

**Aspirations of the Families of Missing Persons  
from The Independent Institution on Missing  
Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic  
for Revealing the Fate of Missing Persons and  
Forcible Disappeared Persons**







اليوم التالي  
لدعم الانتقال الديمقراطي في سوريا



THE DAY AFTER  
Supporting Democratic Transition In Syria

## Aspirations of the Families of Missing Persons from The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic for Revealing the Fate of Missing Persons and Forcible Disappeared Persons

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The Day After Organization (TDA) is a Syrian organization that works to support democratic transition in Syria, and its scope of work is focused on the following areas: Rule of law, transitional justice, security sector reform, electoral system design and Constituent Assembly election, constitutional design, economic reform and social policies.

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## Executive Summary

Families of missing and forcibly disappeared persons in Syria continue to suffer from the effects of disappearance on many levels, most significantly the anxiety associated with not knowing the fate of the missing person, and considering the “scenarios” for the possibility that the missing person is still alive and waiting for their return, or confirmation of death, thus ultimately unveiling their fate and identifying the party responsible for the disappearance and holding it accountable.

With the passage of years of disappearance, many associations concerned with the affairs of missing and forcibly disappeared persons were formed, and many entities have been working on different documentation mechanisms for the many records of missing cases and actors causing them. Due to the efforts made in this context, and the sustained communication with families, as well as the issuance of so many reports on missing persons and their families, a resolution was passed providing for the establishment of The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic to identify the fate and whereabouts of missing and forcibly disappeared persons in Syria and to provide support to the victims and their families. The resolution was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on 23 June 2023.

The establishment of this institution raised the bar of expectations for revealing the fate of missing persons. In anticipation of the start of this institution’s work at the beginning of April 2024, this study aims to survey the priorities and needs, as well as the perceptions and expectations of the families of missing persons from the new institution.

The study relied on a large research sample of (2,560) male and female respondents who are family members of missing persons, 51.6% of them were males and 48.4% were females. The sample was based in various places where Syrians are located, in light of the Syrian exodus that began in 2011.

The study covered: (regime-held areas, the Salvation Government areas, Interim Government areas, Autonomous Administration areas, neighboring countries: “Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt”, Turkiye and Europe).

The study uses the “descriptive analytical methodology” which describes the phenomenon in question and interprets it. This methodology relies on interpreting the status quo and identifying the existing conditions and relations among the variables. A questionnaire was the main research tool used in this research, which was designed based on variables that aim at exploring the reality of the families of missing persons as well as their aspirations, needs and expectations from the work of the new international institution. Data collection was conducted by a large group of data collectors who received training on the questionnaire

and who have former experience in the field, in the targeted areas.

The research reached a number of important conclusions, including:

1. The study sample was 2,560 subjects 51.6% of whom were males and 48.4% females.
2. The field findings showed that the highest level of missing and disappearances were in the early stages of the Syrian revolution and war (2011 to 2016). This is in line with pattern of the conflict at those stages, with the escalation of political and military tensions escalated with an upsurge of violence by all parties, let alone the impact of displacement processes which rippled through various areas of control.
3. 91.8% of the study sample know the place of disappearance (inside Syria, neighboring countries, on smuggling routes) while 8.2% do not .
4. The highest percentage (89.7%) of missing cases took place inside Syria, followed by smuggling routes to Europe (7.11%) .
5. Families of missing persons have been exposed to a number of social effects, including, most prominently, negative discrimination by official institutions, and negative behavior by the surrounding local community, “social isolation, disregard and blame by the social environment, family and relatives, and social stigma.”
6. The study sample was subject to several levels of psychological impact attributable to the incidence of disappearance (serious psychological conditions, psychological harm, chronic psychological issues). In rare cases, the impact reached the level of (suicidal wishes by the children or the wife).
7. Families of missing persons suffered many legal and security difficulties and obstacles due to the incidence of disappearance (security persecution, obstacles in obtaining official documents, difficulty in commercial transactions such as buying and selling real estate and property).
8. 32.9% of the study sample were exposed to forms of “moral and physical” violence. 25.2% of the sample was subjected to arrest and detention.
9. Families of missing persons have been subjected to neglect and lack of attention (in many cases) by relevant international organizations, and to a lesser extent by Syrian civil society organizations.
10. 66.8% of the study sample suffered from severely dire living conditions due to the incidence of disappearance, in addition to other effects such as dismissal from work, in official or private institutions, and denial of employment opportunities by several employers.

11. 68.4% of the sample reported cases of missing and disappearance to the competent bodies, “official, or local or international human rights bodies,” compared to 31.6% who did not report.
12. Only 6.4% of the study sample are affiliated with associations for missing persons.
13. 87.5% of the study sample have not heard of The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic.
14. “Revealing the fate of the missing persons” remains the highest priority for families of missing persons, while other needs and priorities surface, namely “reparation” and “provision of legal support.”
15. Families of missing persons had the desire to have a “precise mechanism” to record, document and preserve data of the missing, with expectations of financial compensation for the financial losses incurred by families of the missing in relation to the period of disappearance during which they had to pay bribes to find out the whereabouts of missing persons, or to compensate them financially for losing work due to the incidence of disappearance.
16. The most prominent needs of women were supporting education for the children of missing persons and settling the status of unregistered children. There were also needs related to vocational training and education for women and the need to provide financial support to fund income-generating projects, as well as the constant provision of medical, therapeutic and psychosocial support for them.



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## **Section one**

### **the Study's methodological Framework**

#### **I. Subject and relevance of the study**

After nearly thirteen years of conflict in Syria, chances of revealing the fate of missing and forcibly disappeared persons are diminishing as a result of the Syrian spiral of violence by all parties. It has become clear that any effective mechanisms concerned with revealing the fate of those who have gone missing, whether in the Syrian regime's detention centers, mass graves, or the prisons and detention centers of other de facto authorities in the landscape of the Syrian conflict, have stumbled. The incidence of disappearance extended to neighboring countries or through the smuggling routes which Syrians took in their attempt to escape death. In the midst of all that, many of the forces in control of different Syrian territories, most notably the Syrian regime, continue to perpetrate violations that lead, every time, to cases of missing and forced disappearance.

The culture of violating the human rights of Syrian citizens did not arise as a result of confronting the popular movement in 2011. Since the Baath Party came to power, and then Hafez al-Assad took office in the 1970s, Syrians experienced various types of violations (such as arbitrary arrest and disappearance in prisons), adopting a systematic policy of forced disappearance of many of his opponents or those of other nationalities amid the political events that Syria and neighboring countries went through.

With the arrival of Hafez's son, Bashar al-Assad, to power as the president of Syria, inheriting the office from his father in 2000, and after a period of some reasonable space for freedom of opinion that was allowed, Syria witnessed a series of arrests of activists from political and cultural forums and civil society organizations. With the beginning of the popular movement in Syria in March 2011, the Syrian regime pursued the same policy with the crowds of protestors, including killings, arrests, and detentions. The question of missing persons became increasingly prominent.

As the popular movement continued and the Syrian landscape turned into something of a 'civil war', along with the presence of different actors sharing political and military control over Syrian territory, the numbers of missing and forcibly disappeared persons grew in the different areas of control of de facto authorities, which have changed over time in the same areas.

Nevertheless, the regime has been responsible for the largest percentage of cases of missing and forcibly disappeared persons. Because of displacement of Syrians to

neighboring countries and to Europe or other destinations, Syrians have endured so many risks on their routes of migration, especially those across the sea. So many men, women and children have gone missing in those routes which continues to happen to date.

Over the years of conflict in Syria, many international bodies worked on collecting the available data on violations which constitute the issue of missing persons. Those bodies, such as the International Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI), as well as relevant Syrian civil society organizations, sought to provide the available data, records and files related to the issue of missing persons. The International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) collected 22,000 records of the missing persons and 65,000 records of families of the missing, including reference DNA samples to test and match DNA as explained by Lena al-Husseini, head of ICMP's Syria/MENA Program.”<sup>[1]</sup>

In addition to the continuous and diligent work undertaken by victims, survivors and their families, as well as community-based associations and civil society organizations, accompanied with the efforts of many international bodies in this regard, on 23 June 2023, the UNGA adopted resolution A/77/L.79 establishing The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic to reveal the fate and whereabouts of missing and forcibly disappeared people in Syria and to provide support to the victims and their families.<sup>[2]</sup>

The incidence of disappearance in Syria was not the result of a natural disaster (earthquakes or hurricanes, for example), rather it emerged concurrently with grave human rights violations, in which the Syrian regime was primarily involved, before other conflicting parties on Syrian territory. Thus, the COI recommended that it was necessary to begin with the first steps to establish a unified mechanism by coordinating and integrating the information and claims that are already present in the records of a large number of entities and bodies, creating a unified database and securing a “comprehensive central database” so that families can submit requests to reveal the fate of their relatives and track their trace, by facilitating ways for joint identification and monitoring of burial sites, even if this is done remotely via satellites available over those areas in Syria, given the current lack of access.

