Women's Inheritance Rights in Northwest and Northeast Syria



NRC NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

For Syrian women, inheritance is not simply a legal right: it is a pathway to security, economic independence, and recovery. Yet across Northwest and Northeast Syria, conflict, displacement, lost documentation, restrictive gender norms, legal complexity, and weak enforcement continue to make that right difficult to claim. NRC research found that 93% of women have faced housing, land, property, or inheritance issues since 2011, with acute challenges in conflict-affected areas. Legal reform alone is not enough. Actors must support integrated interventions that address legal, social, institutional, and protection-related barriers, in order to support women to claim their rights and avoid doing further harm.

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1 Introduction

This analysis examines how women in Northwest and Northeast Syria pursue their inheritance rights through both formal and informal pathways in a context shaped by prolonged conflict, displacement, and institutional fragmentation.

After more than fifteen years of conflict, Syrian women continue to face systemic barriers that affect not only their legal entitlements, but also their practical ability to claim and enforce their rights, which are essential for protection, economic recovery, and durable solutions.

Women in Northwest and Northeast Syria face significant barriers to accessing their inheritance rights. Their rights are constrained by documentation loss, restrictive gender norms, legal complexities, and limited enforcement systems.

According to NRC's 2026 research, *Effective Modalities of Legal Aid to Support Women in Syria in Obtaining their Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) Rights*, and NRC's *Legal Needs Assessment* conducted in late 2025, 93% of women have faced housing, land, property, or inheritance issues since 2011. These challenges were particularly prevalent in areas that experienced intense conflict, changing authorities, and displacement, such as Northwest Syria (NWS) and Northeast Syria (NES).

This analysis addresses the legal framework governing inheritance and its different applications in NWS and NES pre- and post-December 2024, as well as the most significant barriers faced by women in Aleppo, Idlib, Al-Hasakah, and Ar-Raqqa in obtaining their inheritance. It also proposes a set of recommendations to provide better support for women in accessing and claiming their inheritance rights.

1.1 Key Characteristics of the Findings

- The analysis revealed several recurring issues and barriers across participants and locations that have limited their access to justice and inheritance rights.
- Despite legal and religious recognition of women's inheritance rights, women's actual access to their inheritance shares remains limited.
- While general awareness of women's right to inheritance exists, detailed knowledge of inheritance shares and legal procedures remains limited.
- Land and real estate are perceived as the most difficult assets for women to claim, compared with movable property and financial assets.
- Litigation costs, lawyers' fees, and lengthy legal procedures are frequently cited as major barriers to accessing justice.
- Significant differences exist between urban and rural areas, as well as between tribal and non-tribal communities, regarding the acceptance and exercise of women's inheritance rights. The practice of voluntarily and semi-voluntarily waiving inheritance rights is widespread and often influenced by social and family pressures.

1.2 Summary Recommendations

For Donors

- Increase HLP legal aid funding and consider funding specialized legal aid support to women
- Invest in community-based social norm change initiatives
- Strengthen women's participation and evidence generation

For the Government of Syria

- Harmonize and strengthen the implementation of inheritance laws
- Restore and improve access to civil and judicial services
- Address conflict-related documentation gaps
- Integrate women's property and inheritance rights into recovery and reconstruction efforts

For Civil Society and Legal Aid Actors

- Improve access to practical legal information
- Expand legal assistance for the most vulnerable women
- Adopt family- and community-based approaches to breaking social barriers
- Engage religious and community leaders to improve rights and dispute resolution skills
- Advocate for harmonized legal implementation and simplified procedures

2 Methodology

2.1 Data collection

This analysis was conducted through a mixed methodology, including a desk review of internal and external research, particularly the NRC reports, *Legal Needs Assessment* [1], W*omen Accessing and Claiming Housing, Land, and Property Rights;* and *Strengthen Women's Access to HLP Rights in Northwest and Northeast Syria* and external research *Facing an impossible choice: Refugee women's housing, land and property rights in Syria,*[2] and *Stories of Syrian Women, Their Family and Property*.[3]

The analysis employed a qualitative methodology including 11 key informant interviews (KIIs) and 8 focus group discussions (FGDs) in both NES and NWS, including the governorates of Ar-Raqqa, Al-Hasakah, Aleppo, and Idlib, ensuring geographical representation across urban and rural areas, as well as the inclusion of host communities, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and returnees.

