

# Need Assessment Syrian Civil Society organizations in light of continuing effects of the COVID-19



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of the interviews and consultations that the Center for Civil Society and Democracy conducted with organizations, partners, and women's teams to assess their needs in response to COVID-19. These interviews allow the CCSD team to develop the policies and priorities that will guide the response.

The report outlines the methodology used for assessing needs, which mainly focuses on providing an analysis of the problems arising due to COVID-19 and its implications. The report introduces the idea of gender sensitivity and also demonstrates the importance of assessing the needs of the society and creating reports based on the facts in order to build effective policies.

The organizations are overwhelmed with many needs. They were not always able to articulate the needs and priorities.

-We assessed the main challenges organizations faced, the needs they identified, and how their services ways had been affected. All this information will show us how we can best respond to their needs, and support their needs through community initiatives and interventions. We will also use this information to create a Syria-wide report that shows how Syrian civil society organizations focusing on women, are affected by COVID-19.

Additionally, this document provides analysis with respect to the challenges for CSOs and women who work in them within the broader context of challenges that the Syrian community is facing, defines the conflicts that occurred with the spread of the COVID-19, and its effects on countries affected by wars. It notes the deterioration of the health system, with gross human rights violations, especially against women. The report highlights the needs of women organizations, and teams and identifies the support needed to work from home and manage projects remotely.

The report identifies challenges that women and organizations are facing due to existing gender gaps with regards to access and use of technology at work. It was also found out that there is a necessity to develop work mechanisms and procedures to maintain the quality and the performance of the organizations and avoid gender gaps.

The report defines the administrative results and developing work by civil organizations and teams in order to effectively respond to the crises that emerged due to the spread of COVID-19.

Lastly, the report provides recommendations on civil society actors to enhance their role and increase their effectiveness in areas of capacity building to use technology to work remotely as a result of COVID-19 and to raise awareness about the needs resulting from it, and best ways to respond to these needs.. Additional recommendations within this report focus on women's needs with regards to health, improving community response to COVID-19, providing protection, prevention, addressing problems, and accessing humanitarian aid.

## INTRODUCTION

The Syrian population both within and beyond the borders of Syria have been suffering from the ongoing conflict for more than ten years, which began as a result of widespread protests to demand improvement of the political, economic, social, and developmental situation in Syria. The Syrian people were also protesting for their freedom, rights, and justice based on the principles of the rule of law and inclusion of all the components of the society.

The prolonged conflict and the struggle of the society to improve the general situation in Syria were accompanied with tyranny from the Syrian government and other actors that have prevented this change. The conflict turned into violence, counter-violence, militarization, and violent extremism that reached the limits of the spread of terrorism on a large scale. This situation had negative consequences on a national, regional, and international scale.

The effects of the conflict have devastating consequences on Syrian civil society and especially on the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, including Syrian women. Human rights violations, arbitrary arrests, bombing civilians, and extreme violence have all contributed to an unstable and insecure environment for Syrians. Syrians increasingly need a safe, stable, and neutral environment that guarantees their rights, especially women's rights and ends the violence against women. This crisis has worsened with the spread of COVID-19,

There is an even greater need for development and stability efforts to support CSOs so that they can continue their work and serve the most vulnerable groups. The deterioration of the country's overall infrastructure, especially in the health sector, has continued to worsen as COVID-19 spreads. Corruption, chaos, crime rates and a shortage of materials have also impacted Syrians as a result of the pandemic. The health and medical needs have increased due to the lockdowns due to COVID-19 and the weak respective infrastructures, especially technology to respond to COVID-19. All of the previously mentioned challenges highlight the importance of resource mobilization at the level of individuals, groups, teams, initiatives, and organizations to respond to the needs.

Syrian women and refugees are among the most vulnerable groups in the Syrian context, and they are the most affected in society due to many factors such as the legal and the social frameworks that do not support women in general.

Through this assessment CCSD is identifying the basic needs resulting from the spread of COVID-19, so that civil society organizations and institutions could consider them to build evidence-based and well-informed decisions in the design, the implementation, and the monitoring and evaluation of the projects. Therefore, with the spread of the pandemic and the escalation of the crisis, it was necessary to raise the awareness of the CSOs to have their interventions based on clear needs assessment for the emergency response of the current crisis in Syria.