According to statements by Paulo Pinheiro, chair of the COI, the mechanism responds to the wishes and demands of Syrian family associations and women's organizations. We expect the Government and all other duty bearers and organizations who hold information on Syria's tens of thousands of missing and/or disappeared to proactively engage with

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[1] <https://syriadirect.org/an-international-mechanism-to-reveal-the-fate-of-syrias-missing-from-words-to-action/>

[2] <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2023/06/1121562>

this new institution.<sup>[3]</sup> In the meanwhile, the resolution was met with rejection and objection by the Syrian regime and its allies such as Russia and China, with the regime's continued denial of recognition of the crimes of enforced disappearance, and the continuation of its violations with a complete blackout on everything related to detention centers, and the absence of any information that Syrian and international human rights organizations can verify.

The importance of this report lies in two levels:

1. Access to a large number of subjects within the sample of families of missing people, which is the largest and broadest in the reports or studies that dealt with families of missing persons in all of Syria until the time of conducting this study. The sample was distributed, through diligent scientific efforts, in the four zones of control inside Syria, in Syrian governorates, as well as in neighboring countries where Syrian refugees are present (Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Turkiye), in addition to Syrian refugees in European countries.

All of the above makes the research sample stand out as a sample that comes close to accurately representing the families of missing persons, who have not been reached in studies related to their reality and needs.

2. Taking a step towards talking about the new mechanism for missing persons in relation to the families of missing and forcibly disappeared persons, and probe into their perceptions, aspirations and expectations from the work of this new mechanism, after so many years of documentation and search without arriving at what could constitute clear evidence about the fate of their loved ones and relatives.

## **II. Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were as follows:

1. Identifying the attitudes of the families of missing persons towards the work of the newly created institution in revealing the fate of missing persons.
2. Identifying the aspirations and vision of the families of missing persons of the work of The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic.
3. Identifying the needs of the families of missing persons so that contribute actively to the new institution.
4. Identifying the needs of women of the families of missing persons from the new institution.

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[3] <https://www.ohchr.org/ar/statements/2023/09/statement-paulo-pinheiro-chair-independent-international-commission-inquiry>

### **III. Definitions of the study**

1. The missing person: is every Syrian person, or those of equivalent status,<sup>[4]</sup> who went missing during the events of the Syrian revolution, since 2011 until the time the research was conducted. The incidence of disappearance includes every case that has not been confirmed by the family of the missing person through seeing or burying the dead body, or receiving the remains of the missing person, even if the family had been notified of the death of the missing person by the existing authorities or through information from friends or inmates of the detainee or otherwise.
2. Family of the missing person: individuals who are directly related to the missing person. Wherever the term 'family of the missing' is mentioned in this study, it refers to women and men alike. The majority of the relatives of the missing, according to the study, are women, including wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters of the missing, given that the majority of missing people in Syria are men.
3. The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic: On 29 June 2023, the UNGA adopted a resolution establishing a new international institution to reveal the fate of missing persons in Syria. The decision was a key step to support all people seeking answers about the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones, and who are suffering from the circumstances and hardships associated with the disappearance of a loved one. This new institution will devote its efforts to granting families their right to know the truth, and will also work to meet the basic humanitarian needs of the families of the missing.

**The definition was formulated in accordance with United Nations General Assembly Resolution No. A/RES/77/301 dated 29 June 2023, and the study samples were collected before the issuance of the Secretary-General's report No. A/78/627 dated 1 December, 2023, which established the mandate of the institution, which clarifies that support is closely linked to the part of the mandate related to research.**

4. Reparation: It is the recognition of the harm experienced by victims of human rights violations and compensation to the victims as part of the right to access judicial remedies. Reparation includes: moral restitution, financial compensation, rehabilitation, financial settlement, and guarantees of non-recurrence. (Reparation may be made on an individual or collective level)
5. Exposure to difficult psychological situations at a certain stage: refers to times when the

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[4] This wording refers to the Palestinian-Syrians who have been living in Syria since the Nakba of 1948

family of the missing person is exposed to states of anxiety, fear, distress, or sadness during the time they are missing.

6. Exposure to psychological harm and seeing a psychiatrist: The presence of a psychological problem that required resorting to a psychiatrist, such as cases of depression or fear of unknown origin, or other issues that require seeing a doctor to diagnose the condition.
7. A chronic psychological problem: The presence of a persistent psychological issue that requires periodic or permanent treatment using medications or behavioral therapy with a psychiatrist.
8. Place of missing: it means the place where the missing person was last seen, be it their home, a street or any other place before their disappearance.

## **IV. Methodology of the Study**

The study adopts the 'analytical descriptive methodology' which describes the phenomenon in question and interprets it. This methodology relies on explaining the current situation and identifying conditions and relations among the variables. It also delves into analyzing, linking, interpreting, categorizing, measuring data and making conclusions therefrom.

### **a. Tools of the study**

The main research tool was the questionnaire which was designed to address the families of missing and forcibly disappeared persons. It included the main study variables to be selected and studied.

The questionnaire included 26 questions, divided into five sections: (data of the respondent who is member of missing person's family, data of the missing person, legal and economic impacts, social and psychological impacts, needs, priorities and expectations).

Two brainstorming sessions were held with a group of heads of associations of missing persons and some human rights organizations, legal experts and civil society organizations working on the issues of missing and forcibly disappeared persons. These two sessions focused on discussing the needs and priorities of the families of the missing, as well as the legal, social and psychological aspects and their impact on families of the missing. The results of these two sessions guided the research design and implementation.

### **b. Study sample:**

In the absence of a formal and specific framework for the study sample, the most representative statistical method of the original population are used. Usually, several



statistical equations are used to determine a representative sample, taking into account the similar representation of the general characteristics of the sample, such as sex, age, place of residence, and place of disappearance in this study in particular.

The “non-probability sampling”<sup>[5]</sup> was chosen to target the original research population. It is the sample that is adopted when there are certain subjects of the study population, and therefore these subjects must be part of the sample. It is also a choice with a certain purpose (usually we have a particular group that we are looking for). Non-probability sampling helps identify the opinions of the target community.

Since the original target community is that of the families of missing persons, the study sample was selected from among ‘available’ respondents appropriate to the topic of the study, who were accessible in the regions where the study was conducted.

After data cleaning and dropping some of the questionnaires that did not meet the required conditions, the total size of the sample was 2,560, distributed as follows:

1	<b>Syrian regime-held areas</b>	570
2	<b>Salvation Government areas (Idlib and its Countryside)</b>	304
3	<b>Interim Government areas</b>	295
4	<b>Autonomous Administration areas</b>	373
5	<b>Neighboring Countries (Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt)</b>	364
6	<b>Türkiye</b>	370
7	<b>Europe</b>	284
<b>Overall total of the sample</b>		<b>2560</b>

### **c. Data collection:**

Interviews were carried out with the families of missing persons by a team consisting of 43 data collectors: 22 females and 21 males. Data collectors themselves were family members of missing persons, survivors of detention, and former workers in civil society organizations, which facilitated access to the study sample. Data collection took place between 15 November 2023 and 10 December 2023.

[5] Non-probability sampling is a method of sample selection that uses non-random ways to select a group of people, and it relies on the researcher’s knowledge of the nature of the research population, on which he relies to select the sample.

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Data collectors were trained on the questionnaire, and a pilot sample was carried out before the actual collection began. It is noteworthy that the majority of the data collection team previously worked in this field and had knowledge of the mechanisms of dealing with families of the missing persons responding to the study, in addition to receiving training on ways for dealing with respondents. They were provided with the most prominent terms of the study which were discussed with them, and that enabled them to collect accurate data.

#### **d. Data Analysis**

After the completion of data collection, coding, and transcription, the data was processed, analyzed, and statistical findings were extracted using the SPSS software. The data was analyzed based on the correlations coming from the data, and based on the relationship between the study variables. These relationships between variables are included in the Correlation Between Variables panel, which you can review with the report on the website of The Day After.

