

Glimpse

Into the Syrian civil society

Syrian civil society's responding to COVID_19

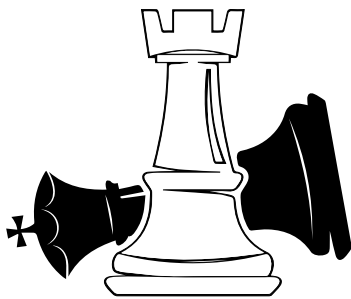
Covid-19 ramifications:

the surge of GBV in Syrian households

Survivor's struggle during the Covid-19's lockdown:

A mental dilemmas

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Kesh Malek

Glimpse aims to shed the light on the Syrian Civil Society which was revived after the Syrian revolution in 2011, showing the civil initiatives and sharing inspiring stories led by grass-roots and civil society movement inside and outside Syria. Glimpse is envisioned to be a reliable resource for readers interested in knowing more about Syria, the history, the society, and the thousands-year-old civilization.

As a youth workgroup Coinciding with the beginning of the Syrian revolution in Aleppo Northern Syria "Kesh Malek" was formed. Its first activities were sharing and taking part in the peaceful movement, demonstrating and spreading demonstrators' demands of "Freedom, Justice, and Dignity." The paigns driven by the group's long term vision to reach a better future for Syria. As "an Independent Democratic Pluralism state, respects human rights and devotes citizenship and justice values."

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Syrian civil society's respond to Covid_19

In the course of the worldwide pandemic proliferation: How the Syrian Civil-society and local stakeholders are responding to the virus's perils ?!!

As the world had gone frenzy with millions of testing taking place worldwide and medical emergencies and curfews, for the northwest of Syria, despite the crucial overall situation, the population remained in a relatively similar posture to how life used to be with "limited" social distancing adherence.

Northern Syria is home to approximately three million people, the rebel-held region of Idlib has yet to record a single Covid-19 case; however, the conditions are especially "ripe" for an outbreak. In late March, The Covid-19 testing kicked off, amid fears of a disaster if the pandemic prefiltered in the overcrowded displacement camps.

The humanitarian status for people remains alarming across northwest Syria. While active hostilities came to a standstill in early March, the impact of recent military operations, as well as multiple displacements, economic hardship, and years of conflict, continue to affect the lives of civilians. Over 854,000 people reportedly remain in "displacement". The figures comprise many vulnerable segments of the society, such as the elderly, persons with disabilities, and female- or

child-headed households. While the situation in NW Syria already struggles from a humanitarian inadequacy across the displaced camps, the pre-existing needs of the broader dwellers remain incredibly high and are drastically getting worse.

Implementing Mitigating Circumstances

Following the virus outbreak, authorities took precautions, closing schools, clinics, and some markets, prohibiting people's gatherings whether for religious worship, reducing operations of businesses including restaurants and grocery stores, and imposing curfews.

Although dwellers' adherence appears to be limited, an extensive communication awareness campaign on individual precautionary measures against Covid-19 was carried out and implemented across northwest Syria, augmented through mosques, local communities, and social and traditional media endeavoring to assert the importance of the precautionary measures obedient.

In a briefing to the Security Council, Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock warned, that Covid19 intensifies the impact of Syria's severe economic crisis. According to the relief chief, the World

Food Programme (WFP) over the past year, basic food prices have jumped more than 100 percent.

While the pandemic behaves in Syria as it has elsewhere, "then tragedy beckons". M. Lowcock asserts. He further warns that "We cannot expect mitigation measures to succeed where millions are displaced in crowded conditions, without adequate sanitation, and no assets or safety net to fall back on".

Despite the ceasefire, the humanitarian situation in the northwest remains as dismal as it has ever been with alarming levels of stunt-

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ing and malnutrition among pregnant and breastfeeding women.

