

4.11.5. Single women and female-headed households

COMMON ANALYSIS

Last update: February 2023

This profile refers to women who are un-married, and women and girls who are widowed or divorced as well as to female-headed households.

COI summary

The number of female-headed households has been rapidly increasing as a result of the widespread and systematic arrests and disappearances of men and boys above the age of 15 years. [[Situation of women](#), 1.2.1, p. 29]

The traditional gender norms in Syria confined the roles and responsibilities of Syrian women predominantly to their homes. The increasing number of female-headed households has led to women adopting new roles in addition to their customary roles as mothers and caregivers. This subjected them to stressful and complex living conditions that are difficult to cope with. Additional challenges include the need to provide for their families, for example by taking up work in the public sphere. In addition, women might face difficulties finding livelihood options deemed suitable for them according to the prevailing cultural and social norms. Other factors can further put burden on women and might expose them to risks of human rights violations. For example, the lack of civil registration with regard to divorce, custody, property rights and criminal matters, as well as movement restrictions imposed on women and girls. In addition, the lack of civil documentation can stop women from enjoying their legal and/or traditional rights provided by their marriage contracts and block the access to other rights and services, including humanitarian aid. [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.3.1, p. 115; [Situation of women](#), 1.2.1, pp. 29-30, 1.2.6, p. 36, 1.2.7, p. 36]

Widows and divorced women and girls can be distinguished as a subcategory of female-headed households, which is highly stigmatised by the Syrian society. It is reported that widows and divorced women and girls were particularly at risk of sexual violence, emotional and verbal abuse, forced marriage, polygamy and serial temporary marriages, movement restrictions, financial exploitation, and deprivation of inheritance, among others [[Situation of women](#), 1.2.10, pp. 39-40]. Female heads of households are in particular at increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence as well as higher risks of homelessness and eviction due to a lack of a male protector and face these heightened risks irrespective of the geographical area [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.3.1, p. 115; [Situation of women](#), 2.2, p. 48].

There is also information about 'widows camps' in urban areas or larger displacement camps. Though women and children were supposed to be protected there, they were subjected to strong restrictions and limitations on their freedom and often even increased stigmatisation and violence. [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.3.1, p. 115; [Situation of women](#), 2.1.1, p. 45]

Risk analysis

The individual assessment of whether discrimination of single women and female-headed households could amount to persecution should take into account the severity and/or repetitiveness of the acts or whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures. It further enhances the risk for such women to be exposed to acts such as sexual violence and forced marriage, which would amount to persecution (see the sections [4.11.2. Violence against women and girls: overview](#) and [4.11.3. Forced and child marriage](#)).

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, and in particular having a male relative who is able and willing to provide support and their marital status (widows and divorced women are particularly at risk),

Other risk impacting circumstances could include: area of origin and residence, perception of traditional gender roles in the family or community, economic situation, lack of documentation, education, etc.

Nexus to a reason for persecution

Available information indicates that, where well-founded fear of persecution could be substantiated, this may be for reasons of membership of a particular social

group (e.g. divorced women or widows, due to their common background which cannot be changed and distinct identity in Syria, in relation to stigmatisation by society).

See other topics concerning women and girls:

- [4.11.1. The situation of women in the Syrian society](#)
- [4.11.2. Violence against women and girls: overview](#)
- [4.11.3. Forced and child marriage](#)
- [4.11.4. Women perceived to have violated family honour](#)
- *4.11.5. Single women and female-headed households*

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