## Section Two

# Missing and Enforced Disappearance (International Law and International and Local Experiences)

Conflict situations in different countries, depending on the degree and severity of the conflict, create many cases of missing and disappearance. The International Committee of the Red Cross defines missing persons as “A person whose whereabouts are unknown to his or her family, and/or who, on the basis of reliable information, has been reported missing in connection with an international or non-international armed conflict, or other situation of violence or internal disturbance, or any other situation that may require the intervention of a neutral and independent intermediary.”<sup>[6]</sup>

### A. Missing and Enforced Disappearance

Enforced disappearance means the “arrest, detention or abduction of persons”, or any other form of deprivation of freedom, by state agents, individuals or a group of individuals acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the state, followed by a refusal to acknowledge that deprivation of freedom or to give information on the fate or whereabouts of those persons. Sometimes, disappearances may be carried out by non-state armed actors, such as armed opposition groups. Victims are often tortured, or a number of them are killed, or live in constant fear of being killed.”<sup>[7]</sup>

The UNGA issued Resolution No. (33/173) on 20 December 1978, regarding disappeared persons, followed on 21 November 1979 by a report on enforced disappearance in Chile, in which it stated that the systematic practice of enforced disappearance constitutes a grave violation of human rights, and that the state, in accordance with its international obligations, is obliged to identify the fate of disappeared persons, hold the perpetrators legally accountable, pay compensation to victims of enforced disappearance, and take the necessary measures to deter it in the future.

On 29 February 1980, the Human Rights Commission supported France’s initiative to create a Working Group on Enforced Disappearances for a period of one year in order to look into issues related to enforced disappearances. This Working Group was the first special committee concerned with human rights in general, and enforced disappearances in particular. The recommendations made by this Group played a major role in the drafting of the 1992 Declaration on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance,

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[6] Exploring Humanitarian Law – Glossary, <https://ar.guide-humanitarian-law.org/content/article/5/lmfqwdwn-wlmwt>

[7] Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/ar/what-we-do/disappearances>

and the drafting of the “International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance,” as well as in its adoption on 20 December 2006. In addition to the importance of these recommendations with regard to formulating the concept of enforced disappearance in national penal legislation, as well as in addressing cases of enforced disappearance in various countries.

Until the 1980s, enforced disappearance was not defined as an independent crime; it was rather defined as a violation of a number of human rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966, and the European Convention on Human Rights of 1950, which are: the right to life, the right to liberty and personal security, freedom from torture, and the right to a fair trial and judicial guarantees.

Currently, there are several international legal mechanisms to protect people from enforced disappearance, which are enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance of 1992, the Inter-American Convention on Enforced Disappearance of Persons of 1994, and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance of 2006, and Statute of the International Criminal Court of 1998.

Given the importance of having a comprehensive and binding international agreement to address cases of enforced disappearance, the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights developed the first draft of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance in 1998, which was approved by the UNGA on 20 December 2006.

The Convention adopted several Mechanisms to address cases of enforced disappearance including: prohibition, deterrence, oversight of implementation and punishment. Many provisions of the Convention stressed the need for State Parties to investigate cases of enforced disappearance and hold the perpetrators criminally accountable. A large part of the Convention’s provisions was devoted to deterring enforced disappearance by guaranteeing freedoms and rights at the stage of arrest or detention, prohibiting the use of secret or unknown places of detention, and the importance of establishing a special register for detained persons. Enforced disappearance is a continuous crime, as long as the fate or whereabouts of the victim remain undetermined. Determining the ongoing nature of the crime is important for identifying the investigative and judicial jurisdictions, as well as for estimating the negative consequences resulting therefrom and the amount of compensation.<sup>[8]</sup>

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[8] See: Confronting the Crime of Enforced Disappearance in the Proceedings of Human Rights Courts, Hussein Issa, <https://aijhssa.us/بيطري-في-يسقلا-افتخدا-قميرج-ي-حصتلا/>

The issue of missing persons is politically charged, as information is usually deliberately withheld by parties to the conflict for fear of domestic or international legal accountability; and of course to cover up the extent of crimes committed by any existing political authority.

The Geneva Conventions of August 1949 provides for the obligations that parties to international armed conflicts must meet by taking all possible measures to clarify the fate of missing persons, search for persons declared missing by the opposing party, and record information about such persons.<sup>[9]</sup>

If the individual is missing because he/she is being detained or under treatment by an adversary, International Humanitarian Law requires that their families and the authorities must be notified through three channels: notification of hospitalization, capture or detention; sending of capture or detention warrant; and the right to communicate with their families. The detaining authorities also have an obligation to respond to inquiries about protected persons.<sup>[10]</sup> Parties to the conflict and international humanitarian organizations must take all possible measures to ensure that families know the fate of missing persons by collecting information about them.

## **B. Incidence of Missing and Enforced disappearances in Syria**

Under the reign of Hafez al-Assad, Syrians experienced arbitrary detention and disappearance in the dungeons and detention centers of security branches. This was accompanied by a systematic practice of enforced disappearance of many of Assad's opponents. This long period of rule witnessed so many internal and external political events, in which the security political regime used the policy of enforced disappearance against Syrians, whose fate remains unknown until today.

The problem of detaining and disappearing Syrians began since Hafez al-Assad took power in 1970, when politicians in that period were sent to prisons for decades without trial or specific charges. This was followed by a phase of detention and disappearance of opposition politicians of different affiliations: Islamists, communists, nationalists among others.

The second wave of arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances took place with the protests that Syria witnessed during the period of activity of the "Muslim Brotherhood" organization from 1979 to 1982. These events were concentrated in the city of Hama in particular, where thousands of Syrians were arrested and disappeared and the fate of so many people is still unknown until this day.

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[9] 1<sup>st</sup> Geneva Convention, articles 19-20; 2<sup>nd</sup> Geneva Convention, articles 16-17, 3<sup>rd</sup> Geneva Convention, articles 122-125; 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention, articles 136-141; protocol 1, articles 32-33.

[10] 1<sup>st</sup> Geneva Convention, article 16; 2<sup>nd</sup> Geneva Convention, article 19; 3<sup>rd</sup> Geneva Convention, articles 70-71, 122-123; 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention, articles 106-107 and 140; protocol 1, article 33.



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That was followed by another period until the late 1990s of systematic series of arrests that targeted hundreds of left-leaning politicians against the backdrop of secret peaceful activities, some of which were merely issuing statements or paper pamphlets opposing the policies of the existing political regime.

As Bashar al-Assad became president of Syria, inheriting power from his father in 2000, the situation was not much different at first. Although Syrians thought that there was some room for opposition and freedom of opinion, Syria witnessed a series of arrests that targeted activists of the 'Damascus Spring', political and cultural forums, and civil society organizations.

With the beginning of the popular uprising in Syria in March 2011, the Syrian regime pursued the same policy against the masses of protestors, including killing, detention and disappearance in prisons. Security agencies and the para-military militias that were created killed and detained thousands of protestors. A significantly increasing number of people have begun to go missing as the regime pursued a policy of enforced disappearance without revealing people's fate, amid the inability of the different human rights organizations to uncover their fate, despite all efforts.

As the popular movement continued and the Syrian case turned into something of a 'civil war' with several forces controlling different territories militarily and politically, the numbers of missing and forcibly disappeared people have increased in the zones of control of the de facto authorities, which have changed over time in the same areas. Here it is worth mentioning the control of The Islamic State Organization (ISIS) over large parts of the provinces of Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, then the end of its control as it was replaced by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), whose backbone is made up of the People's Protection Units (YPG) affiliated with the Kurdistan Democratic Union Party. This replacement of control was accompanied by the displacement of the population and demographic restructuring of the area. Likewise, the 'National Army' took control of the northern countryside of Aleppo, accompanied by displacement of residents from their areas. The same applies to the control of the radical forces, the 'Salvation Government', in the areas of Idlib and its countryside.

Nevertheless, the largest number of missing and forcibly disappeared people remains under responsibility of the Syrian regime. Because of the displacement of Syrians and migration to neighboring countries, Europe and other regions, Syrians were exposed to many dangers on their migration routes, especially smuggling routes by sea, where many men, women and children were lost in the "death boats" as they have come to be known, which continue to happen to date.

All incidents of missing, disappearance, abduction, and death through smuggling are consequences of the increasing violence on Syrian soil, in light of the presence of different authorities in each region, which has led to this increase in incidence of missing and disappearance.

