



## 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence

### Activities Report — Whole of Syria

*"Take a photo of me while I am printing my hand on this sheet and then send it to me. I want to tell my future daughter that I said no to violence for both our sakes."*

#### Introduction

In 2019, the Whole of Syria (WoS) GBV AOR was able to organize events to mark the 16 Days of Activism against GBV from its three hubs – Syria (SYR), Turkey cross-border (TXB), and Iraq cross-border (IXB). This allowed for the targeting of women, girls, men and boys in all areas inside Syria as well as in Gaziantep, where Turkey cross-border GBV actors are based.

#### Contextual Background

The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence is an international campaign that takes place between November 25 (the International Day against Violence against Women and Girls) and December 10 (International Human Rights Day) in order to symbolically link violence against women and human rights and to emphasize that violence against women and girls is a violation of human rights. The 16 Days Campaign has been used by individuals and groups around the world to call for the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls. In the WoS, the GBV AOR and its members mark the 16 Days Campaign annually as a unique moment to advocate for a country (and a world) without violence against women and girls.

#### Theme and Objective

In 2019, the WOS GBV AOR decided to align with UN Women's global theme, *Stand Against Rape*. The theme was contextualized and re-phrased to better fit the Syrian context. **In Syria**, the campaign focused on encouraging the survivors to speak and ask for their rights under the heading of *You have the right to tell*. Several objectives emanated from this approach:

- To raise awareness at the local and national level, through the most effective and appropriate channels, about gender-based violence, with a focus on sexual violence, targeting the maximum number of people across the country, particularly women, adolescent girls, men and boys residing in rural areas.
- To increase awareness on the negative impact of sexual violence on women and adolescent girls as well as society as a whole.
- To provide a forum to highlight available services, including sexual and reproductive health (SRH), and existing referral pathways, and to encourage women and adolescent girls to access these services.
- To Enhance and increase partnerships between the government, the private sector, civil society, faith-based organizations and the media, in an effort to raise awareness around GBV.
- To raise the awareness of the community on the new age of marriage law in Syria, in partnership with SARC and Syria Trust lawyers.
- To ensure mass mobilization of all communities to promote collective responsibility in the fight to eradicate GBV.



- To engage actively with men and boys in the discourse about combating GBV.
- To give women and adolescent girls an opportunity to raise their voice at all levels of the community through their direct participation in the campaign activities.

**In TXB**, the theme was adapted to *With Survivors, Against Perpetrators*. Under this heading, the GBV SC wanted to reflect around the role that each person in the family and the community has in the fight against GBV. The main objectives were:

- To encourage survivors to reach out to specialized services, and to take the blame away from survivors and transfer it on perpetrators instead.
- To remove the stigma associated with being a survivor of GBV in general and of sexual violence in particular.
- To emphasize the role all relevant actors, including humanitarians, in providing support to survivors.
- To initiate solidarity across local communities in the fight against GBV and harmful practices affecting women and girls, and encouraging positive support.

**The IXB actors** chose *16 Days is Not Enough* as a theme to emphasize that one campaign is not enough to end GBV, not only due to the fact that women and girls experience violence on a daily basis, but also because the structures of power that enforce inequality and allow impunity do not rest. Similarly, anyone who challenges these norms should do so beyond those 16 days.

### Preparation work

The GBV Sub-sector in SYR conducted a standalone coordination meeting where the 16 Days of Activism concept note was discussed with the GBV Sub-Sector partners and resulted in a contextualized theme and compiled activity plan from the GBV Sub-Sector partners throughout Syria. The preparation also included a brainstorm on short messages to be aired/shared (via placards/banners/brochures/social media, etc.) during the campaigns:

- You have the right to tell
- Your voice protects you
- Your voice is your safety
- Your voice is the secret of your strength
- #VoiceandChoice
- #RightbyHer
- #OurGirlsMatter
- #orangetheworld

**The GBV SC for the TXB** developed a detailed plan of activities to be carried out both in Syria and in Gaziantep (Turkey). The plan included specific events and activities that could take place simultaneously inside Syria, with GBV SC members tailoring them according to available resources. The events and activities were designed to target different groups, including women, adolescent girls, men, boys, families, humanitarian workers, people with disabilities, in the community with similar messages delivered through a variety of methods.



Moreover, GBV SC Team conducted two orientation sessions to better explain the 16 Days plan with field teams in both Idlib and Aleppo.