The key informant interviews engaged a range of stakeholders with expertise relevant to inheritance laws and access to justice issues, including lawyers, imams, religious leaders, psychologists, teachers and community representatives. The focus group discussions included women and men from diverse social backgrounds, reflecting variation in age, marital status, displacement status, community affiliation and tribal background. A thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative data collected through FGDs and KII.

Findings were organized around the following thematic areas:

1. Legal awareness and knowledge of inheritance rights.
2. Social and family norms affecting women's access to their inheritance rights.
3. The practice of waiving inheritance rights and the pressures that influence women to do so.
4. Financial and procedural barriers to accessing justice.
5. The influence of tribal and local customs on property and inheritance rights.

[1] NRC Legal Needs Assessment

[2] Facing an impossible choice: Refugee women's housing, land and property rights in Syria - Syrian Arab Republic | ReliefWeb

[3] Stories of Syrian women, their family and property | NRC

6. Differences between types of inherited assets (land, houses, movable property).
7. Perceived changes before and after 8 December 2024.
8. Mechanisms for claiming rights through courts and community mediation.

2.2 Limitations

The results reflect the perceptions and experiences of the participants and key informants in the study locations. They therefore provide a qualitative and in-depth understanding of the factors affecting women's access to inheritance rights, but they are not intended to produce statistically generalizable results applicable to all women in Syria.

3 The National Framework Governing Inheritance Rights and Its Application in NWS and NES

3.1 The Syrian Constitution

This section examines the constitutional and legal frameworks governing women's inheritance rights across different areas of Syria, including under different areas of control and changes following the December 2024 change of government. It considers both formal legal protections and how social and political factors shape women's ability to access their rights.

While the right to inherit was mentioned explicitly in the previous Syrian Constitution of 2012 under Article 17: "The right to inheritance is protected under the law," the current government's Constitutional Declaration removed this specific protection. Nevertheless, Article 21 of the Constitutional Declaration includes guarantees of women's rights to education and work and stipulates that the State "shall ensure women's social, economic, and political rights and protect them from all forms of oppression, injustice, and violence." Since inheritance and property rights form part of women's social and economic rights, they can be considered protected under Article 21.[4]

Prior to the 8 December 2024 change of government, the areas under the control of the Salvation Government in Northwest Syria, which was declared in November 2017 and governed Idlib Governorate, parts of the western Aleppo countryside, and parts of the Northwest Aleppo countryside, did not apply a complete Syrian constitution in the traditional sense. Instead, it relied on a set of regulations and founding documents issued by the General Syrian Conference and the General Shura Council. The

[4] Strengthening Women's HLP Rights in Northwest and Northeast Syria, Policy Brief, NRC, 2025.

conference's founding document stipulated that Islamic Sharia was the sole source of legislation, and a committee was formed to draft a constitution for the areas under its control. The founding documents did not contain any specific provisions granting women rights different from those stipulated in Islamic inheritance laws.

The self-administered areas in Al-Hasakah attempted to introduce a kind of equitable legislation through the "Women's Law," which guaranteed equality between men and women in civil and economic rights. However, the practice of inheritance remained governed more by tribal customs than by the legislation.[5]

As for Ar-Raqqa, the majority of participants in the focus group discussions conducted in Ar-Raqqa Governorate reported that they had observed no significant change in access to inheritance rights before and after 8 December 2024. Participants explained that the primary barriers to exercising their inheritance rights are social and familial rather than legal and therefore remain largely unchanged despite the political developments. Although changes were taking place, their impact on women's day-to-day ability to claim inheritance rights had not yet been felt at the community level.

In contrast, women participating in the focus group discussions in Idlib stated that access to their rights became easier after 8 December 2024. Prior to this date, they faced significant challenges due to severe restrictions on freedom of movement between areas under different authorities and the difficulty of obtaining the security approvals required for most real estate transactions involving properties located in areas controlled by the former government. The removal of these administrative and movement-related barriers has made it easier for women to pursue property-related procedures and claim their rights.