On the legal and human rights levels, the question of missing and disappeared persons in Syria has begun to surface more in conjunction with the arrest campaign carried out by the regime with the beginning of the popular movement, especially that human rights reports started to be published by Syrian civil society organizations. The COI made successive recommendations regarding Syria, especially ones related to the necessity of establishing a mechanism to help Syrians uncover tens of thousands of missing and forcibly disappeared people. The activity of many Syrian associations and organizations concerned with the matter has intensified, especially with the successive reports and calls to establish a mechanism to address the issue of missing and forcibly disappeared persons in Syria.

These efforts culminated in the adoption of Resolution 76/228 in December 2021 by UNGA, in which it requested the Secretary-General of the United Nations to study how to strengthen efforts of uncovering the fate of missing persons in Syria. The COI issued its report, “Syria’s Missing and Disappeared: Is There a Way Forward?” on 17 June 2022.

On 29 June 2023, UNGA issued its resolution establishing The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing persons in Syria, and providing support to the victims and their families.

### **C. The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic**

On 29 June 2023, UNGA adopted a resolution establishing an “Independent Institution” under the auspices of the United Nations concerned with missing and forcibly disappeared persons in Syria. The mechanism’s work will focus on “clarifying the fate of missing persons” and “providing adequate support to the victims and families.” Voting on the draft resolution, drafted by Luxembourg, was as follows: 83 countries voted in favor, 11 against and 62 abstained out of 193 member states in the General Assembly.

In his report submitted in August 2022, the UN Secretary-General recommended to Member States of the General Assembly to consider establishing a new institution with a broad scope to clarify the whereabouts of persons whom there are reasonable grounds to believe are missing, describing it as a cornerstone for the path to solve the issue of the missing in Syria.

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic had



under, to be today the most prominent regions making progress in prosecuting enforced disappearances at national courts. Many countries have prosecuted officials for enforced disappearances and other acts that constitute international crimes, including the conviction of five former heads of states and a number of senior military, police and civilian officials on charges of enforced disappearance.

Argentina and Chile were at the forefront of these countries. The courts have convicted former heads of states, such as Fujimori in Peru and Bordaberry in Uruguay, for their responsibility in cases of enforced disappearance. In Guatemala, Ríos Montt was prosecuted and convicted for genocide (including acts of forced disappearances). In Colombia and other countries, some significant progress has been made, despite some cases of impunity, as in “Mexico, Brazil, Honduras, and Paraguay.”

Governments of the countries of that region relied on laws granting amnesty (or equivalent thereof) to those who committed enforced disappearances and other international crimes, and the constitutionality of these laws was ratified by most national courts. However, at a later stage, Latin American organizations resorted to international bodies and the Inter-American system, which led to the development of a jurisprudence ruling that amnesty laws may not apply in cases of enforced disappearance and other serious human rights violations. This led to keeping prosecutions open although the amnesty laws were enforced.

Thus, Latin America, through its judges, has developed advanced jurisprudential theories, such as the continuing nature of the crime of enforced disappearance, to avoid enforcing amnesty laws or to overcome, as much as possible, the effects of those laws.

The debate has shifted today in many Latin American countries from the idea of total impunity to the question of how to prosecute criminals in cases of enforced disappearance. The new cases in question range from the prosecution of complex and sensitive types of crimes, to holding trials, with the participation of many defendants and victims. Prosecutions and trials attempt to go beyond the perpetrators up to the senior military and civilian officials, as well as financial and political figures who were complicit in the crimes. In addition, there is an ultimate set of cases arising from post-conviction dilemmas relating to alternatives to imprisonment and the role of judicial rulings in crimes of enforced disappearance. A new wave of prosecutions is bringing to justice other non-traditional civilian actors for their roles in the perpetration of crimes of this nature. A federal court in Argentina convicted a priest for his involvement in enforced disappearances, and another Argentine federal court recently convicted several judges for complicity in enforced disappearances.

Alongside these efforts, Latin American countries sought justice for victims of enforced disappearance in foreign courts when amnesty laws or impunity schemes were in effect,

or when the victims or perpetrators were in a foreign country. Some examples range from the use of the Alien Tort Claims Act in the United States to the invocation of universal jurisdiction in the famous ‘Pinochet’ case and the conviction of former Argentine naval officer ‘Scilingo’ in Spain. Courts in Italy, Sweden, France, Switzerland, Belgium and Germany have also heard cases of enforced disappearance which took place in Latin America. These Latin American efforts have contributed to establishing judicial precedence regarding universal jurisdiction and state responsibility in prosecuting cases of enforced disappearance in other countries.<sup>[14]</sup>

### **The Cyprus Experience:**

Families of Greek and Turkish Cypriots who disappeared in the 1960s and 1970s have been waiting for the truth about the whereabouts of the remains of their loved ones and the circumstances of their disappearance. After efforts that lasted from 1975 and 1978, the UNGA adopted three different resolutions on missing persons in Cyprus, calling for the establishment of an investigatory body to tackle this humanitarian problem. Subsequently, the UNGA adopted two additional resolutions in 1981 and 1982 welcoming the establishment of CMP and urging CMP to proceed without delay in carrying out its mandate.<sup>[15]</sup> The Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus (CMP) was established in 1981 but did not begin its work until 2006.

CMP consists of 3 Members, representing Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities, and a third Member chosen by the International Committee of the Red Cross and appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General. CMP considers its objective to be primarily humanitarian. CMP does not attempt to establish the cause of death or attribute responsibility for the death of missing persons. Rather, it brings closure to thousands of affected families through the return of the remains of their missing relatives.<sup>[16]</sup> CMP adopts a process of five stages: investigation, excavation, anthropological analysis, DNA testing, then the return of the remains. As of early February 2024, it was able to identify 751 of the 1,510 Greek Cypriots, and 293 of the 492 missing Turkish Cypriots.<sup>[17]</sup>

Despite CMP’s efforts to identify the remains and return hundreds of them to the relatives of missing persons, its evaluation as a tool for promoting reconciliation is still below the desired level. This may be due to considerations such as how and when the truth is reached, as well as the type of truth it presents. This is linked with basic factors including: the long time passed, the committee’s mandate, and the absence of political will.

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[14] The Latin-American Flavor of Enforced Disappearances, Ariel E. Dulitzky, Chicago Journal of International Law, Volume 19 Number 2, 2-1-2019.

[15] <https://www.cmp-cyprus.org/origins/>

[16] <https://www.cmp-cyprus.org/who-we-are/>

[17] <https://www.cmp-cyprus.org/statistics/>



All disappearances in Cyprus occurred in two phases; during the sectarian conflict in the period 1963-1964, when most of the victims were Turkish Cypriots, and during the Turkish military operations in 1974, when the majority of the missing were Greek Cypriots. In addition to the time CMP took from its establishment in the early 1980s to the present day, many families have been waiting to know the fate of missing persons for 50 or 60 years.

Determining the causes of death and attributing disappearance to a specific party does not fall within the mandate of CMP, and this is reflected in reconciliation efforts among the families of the disappeared who seek to know the truth. The 'Missing Truth in Cyprus' investigation states that CMP's report did not provide information on how the missing person was killed, or on the source of information that led to the discovery of the remains. In one case, a Turkish Cypriot woman revealed the location of 9 bodies buried under a tree a few meters away from her. She had witnessed the killing of the nine people 32 years ago, and planted the tree to remember the location of the bodies. The relative of the missing persons only learned of this story because of his close personal relationships with CMP staff.

So far, CMP has not undertaken any initiatives that contribute to reconciliation efforts, such as commemoration, while parties affiliated with the Turkish and Greek parties individually honor the victims, which leads to widening the gap between the two parties instead of bridging it and achieving reconciliation. This failure may be due to a lack of political will for reconciliation.

## **E. Seeking the Truth of Enforced Disappearances**

The Latin American experience has helped families of disappeared persons to understand that they are victims of enforced disappearance and have the right to know the truth. The truth regarding enforced disappearances means the right to know the progress and results of the investigation, the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared persons, circumstances of disappearance, and the identity of perpetrators. This contributed to understanding the legal, ethical, moral and political reason for truth seeking. The Inter-American System made major contributions to give specific legal meaning to this right and duty.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights summarized the contributions of the Inter-American system to understanding the content of the right to the truth as follows:

1. The right to truth: It is the right of victims and members of their families to know the truth about events that led to gross human rights violations, and the right to know the identity of those involved in such violations.
2. A principle has been established that the holders of this right are not only the victims and their family members, but also society at large.

3. Courts and tribunals in Latin America have explicitly reaffirmed the right to know the truth in cases of enforced disappearance. For example, the Mexican Supreme Court has held that the right to the truth allows relatives of a victim of enforced disappearance to access the content of a criminal investigation, even if the decision is not to prosecute or continue the investigation.