One of the objectives for this assessment is to build a participatory needs assessment approach with civil society organizations, through assessment of needs in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the needs of the society, organizations and women during the implementation of activities, and how the responses to these changes in work mechanisms were. In addition to how the work was done in order to identify the best practices.

The interviews were conducted with 24 civil organizations, that focus primarily on supporting and empowering women, and work teams, and our team produced the research in a participatory manner. The organizations targeted by the need assessment are located in Syria and Turkey. Of the organizations included in the assessment, nine organizations did not want to reveal their identity due to security concerns, these are the other fifteen organizations who agreed to be:

The Women's Commission, Reviving Hope, Zanobia Association for Syrian Women, Together for Deir Ezzor Organization, Sara Organization for Combating Violence Against Women, Civil Center in Atarib, Change Makers, Citizenship House, Shawishka Association, Demos Organization, Zahrat Al Furat Association, Women of Peace, Sada Organization Rawafed Organization.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology was built in order to achieve the objective of the needs assessment which is identifying and analyzing the problem as a result of the rapid spread and expansion of the global COVID-19 crisis. This needs assessment is also a complementary step to previous efforts in other activities implemented by CCSD, as CCSD has identified the impact on women civil society organizations from gender perspectives through the “Women for the Future of Syria” program. Marginalized groups in society, especially women. We also developed a perception that assesses the needs of women and civil society organizations that is designed for women and/or women-led organizations. Moreover, the assessment aims to identify lessons learned to share the best mechanisms and benefit from the experiences of others to enable learning and exchange of experiences.

Identifying the needs of Syrian women and civil society organizations in response to COVID-19, through a participatory approach which constitutes engaging and consulting the targeted organizations in the design of the data collection tools, and the writing of the report to ensure it reflects what have been expressed by them, and to ensure it is helpful. The approach focuses on organizations and women to assess needs and challenges, identify key results and suggest recommendations.

. The following steps were conducted to determine the needs of women and CSOs in Syria and Turkey due to COVID-19:

1. Identifying and analyzing the problem
2. Mapping the organizations to be targeted
3. Designing data collection tools
4. Data collection
5. Data cleaning and analysis
6. Writing the initial report
7. Discussing the report with the interviewed organizations as part of the participatory approach with the organizations in dialogue forums
8. Translate and publish the final report