**The WOS GBV AOR** also developed and share one activity, the *Tree of Life*, for GBV actors to implement with adolescent girls and women and, where possible, with men and boys.

### Activities Conducted and Key achievements

*"The cycle of sexual violence will keep moving and will be fed by our silence. The only way we can stop it is by breaking this silence — by seeking help and supporting survivors."*

In **SYR**, as a GBV lead agency, UNFPA launched the campaign through its social media platforms and implemented the campaign's activities in partnership with 16 national partners throughout 14 governorates. The campaign activities mainly focused on raising awareness about GBV, particularly sexual violence, highlighting availability of services for survivors, and encouraging men and boys to assume more responsibility by standing against GBV. The activities included:

- GBV awareness sessions;
- GBV trainings;
- Educational discussions on legal concerns around the new Syrian age of marriage law;
- Interactive talks on women health subjects', such as reproductive health, availability of services including the importance of accessing the health services within 72 hours for the rape incidents;
- Bazar of women's made products;
- Women self-defense and stress management lessons;
- Lectures and debates;
- Different sports and arts activities;
- Street march;
- Music performance and plays in the streets;
- Photo galleries and mural drawings.

**These activities were executed through several methods that comprised:**

- Social media platforms (Facebook/tweeter messaging, TV advertisements, interviews and radio discussions);
- Brochures made available on various public transportation;
- Songs and dances;
- Fine art- wall drawings;
- Street marching;
- Interactive theatre performances;
- Puppet theatre shows;
- Open day events and bazar;
- Empowerment courses (computer skills / GBV trainings / etc.).

**Some of the highlights were:**

In Deir Ez-Zur, a street march was organized on November 25 to launch the 16 Days campaign, enjoying considerable participation by government officials for the first time, along with UNFPA teams, UNFPA

implementing partners, INGOs, and NGOs. Meanwhile, some partners organized outdoors activities to mark the campaign. For example, one organization in Rural Damascus took adolescent girls on a field trip in the hope of making them feel more comfortable. During the trip, participants were engaged in a discussion about self-care and how to better protect themselves. In Tartous, another organization planned an outdoor activity on the seashore, where participants wrote awareness messages on GBV, placing them in bottles and letting them drift into the sea.

Some organizations implemented lectures, debates, and sports and arts activities in schools, universities, hospitals, mosques, factories, streets, farmlands and other public and open spaces. Others organized live music performances and plays in the streets, photo galleries and mural drawings, marathons, bicycle and motorbike rides by both men and women, candle lighting by the seaside, among others. The campaign also targeted community members who can influence change in their communities. This included employers and factory owners, police, health workers, teachers, parents, religious leaders, etc. For example, an awareness session targeting around 40 police officers and forensic doctors who come across GBV survivors in their daily work was conducted aiming to raise their awareness on dealing with GBV related complaints while maintaining the dignity and confidentiality of survivors. Organizations used different media platforms, including social media, radio/TV talk shows, brochures, and use of bulk SMS.



Activities taking place in public spaces by partners throughout the different governorates





An awareness session with men in Rural Ham



Street marching in DEZ city 25/Nov / 2019

*“We are very happy with the ideas coming up and we need to believe in those ideas, especially those about women standing against violence. We believe that centers like this will help change many of the negative stereotypes surrounding women and girls,” — Adolescent girl attending the Girls’ Open Day*

**GBV SC members for TXB** organized a series of activities and events, including awareness raising, recreational and empowerment activities, door to door awareness campaigns, family events, adolescent girls’ days, among others. The most successful activity was the **Celebration Open Day**, which was organized by fourteen organizations, reaching around 3200 people (65% of whom were women and 30% girls). Fifteen organizations conducted the **Girls’ Day**, with the participation of almost 1,700 girls across different locations.

In 2019, 10 organizations reflected in their reports the **engagement of families in a WGSS open day**, reaching around 2350 people (57% women and 35% girls). These organizations conducted the suggested **interactive theatre and role-playing activity**, in addition to a **puppet show and poetry session** on the cycle of violence resulting from living in a family where GBV (and/or IPV) is common. Around 220 people participated in this activity, out of which 48% were boys, 10% were men, 18% were girls and 24% were women. Finally, twelve organizations used the suggested **videos and short movies** to raise awareness, reaching around 2,300 people (94% women and girls).