As the displaced population begins to settle after the halt in a military operation, needs are sharply increasing—work opportunities to afford to buy food and cleaning materials, health, nutrition, and education ser-

vices. The needs of the displaced people continue to be adequate shelters, clean water, sanitation and hygiene, food, and protection. Such requirements are crucial to avoid the proliferation of the virus at a grass-roots level.


Asa'ad Farah, deputy manager of

Eza'az's city council, asserted that “the local administration, within its capacity, took many pre-emptive measures amid Covid-19 outbreak fears by applying curfew and forced closure of public places and events.” He said Parks,



Covid-19 ramifications:

The surge of Gender-Based Violence in Syrian households



Since the beginning of 2020, Coronavirus spreading is the main concern of the whole world. Many countries around the world announced complete lockdown and clamped restrictions on civilians' movement avoiding the spread of the virus. As Northern-West Syria has been enduring partial lockdown affected by the risks of potential widespread of Covid-19, victims of domestic violence, namely Internally displaced people (IDPs), is exacerbating with no sight of hope to escape lacking options and support.

In the northern village on the outskirts of Idlib city, Fatima-a 37-year old displaced mother with five children who live in a humble room says that her daily struggle with her (abuser) husband has become unbearable.

Fatima's husband works as an assistant in a food shop in the town. Even before the lockdown, her husband had continuously been violent with her verbally and physically. The economic situation and needs of our big family always made him very aggressive and violent both against her and the children.

After the outbreak of the virus worldwide, villages and towns took precautionary measures as a response. The ramification of the partial lockdown affected many households losing their source of income; as a result, causing a financial crisis. Parallel to the temporary shutdown, the prices had doubled following the steep decline of the Syrian currency. As a result, families barely able to afford essential needs, which is what happened to Fatima's family and thousands of other families across Northern-West Syria.

Bleak present and future horizon

These subsequent crises overwhelmingly increased the level of domestic violence (Gender-Based Violence[GBV]), putting women on a higher severity of abuse.

Since the beginning of the lockdown, Fatima's husband's workplace had to close. Since then, she has been exposed to harassment and passive-aggressive behavior from her husband.



civil society organizations should target their efforts to raise men's awareness and campaign widely to eliminate the embedded violence of culture against women of all kinds.

"He constantly yells at the children and me and punched me a few times,"

"There is no way to escape from this hell, my family is away, and my children will be under more pressure, and abuse by their father if I just left to my family's house,"

She indicates that she doubts that they would even do anything to support me, they are very bigoted and intolerant towards such a situation would only push her, as they did to her sister many times before.

"They would only tell me to stay with him and be patient," she said

In a survey conducted by Syria Female Journalist Network (SFJN) in Northern-Western Syria about women and violence, the survey's output unraveled a high proportion of domestic violence. 70.3% of women answered that they had endured physical abuse from their spouse or their close relatives (Father & brothers).

Malak Obaid, a member of the Syria free lawyers cluster in Syria who is an advocate against domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence, explains that the lockdown in Syria as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic has been drastic. In parallel to the economic crisis, women have become more vulnerable to violence by their husbands in north-western Syria raged by the overwhelming difficulties to earn a living.