Other regions have copied, transformed and adopted initiatives taken in Latin America since the 1980s. Latin American methods in particular have used truth commissions to highlight the practice of enforced disappearance. Truth commissions have explained how enforced disappearances occur in each country, the repressive strategies used by governments to carry out disappearances, the temporal and geographic scope of the practice, victims of the crime, and institutional responsibilities for those disappearances. In some cases, truth commissions named specific individuals accused of committing the crimes of disappearance. Some truth commissions have begun searching and planning to find the missing persons.

Truth commissions, as an accountability strategy, gained international attention late in the last century, and almost all Latin American countries now have a truth commission to look into the issue of enforced disappearance. Truth commissions have helped expose the monopoly exercised by perpetrators of disappearances over interpretation by denying the cases of disappearance, disregarding or justifying them.

In order to search for and identify people who have disappeared, as part of the right to truth, many Latin American countries have developed search techniques, genetic capabilities, and formed forensic anthropology teams such as those in Argentina, Peru, and Guatemala. The use of forensic teams to lead the search for the remains of missing persons has spread from Latin America to other parts of the world. For example, the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF) focused on the large number of disappeared people in Argentina and developed a methodology that would open “a new era of forensic anthropologists’ involvement in global investigations in the aftermath of political violence.”

EAAF provided its expertise to assist the countries of Latin America, Asia, Africa and Europe: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, Angola, Côte d’Ivoire, Cyprus, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Kenya, Morocco, Namibia, Philippines, Romania, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Togo and Zimbabwe. EAAF has also worked with international efforts in Bosnia, Croatia, Georgia/Abkhazia, Haiti, Iraq, Kosovo, the Philippines, and East Timor.

## F. Reparations and Memory

Latin America has also made enormous contributions in terms of the right to and scope of reparations for victims of enforced disappearance. The Inter-American Court has provided innovative judicial opinions on the subject. Some of the measures ordered by the Inter-American Court in cases of enforced disappearances include national initiatives to trace disappeared persons, identify, respect and return the disappeared person, establish a genetic information system, compensate for financial and non-financial damages, investigate crimes and punish their perpetrators, provide specialized medical and psychological care to victims, designate a day for disappeared persons, establish a memorial commemorating the disappeared persons, publish a bibliographic outline of the life of the disappeared person, organize human rights training courses for State officials, publicly recognize the disappearance, and publish parts of the court ruling.

Most Latin American countries have, to varying degrees, granted compensations or designed schemes to compensate victims of enforced disappearance with varying levels of implementation and success. Some discussions included the gender-based approach for compensations, the possibility of administrative compensation programs, the inapplicability of the statute of limitation to compensations, memory as part of compensation, and compensation from a cultural perspective. For example, the region pioneered in developing important programs and standards for mental health care for relatives of the disappeared. As with truth and justice initiatives, compensation programs have generated intense debate. In some countries, these programs created deep divisions between the relatives' organizations, with some holding that accepting compensation would mean "selling" their children, granting impunity, or acknowledging that the disappeared were dead.

Latin America has also pioneered with significant contributions to "memory efforts," both by the state and through private or public-private initiatives. Museums and memory spaces do important work in this area, because along with building memorials, they help recover places that symbolize disappearances. The topic of memory has been reflected in fields as diverse as literature, cinema, photography, and television series.

All of these memory initiatives became ways to bear witness, humanize victims, make the past horrors visible, and understand what happened. Initiatives encourage reflection and discussion, promote remembrance and expression of dissent, challenge misleading narratives of events, and promote awareness of human rights violations.

## Section Three – Findings of the Field Study

### I. General Characteristics of the study sample

#### a. Data of respondents from families of missing people

##### 1. Sex

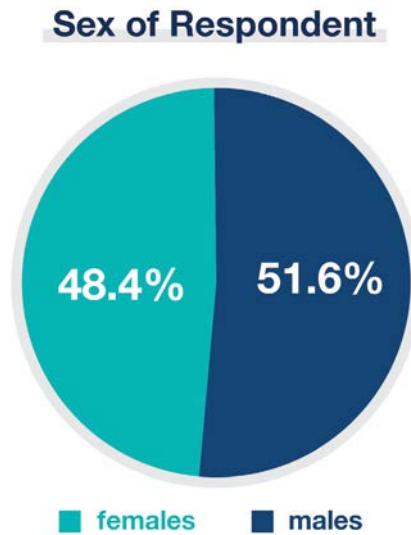


Figure (1) sample distribution by sex of respondent

Percentage of males in the study sample was 51.6% compared to 48.4% of females. The balanced representation of the sample was taken into account in terms of the sex variable.

##### 2. Age

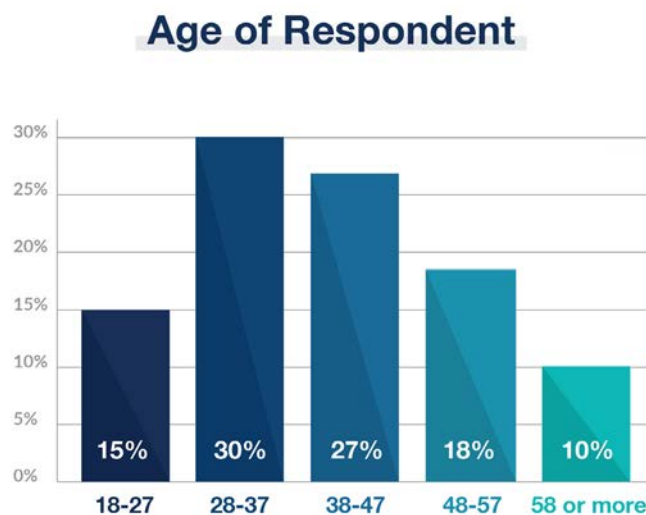


Figure (2) sample distribution by age group

The age categories of the sample varied. The highest percentage was for the age group (28-37) and the lowest was for the age group (58 and above).

### 3. Current place of residence

#### Current Place of Residence

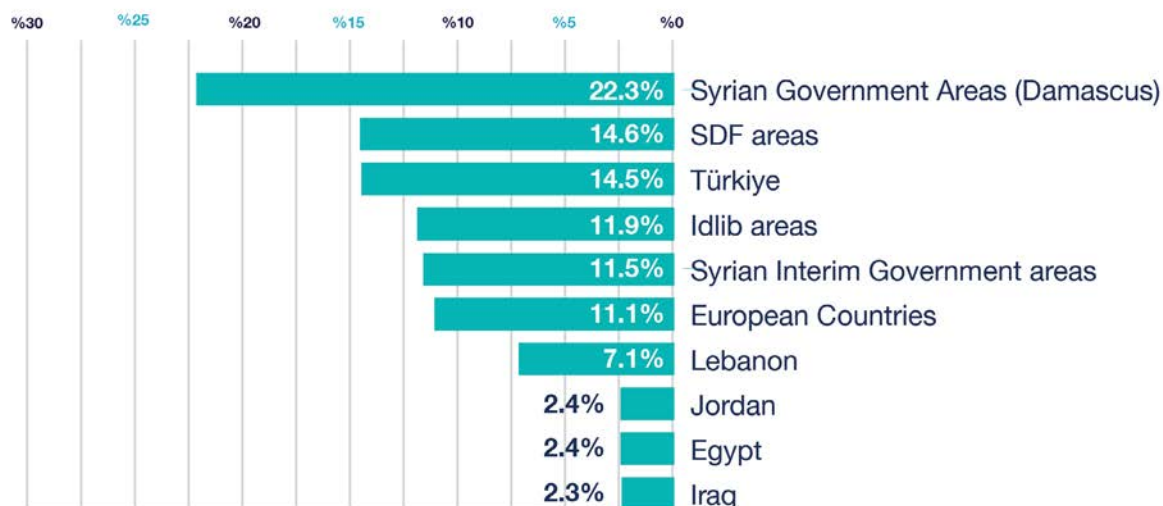


Figure (3) sample distribution by current place of residence

The study sample was distributed on areas where Syrians are present after the waves of displacement they experienced. The largest percentage of respondents was in Syrian Government areas 22.3%, and the smallest was in Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, as shown in the graph above.