On 10 March 2025, the transitional Syrian Government signed an agreement with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)[6] to integrate SDF forces and SDF institutions with the current Syrian government, and initiate the handover of the governorates of Deir ez-Zor, Ar-Raqqa, and Al-Hasakah to the Syrian Government.[7] Following this agreement, official institutions, courts, and service departments, including civil registries and cadastral offices, entered a transitional phase to implement its provisions. Currently, courts, real estate and civil offices and departments in Deir ez-Zor and Ar-Raqqa have resumed operations, while these services remain suspended in the city of Al-Hasakah and some of its surrounding areas, including Qamishli. Against this backdrop, the Syrian Constitutional Declaration now applies to all Syrian territory following the merger agreement with SDF.

[5] Women's right to inheritance: details and specifics not included in the social contract, North Press Agency 2024, حق المرأة في الميراث.. تفاصيل وجزئيات لم يتضمنها العقد الاجتماعي

[6] The Agreement was followed by a subsequent agreement announced on 30 January 2026

[7] Concurrently with the merger agreement, the Syrian President issued Legislative Decree No. 13/2026 to grant Syrian nationality to the Kurdish population in Syria.

3.2 Personal Status Law (PSL)

Inheritance under the PSL

The right of inheritance is governed primarily by the Syrian Personal Status Law, Law No. 59 (1953) and its amendments.[8] The law is applicable in all NWS and NES governorates except some articles related to mandatory bequest and legal inheritance that were not recognized and applied in the Idlib courts.

Under the principles of Islamic inheritance applied through the Syrian Personal Status Law (PSL), female relatives generally receive smaller shares than males. In most cases, a male heir is entitled to a share that is twice that of a female heir of the same degree of kinship. The distribution of inheritance is complex and varies according to the degree of kinship and the relationship between female and male heirs. For instance, when both sons and daughters inherit from their parents, a daughter typically receives half the share allocated to a son. Different inheritance arrangements may apply in cases where there are no male heirs or where female heirs are married. In 2006, personal status laws specific to Christians were introduced, and a 2010 amendment to the Personal Status Law placed the regulation of inheritance and wills under religious communities, resulting in different rules for Muslims and Christians.[9]

However, the PSL No. 59 /1953 applies to Christians in matters not specifically regulated by Christian personal status laws. In such cases the provisions of the Muslim Personal Status Law will apply based on the broad jurisdiction of the Sharia courts.[10] This includes matters such as the cases of death registration, missing persons, guardianship over those lacking legal capacity and the lifting of guardianship. Because those issues are not regulated independently or comprehensively under the Christian personal status laws, the law follows the general rules and the provisions of the Personal Status Law for Muslims.

Exceptions to the general rule of inheritance exist for certain categories of property. For example, the inheritance of *Amiri* lands[11] is governed by a separate legal framework that, in principle, provides equal inheritance shares for male and female heirs.

Amiri lands are lands whose title ownership remains with the State, while individuals are granted rights of possession, use, and exploitation in accordance with the law.

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[8] Amended by Law No. 34 (1975), Law No. 19 (2000), Law No. 18 (2003), Decree No. 76 (2010), Law No. 4 (2019) and Law No. 20 (2019).

9 The Personal Status Law for Catholic denominations was issued by Legislative Decree No. 31 of 2006, and the Personal Status Law for Orthodox denominations was issued by Legislative Decree No.7 of 2011

10 Article 308 from the PSL Law No. 59/1953 amended by Decree No.76 / 2010 and Article 486 from the civil procedures Law No 1/2016

11 Syrian Civil Code, Article 86

Inheritance procedures also differ depending on the type of property. For Amiri lands, conciliation civil courts are responsible for issuing a Legal Determination of Heirs[12] which identifies the legal heirs to the properties. This document is distinct from the Sharia Determination of Heirs issued by Sharia courts, which applies to inheritance governed by Islamic personal status laws. Any legal heir, whether male or female, may initiate the process of obtaining either a Legal Determination of Heirs or a Sharia Determination of Heirs.