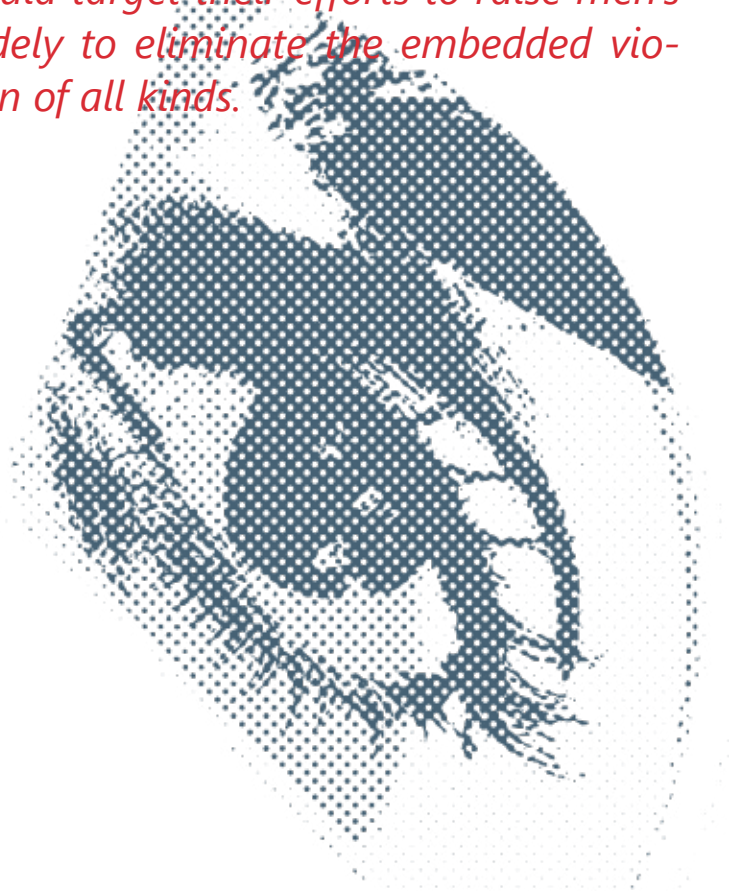
The lawyers' group observed since the onset of the inter-related economic-health crisis with domestic violence. It launched in collaboration with the Syrian Initiative, an awareness program on GBV online with groups of families.

The sessions defined to the families the concept of domestic violence and how to manage pressure by teaching coping mechanisms and parental conflict solving techniques.

"Our vision by conducting this campaign is the dire situation in the country and lack of activism or efforts by the civil society to work in this field," Malak said

Global epidemic

As a perpetuated pattern within the Syrian community, women are one of the most marginalized sub-population and vulnerable at risk of violence, including women and girls, widows, divorces, and adolescent girls.



Parallel to denial of resources, opportunities or services are perceived to be further prevalence;

Gender-based Violence stands as the primary form of the violence women are exposed to daily. In a study by the feminist group last year shown that sexual violence against women in North-west Syria has spiked in comparison to the previous years.

Despite the overarching need to support women who are victims of societal patriarchy dynamics, they further suffer from negligence and denial of support by civil society NGOs.

Fatima explains that women are left to cope with their abusers. She hopes that the civil rights movement improved their involvement in supporting survivors.

In parallel, she notes that "civil society organizations should target their efforts to raise men's awareness and campaign widely to eliminate the embedded violence of culture against women of all kinds."

The advocate explains that Gender-based Violence remains a critical issue in need of a comprehensive approach by international and local stakeholders.

While the advocacy entity targets both genders according to Malak, the majority of civil society actors tackle only the tip of the iceberg. "They simply do not engage with men as much," she said.



A mental dilemmas

Survivor's struggle during the Covid-19's lockdown

While detainees struggle inhuman, degrading circumstances that put their life on the verge of death during the Covid-19 pandemic, though, despite their release, survivors' of detention centres' struggle continues to exacerbate during the time of the health pandemic.

A lack of water, food, and medical care are standard torture methods applied in Syrian detention facilities, a reality of which the 32-year-old Nazir Abbas from Idlib province have experienced, spending 27 consecutive months in Tadmor prison in 2011.

Since the pandemic's outbreak and lockdown, everyone has been following the news worldwide and fears of looming, inevitable perhaps, a crisis that could kick-off in our North-Western Syria. Abbas explains that his current anxiety lies beyond the explicit scope of the rest of the people.

"Although it had been overwhelming and uneasy to cope with the new routine during the lockdown, having to think of my detainees' friends in Tadmor detention centre and what I experienced in 2011, gives me depression and goosebumps."

