

Gendered Impacts of Climate Change and Feminist Climate Grassroots Responses in Syria

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Introduction

Climate change is intensifying existing inequalities across the Middle East, with women, refugees, rural communities, and other marginalised groups experiencing its impacts most acutely. In contexts shaped by conflict, economic fragility, and political transition, climate stress is not only an environmental issue but a deeply gendered one, intersecting with livelihoods, health, mobility, care responsibilities, and access to resources. Yet feminist knowledge, leadership, and organising remain underrepresented in climate governance, policy, and reconstruction processes.

This report, conducted by the Doria Feminist Fund (DFF), examines the intersection of climate justice and gender equality in Syria. It centres the perspectives of feminist and grassroots organisations, women-led initiatives, feminist journalists, and practitioners who are responding to climate impacts on the ground, often under conditions of prolonged crisis and limited institutional support. The research seeks to document the most pressing climate-related challenges affecting women's lives, assess the constraints and opportunities facing feminist and environmental actors, and identify priorities for policy, advocacy, and resourcing grounded in lived experience.

In Syria, the climate movement remains emergent after more than a decade of conflict, humanitarian crisis, and the long-term neglect of environmental governance under the former authoritarian regime. Although the country has faced earthquakes, prolonged droughts, rising temperatures, pollution, and wildfires both before and during the conflict, environmental concerns have often been overshadowed by immediate survival needs. As a result, feminist engagement with climate and environmental justice is fragmented but growing, shaped by new political openings, grassroots leadership, and increasing recognition of the gendered dimensions of climate harm.

The findings presented in this report are structured around six thematic areas: the most prominent climate-related issues impacting women's lives; the challenges and opportunities facing feminist and grassroots organisations working on climate and environmental issues; organisational and community needs; and policy and advocacy priorities, including just reconstruction. Drawing on desk research, key informant interviews, and a participatory ideation workshop with DFF partners and research participants, the report aims to contribute feminist, context-specific analysis that can inform funding strategies, policy debates, and collective action on climate justice in Syria.

Background

A. Climate-Induced Crises Facing Syria

In 2025, Syria is at the forefront of a worsening climate crisis. Successive years of extreme drought, declining rainfall, and [rising temperatures](#) have compounded the country's fragile environment, triggering severe water scarcity, agricultural collapse, and escalating public-health risks. [Over 16.5 million Syrians](#) need humanitarian aid, including more than half the population without safe water. [Rainfall has dropped](#) to just 25% of seasonal averages, making this the driest winter since 1958. As a result, more than 80% of the population is affected by [drought](#), with 8.3 million directly or indirectly impacted by severe water shortages, failing irrigation, and collapsing WASH systems nationwide. Syria has faced [recurring droughts](#) since 2006, with the 2007–2009 spell among the most severe and far-reaching. Assessments at the time found that [1.3 million people](#) in eastern Syria were affected, including more than 800,000 who lost nearly all sources of livelihood and faced extreme hardship. The drought also triggered [large-scale displacement](#), with 40,000–60,000 families forced to leave their homes—36,000 from Al-Hasakeh Governorate alone. Climate change intensified the most severe drought in Syria's recorded history at that time, [forcing hundreds of thousands of farmers](#) into already overcrowded cities. While the drought was a critical stressor, it did not act in isolation. Its impacts were compounded by years of political repression, economic and social injustice, which together deepened vulnerabilities and fueled the conditions that contributed to 14 years of conflict. However, Syria's droughts before and after the conflict were made far more severe by climate change. Analysis of observation-based datasets indicates a clear trend toward more frequent and intense droughts in the region. [A study](#) shows that the combination of low rainfall and high evapotranspiration that today produces a severe drought would, in a pre-industrial climate without the additional 1.2°C of warming, have been so much less intense that it would not have resulted in a drought.

In addition to the ongoing drought, water scarcity, and [agricultural collapse](#), Syria faced [a major wildfire emergency](#) on 2 July 2025 when multiple fast-

moving fires erupted across the northern countryside of Lattakia. Fueled by extreme heat, strong seasonal winds and low humidity, more than 40 ignition points spread rapidly through pine forests, farmland and the edges of villages. Around [100 km² of forested and agricultural land](#) was burned, accounting for over 3 per cent of Syria's total forest cover, along with significant damage to civilian property and infrastructure.

B. Women on the Frontlines of Climate-Induced Crises in Syria

Women, especially rural women, are vital to agriculture and food security in Syria. One study that looked at [the role of women in agriculture in Northeastern Syria](#) found that they are essential to food security, engaging in crop cultivation, livestock rearing, and field labour. Women also supplement household income by selling produce, dairy, and homemade goods, and they participate in decisions on agricultural resources, highlighting their central role in sustaining rural livelihoods and resilience. However, Women and girls are the most affected by climate-induced crises in Syria, bearing the brunt of worsening droughts, water scarcity, and damaged infrastructure. While drought, declining rainfall, the reduced flow of the Euphrates, and damaged infrastructure have undermined harvests, household incomes, and public health, [women and girls remain the most affected](#), facing increasing malnutrition, greater exposure to waterborne diseases, and heightened protection risks. Moreover, the scarcity of water and resources increases [women's vulnerability to exploitation](#) and abuse by those controlling access to vital resources.

[One study](#) that focuses on the disproportionate impact of climate change and environmental pollution on women and girls across three regions in Syria found that these factors, combined with conflict, are undermining women's health, livelihoods, and safety. The study reports that limited access to healthcare, especially sexual and reproductive health and family planning, combined with toxic emissions and war remnants, has left many facing serious physical and psychological risks. Shortages of clean water, widespread pollution, and limited access to hygiene products have further weakened health and sanitation conditions, with a particularly severe impact on women's hygiene needs. Adolescent girls are among the most affected, experiencing restrictions on personal choices, reduced mobility, and obstacles to continuing their education and engaging in community life. Food insecurity and rising prices have deepened malnutrition, particularly for pregnant and nursing women, while the collapse of agriculture and infrastructure has forced many into unsafe work such as waste scavenging

and makeshift refineries. At the same time, worsening economic hardship has fueled early marriage, school dropouts, and heightened exposure to violence, leaving women and girls increasingly vulnerable and with fewer opportunities to secure their well-being or future ([Impact Research – The Overlooked Crisis](#)).

Another study found that environmental changes have severely affected [women’s health in Northeastern Syria](#), as reported by doctors. The study found that women suffer from respiratory and skin diseases, fertility problems, miscarriages, fetal deformities, hepatitis, and diarrhea. Food scarcity, particularly during pregnancy and breastfeeding, has worsened malnutrition for mothers and children. Rising temperatures have led to heat stress, sunstroke, and increased mortality. In addition, [many women face mental health challenges](#) such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, and eating disorders, with severe cases leading to suicide.

Methodology

The research employed a combination of desk review, key informant interviews, and a participatory ideation workshop to examine the intersection of climate justice and gender equality in Syria. The desk review provided a foundation by mapping existing literature, reports, and data related to feminist organizing and climate issues, while also identifying knowledge gaps to be addressed through primary data collection. Semi-structured, open-ended key informant interviews were conducted with feminist actors, initiative leaders, and organizational representatives to capture diverse perspectives on strategies, challenges, and opportunities in advancing climate–gender justice. To complement these methods, the research included a collaborative ideation workshop with DFF’s partner organizations and research participants. This workshop served as a consultation and co-design process, allowing participants to shape the thematic focus and research tools, validate emerging findings, and ensure the study remained aligned with lived feminist knowledge and priorities.

