communities. Many challenges prevent in particular CRSV cases from being properly addressed and documented, including underreporting due to stigmatization and intimidation of survivors.

Main recommendations that were discussed throughout the conference include:

A. Recommendations to the Syrian Interim Government

- Initiate legal reforms and ensure that these laws and their application mechanisms are inclusive and responsive to the needs of both women and men. This begins with a new constitution that guarantees equality for both men and women and the issuance of laws that criminalise discrimination and all forms of VAWG.
- Facilitate access to justice for victims/survivors, including victims/survivors of CRSV by facilitating the legal process and ensuring the implementation of victim-centred approach in courtrooms and legal procedures. The process should also consider the different needs of women and men.
- Ensure the participation of women's rights defenders and victims/survivors in all transitional justice procedures and include their vision and perspective in all related processes. This can be done through the development of a national gender-sensitive transitional justice program, led by Syrians, with the use of mixed courts and the involvement of international judges and lawyers to ensure transparency and integrity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Amend the Transitional Justice Commission formation decree to include all violations against all victims/survivors and holding perpetrators accountable from all sides of the conflict.
- Establish a mechanism to monitor the performance of transitional justice institutions to ensure that they are responsive to the needs of women victims/survivors.
- Include VAWG, especially sexual violence and CRSV, within the transitional justice mechanisms, with the establishment of specialized units for victims/survivors of VAWG.
- Design and provide training programs for judges, judicial officers, and police forces on international human rights standards, women's rights, victim/survivor-centred approach in particular with cases of sexual violence and CRSV.
- Cooperate with women's rights CSO to draw on their accumulated knowledge, experience and expertise to enhance understanding of the structural causes and consequences of violations women face and sustain all efforts towards implementing an inclusive transformational transitional justice, responsive to the needs of women victims of all sorts of VAWG, including CRSV.
- Provide legal, social, and symbolic recognition of women victims/survivors of all forms of VAWG, breadwinners, and women from minorities, such as refugee women, and women with disabilities. This can be done through financial compensation, psychological and social support.
- Design and provide training programs for personnel on gender analysis when documenting or dealing with violations and/or their impacts. This can be done in collaboration with CSO that have accrued extensive experience in that field in the past 13 years.
- Ensure the participation of all segments of the society in the pathways, mechanisms, and programs of transitional justice, with a guarantee of women's participation in all decision-making positions, whether in judicial institutions, transitional justice bodies (such as truth-seeking committees), or other related institutions on national and local levels, and in the design and implementation of all transitional justice programs.

B. Recommendations to Civil Society Organizations

- Design special programs for survivors of sexual violence and CRSV, using art, literature, cinema, and media as tools for recognition, reparation, and healing.
- Provide technical support to the government to help them in bridging the gap between international law and Syrian law regarding the crimes of sexual violence and CRSV.
- Provide legal and psychosocial support to women victims/survivors of all forms of VAWG and ensure access to those services on national and local levels.
- Organize community dialogues in all Syrian regions to promote nonviolent communication and conflict resolution and enhance peace building and social cohesion.

C. Recommendations for International Donors

- Support the Syrian government to provide financial compensation, and recognition to all war victims/survivors and their families.
- Support training programs for the Syrian government on victim/survivor centred approach on dealing with victims/survivors of sexual violence and CRSV.
- Fund special programs for survivors of sexual violence, along with healing and reparation programs.
- Support cooperation between feminist CSOs, women-led CBOs and policy makers, to strengthen coordination and improve institutional and organisational capacities in documentation and reporting.

Common Agenda for Combating VAWG as Main Barrier to Women's Participation

Conference Recommendations From Policy Objectives to Policy Outcomes

Advancing international commitments for a gender-sensitive reconstruction of Syria

Syrian Transitional Government

Legal discrimination annulled, equality laws in place and equal participation in political and economic life ensured.

Syrian Civil Society

Women's rights approach integrated in all projects and the diverse needs of both women examined and included.

International Donors

International funding is tied to measurable progress on women's rights and equality.

Promoting women's participation in decision-making in all aspects and levels of reconstruction

Syrian Transitional Government

Women and women's rights activists participate in all stages and at all levels of political dialogue and negotiation with the Syrian government; NAP for UNSCR 1325 is developed ensuring minimum 30% women's participation.

Syrian Civil Society

Leadership programs are developed and women candidates and elected women are supported.

International Donors

Joint technical, community committees are formed to monitor reconstruction funds, representation of local women is ensured.

Creating an enabling environment for cooperation between women's rights CSOs and decision makers

Syrian Transitional Government

A law on the associations is adopted and guarantees freedom and independent action of CSOs and women's rights defenders.

Syrian Civil Society

Strong alliances between feminist and women-led organizations are built, experience and knowledge exchange platforms established.

International Donors

International aid is linked to meaningful inclusion and consultations of civil society in policymaking and implementation.

Engendering transitional justice process

Syrian Transitional Government

VAWG, especially sexual violence and CRSV is included within the transitional justice mechanisms; specialized units for victims and survivors of VAWG are established.

Syrian Civil Society

Victims and survivors of all forms of VAWG have access to services at national and local levels.

International Donors

Women's rights are on donors' transitional justice agendas.

Ensuring an inclusive reconstruction in Syria

- Democratic environment with stop of violence and all forms of VAWG
- Women's rights CSOs participate and contribute to policy making and monitoring