Despite the existence of a national legal framework, the application of the Syrian Personal Status Law have not been unified across all governorates. In Idlib Governorate, for example, Sharia courts have continued to reject the concept of the mandatory bequest[13] despite the Personal Status Law explicitly stipulating it, as it is deemed contrary to the interpretation of Islamic law. Consequently, the children of a son or daughter who predeceased his/her father were deprived of any share in their grandfather's estate. This disproportionately affected females within this category, as they were often the least able to claim their rights or secure alternative economic means. Further, in Idlib there is still no legal recognition of inheritance rights for *Amiri* lands. Consequently, such lands in Idlib are still subject to the rules of Sharia inheritance and Sharia Courts, with the male receiving twice the share of the female. Regarding Christians' properties within this governorate, inheritance was subject to the provisions of the Sharia inheritance law until 2022, when the procedures of the *AlRouhi* courts[14] were adopted, and they became independent in matters of inheritance from Sharia courts.

Inheritance in the case of missing persons

The Syrian conflict has resulted in the death or disappearance of large numbers of men, contributing to a significant increase in female-headed households. Humanitarian organizations estimate that female-headed households now represent approximately 22% of conflict-affected households in Northwest Syria.[15]As a result, many women have assumed primary responsibility for supporting their families while simultaneously facing heightened legal and protection challenges, including barriers to accessing housing, land and property rights, civil documentation, inheritance and livelihoods. Studies also show that women residing in displacement

12 Law of Transfer of State Lands issued in February 1913

13 Article 257 from the Personal Status Law: "the mandatory bequest is that any person who dies leaving grandchildren through a son or a daughter, where that son or daughter predeceased the deceased or died at the same time, shall be deemed to have made a bequest in favour of those grandchildren out of one-third of the estate."

14 The Rouhi courts are the personal status courts for Christians

15 Rapid Gender Analysis: Sacrificing The Future to Survive the Present: Findings from north-west Syria, CARE organization, 2022 CARE Rapid Gender Analysis: Sacrificing the Future to Survive the Present: Findings from north-west Syria - Syrian Arab Republic | ReliefWeb

camps have become the primary breadwinners of the household, particularly among displaced communities, in Idlib and Northern Aleppo.[16]

In Northeast Syria (Al-Hasakah, Ar-Raqqa), there is no comprehensive or unified data on the percentage of female-headed households in the area. However, both local and international organizations have reported a significant increase in the number of female-headed households, particularly following the military campaign against ISIS and in tribal communities that experienced high numbers of male casualties and disappearances.[17]

As per the Syrian Personal Status Law for Muslims, a widow's share of her deceased husband's estate depends on whether the deceased left children. A widow inherits one-eighth of the estate if the deceased has children or grandchildren, and one-quarter if he leaves no descendants. Conversely, a husband inherits one-half of his deceased wife's estate if she leaves no children or grandchildren, and one-quarter if she leaves descendants.

According to NRC's 2025 Legal Needs Assessment, 87% of women whose husbands are missing reported they were unable to access or benefit from their husbands' property, assets or associated legal rights. This reflects the significant legal and administrative barriers faced regarding missing persons.

It is important to note that, under Syrian law, the wife of a missing person does not automatically become an heir upon his disappearance. Inheritance rights arise only after the husband's death has been legally established, either through proof of death or a court decision declaring the missing person deceased.[18] Until such a determination, the wife may petition the court to be appointed as the legal representative of her missing husband for the purpose of managing and preserving his property and legal interests. Although the Syrian Personal Status Law does not explicitly require a male representative of the missing person, it was reported that women often face practical barriers in being appointed to this role. The decision is left to the discretion of the Sharia judge, especially where multiple family members apply for the appointment. In practice, male relatives are frequently given preference over women, limiting their ability to administer family assets and exercise authority during the period of disappearance.[19]

16 The challenges faced by women in northeast Syria, Syria Civil Defence, 2022.

17 Northeast Syria: Rapid Gender Analysis Brief: Ar-Raqqa, Deir Ez Zor and Al-Hasakah Governorates (23 December 2024), Northeast Syria: Rapid Gender Analysis Brief: Ar-Raqqa, Deir Ez Zor and Al-Hasakah Governorates (23 December 2024) - Syrian Arab Republic | ReliefWeb.