Data collection consisted of 10 semi-structured interviews with representatives of nine organizations and one journalist. The sample was designed to reflect a cross-section of actors engaging with climate and gender issues at different levels of capacity and experience. The research participants include Doria partner organizations: one of the most emerging climate organizations in Syria, a youth-led regional climate and gender justice

movement, and a feminist organization. Additional participants include a professional from UNDP Syria who is also the founder of a new startup focusing on food security and agriculture; one youth-led initiative seeking to expand its involvement in climate-related work; one women-led organization that has piloted small-scale climate projects and is interested in scaling up; one organization focusing on urban planning and early recovery with attention to climate justice; one Syrian journalist reporting on climate and gender issues; one newly established youth environmental and climate initiative; and one of the largest organizations working on climate and environmental issues in Northeast Syria. Together, these interviews provide insights into the most prominent climate-related issues impacting women's lives and their consequences, the needs of feminist and climate organizations, the priorities of communities, as well as the advocacy strategies and constraints of diverse Syrian actors, complementing the broader desk review and participatory workshop.

Limitations

This research provides valuable insights into how climate change impacts women and vulnerable communities in Syria; however, several limitations should be noted:

1. Focus on women: The study primarily examined the experiences of women. While this was intentional, perspectives from other marginalized groups, particularly LGBTQI+ communities, did not emerge strongly in the data and are therefore not adequately represented in the findings.
2. Interview sample: Most interviews were conducted with women and individuals leading environmental or climate-related initiatives, NGOs, grassroots groups, or organizations. As such, the research reflects the perspectives of those who are both impacted by climate change and actively engaged in responding to it.
3. Scope: Given the focus on gendered impacts and feminist responses, the research does not attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of all societal groups affected by climate change in Syria. Instead, it highlights patterns emerging from women-led and feminist-driven engagement with the issue.

Finding:

A. Most Prominent Climate-Related Issues Impacting Women's Lives in Syria and Their Consequences.

A.1. Water related issues

[Water scarcity](#) in Syria is a [gendered crisis](#), heavily impacting women and girls in both rural and urban areas. Women bear the primary responsibility for household water needs, childcare, and hygiene, which intensifies during scarcity, leading to physical, emotional, and psychological strain. In cities like [Damascus](#), women must adjust their routines to access water only every 48 hours, often during power outages. [In Qamishli, women](#) endure long hours outdoors to secure water, facing heat, [harassment](#), and insecurity. In rural areas like Afrin and Azaz, displaced women walk long distances to gather water for domestic and farming use, often lacking support and safe infrastructure.

Women have been affected both physically and psychologically. They are held responsible for all household duties, including securing necessities and caring for sick children. When the Alouk water station stopped functioning, people had to rely on private water trucks, many of which were unregulated. This led to an increase in waterborne diseases, particularly among women and children. Women suffered physically from the effort required to secure water for drinking and cleaning. During field visits to several homes, we observed that women were psychologically distressed due to the lack of water. The recent drought has made things worse, particularly in Qamishli, where water cuts due to decreased drinking water have become more frequent. [Sultan Ziadan Mohammad, Free Women Foundation.](#)

Gender inequalities in northeast Syria have worsened with the drought, leaving women to bear the greatest burden at home and at work. [Research](#) shows that the [collapse of agriculture](#) in Al-Hassakeh and Ar-Raqqa due to the drought has forced many women to work in daily labour, often in male-dominated sectors, while still carrying full domestic responsibilities. Nearly 60% of women reported [working longer hours](#) since the drought, while men rarely shared household duties.

Second, water is being used as a geopolitical tool, with upstream actions by Turkey manipulating key sources like the Euphrates River and Alouk water station. [Tensions over the Euphrates-Tigris rivers](#) have intensified, as [Turkey controls much of the water](#) and restricts its downstream flow. Combined with past [Turkish military strikes](#) on power stations, gas facilities, and oil fields, this

has severely disrupted water access, [worsened humanitarian conditions](#), and reduced communities' ability to cope with climate stressors. This has led to river drying, reduced dam levels, and shutdowns of vital pumping stations, rendering water a tool of control. Women bear the brunt of this scarcity, particularly in displacement camps and informal settlements, where they must rely on costly and unregulated water trucks.

Third, contaminated water and deteriorating infrastructure emerged as key concerns. In areas like Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, and parts of Aleppo, years of conflict, bombing, and explosive remnants have severely polluted water systems. Wastewater from informal camps and poor sewage systems leaks into groundwater, and unregulated digging of wells has worsened the situation. Women and girls, particularly those who are pregnant or [menstruating](#), face elevated [health risks](#) due to the lack of clean water and inadequate medical attention. Between August and December 2024, Syria recorded 1,444 suspected [cholera cases](#) and 7 related deaths, with the largest numbers reported in Lattakia, Al-Hasakeh, Aleppo, and displacement sites including Al-Hol camp. According to [a report by the World Health organization](#), the outbreak has been driven by prolonged drought, population displacement, and recurring breakdowns in water and sanitation systems. Women, who are often responsible for securing water, caring for sick family members, and managing hygiene in overcrowded settings, bear a disproportionate share of this burden.

International reports have identified Raqqa as one of the most polluted cities in the world—largely due to the explosive remnants of war and the heavy fighting between the coalition, ISIS, and the Syrian Democratic Forces. These battles, and the variety of explosives used, caused severe damage to infrastructure, including water treatment facilities. The Euphrates River itself—and the water treatment systems—have been damaged. There were widespread cholera outbreaks in Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, and even Damascus—but the most severe cases were in Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, and Aleppo. Pregnant women and girls on their menstrual cycles are more vulnerable to the impacts of contaminated water. Yet, public health authorities often overlook this issue. [Rukaia ALabadi - Syrian Climate and Gender Journalist](#)

Finally, the water crisis has had a devastating impact on [agriculture and livelihoods](#), particularly in regions dependent on irrigation, such as Afrin, Azaz, and other parts of northwest Syria. The drying up of springs, the depletion of groundwater, and the collapse of irrigation channels have caused many women to lose their seasonal agricultural jobs. For women who once depended on small farming plots or livestock for income and food security, this has meant total economic loss.

Even young people and women living in areas like Afrin, Azaz, and the surrounding villages used to depend on agricultural work. During the vegetable harvest season, you'd see both young and older women going out to work, earning an income from it. Unfortunately, ever since the water from the dam was cut off and irrigation channels stopped functioning, people have stopped farming. On top of that, this year's drought has made things even worse. Rain-fed agriculture has been severely affected. This has had a direct impact on employment opportunities—especially for young women. [Yasmin Sheikho, Syrian Youth Initiative](#)

[The Food and Agriculture Organization](#) indicates that the 2024/25 drought in Syria is placing extreme pressure on rural communities and aggravating one of the world's most severe food security crises. With rainfall recorded at 54 percent below the seasonal average, extensive crop failures have occurred. As a result, [farming families are unable to continue cultivation](#), pastoral livelihoods are collapsing, and households dependent on livestock are swiftly exhausting their remaining means of survival.

A.2. Rising Temperatures and Their Impact on Women's Reproductive and Mental Health

Extreme heat is having a direct impact on [women's reproductive and physical health](#). Women across Syria, especially in displacement camps and poorly insulated homes without access to electricity or cooling, are suffering from heat-related health consequences. Women reported increased cases of miscarriages, premature births, menstrual irregularities, and rising rates of reproductive infections. Older women are also reporting sharp rises in blood pressure and fainting episodes during heatwaves. Research indicates that [heat is deadlier for women](#) than for men. Moreover, one [study indicates](#) that older women are physiologically more susceptible to high temperatures and humidity compared to older men, and women aged 40 to 64 face vulnerability levels similar to those of men aged 65 and above.

Climatic cycles have a significant impact on women's menstrual cycles. We already know that extreme heat or cold can affect menstruation, and since our region is extremely hot—just two or three days ago, the temperature reached 48 degrees—this heat is causing changes in menstrual flow and duration. The extreme temperatures also increase sweating and lead to more cases of reproductive infections and skin irritation. Additionally, cases of

miscarriage and fetal death inside the womb have increased. For instance, a pharmacist told me this week that he had three women come in who had lost their babies in the womb, asking for pills to help expel the fetus after it had died. Nivin Mousa, Green North East Syria.