#### 4. Degree of kinship to the missing person

The study sample was broken down to four categories by the degree of kinship as follows:

First degree: father/mother/ children (husband/wife)

Second degree: grandfather/grandmother/ siblings/ grandchildren

Third degree: uncles and aunts (father side or mother side)/nephews and nieces

Fourth degree: cousins/in-laws

## Degree of Kinship to the Missing Person

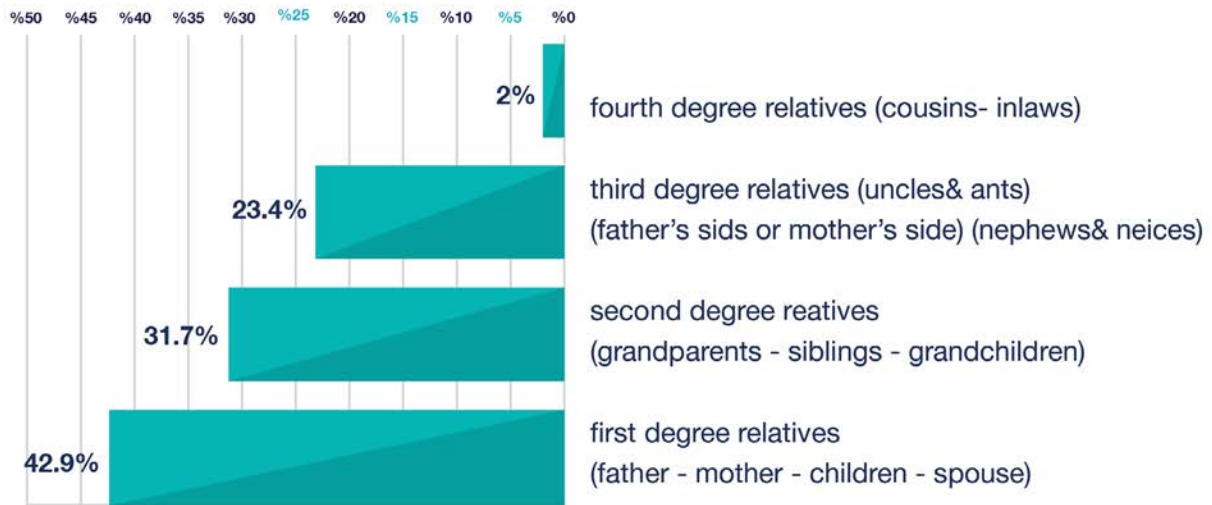


Figure (4) sample distribution by degree of kinship to the missing person

The study sample was distributed by degree of kinship to the missing person on four degrees of kinship. The highest percentage of respondents were relatives from the first degree with 42.9% and the smallest share were relatives from the fourth degree with 2%.

### b. Data of the missing

#### 1. Sex of the missing

### Sex of the Missing Person

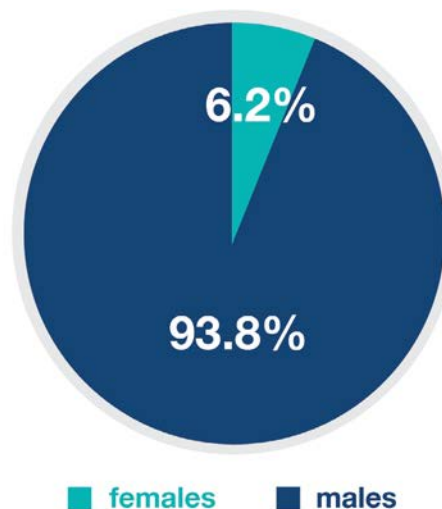


Figure (5) sex of the missing person



Males were the largest percentage of the missing within the study sample with 93% compared to 6.2% of females.

## 2. Age of the missing person at the time of disappearance

### Age of the missing person at the time of disappearance

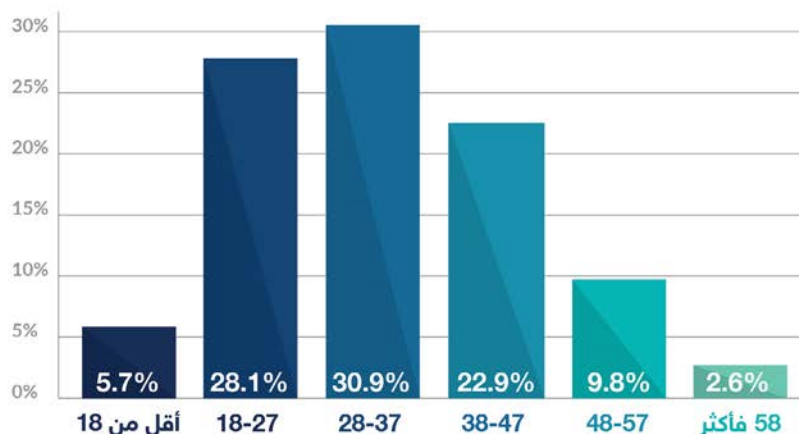


Figure (6) age of the missing person at the time of disappearance

Ages of the missing persons within the study sample varied at the time of their disappearance, but the largest percentage were in the age group 28-37 when they went missing, followed by 18-27 and 38-47, respectively, which is consistent with the fact that the above age groups have been targeted by authorities in the various regions of Syria. Additionally, they experienced various types of violence and dangers during their escape journey outside Syria.

## 3. Date of disappearance

The years of disappearance were divided into four periods:

- The first period: between 2011 and 2013, Syrians witnessed cases of forced disappearance by the regime against the backdrop of the anti-regime protests and the raid campaigns by the army and intelligence branches into cities and villages, causing the disappearance of thousands of Syrians. This is reflected in data, as the percentage of missing persons in the study sample in this period reached 43.3%.
- The second period: between 2014 and 2016. This period witnessed the emergence of military forces of multiple ideologies. ISIS took control of large areas of Syria after

declaring the caliphate in 2014.<sup>[18]</sup> Russia announced its intervention in Syria to support the Syrian regime in September 2015,<sup>[19]</sup> and the fronts of military operations expanded with the support of Iran and Hezbollah to the regime. In addition to the waves of mass migration to Europe across the sea, on the so-called the “death boats.” All of these factors led to the disappearance of more Syrians, and this is reflected in the findings of the study. One third of the respondents said that their relatives went missing during that period.

- The third period: between 2017 In 2019, Syria witnessed one of its worst humanitarian disasters, which was the forced displacement of residents of the eastern part of Aleppo, eastern and western Ghoutas of Damascus and its southern neighborhoods, Daraa, and the northern countryside of Homs and southern countryside of Hama, as part of the so-called reconciliation agreements that led to the arrest and later the disappearance of many of those who refused to be displaced, especially young people.
- The fourth period: which extends until the date of writing this report. According to the survey sample, it witnessed the lowest percentages of disappearance, due to the state of stability and the agreements signed by the guarantor countries, despite displacement of people from the southern and eastern countryside of Idlib, and some violations committed by forces in control of regime-held areas and areas outside its control.

2011-2013 (the peaceful period of the revolution, then armament and turning to a war)

2014-2016 (the period of emergence of different military and political powers conflicting on Syrian territory)

2017-2019 (the period of dividing control over the different areas in Syria and the continuation of hostilities)

2020-2023 (period of relative stability and de facto authority that continue to be seen today in Syria)

[18] Aljazeera, It has gone through five milestones.. declaring the demise of the caliphate of ISIS, 2019 <https://www.aljazeera.net/politics/2019/3/23/ايروس-قلودلا-ميطنت-قفلادلا-لاوز/>

[19] Al-Khouri, Ilias, Baladi News, Causes and Motives.. Why Russia Intervened Militarily in Syria, 2021 <https://baladi-news.com/ar/articles/73629/ايروس-سي-ف-ايركس-ايسور-تباخت-اناملو-عفاودلاو-باباسلأنا/>

## Date of Disappearance

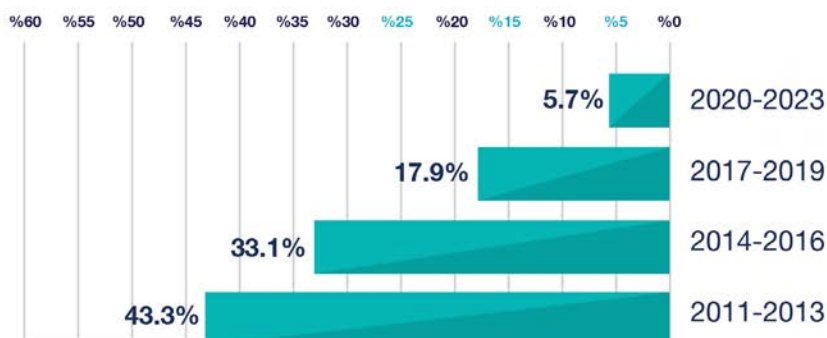


Figure (7) date of disappearance within the study sample

Field findings showed that the highest percentage of disappearance in the study sample was in the early stages of the Syrian revolution and war (2011 to 2016), which is consistent with the pattern of conflict in those two stages, where political and military tensions increased, and the level of violence increased among all parties. In addition to the subsequent displacement operations in the various areas of control, this exposed Syrians to the risks of irregular migration to neighboring countries and Europe and contributed to the incidence of many cases of people who went missing or disappeared. The following figure shows the percentages divided by year.