"Recalling Tadmor and the rest of the detainees across Syria, where almost a full absence of any health care that anyone can imagine because of constant fear about the destiny of thousands of detainees and enforced disappers.

I can imagine how cruel their situation could turn. Having to be amongst those who have survived and now living under the lockdown, safely while my friends are still in detainment, brings me a lot of distress and helplessness." Abbas said

In addition to the daily torture sessions, detainees suffer from the worst inhuman detaining conditions. The Syrian authorities deliberately dismiss the health consideration that would prevent the Covid-19's proliferation, such as the lack of necessary hygienic measures, let alone clean water or food aimed at.

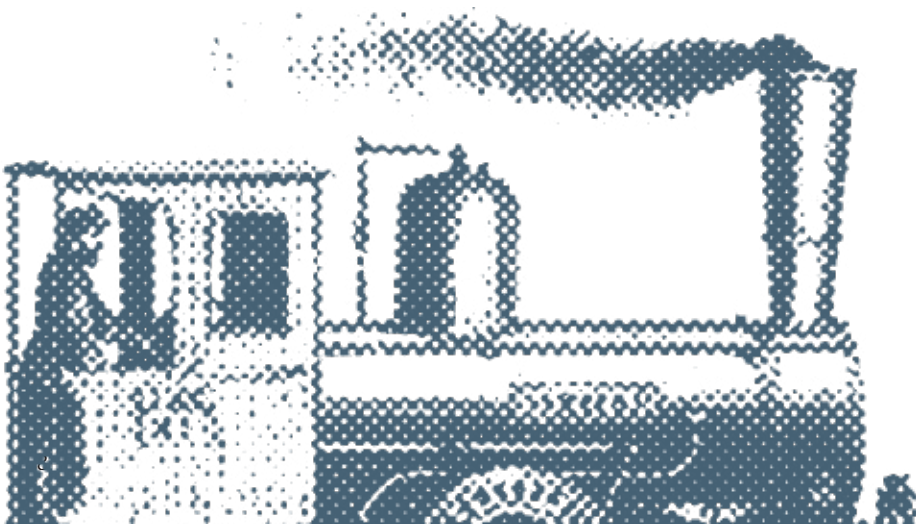
Human Rights Groups expressed their rising fears for tens of thousands of detainees in Assad's authority slaughter detention centres as the Coronavirus widespread through the war-torn country, with staggering conditions and a history of ill-treatment exacerbating concerns.