[A research paper issued by the Studies and Research Department at GAV Relief and Development Organisation](#) highlighted that environmental changes in Northeastern Syria have severely affected women's physical and mental health, as reported by doctors and local interviews. Women face rising cases of respiratory issues, miscarriages, fetal deformities, malnutrition—especially during pregnancy—heat-related illnesses, and increased exposure to gender-based violence. Mental health conditions such as depression, PTSD, and anxiety are also prevalent, sometimes leading to suicide. In the research, Dr. Iman Issa, a local gynaecologist, notes a rise in conditions like gestational diabetes but highlights the lack of data and research on these impacts.

In addition, women are being forced to develop survival strategies in the absence of institutional support. Despite the severe impacts, women are finding individual ways to adapt. They are using methods such as cooling themselves with frozen water bottles or reorganising their routines to avoid heat exposure.

In the summer of 2023, there was an intense heatwave. I came across some information from hospitals in Azaz and Al-Bab, where doctors were reporting an increase in premature births and miscarriages during the same period. That really pushed me to investigate further. Many of these women are either living in camps or in homes without electricity—so they don't have fans or any way to cool themselves, even during pregnancy. I spoke with several women who are doing what they can. Women are always resourceful. One woman told me she puts a cold water bottle on her stomach to help cool herself down. That's her coping strategy. Rukaia Alabadi - Syrian Climate and Gender Journalist

This firsthand account reflects a broader and growing body of evidence linking rising temperatures to adverse reproductive and long-term health outcomes for women in the region. [A recent study examined cancer prevalence and mortality among women in 17 MENA countries, including Syria, using Multiple Linear Regression analysis to explore the impact of rising temperatures. The results show a significant association between higher ambient heat and increased rates of breast, cervical, ovarian, and uterine cancers, with breast, ovarian, and cervical cancers most strongly affected. With regional temperatures projected to rise by up to 4°C by 2050, the study](#)

concludes that climate resilience must be urgently integrated into national cancer control and public health strategies to address these risks.

I spoke with one of the doctors specialised in oncology, and he told me that chronic illnesses in our region have increased dramatically. In just the past two weeks, they've had several new cases reported in different areas of northeast Syria. [Nivin Mousa, Green North East Syria](#).

These climate-related health risks are compounded by the [absence of adequate medical care](#) and the social [stigma surrounding reproductive health issues](#). In response, some climate-related initiatives have begun addressing these challenges by focusing on women's health, equipping them with skills to mitigate the impacts. For example, [the Global Education and Languages Academy in Qamishlo](#) offers nursing and first aid training for women, enabling them to manage both financial and health-related hardships while also promoting community health awareness. However, such efforts remain limited in scope and have yet to be scaled up to the national or institutional level.

A.3. Pollution and Its Impact on Women's Health and Well-being

[Pollution](#) is another major threat to [public health](#) in Syria, with severe and gendered consequences. The combined effects of [massive fuel leak](#), air pollution from diesel generators, toxic emissions from [makeshift oil refineries](#), and [remnants of military conflict](#) have led to a surge in chronic illnesses, including cancer and respiratory diseases. These risks are compounded by rising temperatures, which intensify air pollution, increase exposure to toxic substances, and place additional strain on already fragile health systems. Women and children, particularly those living in camps or in areas with high exposure to refined oil and unregulated fuel, are experiencing significant health impacts. As temperatures rise, prolonged heat exposure exacerbates existing health conditions and increases vulnerability to chronic disease.

[Air pollution](#) has consistently been [a major problem in Syria](#) even before the conflict. In 2016, the majority of the population was exposed to [pollution levels](#) exceeding the WHO Interim Target-1 value, which represents the minimum air quality standard set by the World Health Organization to reduce health risks from particulate matter. According [to a survey](#) on toxic PM2.5 particles, Syria ranked 18th worldwide for air pollution, based on average PM2.5 concentration ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) from available data. Cities such as Damascus consistently record an Air Quality Index (AQI) classified as "poor," according

to [AccuWeather](#), a platform specializing in air quality monitoring. A “poor” rating generally reflects elevated levels of fine particulate matter (PM2.5)—tiny pollutants less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter that can penetrate the lungs and bloodstream, causing respiratory and cardiovascular health problems such as asthma, coughing, and worsening of chronic diseases.

Additionally, the [reliance on low-quality diesel](#) and lack of access to clean energy contribute to long-term exposure to heavy metals and toxic fumes. In rural areas like Deir ez-Zor and parts of Aleppo, oil waste and visible surface contamination have become part of the landscape, while displaced women in camps face daily exposure to polluted air and poor sanitation. [A study that examined household fuel](#) use in refugee and displacement camps in northern Syria found heavy reliance on solid fuels, poor housing, and limited ventilation, leading to dangerous levels of indoor air pollution and related health risks. The findings underscore the urgent need for cleaner fuels, better shelter conditions, and financial support to reduce energy poverty and improve health outcomes. Despite the severity of these issues, there is little governmental oversight or regulation, leaving communities, particularly women, to bear the brunt of this environmental degradation without adequate protection or healthcare infrastructure.

The rate of cancer diagnoses in northeast Syria is extremely high, and many local doctors and residents suspect that unregulated oil refining may be contributing to this alarming trend. But the question remains—where are the authorities today? There has been no real government oversight for a long time. The issue of refining crude oil, especially in rural areas of Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor, needs urgent legal intervention. In Deir ez-Zor, particularly in the eastern parts of the city, there have been reports of babies born with deformities. Locals believe this may be related to toxic substances used during Coalition strikes on ISIS positions. Rukaia ALabadi - Syrian Climate and Gender Journalist

According to [Airwars](#), a non-profit transparency watchdog that investigates civilian harm claims in conflict-affected countries, officials confirmed that despite earlier pledges not to use depleted uranium (DU) munitions in Iraq and Syria, the US military fired thousands of rounds during two major strikes on oil tankers in Islamic State-controlled areas of Syria and Iraq in late 2015. DU, a dense byproduct of uranium enrichment, is valued militarily for its ability to penetrate armoured targets but is also toxic and considered a radiation hazard if inhaled or ingested. While evidence on its precise health effects remains inconclusive, concerns about [links to cancer](#), birth defects, and psychological distress in affected civilian areas persist, especially given the lack of comprehensive post-conflict research.

Additionally, water pollution in places like Afrin poses a significant risk to women, who are often responsible for managing household water needs. [The lack of proper wastewater treatment](#) and the [contamination of local water sources](#) not only [threaten public health](#) but also exacerbate the burden on women, particularly in maintaining hygiene and [securing safe water](#) for their families.

We have the river stream passing through the centre of Afrin. The sewage is being dumped directly into the river, which has no water. There's no wastewater treatment plant to convert sewage water into water that could be used for irrigation or other purposes. Unfortunately, NGOs tried to build this project, but organisations and local councils don't have the resources to build a wastewater treatment plant. So, we are facing another disaster: epidemics will spread in the region. [Yasmin Sheikho, Syrian Youth initiative](#)

Pollution, conflict-related environmental damage, and rising temperatures are reinforcing one another to produce a compounded public health crisis in Syria, with women and children disproportionately exposed to long-term and often irreversible health risks. In the absence of effective governance, regulation, and health infrastructure, environmental degradation has become both a driver of disease and a gendered burden, leaving communities to cope with its consequences largely on their own.

A.4. Climate-induced migration

Climate change has severely impacted rural livelihoods, pushing people to migrate in search of work and survival. In areas like Daraa and southern Syria, severe drought has depleted essential water sources, such as [Lake Muzayrib](#), and caused groundwater levels to drop due to excessive well drilling. This has led to [a collapse in agriculture](#), with many farmers unable to sustain their livelihoods. The cost of water for irrigation or even drinking has become unaffordable, forcing families to abandon farming altogether. Interviewees estimated that up to 50% of young people have migrated to find alternative income, often taking on precarious or informal jobs to support their families.