## Date of Disappearance by Year

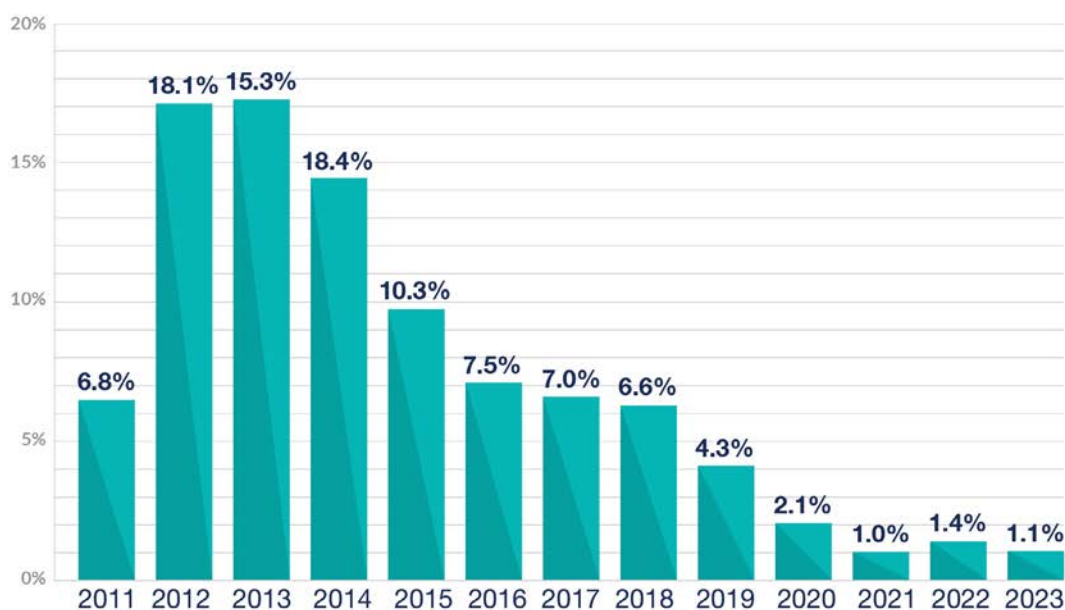


Figure (8) date of disappearance by year

## 4. Place of Disappearance

91.8% of respondents of the study sample reported that they knew the place where the missing person went missing (inside Syria, neighboring countries, smuggling routes, etc.), whereas 8.2% of them did not know where the person went missing. The knowledge of the place of disappearance among respondents is illustrated in the following figure:

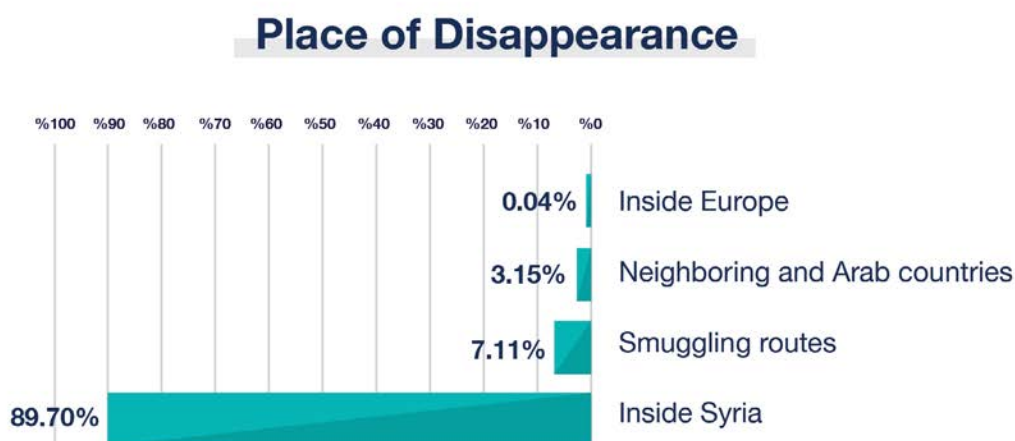


Figure (9) knowledge of the study sample of the place of disappearance

The highest percentage of missing persons was inside Syria with 89.7%, distributed among the different areas under the various de facto authorities. Next came ‘smuggling routes to Europe’ with 7.11%, and smaller percentages of people who went missing in neighboring and Arab countries. These numbers are consistent with the fact that forced disappearance is one of the most prominent causes of the incidence of disappearance, as the number of people forcibly disappeared reached 112,713 people who went missing at the hands of the parties to the conflict and forces in control inside Syria.<sup>[20]</sup>

[20] SYRIA'S MISSING AND DISAPPEARED, THE INDEPENDENT INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ON THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC, 17 JUNE 2022. [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/PolicyPaperSyrias-MissingAndDisappeared\\_17June2022\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/PolicyPaperSyrias-MissingAndDisappeared_17June2022_EN.pdf)

## II. Social and Psychological Impacts of Disappearance Cases.

The disappearance of many Syrians resulted in multiple social and psychological consequences, based on the position of the missing person in the family on the one hand, and the location of his family on the other hand, which plays an important role in the issue of social and psychological support or lack thereof by the surrounding community.

### 1. The Social Impacts of Disappearance

Field findings showed that the study sample was exposed to negative discrimination by official institutions “in every area of control,” which indicates the involvement of those parties in the disappearances. Negative discrimination or “bullying and ill-treatment” by institutions of the authorities in control was manifested in ill-treatment when asked about missing persons in security branches, or obstructing the provision of some services in some institutions.

Relatives of missing persons were also exposed to negative behavior by the surrounding local community, to varying degrees. Families of missing persons experienced social isolation, disregard, and blame by the social environment, family, and relatives, in addition to social stigma, which means being “outcast” from the circle of general consensus of the local community, in their positions on the political events taking place in each respective region.

### Social Impact of Disappearance

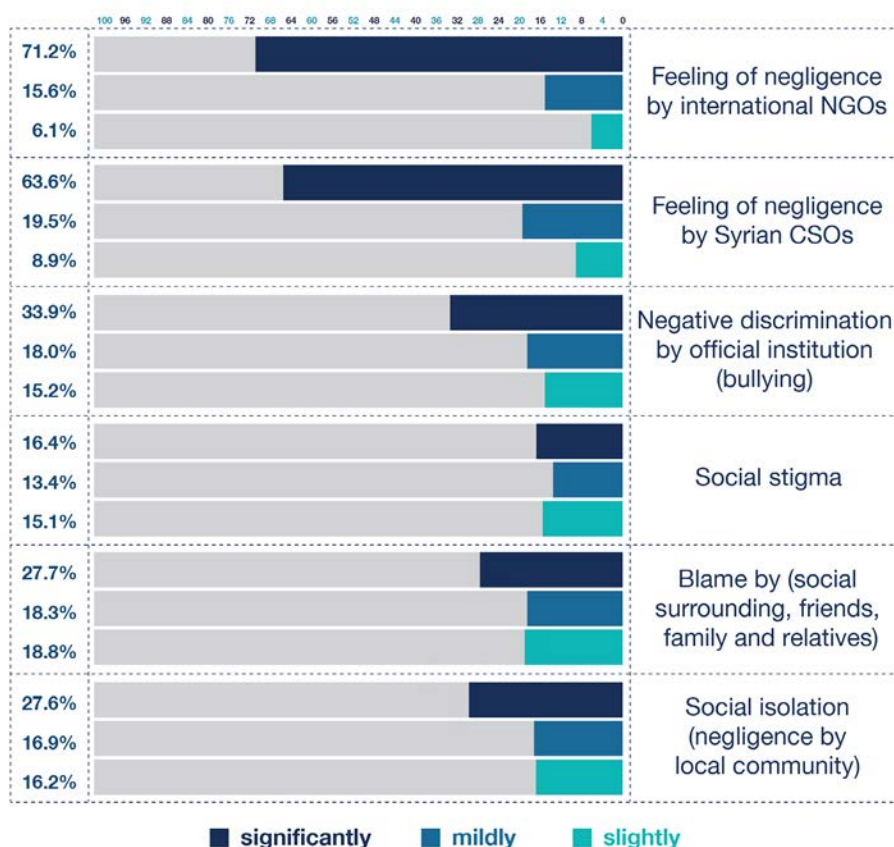


Figure (10) social impacts of disappearance

On the other hand, a high percentage of the study sample reported that they were subjected to disregard and lack of attention by relevant international organizations, and to a lesser, yet high extent, by Syrian civil society organizations.