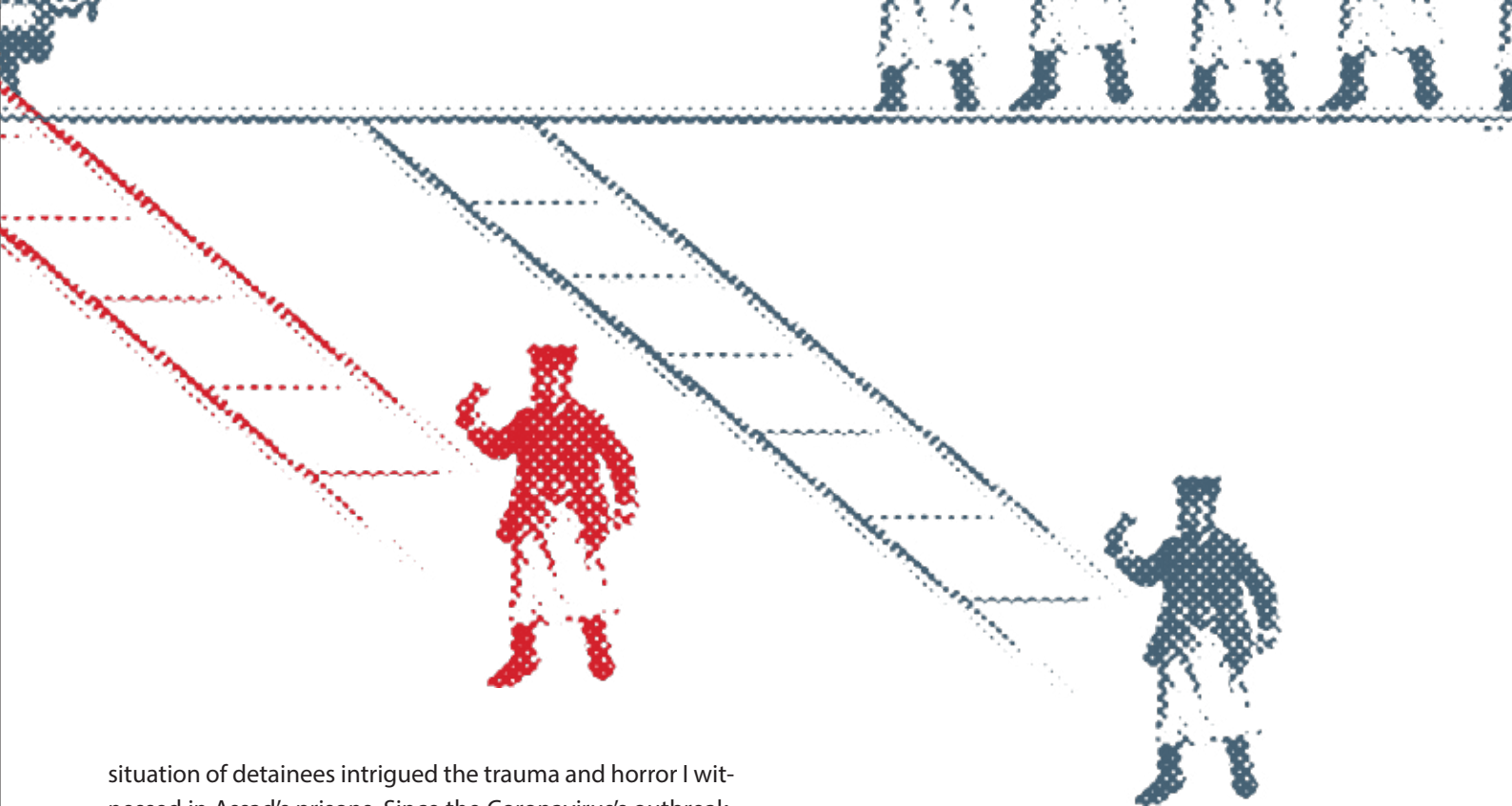
The Syrian intelligence holds over 130,000 detainees, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), with most arbitrary detained since the beginning of the Syrian uprising against the Ba'ath authoritarian regime in March 2011.

International Scrutiny

Following the lockdown, many people obeyed the lockdown recommendations and stayed indoors. Accordingly, people are obliged to remain indoors amid limiting the risks of the virus's outbreak. Those who adhered to the restrictions, like Abbas, describe it as a negative experience that influenced both his temper and mental well-being.

"The linkages between prison and the lockdown circumstances where I am battling with the loneliness that made me helplessly overthinking about the past and present





situation of detainees intrigued the trauma and horror I witnessed in Assad's prisons. Since the Coronavirus's outbreak, I stay most of my day at home, seeing the same faces, in the same room," he said

Abbas spends the prolonged hours of silence and flashbacks of the imprisonment arouse the feelings of despair, pain, and inability to help detainees who are struggling every single moment.

The United Nations rapporteur for Syria, Geir Pedersen, pointed out to the Covid-19 risks, the significantly contagious respiratory illness caused by the Coronavirus, racing and potentially breaking, through the country's prisons and urged quick action to free detainees.

Although the Syrian authority announced a new amnesty decree last March, However, human rights groups said that only a few hundred people jailed for common crimes had been released, while disappeared and political prisoners remain in captivity. SNHR said it documented 665 arbitrary arrests, 116 deaths under torture, and 232 releases since the September amnesty.