Lake Muzayrib in Daraa has almost completely dried up. In many places, wells are being drilled near natural springs to extract groundwater, but this is gradually depleting the water table. The groundwater is no longer sufficient for irrigation or even for drinking in some cases. In several areas, the water pumps and wells can no longer meet demand. People are now forced to purchase drinking water—one 200-litre barrel costs about 3,000 Syrian pounds, and families need around 75,000 to 80,000 pounds per month just to

meet basic water needs. That's more than half the monthly salary of a public employee in Syria. As a result, many are abandoning agriculture altogether and looking for other forms of income, often in irregular or informal jobs that could negatively affect their health. [Talah Alshami, Syrbanism](#)

With agricultural land degrading, livestock losing access to feed, and income collapsing, many rural residents, especially women, are forced to move to urban areas like Damascus. There, they sell goods in informal markets without any government support or stable contracts. This rural-to-urban migration creates urban overcrowding, unregulated expansion, and mounting pressure on city infrastructure. Additionally, [men are increasingly abandon farming altogether](#), leaving women to manage what's left or shift to other labour sectors. As a result of the previous Syrian regime's policy of compulsory military conscription for men, many young people in rural villages have been forced to make difficult choices—either migrating abroad or remaining in their communities with limited employment opportunities. These conditions have placed [additional burdens on women](#) and girls, many of whom are compelled to seek work in urban centers to support their families when male relatives are unable to do so. This migration is not new as it echoes the [2007–2010 drought period](#), which caused massive rural exodus and informal settlement growth around cities.

There is currently a clear wave of displacement and significant overcrowding in the cities. Many women are being forced to leave rural areas to sell their products in the city. However, the government doesn't step in to offer them fair or competitive purchasing agreements that could ensure a stable income and help them prepare for the coming year or the one after. So these women are essentially left to fend for themselves, trying to manage on their own by going to the city to sell what they can. [Mariam Riad Abbas, Climate Sirens](#)

Furthermore, migration driven by climate pressures is compounding existing environmental and [urban crises](#). As populations concentrate in urban and peri-urban areas, the strain on municipal services, including waste management, water, and sanitation, grows. Displaced populations often settle in informal housing that lacks basic infrastructure, contributing to poor health and pollution. Without waste sorting systems or recycling infrastructure, the increase in garbage generation overwhelms landfills, some of which are located near agricultural zones, contributing to air and soil pollution.

Agriculture is no longer generating the income it once did, which supported local economies. As a result, people left their jobs and migrating elsewhere—either to find other agricultural work near cities or to move to areas where

reconstruction or urban expansion is happening. This led to chaotic, unplanned urban expansion, which further consumed surrounding agricultural lands. It also created problems with land ownership, blurred boundaries between administrative and agricultural zones, and contributed to overlapping legal disputes—at least this was the case before 2011. [Talah Alshami, Syrbanism](#)

Beginning in the winter of 2006/2007, Syria and the wider Fertile Crescent experienced the [worst three-year drought](#) on record at that time. The drought intensified existing agricultural and water insecurity, causing the displacement of up to 1.5 million rural residents to the outskirts of urban centers. Nonetheless, climate-induced disasters continue to shape Syria today, most recently illustrated by [the widespread wildfires](#) that devastated large areas of agricultural land and forests, forcing thousands of residents to flee high-risk areas and resulting in significant population displacement and escalating humanitarian needs. Furthermore, for many rural families, the loss of agricultural assets has been a decisive factor. Climate-related environmental destruction has also become a major barrier preventing displaced women from returning to their home areas.

If there were olive trees, you could build two rooms and live like any farmer in the area, but if there's no crop to sustain you, you don't return—you stay in the camp. [Hanin, SPCC](#)

Since December 2024, about 1.8 million Syrians—comprising both internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees from abroad—have gone back, according to the latest data from the [International Organisation of Migration](#). However, numerous challenges persist. Reports by the [Norwegian Refugee Council](#), [IMO](#) and other [sources](#) highlight several challenges including limited access to water, lack of livelihood opportunities such as agricultural activities, and widespread destruction. Yet, climate-related issues remain largely absent from these assessments.

A.5. Climate induced loss of livelihoods

Climate change and drought have destroyed agricultural livelihoods, leaving women, who form the majority of the rural workforce in Syria, without income or support. Issues such as poor rainfall have led to a collapse in crop production, forcing women into informal, physically demanding, or unfamiliar jobs.

The rainfall in our area was extremely low, which severely damaged the crops. Most women here work in agriculture, not trade. So when crops fail, they lose their only source of income. Nivin Mousa, Green North East Syria.

Syria's agriculture sector is struggling under one of the [most severe droughts](#) in nearly four decades, compounded by over 14 years of conflict, widespread infrastructure destruction, and a deep economic crisis. These overlapping shocks have pushed food production to critical lows and placed immense strain on agricultural workers across the country. Escalating costs, limited access to fuel, and the collapse of rainfed agriculture have compelled many to scale down their activities or [abandon agriculture altogether](#). On top of these challenges, women in certain communities in Syria face [systemic exclusion from land ownership](#) and recovery mechanisms, which further heightens their vulnerability in times of crisis. Without land titles, women cannot access compensation, rebuild, or claim livelihood losses. This is especially devastating for widows or displaced women who lose both their homes and means of survival.

Women in certain communities are prevented from owning land. If she loses her husband or her home, she loses everything—because the land is never in her name. Talah Alshami, Syrbanism

There's no support if your crops fail or if your livestock die. There's no aid fund, no rescue loans, nothing. Mariam Riad Abbas, Climate Sirens

The shift from traditional livelihoods to unfamiliar or exploitative labour is [harming women's health, safety, and dignity](#). Women working on others' land or in different occupations face harassment, discrimination, wage exploitation, and physical abuse, often with no rest or accommodation for their health needs.

A very large segment of women who were working in agriculture before the revolution in Syria lost their jobs. As a result, many were forced into jobs they weren't familiar with and couldn't build real skills in. Most of the programs offered by organizations don't match the women's backgrounds. For example, I might be a farmer raising sheep or chickens, and suddenly you want to teach me sewing or hairdressing. It just doesn't work. Another issue is that women who work on land owned by their families are often treated differently from those who have to work for others. In the latter case, many women face clear violations—there have been incidents of sexual harassment, blackmail during wage negotiations, and general exploitation. Thuraya hejazi, Transformative path Syria

Women realities underscore the need for livelihood interventions that are context-specific, rights-based, and aligned with women's existing skills and economic roles. Without such approaches, climate and livelihood programmes risk deepening exploitation rather than supporting women's safety, dignity, and long-term resilience.

A.6. Gender-Based Violence and Child Marriage: The Intersection with Climate Change

As climate change worsens access to water, food, and income, women are forced to walk longer distances to secure basic needs, putting them at greater physical and social risk. Prolonged displacement and food insecurity have intensified household tensions and made women more vulnerable to domestic and gender-based violence.

families are unable to afford basic necessities. For example, they can't buy air conditioners for their homes, and they are facing immense financial burdens. They can't reasonably secure food or water. As a result, many are resorting to early marriages for young women and girls, which is something we are noticing more in areas severely impacted by climate change. This, in turn, increases violence against women. For example, you find a woman whose husband, brother, or father, due to the pressures of the climate, takes out his frustrations on his family. This leads to many cases of violence. Hanin, SPCC.

[Research by UNFPA](#) found a rise in reported gender-based violence (GBV) cases among affected households during the extreme weather and heavy snowfall in northwest Syria in January 2022. This increase was linked to the loss of shelter, heightened psychological stress, and growing unemployment, which left many men unable to meet their families' basic needs. Women heading households were particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse while trying to secure essentials like tents, furniture, heating supplies, or food.

These same economic and environmental pressures are also driving harmful coping strategies within households. As families struggle to cope with rising costs and loss of livelihoods, many see early marriage as a coping strategy, especially in communities where livestock and agriculture have failed due to drought and climate stress. Girls are married off at younger ages to reduce the number of dependents or to access dowries, often with long-term consequences.