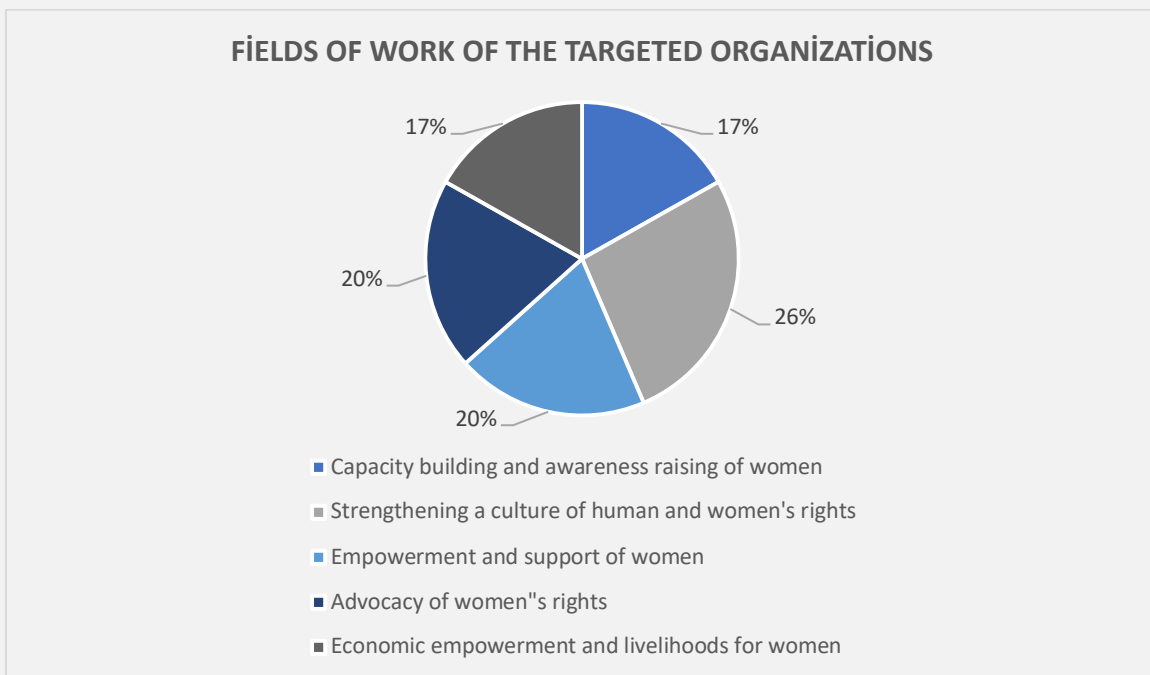
**TARGET GROUPS:**

The interviews targeted 24 organizations operating in Syria and Turkey. CCSD identified organizations to participate whose work targets women, or that are led by women.

Number of staff in the targeted organizations	Number of targeted organizations	Region
213	6	South of Syria
100	7	Northwest of Syria
135	7	North East of Syria
220	4	Turkey

**TARGET ORGANIZATIONS:**

Using the data collected in the interviews, we identified the target organizations' areas of work as capacity building, support, and empowerment of civil society, youth, and women, and worked on mechanisms for raising awareness, mobilization, advocacy, community initiatives, and interventions.



Data about the orgs interviewed

Dialogue forums targeted more than 35 women. The forums discussed the needs and response of women to COVID-19 and the impact of the associated procedures.

Selection Criteria of the Targeted Organizations by the Needs Assessment:

- Organizations should have minimum 30% of women and youth as staff members
- Organizations should be working on and supporting women's issues
- Organizations should be women led
- organizations with good reputation locally and to be pro human rights and specifically women rights.
- impartial organizations not affiliated to any political, military or extremist groups
- Organizations should be working to respond to Syrians inside and out of Syria
- Organizations willing to use the needs assessment in their current and future projects and activities

### **Challenges for Women focused Civil Society Organizations in Response to COVID-19:**

The effect of the Covid-19 pandemic is exacerbated in countries affected by conflicts, as conflicts cause under development or developing countries the lack of infrastructure, deteriorating health systems, chaos, and corruption adding an extra layer of challenges. Furthermore, women and civil society organizations were highly affected by the following challenges:

#### **Mental Health Challenges:**



Targeted organizations by the needs assessment reported that at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak the lack of information about the virus, the difficult living conditions, the state of war, and the ongoing conflict in Syria has caused many mental health issues. These challenges have had a great impact on women in particular who are bearing extra burdens at work and society, the spread of the pandemic directly affected work from home and affected the quality of performing tasks. This new situation increased the cases of domestic violence and gender-based violence (GBV).

#### **Operational Challenges:**



This was greatly reflected in the quality of work, which required them to exert extra efforts in training and learning on the new tools and requirements of remote work. However, there is a technical gap that women suffer from and needs to be addressed, since the women targeted by the key informant interviews reported that they need trainings on how to use the technology to work online, and more guidance on the best ways to deliver activities online as a result to the situation of COVID-19.

Additionally, n out of m organizations identified challenges in implementing adherence to and application of social distancing procedures, provision of medical supplies such as PPE and sterilizers. Targeted organizations reported that the financial challenges they are facing is affecting the quality of communication activities such as meetings online, the platforms used for online delivery of activities, and communication online with the work team and the beneficiaries. The effect on communication

causes lack of trust among staff members and the targeted communities. there are no specific budgetary items for the communication activities/requirements.

### Access and Communication Challenges:



Access and communication challenges are related to the ability of women and women's teams to access and use technology. The pandemic has highlighted and perpetuates the existing digital gender gap, the lack of technological skills and therefore the challenges to fulfill the work requirements and responsibilities when this work was done remote online.

### Economic Challenges:



High prices for goods, a lack of resources, and quarantining at home have all had negative consequences on the economic situation in Syria. The strained economic situation had consequences on the programs and organizations in which women are working, as women are the most vulnerable to dismissal from work or programs.