18Article 260 from the Personal Status Law: "Inheritance is due upon the death of the deceased or upon being declared dead by a judge's decision."

19 This applies to Muslims and Christians. According to the PSL and civil procedures law, the PSL for Muslims applies to Christians in certain cases including the death registration case for missing person and appointing legal representative for missing or absent person.

3.3 The Civil Status Law (CSL)

The Civil Status Law No. 13/2021 regulates the mechanism for the official registration of death events as a first step to obtain an inheritance certificate. The law provides for the registration and maintenance of official civil records for Syrian citizens, expatriates and residents documenting civil status events such as births, deaths, marriages, divorces, and other related events regardless of whether they occur inside or outside Syria.[20]

Throughout the conflict, the Civil Status Law No. 13/2021 was not applied uniformly across Syria due to the existence of multiple governing authorities. For example, in Idlib, civil status claims were administered by the Civil Affairs Directorate of the Salvation Government, which maintained its own civil registry and issued civil records, family booklets and identity documents to residents within its areas of control. Similarly, in Al-Hasakah and Ar-Raqqa, the Autonomous Administration established its own registry institutions responsible for registering civil events and issuing certain civil documents to residents.

Prior to 8 December 2024, documents issued by the de facto authorities in Northwest and Northeast Syria were not officially recognized by former Syrian state institutions. Consequently, these documents had limited legal validity outside the areas controlled by the issuing authorities, creating administrative and legal obstacles for affected individuals. This multiplicity of civil status systems had a direct impact on women's ability to prove their inheritance rights due to difficulties in proving civil events. The effects of this issue continue to be felt, as many deaths were either not registered with the Syrian Central Civil Registry or were registered only after significant delays due to the conflict. When a death or marriage is not officially registered or clearly established, women may face difficulties initiating inheritance proceedings or claiming their share of the inheritance.[21]

20 HLP and gender guidance note, NRC and UNDP, Syria, 2021, Page 18
21 Strengthening Women's HLP Rights in Northwest and Northeast Syria, Policy Brief, NRC, 2025, page 16.

4 Challenges and Barriers facing women in claiming their inheritance rights

The existence of legal rights has not necessarily translated into actual enjoyment of inheritance rights. Women who seek to claim their inheritance often face significant challenges and barriers, including the absence of official documentation or proof of ownership. Additional obstacles arise from the complexity of inheritance inventory procedures as well as the displacement or unstable residence status of many rightful heirs. Social barriers remain one of the heaviest, as they relate to family pressure, tribal customs, and fear of family isolation.

According to the Legal Needs Assessment conducted by NRC, the dominant barrier in claiming property or inheritance was lack of documentation and absence of a death certificate (32%), followed by family pressure (16%), lack of legal awareness (15%), and costs (15%). Court complexity and safety concerns were also reported.[22]

FGD respondents across all the areas of the study mentioned that women rarely receive their full inheritance. This could mean they receive no inheritance at all and/or are pressed to relinquish inheritance rights, or they receive only a part of their legal shares as compensation instead of their rightful shares, especially with regard to agricultural lands.

4.1 Social norms, tribal traditions and family pressure

According to the FGDs and KIIs, women stated that social norms are stronger than legal frameworks, with the influence of customs, traditions, tribal norms, and family expectations being higher than the application of laws. Participants also noted that the

[22] Legal Needs Assessment, NRC, 2025, p. 30

dominance of customs and traditions that discourage the transfer of wealth to a man outside the family (through a married daughter) and prevents many women from obtaining their rightful share of inheritance.[23] Nevertheless, most community members in Northwest and Northeast Syria believe that properties, particularly the family home, should remain within the male family line to preserve family unity, which they perceive could be undermined if women claim their rightful share of the inheritance.