Extreme weather is destroying livelihoods. Families that once depended on dairy and livestock no longer have income. If a family has many daughters and a marriage proposal comes—even for a minor—they accept it out of economic need. [Nivin Mousa, Green North East Syria.](#)

Furthermore, in Syria, recurring waves of drought have forced many girls to abandon their education in order to support their families. This situation not only increases their economic and domestic burdens but also deprives them of their fundamental right to education. For instance, delayed rainfall and rising temperatures have caused major agricultural losses across many farming areas. [In places like Tel Aouda](#), a village in the Qamishli region of northeast Syria, these conditions have forced many girls to leave school and migrate to Qamishli city in search of work, as their families struggle to adapt to increasingly difficult living conditions. Additionally, multiple reports indicate that women and girls in Syria are increasingly being married off due to family financial pressures. In some cases, girls are married as second or third wives to much older men, particularly from Iraq. [According to a report by Kurdish Rudaw TV](#), Iraqi brokers travel to Syria in search of young brides for men in their fifties or sixties. While there are no official statistics, estimates suggest that thousands of Syrian girls have entered such marriages, with families viewing them as a means of financial relief amidst poverty. Other accounts highlight similar trends, including Syrian women [marrying foreign fighters](#) to escape economic hardship, as well as the rise of early and child marriage. This phenomenon has grown significantly in areas such as [Deir Ezzor governorate](#), affecting both urban and rural communities over the past decade of conflict and crisis.

B. Challenges Faced by Feminist Organisations and Groups Working on Climate and Environmental Issues

B.1. Policy and Governance Gaps

One of the key challenges organisations face in Syria is the absence of concrete environmental and climate regulations despite clear public health risks.

The pollution caused by explosives and oil refining is one of the biggest reasons behind the very high cancer rates in northeast Syria...Since the formation of the transitional government, I've been waiting for the authorities

to issue laws banning oil refining, but nothing has happened yet. [Rukaia ALabadi - Syrian Climate and Gender Journalist](#)

At the same time, while public discussion about climate risks has grown, especially after large-scale wildfires and deforestation, there is still no structured, long-term strategy or institutional framework to guide climate action, leaving local initiatives fragmented and reactive.

Climate issues are still not a priority in Syria's emergency or early recovery response. While recent crises, such as the 15,000 hectares of wildfires in Latakia, have sparked more public discussion about tree-planting campaigns, there is still no clear structure or long-term strategy for responding to climate and environmental risks. [Ahmad Ankir , Syria Program for Climate Change \(SPCC\)](#)

This lack of strategic direction is further evident at the policy level. Syria's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) lacks recent updates and fails to consider the gendered impacts of climate change, including issues related to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). [Syria's last NDC, submitted in November 2018](#), made no mention of gender, women, or girls. It also gave no attention to the social dimensions of climate change affecting women, girls, and vulnerable communities. It excluded critical issues such as gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). [According to a UNDP report](#) analysing the inclusion of gender and SRHR and related themes in NDCs across the Arab States, Syria was among the countries that had not submitted an updated NDC since 2018, making it difficult to assess or advance gender-responsive climate policy in the Syrian context.

B.2. Lack of Awareness Among Communities and Stakeholders on Climate Issues

One of the most critical challenges organisations face is the widespread lack of awareness regarding climate issues. [Despite the increasing urgency of climate change](#) and its impact on health, agriculture, and livelihoods, many communities remain uninformed about the specific risks posed by climate events. This lack of understanding limits the effectiveness of adaptation strategies and hinders long-term resilience building. Furthermore, there is little targeted awareness about the specific needs of vulnerable groups, such as pregnant women, who are particularly susceptible to extreme temperatures.

There is no specific guidance, warning to pregnant women to be cautious about these high temperatures and stay indoors. There are many hospitals or mobile health units specifically for areas with camps, but none of these is available. All these points should have been provided by the authority. [Rukaia ALabadi - Syrian Climate and Gender Journalist](#)

Furthermore, climate education remains scarce, with many people still viewing climate issues as secondary concerns, rather than as essential to their daily lives and survival.

We don't have awareness; we never learned this in school, we don't know anything about it. Young people, if they don't know something, it's hard to convince them later that it has consequences and impacts. This leads to a chain reaction. I believe this is one of the biggest problems. [Ousayma Bakir, Syrian Environmental Initiative.](#)

While many view the lack of public awareness regarding the significance of climate issues as a major problem, others argue that it's not simply a matter of awareness, but rather that the complexity of immediate needs often overshadows long-term climate concerns. Climate issues are often viewed as a luxury rather than a necessity. Immediate concerns such as food security, economic survival, and basic health take precedence.

Climate change is still seen as more of a luxury in Syria. Today, food security and economic security are the primary concerns for most people. So, when we talk about climate change, people, whether farmers in rural areas or even those in the city, are fully aware that there is climate change. However, people who can't even find food, and whose financial or economic situation is very, very dire. So when you mention climate change, they tell you, "I can't think about something advanced like climate change when I can't even secure my daily food," even though climate change is impacting their food security every day. [Mohammad Hanana UNDP Syria + Founder of SEED](#)

According to a [UNDP report](#) around 90 percent of Syrians now live in poverty. This is linked to an economy that has contracted to less than half its 2011 size and to unemployment levels that have tripled since the onset of the conflict.

B.3. Funding

One of the major challenges that organisations, particularly feminist and climate groups, face in Syria is the lack of funding and resources, which has significantly hindered their ability to implement and expand important

projects. This challenge is further compounded by a lack of awareness, both within the general public and among key stakeholders, about the importance of climate issues. For feminist organisations and groups, in particular, this creates a delicate balancing act. They must navigate both the pressing needs of their communities, such as health and economic survival, while still attempting to engage with climate issues that are often seen as non-essential. The difficulty in mobilising resources for climate causes, especially when funding priorities are shaped by immediate humanitarian needs, is a significant obstacle. Furthermore, in many cases, there is no dedicated funding for climate issues for feminist organisations, and organisations are forced to work on agendas set by funding agencies that do not always prioritise climate concerns in Syria.

Another challenge is primarily related to the number of funding opportunities available to support such projects. I consider one of the most important things that should happen in Syria is the ban on the use of plastic bags. Imagine if, in this crazy war, I were to start working on this issue. I can't even imagine it, people would come and give you a list of accusations. But I believe that if we had enough knowledge to argue about this issue, people might start using alternatives more. We are always asking for funding, but unfortunately, it is provided based on the sectors they [Funders] allow you to work in. Thuraya hejazi, Transformative path Syria

This challenge is not limited to feminist organisations but affects the broader sector as well, where there is a lack of entrepreneurship programs for environmental and climate issues. Additionally, effective knowledge transfer is absent, and rural women often bear the greatest burden, struggling with both economic and climate challenges.

Most entrepreneurship programs aren't heavily directed towards the agricultural sector because everyone is currently focused on other areas. The environmental sector lacks proper support, and the available support is weaker compared to other sectors. The group responsible for this is mainly farmers or rural women. Most entrepreneurs don't want to work in these fields because the risk and cost are high. For example, the electricity system for just one barley cultivation unit costs \$10,000. In the technology sector, this is the entire capital needed for development. Mohammad Hanana UNDP Syria + Founder of SEED

B.4. Other Challenges: Lack of Data and Research, and the underrepresentation of Women in Decision-Making

In addition to funding challenges and a lack of awareness, organisations, including feminist groups working on climate issues, also face significant obstacles due to the lack of updated and context-specific data. The severe shortage of climate-related research in Syria, compounded by its deprioritization in conflict-affected regions, creates a critical evidence gap that hinders effective action. Moreover, the underrepresentation of women in decision-making highlights the need for feminist leadership in climate governance.

The underrepresentation of women in environmental decision-making leads to ineffective policies that fail to address these challenges efficiently. If more women were involved in these issues, the outcomes could potentially be more impactful. Additionally, the lack of data and indicators significantly hinders the ability to understand challenges accurately and, consequently, to devise effective solutions. I believe that if women were genuinely included in decision-making, they would bring a fresh perspective, as women, particularly rural women working the land, have a deeper connection to the environment and its challenges. They hold a unique value and insight into environmental issues that others may not fully grasp. Hanen, Syrian Program for Climate Change

Further complicating the situation is the limited access to on-the-ground information, exacerbated by conflict and logistical barriers that prevent organisations from gathering the necessary data for a timely and evidence-based response.