Accordingly, the Syrian regime seeks to manoeuvre the pressures it is facing from organizations and states that fear the spread of the virus in the ranks of detainees. Meanwhile, Thousands of political prisoners detained since the outbreak of Syria's conflict remain held captive exposed to increased risks of death.

Coping mechanisms with the lockdown

Laila, 25-years old survivor from the air-force secret service detantion centre in Damascus, explains that although the new routine becomes very slow and alike in activities and faces. "It reminds me somewhat with the prison atmosphere, but it is nothing like," the survivor said

The extra free time gives moments we can spend with family members bring both gratitude to being open, "at least we are here without a daily humiliation or torture or fears," she said

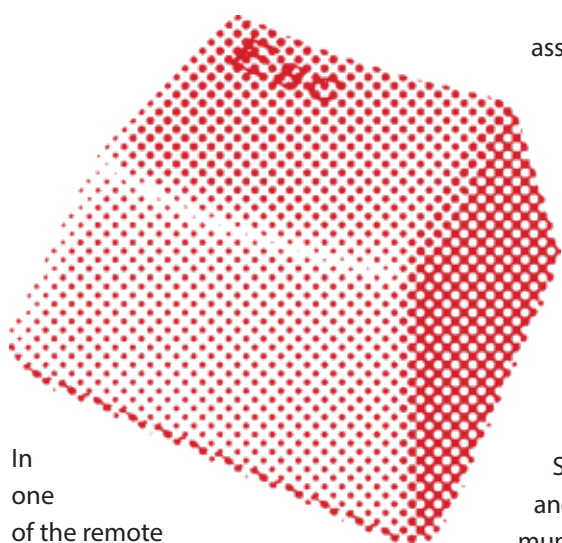
Laila asserts that, nowadays, it is evident to go through depression, anxiety, and loneliness, which perhaps looks like solitary confinement, sometimes I cannot help it. However, unlike prisons, with books, internet, and phones, life is incomparable to how it is like in Assad's detention death centres, this makes life pass by at ease.

"In prison, we can see no one, we barely eat, sleep and wake up on the sounds of torture, but now we are quarantined with our families or at least we can talk to them online," Laila added.



Working Remotely

New ways for people with special needs to participate in the Society



In one of the remote towns of Idlib While the youth population suffers marginalization at large, in North-Western Syria, those who are with a disability struggle the most from lack of attention and support by society and civil society. Youth with disabilities lack the opportunity to be part of their society and are stuck in a stress, stigma, and helplessness dilemma. Initiatives to build a much-needed setting with accessible

resources are underway, but at a slow rhythm and narrow scope that covers medical and special needs educational programs proportionately.

The reality is that civil society movements had invested in many 'medical' and 'special educational' which are inevitably crucial to the recovery and

assistance they need. Though it is equally imperative to pre-prepare youth with disabilities to a more diverse-education atmosphere, and social change participation as well.

Stigma and exclusion & Civil society engagement.

The majority of disabled Syrians are suffering from stigma and exclusion within their communities, in addition to the effects of the war. The embedded negligence and lack of psychological help had left a permanent psychological scar, especially on those who became impaired by the war.

They are facing an overwhelmingly unfavorable socio-economic struggle that has almost no chance of getting into the work or becoming productive members in their communities.

Ali Waheed, Identity of a Country Centre manager operating in North-east-Syria by Kesh Malek organization, said that the "Special needs inclusion and empowerment is one of Kesh Malek's main vision in the new Syria, their improvement is key to accelerate the recovery and development of the country," the manager said

The manager explains that the center's aim and works to reintegrate, support their stigmatization vulnerability, and reconnect with their peers to spend more time with one another regardless of their ability preferences and feel belonging again.

Derived from a zero-exclusion policy development plan, the Youth Citizens' Club started since its establishment, to encourage youth who have a disability to participate at the Youth Citizen Club. While lack of youths' participation in mixed capacity building with their peers in interactive civil activity movements remains a striking phenomenon.