### Safety (due to Covid-19) Challenges:



Civil society organizations and women targeted by the needs assessment are facing challenges related to the poor commitment to procedures and safety measures both from the staff and from targeted communities due to the lack of awareness of the risks of COVID-19. Some groups in society lack awareness about the pandemic, and are not convinced that COVID-19 is real. This leads to a lack of responsibility, which has negative implications for the work of organizations. COVID-19 safety challenges and the lack of commitment by some the staff members and the targeted communities caused an additional burden on organizations to providing medical and health protection supplies for targeted groups such as:

- Women who suffer from health conditions
- Pregnant and lactating women
- Women heading their households
- Women who are the primary caregivers of their children

### Health Awareness Challenges:



Health awareness challenges come from the information gap about COVID-19 when it first emerged, the lack of the response facilities, and the absence of a vaccine. This required all interviewed organizations and organizations willing to use this needs assessment in their activities to apply existing resources with first aid expertise to respond to the challenge of creating awareness about the increasing spread of COVID-19. However, even before the pandemic there were significant health challenges related to the capacity and responsiveness of the health system in Syria due to the war and deteriorating health sector. These challenges have only gotten worse with the spread of COVID-19.

This challenge constituted a burden for women's organizations, teams, and groups in the necessity of raising awareness about the social responsibility for the individuals and the communities, the social protection and prevention, and the importance of awareness campaigns and experience sharing of campaigns management, which constituted burdens on the programs, activities, and budgets for this purpose.

### Financial Challenges:



All women organizations and programs suffer from the lack of funding, and there are different methods these organizations are following in responding to adapting to the lack of funding, but all organizations considered obtaining funding as a challenge and also the challenge in allocating budgetary items to respond to and prevent COVID-19 and also to respond to work requirements. This is due to COVID-19 measures, especially in women-focused programs.

### Workplace Challenges:



The shift from physical to remote work implied the rising of requirements to build capacity, equipment, and communication costs, and other logistic measures. Safety measures while implementing the activities, and the need for human resources policies and procedures emerged. This challenge goes back to the lack of similar past experiences to respond and cope with similar situations.

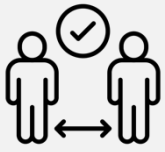
## BEST PRACTICES TO RESPOND TO COVID-19:

### Raising Health Awareness and Enhancing Social Responsibility:

Health and social awareness has an important role in order to mitigate the gap in health information, and to alleviate the panic associated with the spread of COVID 19. As well as the contributions that organizations have made on gender mainstreaming and the most vulnerable groups in order to reduce the effects of domestic violence and poverty for the most vulnerable groups including women. These groups who are subjected to GBV and domestic violence at home as the primary caregivers at their households, due to the patriarchal culture that controls society. Civil society organizations and women's groups have played an effective role in raising awareness, sharing information, and committing to procedures.

### Quotes from Interviews on Best Practices:

“Carrying out a campaign about our responsibility as community members under the title “We are All Here”, in conjunction with a campaign from Nowruz to Akito (celebrations of groups in Syria) to educate people about celebrating the holidays from their homes through the participation of the surrounding community from Raqqa, Hassaka, and Deir Ezzor by publishing messages and educational videos.”



### **Social Distancing Measures:**

There were good results regarding the adherence to the procedures of social distancing and the use of sterilizers and prevention methods during fieldwork, especially for field intervention teams.

#### **Quote:**

*“Committing to social distancing and commitment to wearing masks, sterilizing hands regularly, and reducing the number of volunteers within the sessions and activities were highly witnessed.”*



### **Technology Resources:**

Information and communication platforms and devices are among the most important emerging and relatively low-cost resources, and they are accessible and available to all. They are also considered to be among the most important tools people used to apply the procedures and minimize the effect of closures, continue working and meet the needs. So there is a fundamental role for information and communication technology resources, and because of the digital gap from a gender perspective, there is a need to fill these gaps to support access and use of technologies.

#### **Quote:**

*“Media workers are designing awareness posts according to the standards of the World Health Organization and the Turkish Ministry of Health to be published on social media (Facebook - YouTube - WhatsApp groups for the target groups in Zenobia) is a very important step towards using the information and communication resources to respond to COVID-19”*

### **Human Resources at Organizations:**



Benefiting from the human resources internally in the organizations was one of the most feasible mechanisms due to its sustainability and availability with the least waste of resources to develop work techniques and benefit from the existing technical expertise for training, counseling and work achievement. Also benefit from health expertise and information, especially from nurses within the teams and humanitarian workers who are well acquainted with the principles of first aid and psychological support.