C. Opportunities

C.1. Changes in the Political Regime

The fall of the Assad regime marked a pivotal turning point, offering organisations, including feminist and groups working on climate issues, new opportunities for growth and expansion that were previously unattainable.

The fall of the regime was truly a turning point because we used to work without publishing anything, and when we did publish, we tried to filter everything we wrote to ensure it was completely neutral. Talah Alshami, Syrbanism

This shift allowed organisations like Syrbanism to move beyond limitations, such as the fear of publishing and sharing research, which had been heavily filtered and neutralised to avoid prosecution. Previously, they struggled to expand their work or access necessary resources within Syria, often relying on online platforms or hosting events in Beirut. However, now, the opportunity to [engage directly on the ground](#) is becoming increasingly feasible. While challenges remain, including the need for clearer structures within civil society and the ongoing concerns over political and logistical barriers, the new political environment presents potential for significant progress.

There is room for us now to work on the ground. Working on the ground is very different from working remotely. I'm just an external observer, reading reports and conducting online interviews with people. It's not the same as being on the ground, where you can truly understand the environment and grasp the scale of the destruction and damage. So, being present on the ground is important. [Talah Alshami, Syrbanism](#)

This shift not only allows for deeper engagement and understanding of local issues by organisations that were forced to operate from abroad but also brings a renewed sense of hope, with many people eager to bring about change and contribute to rebuilding efforts.

C.2. Availability of Human Resources and Expertise

An important opportunity for feminist groups and organisations working on climate issues is the availability of volunteers and expertise. There is a strong desire among people to contribute, especially with the changing landscape in the country.

We opened a registration request a while ago. The surprising thing was that a lot of people responded. This was really great because there is a lot of desire and enthusiasm from people, wanting to work and contribute. They said, "I want to do this," and "I can help." I felt that this desire, this positive energy, and the initiative from the people could really help us, both now and in the future. [Ousayma Bakir Syrian Environmental Initiative](#)

There are a large number of volunteers on the ground, and everyone is ready to work. [Yasmin Sheikho, Syrian Youth Initiative](#)

This momentum presents a critical opportunity to formalise volunteer engagement through structured programmes, training, and coordination

mechanisms. Mobilising this existing enthusiasm can strengthen locally led climate action and build sustainable feminist and environmental movements across Syria.

In addition, there is an abundance of expertise available, both locally and in the diaspora.

The region is rich in human resources with academics and specialists in climate, water, and the environment, both inside and outside Syria. We often receive messages through our pages from academics, like one from Germany, saying they are available and eager to contribute to specific topics. However, we do not have the capacity to absorb these experts or design programs that would align with the areas they specialize in. [Ahmad Ankir , SPCC](#)

Volunteers and experts are eager to contribute, as demonstrated by the many requests received by organisations. With the right support and infrastructure, such as funding to mobilise and organise these experts and volunteers, there is a great potential for growth and positive impact. Organisations can tap into this wealth of human resources to enhance their climate projects, creating sustainable solutions that directly address the needs of local communities. This convergence of enthusiasm and expertise represents a significant opportunity for feminist and climate organisations to expand their reach and effectiveness in the country.

C.3. Women Leading Climate Initiatives

Another significant opportunity lies in the growing role of women in leading environmental and climate change initiatives. Many of the new grassroots programs and projects emerging in the climate and environmental sectors are women-led. Additionally, [many programs offered by UN agencies](#) or local organisations are specifically targeting women in sectors such as agriculture, recognising their critical role. This shift is particularly notable due to the changes that occurred during the war, where women have become the primary workforce in agriculture and other sectors, taking on roles that were previously dominated by men.

We wanted to target women in our programs. At first, we thought about farmers, but then we realised that there are women who raise livestock, so it's better to teach women about barley cultivation. We are looking for projects that are simple to implement and sustainable. If we worked on cultivating barley, for example, it would help us provide food for livestock, and by improving the feed for the livestock, we would provide milk and cheese, thus

increasing the income of the families who depend on these things. Nivin Mousa, Green North East Syria.

One concrete example of this broader shift toward women-led environmental action is the project '[The Environment is a Feminist Issue](#)', launched by the Syrian Female Journalists Network (SFJN). The project highlighted how environmental degradation and climate challenges impact women's lives in Syria, providing a platform through five in-depth discussions for women to share experiences and solutions. It underscored the links between environmental injustice, gender inequality, and political marginalization, fostering feminist engagement with environmental and climate issues.

C.4. Regional Peer Learning and Traditional Knowledge:

There is also potential for regional peer learning, where different regions can learn from each other's experiences in tackling climate challenges. For example, Thuraya hejazi from Transformative path Syria, reflect:

I don't want you to tell me how France manages its environment because it's not applicable there. But you have examples from Iraq, especially the southern provinces, which are impressive. A fellowship between us and them could be something useful. This also allows people to make comparisons and realise that it's not a luxury, because, like us, they are suffering, dying, experiencing poverty, and facing these challenges. These initiatives mustn't be imported but truly based on the reality on the ground. Thuraya hejazi, Transformative path Syria

Regional exchanges allow organisations from countries facing similar climate challenges to share solutions and best practices. Women, in particular, are often at the forefront of these local initiatives, demonstrating how traditional knowledge can be harnessed to address modern environmental issues. Moreover, there is an increasing recognition in Syria that rebuilding efforts should not merely replicate western consumption patterns but should instead incorporate local, sustainable practices that respect cultural and environmental traditions. Women's roles in this process are crucial, as they possess valuable knowledge of local environmental management practices, such as water conservation and organic farming. By combining this traditional knowledge with modern techniques, communities can rebuild in a way that is both climate-just and culturally relevant.

D. Organisations needs

D.1. Capacity Building

Organisations, particularly feminist ones and those focused on climate change, face significant challenges in capacity building, especially in areas such as legal literacy, ecological knowledge, and technical decision-making. highlighting the importance of equipping them with specialised skills to better address climate challenges. Capacity building is essential to strengthen the involvement of women, particularly in agriculture and water management, which are critical sectors where women play a significant role. The need for structured and technical training is clear, as organisations seek to support women through education on topics like mitigation, adaptation, ecological sustainability, and environmental protection.

D.2. Funding and Support for Climate Projects:

While capacity building is a key focus, funding remains one of the most critical needs for implementing climate justice projects. Without sufficient financial resources, many promising initiatives, such as sustainable agricultural practices or climate adaptation programs, cannot be fully realised. Proper funding is needed to design comprehensive climate programs, ensure the accessibility of eco-friendly alternatives, and promote sustainable behaviour changes within communities.

D.3. Strategic Networking and Peer Learning:

There is also great potential in strategic networking and peer learning from similar contexts. Peer learning from countries facing similar challenges, such as Iraq, Sudan, and Yemen, could provide valuable insights into successful climate practices.

Despite the challenges, Syria has relatively greater opportunities to expand adaptation programs by integrating international support with realistic local strategies, while Sudan and Yemen face deeper political fragility that limits implementation. Meanwhile, Iraq shows relative progress in modernizing irrigation and water management with broad international support. Rukaia ALabadi - Syrian Climate and Gender Journalist

By sharing best practices and lessons learned, organisations operating in similar contexts can strengthen peer learning and design climate programmes that are responsive to local realities and the specific needs of affected communities.

D.4. Institutional Support for Climate Awareness:

Institutional alignment and support are still needed to ensure that climate programs, especially those led by women, receive the necessary backing to sustainably succeed.

We need more networking with active individuals to have a better impact. We need to engage more effectively with all stakeholders, with the local community, and create more connections with organisations, initiatives, and decision-makers. Mariam Riad Abbas, Climate Sirens.

Institutional alignment and sustained support remain essential to ensure that climate programmes, particularly those led by women, can operate and scale within the Syrian context. As Mariam notes, stronger networking among active individuals, deeper engagement with local communities, and more effective coordination with organisations, initiatives, and decision-makers are critical. In a setting shaped by protracted conflict, fragmented governance, and limited resources, strengthening these connections is key to enabling locally led, women-driven climate action and ensuring that grassroots initiatives are reflected in policy discussions and programmatic responses.