Ali states that the Identity of a country centers since their establishment in 2015, took into consideration visitors with special needs, yet in a non-discriminate personal manner. Inclusiveness' succession can only be through equal non-personnel treatment.

"We make sure to display shared responsibility and support for all participants,"

The bright side of transferring to the Online clubs:

Since the beginning of 2020 Identity of a County centers has faced many obstacles. As the year began the Syrian



regime with its Russian and Iranian allies held an intensified military campaign in which the Syria regime took control of Ourem and Kafrnaha, and the centers which were hosting the clubs closed its doors. Followed by the spread of the Corona Virus globally, and the pandemic imposed unconditional circumstances. The Youth Citizens club had to move to operate online. Opening the door for new participants to be part of the clubs and expanding its geographical coverage. The new teams comprise three people with disabilities at the Youth Citizens Club.

Oula is a twenty years old girl from Aleppo countryside, is a member of the Youth Citizens Club in Kafarnaha before the spread of coronavirus. She was forcibly displaced in the new regime's military offensive and lives now with her family in Jendërs. Although Oula struggles from "Maternal Disability", she joined in 2018 to the center and had been ever since an active member. Ali highlights that Oula had been one of the most active members at the center. Her participation and engagement with her peers in the club with high self-esteem, passion, and confidence.

"I have always been eager to enhance

my abilities and be an active part of society. I do not want to be in the margin," Oula said.

Over the past year, the 20 years old girl praised the quality of much-needed knowledge and training that she received at the center. "I am now more able to facilitate debates, comprehend the problems, and listen carefully to judge and logically make decisions."

Slow but continuous advance

Affected by the pandemic, civil society organizations' operations transferred to online form as a precautionary measure. As a result, a new – disability youth managed to register to take part in the Youth Citizens Club. Hadi, twenty years old displaced from Aleppo suffers from [muttering, attention, and communication disability]

Knowing about the Youth Citizens Club previously through the computer skills enhancement courses he attended, Hadi recently became a member at the center.

Asking about the motive the youth believes that, he wants to expand his knowledge and contribute to his community.

"Young generations in general and

those who are struggling from disability need to direct their efforts to enhance their knowledge level," Hadi said.

"The center amplifies our abilities and provides a cornerstone platform where we can mobilize now and organize wider initiative independently,"

The significance of his participation the young man says will manifest in the future of Syria. As the new skills he learned capacitated him with the means to improve himself and other youths to learn more themselves.

Hadi and Oula outline that Once youth learn more and expand their awareness, they will become liable to be more responsible and relinquish the stereotype image of adolescents.

"The learning process at the Youth Citizens Club prepares us to be more and more liable for taking the social change initiatives ourselves in the future and help other youths to be a positive citizen and change Syria to the better", she said

"We want to take a leading position in the future in our communities and lead the social change movement," Oula said

Activities



Local Female Physical Therapist Volunteer Initiative

Aiming to support neglected war-injured females, in northern Syria, a women-led initiative started in-home physiotherapy for women who are in need. The physiotherapist female group took to go weekly to visit and treat the wounded person who is in the recovery period and yet cannot visit doctors or hospitals.

The free therapy programs target 'war female' wounds who had undergone surgery and need a post-physiotherapy session. The segment that the initiative aims to reach out in particular who cannot afford or able to make it to the therapy clinics. This would fairly alleviate the transportation burden due to their medical status because the financial situation of the injured families in the larger scope is dire.

According to Suha, a 31 years old physiotherapist volunteer in southern Idlib said that the number of female patients who are in need to have a "female" specialist to help them throughout the recovery process is inadequate in comparison with the proportion of patients.

Since the outbreak of Covid-19, our work continues to provide- namely survival of war injuries- with the needed recovery programs and materials they need. As the therapy sessions take place at the patient's house, the therapist took the standards precautionary measure while conducting their therapy, using masks, gloves, and hand washing.