The qualitative data collected from the FGDs and KIIs showed the distribution of inheritance to women varies between communities, families and individuals. Based on NRC's observations and interactions with communities in Syria, very few families grant women the same share of inheritance as men. Some families allocate women a smaller share than men, while many do not recognize women's right to inherit at all. One FGD participant in Ar-Raqqa stated that discrimination may occur even among male heirs during the distribution of inheritance, with the eldest or youngest son sometimes receiving the largest share. The participant also noted that a portion of the inheritance may be misappropriated under the pretext of legal procedures, lawyers' fees and other costs deducted from the estate.

Women also continue to face economic and social discrimination in relation to inheritance. They are often perceived as making limited contributions to income generation or the accumulation of family wealth, while men are viewed as bearing primary financial responsibilities. As a result, men are frequently considered more deserving of family assets and inheritance.

In Ar-Raqqa and Idlib, some women reported being exploited due to their illiteracy and lack of awareness. One example given by participants was that male relatives deliberately took advantage of women's inability to read and write by persuading them to provide fingerprints or sign documents, such as general powers of attorney or inheritance waivers, under the pretext of completing inheritance settlement procedures. These practices were reported as a means of depriving women of their rightful share of the inheritance. Prevailing social practices in certain areas revealed that some fathers or grandfathers, during their lifetimes, would register certain properties in the names of their sons, excluding their daughters, thus widening the actual gender gap in ownership.

4.2 Documentation-Related Barriers to Women's Inheritance Claims

Civil documentation plays a crucial role in enabling women to access and claim their inheritance rights. Documents such as death certificates, family records, marriage

[23] Absence of law and the dominance of customs: Women deprived of their inheritance rights in northeastern Syria, Enab Baladi Newspaper, Syria 2019

certificates, and proof of kinship are often required to establish legal entitlement to inherited property and initiate inheritance procedures. When these documents are missing, lost, damaged, or not updated, women may face significant difficulties in proving their relationship to the deceased or asserting their rightful share of the inheritance.

Based on an assessment done by NRC in 2026, lack of documentation remained the clearest cross-cutting barrier in NES and NWS. Repeated document loss had severely weakened women's ability to verify ownership and inheritance claims. Research showed that:

- **34%** of internally displaced respondents lacked key civil documentation needed to support ownership and inheritance claims.
- **62%** of respondents reported documentation and proof-related challenges in HLP/inheritance cases.
- **59%** of women specifically reported documentation barriers affecting inheritance/property claims.

NRC's Legal Needs Assessment stated that 34% of internally displaced women lacked key civil documents, compared to 6% in host communities and 13% among returnees. Additionally, evidentiary standards vary widely across institutions in both areas, for example, some may accept alternative evidence (witness testimony, mukhtar certification, possession) while others require complete formal documentation. FGD participants consistently described death as the main bottleneck, freezing inheritance and housing claims. Most participants in the FGDs in Idlib mentioned that the conditions of displacement have led to many women losing their identity documents and property deeds, making it extremely difficult for them to prove their right to inheritance.

4.3 Lack of Legal Awareness on Rights and Procedures

Lack of legal awareness is a significant barrier preventing women from claiming their inheritance rights in Northwest and Northeast Syria. According to women who participated in focus group discussions (FGDs) in Idlib and Aleppo, most women are unaware of their legal entitlements related to inheritance. For instance, they often lack knowledge about the different types of property and do not understand the distinctions between legal inheritance rules and Sharia-based inheritance provisions. This limited understanding makes it difficult for women to assess whether inheritance has been distributed fairly or to identify situations in which their rights have been violated. Insufficient awareness also reduces women's ability to challenge discriminatory practices and negotiate for their rightful share within the family. In many cases, women rely on male relatives to explain inheritance rules or manage inheritance-related processes, creating opportunities for misinformation or unequal treatment.

As a result, women may accept distributions that do not reflect their legal entitlements or refrain from pursuing claims altogether, not because they reject their rights, but because they are unaware of them or lack confidence in their understanding of the applicable legal framework.