E. Community Needs

E.1. Addressing Rural Women's Lack of Climate-Resilient Alternative

Rural women, in particular, face significant challenges related to the lack of climate-resilient alternatives. These women, who work the land, struggle with a scarcity of viable alternatives. They also experience multiple layers of challenges that intersect with broader social and gender issues. Many rural women lack the resources to implement sustainable farming practices, which are crucial in the face of climate change. There is a clear need for empowering these women through climate-resilient agricultural practices and community-based adaptation strategies. For example, training in techniques like drip irrigation or growing drought-resistant plants can provide practical solutions.

Rural women, in particular, face many violations related to suitable alternatives. There are no alternatives, and they live through many difficulties. This is one of the challenges that we can add to the broader issue, which intersects with the basic principles of environmental feminism and its principles. Hanin, SPCC

Training in drip irrigation or cultivating drought-resistant crops represents an important technical solution. However, its application faces a major obstacle: women in rural Syrian areas often do not own land due to inheritance laws and tribal customs, making access to agricultural loans or investment in new technologies nearly impossible without community or institutional support. Rukaia ALabadi - Syrian Climate and Gender Journalist

Providing accessible training, institutional support, and funding can help reduce water usage, enhance crop production, and ultimately improve the livelihoods of rural women and their communities. However, for these interventions to be effective and sustainable, they must go beyond technical solutions and address the structural inequalities that limit rural women's access to land, resources, and decision-making power. Climate-resilient agriculture can only succeed when legal, institutional, and community-based support enables women to participate fully in adaptation efforts.

E.2. Climate Literacy

There is a critical need for climate literacy in Syria, especially for women in rural areas who are directly impacted by climate change but lack the knowledge to adapt. Simplified, localised education is essential to help communities, especially women, understand how climate issues affect their health and daily life.

When I work with a group, I have to simplify these terms and make them understandable, such as how drought affects farmers and how good farming practices can benefit the land. We need to understand that people are focused on survival, protecting themselves from bombing, working to earn their daily bread. Therefore, these terms need to be simplified and communicated in an easy way. Rukaia ALabadi - Syrian Climate and Gender Journalist

Addressing climate literacy in Syria requires approaches that are practical, locally grounded, and sensitive to communities living under conditions of conflict and economic precarity. Integrating simplified climate education into livelihoods, health, and community-based programming is essential to

ensure that women are equipped with knowledge that is both accessible and immediately applicable to their daily realities.

E.3. Bridging the Disconnect Between Aid Efforts and Actual Needs

There is often a disconnect between aid efforts and the actual needs of affected women, particularly in post-conflict and climate-impacted areas. Effective recovery and climate adaptation strategies must include the voices of those most affected—women, especially those in rural areas.

A lot of efforts are being done without receiving feedback from the affected groups, without studying their needs. They should be involved in the needs assessment process and decision-making. What do they need, and what are their real needs? Without pre-imposed assumptions about their needs. Mariam Riad Abbas, Climate Sirens

Many initiatives lack participatory needs assessments, and women’s input is often excluded from decision-making processes. This leads to solutions that may not align with their real needs or priorities. Acknowledging the need for co-creation and partnership-based models is essential to ensure that recovery efforts and climate adaptation strategies are more sustainable and inclusive. At the same time, while some donors have begun adjusting their requirements to align with environmental and climate needs, these measures often fail to account for local realities. [Women’s rights organisations have expressed frustration](#) and disbelief at being asked to use 'green' fuel, given the extreme scarcity of any fuel due to the ongoing conflict. As [one representative from Women Now for Development](#) put it, “They ask us to ensure the fuel is clean, when we can barely find any at all—it feels like the people’s needs are being overlooked.”

E.4. Just Reconstruction

A key issue currently is ensuring that [recovery and reconstruction is environmentally just](#) and culturally appropriate. This involves rebuilding in a way that respects local cultural and climate contexts, avoiding unsustainable practices that could harm the community in the long run. For example, the emphasis by feminist and climate justice advocates is on creating spaces that balance development needs with environmental preservation, and that do not impose western consumption patterns but rather incorporate local solutions. Traditional knowledge, such as organic farming techniques and sustainable water management, can be vital in this process. The challenge

remains to integrate these solutions into reconstruction plans while ensuring that they benefit all, especially women and marginalised groups.

We want reconstruction, but we want it to be environmentally friendly. It shouldn't just be about building. We need to understand the context and the nature of the areas. Today, we have valuable expertise, and a lot of what we learned during the siege to create alternatives, like recycling. Why throw away everything when we can recycle it to reduce waste and think of eco-friendly alternatives? And creating new job opportunities for marginalised groups. [Thuraya hejazi, Transformative path Syria](#)

However, locally driven solutions remain constrained by the absence of coordinated planning that accounts for long-term environmental and social risks. While the immediate impacts of climate change and displacement are visible, the broader consequences, such as the long-term effects on land quality, the relocation of people to potentially hazardous areas, and the lack of a clear recovery plan, remain largely unaddressed. These gaps highlight the need for a more comprehensive approach to reconstruction and climate adaptation, one that considers both climate and social dimensions to avoid unintended negative impacts on vulnerable communities and ecosystems. These concerns are echoed by practitioners working on urban planning and early recovery, who caution against focusing solely on short-term reconstruction outcomes.

We see the immediate effects, but we don't see the bigger picture. We celebrate that the camps are gone, but we don't know where these people are going. We don't know where they're settling, or what land they're taking, or if there are war remnants on that land. This is a part of the bigger picture that we don't fully know. We don't want our work, whether in reconstruction or early recovery efforts, to inadvertently create something harmful to the environment. [Talah Alshami, Syrbanism](#)

The absence of long-term planning is particularly dangerous in a post-conflict context where environmental degradation intersects with unresolved conflict-related hazards. [Human Rights Watch reports](#) that, since December 2024, more than 600 people in Syria—including children—have been killed or injured by landmines and other explosive remnants of war. Thus, addressing the intertwined challenges requires recovery and adaptation strategies that are not only climate-just and culturally relevant but also responsive to the ongoing risks posed by conflict legacies such as landmines and explosive remnants of war.

F. Policy and Advocacy Priorities for Feminist Organisations and Groups working on Climate and Environmental Issues

F.1. Raising Awareness on Climate Issues

Organisations have recognised the importance of raising awareness within their communities. This includes intersectional issues, such as how high temperatures impact women's reproductive health, as well as more direct topics like waste management and plastic use.

Through an awareness campaign, we faced significant challenges, especially when discussing topics like waste disposal and plastic use. In the beginning, when we started talking about the harms of plastic, we received some criticism, as is common when introducing new topics in any community. However, we began to explain that plastic does not decompose in the soil; instead, it forms a layer that isolates plant cover from the roots, causing significant damage to the environment and plants. After continuous awareness efforts and explaining the damage, people began to understand the severity of the issue. We now notice some changes, although slow, they are positive. Nivin Mousa, Green North East Syria.

As these initiatives continue to evolve, the focus remains on empowering local communities, particularly women, to play an active role in environmental and climate resilience. These experiences highlight the importance of sustained, community-led awareness efforts that translate environmental concepts into practical, locally relevant knowledge. Despite initial resistance, consistent engagement can shift perceptions and behaviours, gradually strengthening communities' role in environmental protection and climate resilience.

F.2. Building Women's Resilience to Climate Impacts

Supporting women's adaptation to climate change is a critical area of focus. Many women in rural areas are highly vulnerable to climate impacts, particularly those related to water scarcity and extreme temperatures. Initiatives are currently being designed to build resilience by training women in sustainable farming practices, water conservation, and adaptation to shifting climate patterns.

We are always trying through our training to focus on how to adapt to the changes happening in our region, including climate change and drought. For example, in the water sector, we want to train women on how to adapt to these changes, and how they can also help their children adapt to the current situation and the climate changes happening in the region. Sultan Ziadan Mohammad, Free Women Foundation.

