

## Brussels Conference on Supporting the future of Syria and the Region – 14-15 June 2023

### Side event: The Role of Syrian Women’s Rights organisations in the future of Syria

#### Concept Note

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Over a decade now since the beginning of the armed conflict in Syria, socio-economic struggles, poverty, political instability, overall violence, and gender-based discrimination continue to paint the reality of the Syrian population. The crisis has disproportionately affected the lives of women and girls in the country: they still register higher rates of poverty than men and face an increased risk of violence. Violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains widely underreported due to lack of shelters and support services for victims, lack of accountability for perpetrators, lack of legal framework addressing this violence as well as persisting legal discrimination, predominantly in personal status law and penal code. Girls continue to suffer from being taken out of school forcibly, coerced into early marriage or facing the risk of human trafficking. The deadly earthquake that has affected both Syria and Turkey has increased the need of humanitarian aid in Syria and exacerbated the existing suffering of women, who have to face additional challenges in a very unstable part of the country.

Women's rights organisations and initiatives have been essential in sustaining communities, raising awareness, challenging gender power structures and advocating for women’s role and equal participation in all political and peace building processes for Syria and in Syria, on international, national and local levels. The protracted armed conflict with all its implications as well as the ongoing ban on civil society organizations have all hampered their development and sustainability as well as communication channels. In 2022 EuroMed Feminist Initiative conducted a study, mapping 167 women’s rights and women’s led organisations and initiatives in Regime controlled areas, Northeast and Northwest Syria, Turkey, Lebanon and Europe. The highest number of organisations (32) are equally operating in the Regime controlled areas and in Turkey. In the Northwest of Syria 29 entities were identified, in Lebanon 27, in Europe 24 and in Northeast Syria 23. Except Europe, majority of organisations underlined restrictive to extremely restrictive civic space.

Supporting the freedom and independence of Civil Society in Syria where women’s rights organisations can prepare the ground for a long-term process towards peace and democracy inclusive of gender equality, has been underlined as fundamental by the *Syrian Civil Society Women’s Rights Conference that took place in Brussels on the 9-10 December 2021*. Furthermore, lack of sufficient dedicated funds and long-term support to Syrian women’s organisations and initiatives to combat VAWG at all levels, was one of the challenges identified in the *Common Agenda for Combating VAWG in Syria*, developed during 2022 in a consultative process by Syria Gender Advocacy Group (GAG), with the support of EuroMed Feminist Initiative and funded by the European Union (EU).

**This side event will be organised in the frame of the Euromed Feminist Initiative program “Supporting political transition in Syria through gender-sensitive social reconstruction”, funded by Sweden.**



### **Date and location**

The side-event will take place on the 9th of June 2023, from 11.30 to 14:00 pm at Residence Palace, 155, rue de la Loi, 1040 Brussels (Maalbeek Room). About 20-25 people will participate in person. There will also be participants online. Interpretation Arabic-English will be provided.

**Title:** *The Role of Syrian women's rights organisations in the future of Syria*

### **Description of the topic, issues to be addressed, agenda:**

The side event will build on the achievements of the last year and aim to continue provide a gender sensitive input on the agenda setting and final conclusions of the Conference. The 2022 Brussels VI "Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region", introduced an additional element in discussion during the Day of Dialogue: *"the Conference benefited from the valuable input and expertise of the EuroMed Feminist Initiative. We heard from a leading gender expert, yesterday, who ensured that the gender perspective was duly reflected throughout yesterday's discussion in the Day of Dialogue and today's restitutions of rapporteurs"*, stated the Conference facilitator Karen Coleman.

The side event will tackle the indispensable role of women's rights organisations in the discussion on the future of Syria. It will go beyond the challenges they face and will highlight concrete recommendations for their support and inclusion in all debates on political, educational, economic and social agendas and legislation as well as for their structural involvement in all stages of peace building processes for and in Syria to make sure that sound gender inclusive policies are designed and reforms do not remain "on the books": from preparation to follow up on implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

Panellists include three Syrian women's rights activists, a representative from the European External Action Service and from Swedish Foreign Ministry of Sweden. It will be moderated by EuroMed Feminist Initiative. The audience will be invited to participate to the debate.

### **Participants:**

The event is organised in partnership with Syria Gender Advocacy Group (GAG, whose members and other Syrian Activists will attend in person, together with **international actors who cannot attend physically**.

The event will be open to public who have registered over the website of Brussel donors' conference and will include online:

- Syrian Civil Society Organisations, Platforms, Coalitions
- Decision-makers
- Journalists
- Academic and researchers

### **Organiser, contact person/ details:**

- EuroMed Feminist Initiative
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### **Co-organiser, contact person/details:**

- Gender Advocacy Group for Combatting VAWG in Syria
- Doris Awwad - [dorisawwad29@gmail.com](mailto:dorisawwad29@gmail.com)



EuroMed Feminist Initiative  
المبادرة النسوية الأورومتوسطية  
Initiative Féministe EuroMed



Supporting the future  
of Syria and the region  
Brussels Conferences



**EuroMed Feminist Initiative (EFI)** is a policy network that provides expertise in the field of gender equality as inseparable from democracy building and citizenship, and advocates for political solutions to all conflicts, and for the right of people to self-determination. EuroMed Feminist Initiative has supported the work of the Syrian human rights and women's rights activists and lawyers towards a gender sensitive political transition since 2012 with funds of Sweden and EU and has provided networking and advocacy platforms for over 130 diverse civil society organizations and initiatives and over 350 activists and lawyers to continue the pivotal discussions on the future of Syria and advocate for a gender sensitive transition towards democracy, aiming at promoting women's rights, combatting VAWG and gender-based discrimination thus supporting women's role and equal participation at all levels of decision making and social reconstruction in Syria. EuroMed Feminist Initiative has regularly organised side-events, panels, lobby trips, to support Syrian activists voice their needs and demands.

Syria **Gender Advocacy Group** was formed during the Consultative Process on building a Common Agenda for combating VAWG as a main barrier to women's participation (2020-2021), to raise awareness and mobilise local communities as well as to advocate on local, national and international levels, including the donor community, on the need to combat VAWG as a key to enabling women's participation in peace building, and in all Syria's political, economic and social processes.