This contributed to the provision of expertise and resources to organizations and institutions significantly. Also, administrative expertise was used to develop work mechanisms that provide advice and support for administrative, financial, and program work aspects in a manner that meets the requirements of documentation and quality. In addition to the team spirit that is well utilized in order to support activities and share information, data, and updates.

**Quotes:**

*“We have a youth team that has worked to raise awareness and address issues in society, including COVID 19.”*

*“We contracted with an expert team in the Humanitarian Aid Experts Organization for a period of 25 days to support our organization with all medical matters and 3 days dedicated to respond to COVID 19.”*

*“There are volunteer doctors and nurses at our organizations.”*

*“The support of the nurses within the team and the support provided by the World Health Organization, as we carried out activities in which all measures were taken into account to confront COVID-19.”*

**Coordination and Networking:**



Coordination and networking are also among the effective mechanisms for women's organizations and teams in order to confront crises of COVID-19, especially in Syria.. Therefore, one of the best mechanisms is coordination and cooperation efforts among organizations in raising awareness of the dangers of the pandemic and the necessity of prevention of it. As well as assessing needs and advocating to address them. Finding innovative mechanisms to find solutions. Through social responsibility, advocacy efforts, and pressure to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized in the communities of displacement and asylum. As well as the initiative of the feminist movement to take into account the gender perspective, and an attempt to highlight the importance of gender equality, in order to contribute to achieving justice and equality.

**Quote:**

*“We have carried out awareness initiatives such as “enough recklessness - your commitment is your safety” Carried out awareness sessions - campaigns - printed brochures and posters and distributed them in the camps.”*

**Effective Solutions:**



COVID-19 proved how important the work of humanitarian, civil society, and women's organizations are in times of crisis. The analysis of the interviews and discussions showed one of the most important work experiences to elaborate on a list of solutions for medical teams around the world. The methodology is one of the effective practices of workers and organizations about the importance of awareness raising, and analyzing the sensitivity of each situation of women, children and other vulnerable groups. Finding solutions to implement activities, raise awareness and respond to women specific needs, through finding administrative and practical alternatives of technology resources, and by

developing policies and procedures, initiate networking to maintain support and coordination.

**Quotes:**

*“We used the media to shed light on women's specific needs during COVID 19, such as publishing stories of women or talking about them through radio episodes - also the organization established a hotline to receive complaints of women during the quarantine period.”*

*“Our attempt to support each other by collecting donations to support the organization responds to the impacts of COVID-19”*

## **NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF SYRIAN WOMEN ORGANIZATIONS AFFECTED BY COVID-19** :

There are so many needs of women and organizations, but the focus of this assessment is on the priorities from the perspective of civil society organizations and women in light of COVID-19.

The needs that have been prioritized to support organizations to have their staff work from home and when they do work in the office they do so safely: capacity building, equipment, applications, multiple uses of information and communication technology, administrative needs and remote management:

### **Training and Capacity Building:**

Capacity-building, knowledge, and skills, through training, support, and empowerment of organizations' and women's capacities in order to respond to the emergency situation caused by the pandemic. Identifying methods to respond more effectively to the requirements of remote work and pressure caused by committing to COVID-19 safety procedures:

- Training on managing and facilitating remote activities and online training.
- Technical training related to technical skills and applications usages of Zoom and Webex meetings.
- Training related to first aid, cases management, and health awareness of COVID 19.
- Developing skills of technical devices and equipment like the office programs, the Internet and the domains of the organization, and building the visual identity of the organization.
- Training on digital security and protection.

### **Equipment and Devices:**



The equipment and devices such as computers and their ability to deal with larger work requirements for managing data and information and also for preserving data and archives for the organization or team to preserve information and data, and effectively manage activities and programs. There is also a need for more printers in order to meet the needs of remote working conditions and special needs of women such as basic equipment for women who suffer from a lack of possession of the equipment. There is gender-based discrimination caused by the weak experiences of women in technology, therefore, it is necessary to bridge the technical gap in owning equipment and using technology.

### **Communication Tools:**



Trainings on tasks managing applications, online platforms, and Microsoft Office for reports, presentations, budgets, and analysis of information and data, as well as Google applications and communication platforms such as Zoom, Webex, Meeting, GOAL applications, E-mail, the Internet, digital protection from viruses, information and data protection and encryption such as East, Defender, Symantec, Data Drive Spaces. Also, Connection Encryption to achieve greater protection. Among the needs are the rise in communication budgets, the costs of connecting to the Internet, and updating programs and applications that help protect the quality of information.