By strengthening women's adaptive capacities, these initiatives enhance household resilience, support children's well-being, and reinforce community-level responses to climate change.

F.3. Strengthening Policy Frameworks and Climate Justice

For organisations, the need for strong, cohesive policy frameworks is vital. In Syria, where climate issues often intersect with complex political and socio-economic challenges, there is a call for policies that integrate climate justice and provide equitable resource distribution.

There should be some kind of care laws that institutions or even associations working with women should take into account the specific circumstances women face. For example, when I was working with farmers, they told me that in the middle of summer, in Deir ez-Zor and Hasakah, a woman would go out to work while pregnant, and her supervisor wouldn't have an issue with her being pregnant. He would just see that she is needed, so he doesn't provide her with any health care. The problem lies in the absence of occupational safety laws in the agricultural sector and the weak mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of any preventive measures. Today, it has become essential for ministries to work together, as climate, health, and social issues are interconnected and complex, and cannot be addressed in isolation from one another. Rukaia ALabadi - Syrian Climate and Gender Journalist

Furthermore, ensuring that women have a seat at the decision-making table is essential for developing climate policies that respond to these realities and protect women from harm. Addressing these gaps requires moving beyond fragmented policy responses toward integrated frameworks that recognise climate change as a social, health, and labour issue as much as an environmental one. Strengthening climate governance must therefore include enforceable occupational safety standards, cross-ministerial coordination, and meaningful participation of women in policy design and implementation. Without such systemic reforms, climate policies will

continue to overlook the lived realities of women and remain ineffective in protecting those most exposed to climate-related risks.

F.4. Mainstreaming Gender in Climate Policy

A key challenge for feminist organisations is the integration of gender justice into climate policies. Women's participation in climate action are seen as essential for addressing climate-related challenges. This includes creating policies that enable women to access resources, make decisions, and influence change, particularly in sectors like agriculture and water management. Women, especially in rural communities, are at the forefront of climate adaptation efforts, and their knowledge and leadership are critical for effective climate action.

Women's rights or empowerment in reality, is part of empowering a wide segment of society to face climate change. I don't think they can be separated. They ultimately intersect. The issue of equality and justice in the distribution of water and services, as well as supporting the most vulnerable groups in facing climate change, requires much greater and clearer mobilisation than what we currently see. Right now, it is viewed as a luxury issue that doesn't touch reality, while in fact, it directly impacts our food, our water, and every aspect of our lives. [Mariam Riad Abbas, Climate Sirens](#)

Integrating gender justice into climate policy is essential for effective climate action in Syria, particularly in agriculture and water management where women play a key role. As Mariam notes, equality and climate resilience are inseparable, directly shaping access to food, water, and livelihoods.

F.5. Just reconstruction

Another advocacy priority for feminist organisations and groups working on climate and environmental issues in Syria is the integration of housing, land, and property (HLP) rights into post-conflict reconstruction efforts. The focus is on ensuring equitable access to land and housing for all Syrians, especially for displaced populations. Many rural and agricultural lands have been lost due to conflict, and there is a pressing need to restore these lands for sustainable agriculture and community rebuilding.

Whether it's the construction of homes or providing suitable housing, what we call proper housing. Agricultural land, is continually disappearing around

the cities, especially in Eastern Ghouta, where a large part of it has disappeared, and this applies to other cities as well. The focus should be on reconstruction and housing rights. Currently, we don't see transparency regarding their plans [government]—what they are doing and what they are planning. Examples like Mount Qasioun and the controversy surrounding it. Regarding the housing rights of displaced people, 90% of people in areas such as Qaboun are still without proper land; large parts of the rubble remain. Such areas are just dirt; streets have disappeared, and the layout is unrecognisable. [Talah Alshami ,Syrbanism](#)

Even prior to the conflict, [Syria's property and land administration system](#) was highly complex and struggled to safeguard people's HLP rights in the face of rapid urbanization and population growth. Rooted in legal pluralism and widespread informality, these challenges made it difficult for justice actors to envision durable solutions. Today, these longstanding weaknesses are compounded by a [reconstruction](#) process that, as advocates stress, [lacks transparency and inclusive decision-making](#), with little attention to the needs of displaced people and local communities. This creates a barrier to achieving a just and equitable recovery, particularly for women who often bear the brunt of the socio-economic and environmental impacts of displacement.

F.6. Other priorities

Other key advocacy priorities shared by the participants include the development of practical mitigation strategies for emissions reduction, particularly from aging and highly polluting vehicles, and sectoral reform. Even before the conflict, [reports indicated that automobiles](#) were a major source of air pollution in cities like Damascus, contributing to respiratory infections and other health problems. Another critical priority is leveraging political pressure to restore water access, especially by engaging with neighbouring countries like [Turkey](#). Advocating for the opening of irrigation channels is essential to support Syria's agricultural recovery, ensuring water availability for farming and improving the livelihoods of rural communities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the testimonies of feminist groups and grassroots organisations working on climate and environmental issues in Syria, several key recommendations emerged.

First, the climate movement in Syria is still emerging after more than 14 years of conflict. Although Syria faced an earthquake, enduring droughts, and wildfires before and during the conflict, environmental and climate concerns were overshadowed by the immediate humanitarian crisis and the neglect of environmental governance under the authoritarian former regime. However, now we see the beginnings of a growing climate movement across the country, from the emergence of new groups and the official registration of environmental and climate organisations that were previously unable to operate formally in Syria, to the expansion of grassroots initiatives that once could only work within limited local areas. Interestingly, feminist organisations, Feminist journalists, women-led initiatives, and women activists are at the forefront of this emerging field. Whether through establishing informal climate groups, leading environmental and climate campaigns, or playing a central role in the agriculture sector, an important part of Syria's economy, women are a major force driving climate action. This leadership is rooted in the gender role shifts that occurred during the war, as well as in the long-standing presence of women's rights activists who have continuously responded to community needs on the ground.

Therefore, one important recommendation is to acknowledge and centre the role of feminist groups, women leaders, and women activists as key actors in responding to climate challenges in Syria. Recognising their leadership should be a guiding principle for future funding strategies, partnerships, and policy engagement.

Another recommendation is to support intersectional grantmaking that allows feminist and grassroots groups to design projects reflecting the interconnected realities of their communities. Because climate issues in Syria intersect with health, gender-based violence, displacement, and livelihood challenges, funding mechanisms must remain flexible and intersectional. This approach enables women and feminist groups to address multiple, overlapping issues in ways that are most relevant to their local contexts.

Given that women make up the majority of the agricultural workforce in Syria and are leading efforts in food production and adaptation, targeted support for rural women and women in agriculture is critical. Investing in women-led agricultural initiatives, sustainable farming practices, and livelihood programs can significantly strengthen both local resilience and women's economic empowerment.

Additionally, testimonies collected in this report highlight how climate change is directly affecting the health of women and girls, from rising temperatures influencing reproductive and mental health to increased

exposure to pollution and unsafe water sources. Future grantmaking and programming should take this into account by integrating women's health and climate resilience as a shared priority.

Another key point that emerged through the testimonies is that climate and environmental challenges are also standing in the way of a dignified return for refugees and displaced people. Women often bear the heaviest burden in these circumstances, as they are the ones managing household survival, food production, and caregiving under worsening environmental conditions. For any dignified and sustainable return to take place in Syria, supporting grassroots women's organisations working at the intersection of displacement and environmental recovery is essential. These organisations and groups understand the local realities and are best positioned to ensure that return and reconstruction efforts are both just and climate-resilient.

Finally, since the climate movement in Syria is still developing, there is a strong need for capacity building, knowledge exchange, and peer learning opportunities. Feminist and grassroots organisations and groups recognise that they need more tools, technical knowledge, and networking opportunities, especially with other organisations and groups in neighbouring countries and across the Global South, facing similar contexts where conflict and climate issues intersect. Strengthening these connections will enhance local expertise, foster cross-border solidarity, and ensure that feminist voices from conflict-affected areas shape regional and global climate justice agendas.

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