Women and girls were also engaged in activities and awareness sessions related to reproductive health and early pregnancy and child and mother’s health, reaching 920 people (62% women and 38% girls). Some GBV SC partners conducted the **Proverb Activity**, which examines a number of popular sayings that portray women negatively and turns them into positive statements. In some locations, participants danced, shared delicious food and celebrated the event with other people in the community. Meanwhile, **facilitators were able to reach out to camps and houses of local community’s members** to raise awareness on GBV. Others were able to **visit schools** where girls and boys participated and expressed their ideas with enthusiasm. Some organizations conducted **door-to-door promotions for the 16 Days**, with candies offered to children and a message on gender-based violence for adults.

Most of the **challenges faced** during the implementation can be associated with contextual hardship; they include security challenges that impeded some beneficiaries from reaching the centers where activities were taking place, as well as cultural norms that prevented discussions of certain topics or joint activities for men and women / boys and girls. Meanwhile, cold weather and last-minute arrangements also presented certain challenges.

**In Turkey, the GBV SC and the SRH TWG Coordination Teams organized a joint workshop** to focus on the issue of sexual violence and its response in northwestern Syria. The workshop served as an opportunity to reflect on the achievements, challenges, and next steps, and the group came to an agreement that a joint action plan for 2020 is essential. Following the workshop, the GBV SC organized a celebration event with all GBV SC members to celebrate the work that was done during the year of 2019.



**From IXB**, GBV actors conducted different activities to highlight the GBV that women and girls experience and to provide an empowering platform. These included information sessions on the importance of the campaign for both women and men; open days; and handcraft and film sessions with topics related to the theme. Initiatives to engage male community members to provide information about the 16 Days of



Activism campaign were organized, including on the importance of them being change agents for the violence women and girls experience.

### **The Tree of Life Activity**

One common activity — The Tree of Life — was conducted throughout the Syria response countries. The objective of the activity was to bring the stories of Unbroken back to their real owners (Syrian adolescent girls), and to give them the opportunity to redesign the flow of these stories, even to the extent of choosing a different ending or outcome. This gave participating adolescents the space to think about the challenges experienced and the resilience demonstrated, to derive inspiration from others whose experiences possibly mirror their own, and to identify factors that may be important to their wellbeing and protection. The activity was also designed and adapted for adolescent boys and men in the hope of inspiring careful examination of the violence and abuse that adolescent girls and women experience and the resilience they are able to demonstrate in facing their daily struggles. Several participants identified with the characters of the stories included in Unbroken and shared their own experiences as a result:

*“My family prevented me from going to school, and whenever I saw other girls going to or coming back from school, I would feel very sad and ashamed. Now, I am displaced and living in a school with my family. I keep telling my parents that it is a punishment from God: we are now forced to stay in a place, a school, where they never allowed me to go.” — 17-year-old girl*

*“I was still a child when I got married. After a few years my husband passed away. I have been raising my three daughters on my own without any support from my in-laws. Now I am afraid of the future, as my parents want to marry me off again. If they succeed in forcing me into a new marriage, I might lose my daughters. I already fear for them as life is not easy for females in this part of the world.” — 32-year-old woman*

*“I am from Deir ez-Zur and married to a thirteen-year-old girl. I treated my wife badly during the first three months of marriage. I would beat her and swear at her. Then we moved from Mabrouka camp to Areesha. My wife complained to her family many times but they did not listen to her. They kept telling her that there is no way that I would beat her for no reason; that she must have been doing something wrong to deserve the beating and she should listen to me. At the end, my wife’s family spoke to my father who advised me not to beat my wife but to protect and help her. I told my father that I do not know anything about marriage and my father told me that I would eventually learn. Now, my wife is eight months pregnant.” — 14 year-old boy*



## Locations

**For SYR**, GBV actors implemented the campaign's activities throughout 14 governorates. The activities were held in the various GBV facilities throughout the country like WGSS, community wellbeing centers as well as through mobile outreach teams. Some organizations also held activities in schools, universities, hospitals, mosques, factories, streets, farming land and other public / open spaces.

**For the TXB**, GBV SC members in Syria implemented activities in 3 governorates and 10 sub-districts. Additionally, the GBV SC coordination team also organized activities in Gaziantep (Turkey), where most of the GBV organizations working cross-border have their offices. Activities were mainly carried out in static facilities, in WGSS, where existing, and in other centers such as community centers, schools, clinics. Some awareness raising activities were carried out through outreach and door to door.

**For IXB**, GBV actors conducted activities in two governorates in Women's center and health clinics.