4.4 Access to Justice and Financial Barriers

In many areas of NES and NWS, women face difficulties in accessing courts and legal authorities due to geographical distances, limited transportation, and weak judicial infrastructure. These challenges increase the time and effort required to pursue inheritance claims, leading many women to abandon their claims.[24]

Information obtained from KIIs and FGDs indicates that the length of inheritance transactions, procedures, and lawsuits in courts is one of the barriers facing women in Northwest and Northeast Syria in claiming their inheritance rights.

Households reported administrative complexity and reliance on intermediaries, reflecting accessibility constraints within documentation systems.[25]

Following the agreement between the current Syrian government and the SDF, the courts in Al-Hasakah and cadastral offices remain closed, hindering women's ability to pursue their rights.

FGDs and KIIs conducted in Ar-Raqqa, where tribal customs exert a strong influence, indicated that the existence of formal legal procedures does not necessarily translate into access to justice for women. Participants explained that pursuing inheritance claims through the courts often requires financial resources, the support of male witnesses, and the social influence or protection needed to withstand familial and community pressure.

Most FGD and KII participants also noted that resolving inheritance disputes through amicable mechanisms, such as mediation, may be more accessible and less costly than formal litigation. However, many women remain reluctant to seek the intervention of tribal leaders or family elders because of prevailing customs and traditions. Participants emphasized that asserting inheritance rights—whether through formal legal channels or informal dispute resolution mechanisms—continues to impose a significant social burden on women, who may face intimidation, stigma, or the risk of family exclusion.

As one female FGD participant in Ar-Raqqa explained: “My brothers-in-law told me that I have no right to any inheritance and that they would take everything. They

24 Women deprived of inheritance rights in northeast Syria. Article issued on Enab Baladi newspaper website, 2024. Women deprived of inheritance rights in northeast Syria - Enab Baladi
25 Legal Needs Assessment, NRC, 2025, p. 24.

threatened me that if I ever went to the tribal sheikh or the court, they would humiliate me."

"Although women might recognize their rights, they remain in an internal struggle between moving to claim their rights and their family's perception of them." Female key informant, Al-Hasakah

"If my husband throws me out, I have no one but my brother to turn to. How could I go to him if I had demanded my inheritance from him and ruined the relationship?" Female FGD participant, Ar-Raqqa.

5 Importance of Supporting Women in Claiming Inheritance Rights in NWS and NES

Claiming inheritance rights is essential for women in NWS and NES because inheritance often represents one of the few assets that can provide long-term economic security, especially for widows, divorced women, and female-headed households. Women who are denied their inheritance become more financially dependent on male relatives and are more vulnerable to poverty and housing insecurity. Inheritance rights also strengthen women's ownership and control over housing, land, and property (HLP), which is particularly important in conflict-affected and displacement contexts. Furthermore, exercising inheritance rights contributes to women's access to justice and reinforces the principle of equality before the law.

5.1 Legal Aspect

Supporting women in Syria in accessing and claiming their inheritance rights will help to enhance their security of tenure, protect their HLP rights, prevent forced eviction and reduce family disputes over property. It also enables women to obtain their inheritance rights, strengthens the rule of law in those areas, and contributes to achieving social justice.

5.2 Social Aspect

Supporting women in Northwest and Northeast Syria in claiming their inheritance rights is directly linked to the reshaping of the social and economic fabric after more than fifteen years of war, collapse, and displacement.

5.3 Economic Aspect

Reports indicate[26] that poverty rates in Northeast and Northwest Syria have reached catastrophic and unprecedented levels. For many women, particularly widows, wives of missing persons, and displaced women, inheritance may be their only source of property or income. Access to their inheritance helps them to secure housing, support children, establish a source of income, and reduce economic dependence on relatives or humanitarian aid.

[26] Syria: Deepening economic crisis compounds conflict misery, as Syria crisis enters its fourteenth year and humanitarian needs reach unprecedented levels, warns the IRC, https://www.rescue.org/press-release/syria-deepening-economic-crisis-compounds-conflict-misery-syria-crisis-enters-its

Economic Deprivation in Northwest Syria - April 2024, Economic Deprivation in Northwest Syria - April 2024 - Syrian Arab Republic | ReliefWeb

6 Conclusions

The findings indicate that women's inheritance rights remain largely unrealized in both Northeast and Northwest Syria, despite broad recognition that women are legally entitled to inherit under the applicable legal frameworks. The gap between legal rights and their practical realization remains substantial and is driven by deeply rooted social norms, tribal customs, family pressure, and limited access to justice.