### Development of Administrative Policies and Procedures:



There is a set of needs for work requirements in terms of coordination, remote communication, time management, administrative and financial documentation. In order to preserve the process, achieve feasibility and impact, enhance productivity and achieve the goals of the institution or organization. There is also the need to take into account gender sensitivity in human resources management and within institutions or teams. Remote work procedures require documenting activities and tasks as well as taking into account domestic stress. Especially women because of their stereotypical roles in society and because they are under greater pressure due to usually being in charge of managing their households.

### Remote Management:



These needs are represented by equipment, hardware, software, applications, costs, training, and capacity building to respond to COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it needs to meet the above requirements of all needs for remote management of the entirety of the operations and tasks, so it needs training, equipment, the application uses, and programs.

### Health and Medical Procedures:



The needs in this sphere are related to health awareness of the pandemic and symptoms and providing to the most affected protection materials and requirements like sterilizers, temperature scales devices, developing safety procedures during physical meetings or humanitarian interventions, and the needs that women require for prevention and protection, especially pregnant women, or the vaccine which is coming into effect.

### Support and Funding:



This need has been expressed at all the interviews to support initiatives, programs, activities, supplies, purchase of equipment, space costs, and operating expenses in order to support the continuity and sustainability of the organization.

### Special Needs for Women:



Special needs of pregnant women to be provided since they need extra protection from COVID 19. The internet costs for women are a burden compared to their income and budgets. Many women believe that there is gender discrimination when it comes to accessing technological resources.

## GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The most important recommendations can be identified from a more effective response, taking into account the gender perspective and reducing harmful practices against women and girls, especially in countries of conflict and war, and the absence of a safe and stable environment.

### Organizational Capacity Building Recommendations:

- Supporting women and organizations in order to respond to the requirements of administrative work, remote management, and policy development.
- Supporting programs related to women and empowering civil society in order to improve raising awareness and advocating for community issues.
- Supporting organizations' costs to provide equipment, devices, and communication applications to women in civil society organizations in order to reduce the digital divide and also to activate the work of organizations through programs that support technology for organizations, especially women.
- Supporting organizations to provide medical and health supplies to workers and beneficiaries, and this is through dedicated projects to support work teams during the response to COVID-19, especially medical ones that have contact with the community, with a focus on the camps.
- Supporting organizations to provide safe spaces increases women's engagement in developing their skills and also contributes to greater participation of women.
- Building and developing the capacity of organizations and teams to use technology applications effectively, especially women and digital security, through programs that support equipment and capacity building, in order to increase the effectiveness of activities, especially during the response to COVID 19, and the accompanying procedures made technology an important resource for the implementation of work, goals, programs, and activities.
- Fundraise for the people with disabilities to have access to the services in light of COVID 19 and to facilitate their involvement in the civil society organizations.

### Recommendations for supporting women working in CSOs:

- Engage women in decision-making through inclusion in dialogue sessions, information flow, capacity building, and increasing the participation of women in decision-making centers, in order to take into account, the gender perspective, especially in times of emergency and crisis.
- Encourage studies and researches on the women needs in the field of technology, and provide women with necessary equipment to use technology and deliver activities online within their organizations.
- Provide medical assistance to pregnant and lactating women in medical centers, increase the number of medical points, and pay attention to maternity hospitals and medical organizations.
- Issue laws and procedures that contribute to protecting women from GBV, especially in times of emergency and the absence of rule of law.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is important to support civil society organizations and women and improve their influence in decision-making, especially for sustainability purposes. Also, in order to develop the work, especially the work affected by COVID 19 and the needs for capacity building, information and communication technology, equipment, response plans and programs, taking into account gender sensitivity, responding to the digital and gender gaps in order to work efficiently and with high quality.

## REFERENCES

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### PRIMARY:

- Interviews with 24 organizations in Syria and the neighboring countries with Syrian refugee women and men.
- Forums targeting Syria and Turkey to discuss needs and challenges.
- Partners feedback and develops the file in a participatory manner with them.

### SECONDARY:

- [Reports](#) issued by the Center for Civil Society and Democracy during the period from March to October
- [Messages](#) sent by the Centre for Civil Society and Democracy