Wounded civilians and women, in particular, are always marginalized and struggle to get the full treatment they need after being discharged from the hospital.

Our vision is to make therapy available to women to help them overcome their temporary inability to resume their normal life. As such, the group includes psychological therapy as well to enhance the patient's self-esteem and boost them to follow a positive daily routine until they are fully recovered.

"The recovery process is both physically and mentally exhausting, hence we stand by their side and help them to surmount the overwhelming obstacles they endure," Suha said

Mobilizing and organizing the humanitarian efforts

The Emergency Cluster Response conducted a workshop with a wide range of volunteer groups team's leader in northern Syria in Atma town, Idlib, near Turkish borders.

Thirty volunteer team leaders represented their groups, took part in a lengthy discussion session concerning the group's work, and the challenges and barriers that are emerging and desisting the volunteering groups work.

The team leaders brainstormed solutions to issues such as relief actors' disorganization and lack of memoranda that unite stakeholders' deeds and organize their ground endeavors.

During the meeting, a lecture was held by D. Waheb Khador, a humanitarian expert, explaining the fundamental principles and mechanisms that international aid organizations uphold.

The meeting's outputs reflected a positive attitude among the groups' participants. Dullama Ali, manager at the cluster, indicated that the groups agreed to work towards unity aiming for the higher good of the society.

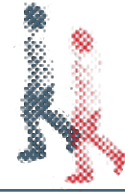
For this sake, an executive council will be created to establish a central body that will articulate a code of conduct of humanitarian work that all groups adhere to its principles.

Yakeen Bido a new women awarded for coverage in Syria

It is not the first time for Syrian women to win the international prize for their outstanding bravery and work speaking out for the Syrian people. Alongside three women from different parts of the world, Yakeen Bido, a 25 years old journalist won the International Women Media Foundation (IW-MF) Annual Journalism Courage Award.

The award represents and awards champion women in their society who have had tremendous participation and influence in their communities and are risking their lives in the pursuit of justice and change in Syria.

Yakeen has been reporting from inside Syria for the five years broadcasting stories of the humanitarian situation. She also



covered the recent humanitarian displacement crisis following the Russian-Syrian military campaign through her contribution to multiple national and international outlets and media channels.

The young journalist stories have drawn wide international attention to Syria and documented human rights and war crimes violations by the Syrian-Russian regimes.

Although she received death threats by Syrian government officials, Bido continues her work. She told IWFM that: "the award is a symbol of courage not only for me but for all women working in the press... and women who sacrifice their personal freedom in order to face social injustice."

Youth led awareness campaign Covid-19 virus

In the third week of March, a social awareness campaign was launched about Covid-19 hazardous risks, led by medicine and pharmacy faculty students volunteer group from Aleppo Free university in North-Western Syria.

Approximately 220 students took part in the campaign who scattered across the camps and towns, including Idlib city, raising locals' awareness about Coronavirus fetal risks and the precautionary measures people ought to take in order to avoid catching the respiratory virus, and the symptoms of the infected persons as well.

Marah Lata, 24 years old medical students and team leader at the campaign said that the main motive they had to 'independently' organize this initiative was driven by the responsibility students felt and obligation as Syria's future doctors and pharmacists towards our societies.

"People across northern Syria lack sources of knowledge, and struggle from a high level of ignorance concerning unhealthily and unhygienic consequences."

"It is our duty to share knowledge with those who lack and help with the minimal capacity and resources that we have."

The idea came after a meeting between

students who gathered at the beginning of the health crisis and brainstormed ideas to assist the local medical and NOGs due to the compelling needs.

The youth campaigners distributed pamphlets and undertook surveys about the level of knowledge people have about public health and hygiene.

Besides, the graduation year medical students establish an 'infection supervision committee' to observe the virus' status and keep evaluating the needs for future campaigns in the future if the pandemic continues to develop.