Although the findings suggest that many women are aware of their legal entitlement to inheritance, they often lack the practical knowledge required to navigate the legal procedures and claim their rights. Furthermore, even where women possess such knowledge, social and familial pressures frequently discourage them from pursuing inheritance claims due to fears of stigma, family conflict, or social exclusion.

Overall, the study demonstrates that improving women's access to inheritance requires more than legal reform alone. It calls for integrated interventions that address legal, social, institutional, and protection-related barriers while ensuring that efforts to support women do not expose them to additional risks or harm.

NRC recommendations:

For Donors

1. Increase HLP legal aid funding and consider funding specialized legal aid support to women

Increase funding for legal aid services that help women obtain civil documentation, death certificates, determination of heirs, and property records necessary to claim inheritance rights, particularly for widows, displaced women, and wives of missing persons.

2. Invest in community-based social norm change initiatives

Support long-term programmes that engage men, women, boys and girls, tribal leaders, religious leaders, and community influencers to address discriminatory practices and promote acceptance of women's inheritance rights.

3. Strengthen women's participation and evidence generation

Support research and monitoring on women's inheritance rights and ensure women are actively involved in designing, implementing, and evaluating interventions that affect their access to inheritance and property rights.

For the Government of Syria

1. Harmonize and strengthen the implementation of inheritance laws

Ensure the consistent application of inheritance-related laws and procedures across all governorates and address discrepancies that limit women's ability to exercise their rights.

2. Restore and improve access to civil and judicial services.

Reopen and strengthen the capacity of courts, civil registries, and cadastral offices across the entire country, while simplifying inheritance procedures and reducing administrative barriers for women.

3. Address conflict-related documentation gaps

Facilitate the registration of deaths, marriages, and other civil status events that were unrecorded during the conflict and support the replacement of lost civil and property documents, and facilitate a clear procedure that allows women to assert their inheritance rights in cases involving missing or disappeared relatives.

4. Integrate women's property and inheritance rights into recovery and reconstruction efforts

Ensure that housing, land, and property policies, restitution mechanisms, and reconstruction initiatives adequately safeguard women's ownership and inheritance rights.

For Civil Society and Legal Aid Actors

1. Improve access to practical legal information

While many women are aware that they have a legal right to inherit, they often lack practical knowledge of the procedures, documentation requirements, and legal mechanisms needed to exercise this right. Legal awareness initiatives should therefore move beyond explaining legal rights and focus on practical guidance, using simple language, real-life examples, and accessible communication methods. Attention should be given to women living in rural and tribal communities.

2. Expand legal assistance for the most vulnerable women

Legal aid services should be expanded and made more accessible to women in vulnerable situations, including widows, divorced women, wives of missing persons, women heading households, and internally displaced women. Tailored legal support should address the specific barriers faced by each group.

3. Adopt family- and community-based approaches

The findings show that the primary barriers preventing women from claiming inheritance are social rather than legal. Awareness and behaviour change initiatives should therefore engage men, women, boys, girls, family elders, and community leaders together to promote a shared understanding that women's inheritance is a legally protected and legitimate right rather than a violation of social or tribal norms.

4. Engage religious and community leaders

Religious leaders, tribal sheikhs, and respected community figures play an influential role in resolving family disputes and shaping community attitudes. Strengthening their understanding of women's inheritance rights and training them on gender-sensitive collaborative dispute resolution (CDR) approaches could contribute to more equitable outcomes.

5. Advocate for harmonized legal implementation and simplified procedures

Advocacy efforts should promote greater consistency in the implementation of inheritance laws and regulations across all Syrian governorates, including Northeast and Northwest Syria. Efforts should also encourage the simplification of inheritance procedures, improve access to civil and property documentation, and reduce administrative and financial barriers that disproportionately affect women seeking to claim their inheritance rights.