Despite the efforts made by associations of missing persons and Syrian civil society organizations to document and follow up on cases of missing people, the fact that civil society organizations are new and the legal spaces in which they can operate are limited, in addition to the large volume of cases of missing persons and their families make this undertaking way beyond the ability of these organizations to meet the needs. All of that makes their role fall short of the expectations of some of the missing persons' families. However, this finding raises a question of the roles that international and local organizations can play in the coming period.

The study sample reported other effects the incidence of disappearance, including: exposure to harassment, a constant feeling of fear, and a feeling of remorse. In terms of the respondent's sex variable, the findings showed that women were exposed to social isolation, blame from the social environment, stigma, and bullying more than men, even though by a slight difference. This in turn reflects on the image of women in society and their inferior status compared to men. Disregard by local and international organizations was more common among men, possibly due to social relationships that allow men to communicate with organizations more.

### Social Impacts of Missing a Person by Sex

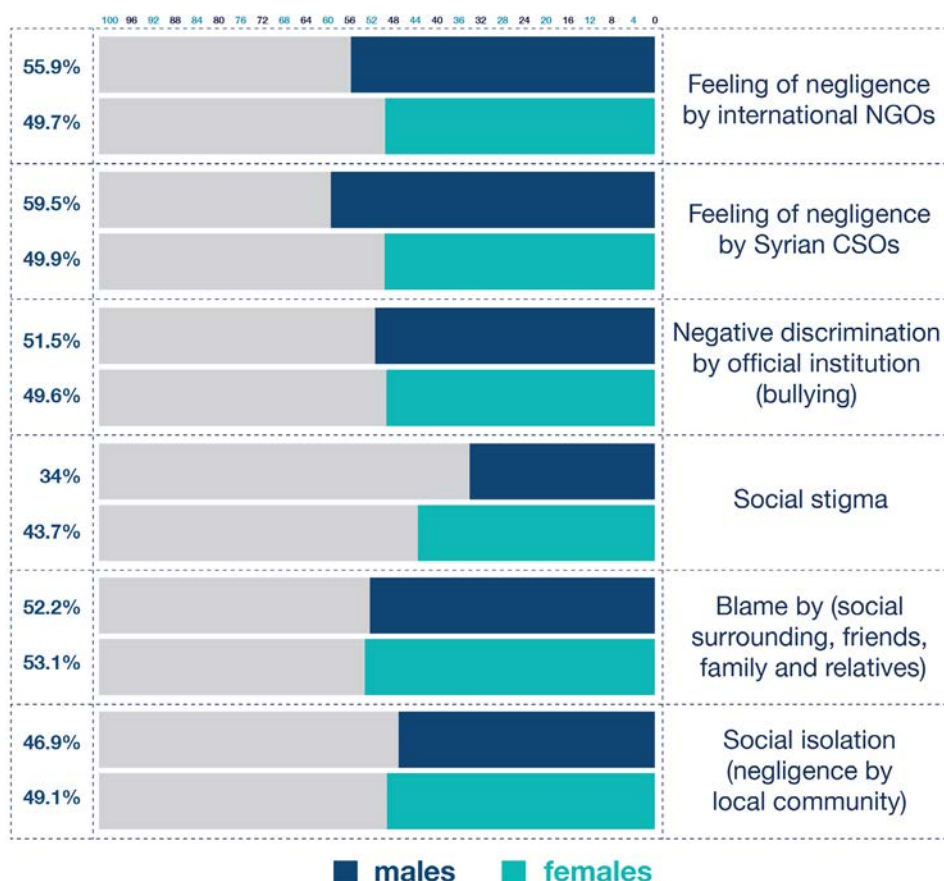


Figure (11) social impacts of missing a person by sex



Although disregard by NGOs was more among men than women, the percentage of disregard of local and international organizations was double in comparison with the social surrounding. Female respondents considered that the most prominent impact was the great disregard of international organizations with 26.3%, followed by disregard by Syrian local organizations with 23.8%. Bullying and disregard by community and blaming by the social surrounding came at lower percentages at 14.6%, 13.7% and 12.7%, respectively.

### Social Impacts of Missing a Person for (female members of the study sample)

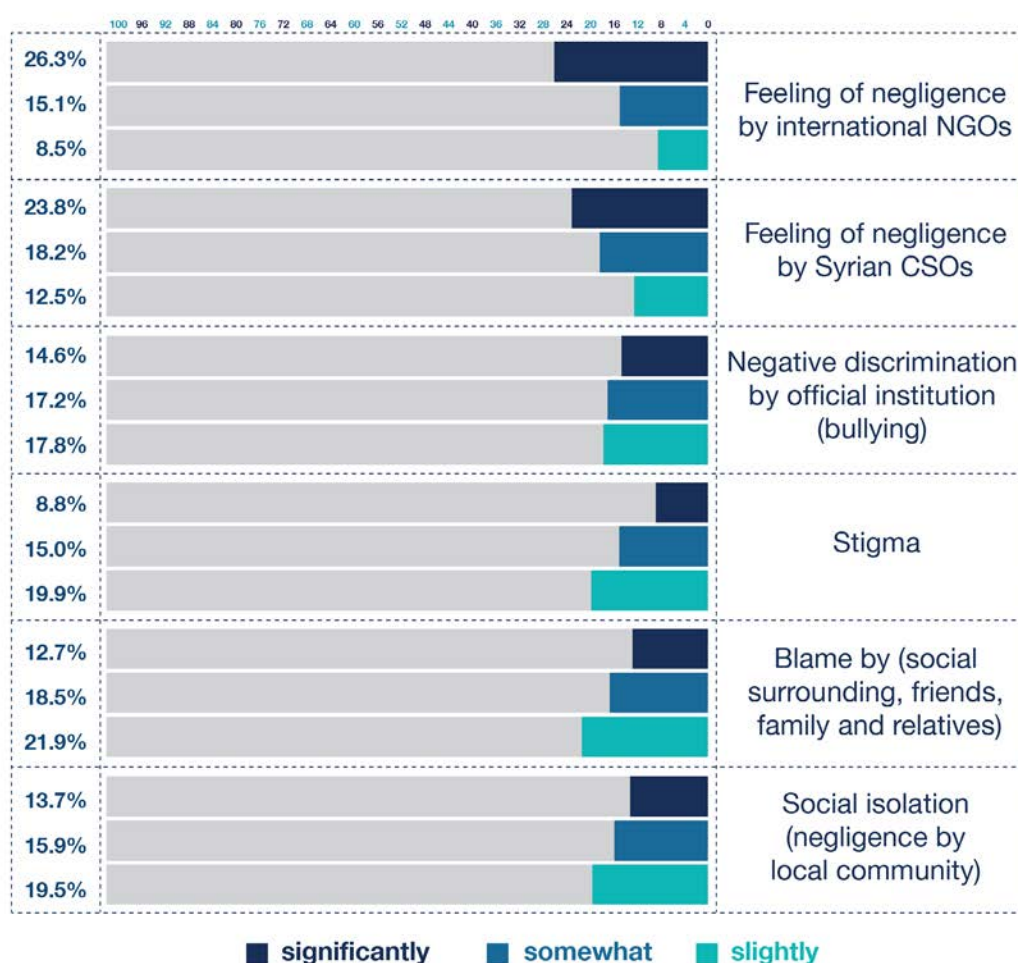


Figure (12) social impacts of missing a person for female members of the study sample

In terms of place of residence, the highest levels of social impact were in areas controlled by the Syrian government (Damascus). The impact of social isolation was the highest in regime-held areas, followed by Syrian Interim Government-held areas and Lebanon as the highest levels. In terms of the impact of blame from the social environment, Lebanon, areas of the Syrian Interim Government, and SDF-held areas came after the regime-held areas. For stigma, areas of the Syrian Interim Government and SDF-held areas came after the regime-held areas. In terms of the impact of negative discrimination from official institutions, Jordan had the highest

percentage, followed by areas controlled by the Syrian regime, the Interim Government, and Idlib, respectively. The families of missing persons (the study sample) experienced high rate of disregard by local and international civil organizations, which indicates the poor work of these organizations in their relationship with special programs for the families of missing persons.

### social Impacts by Place of Residence

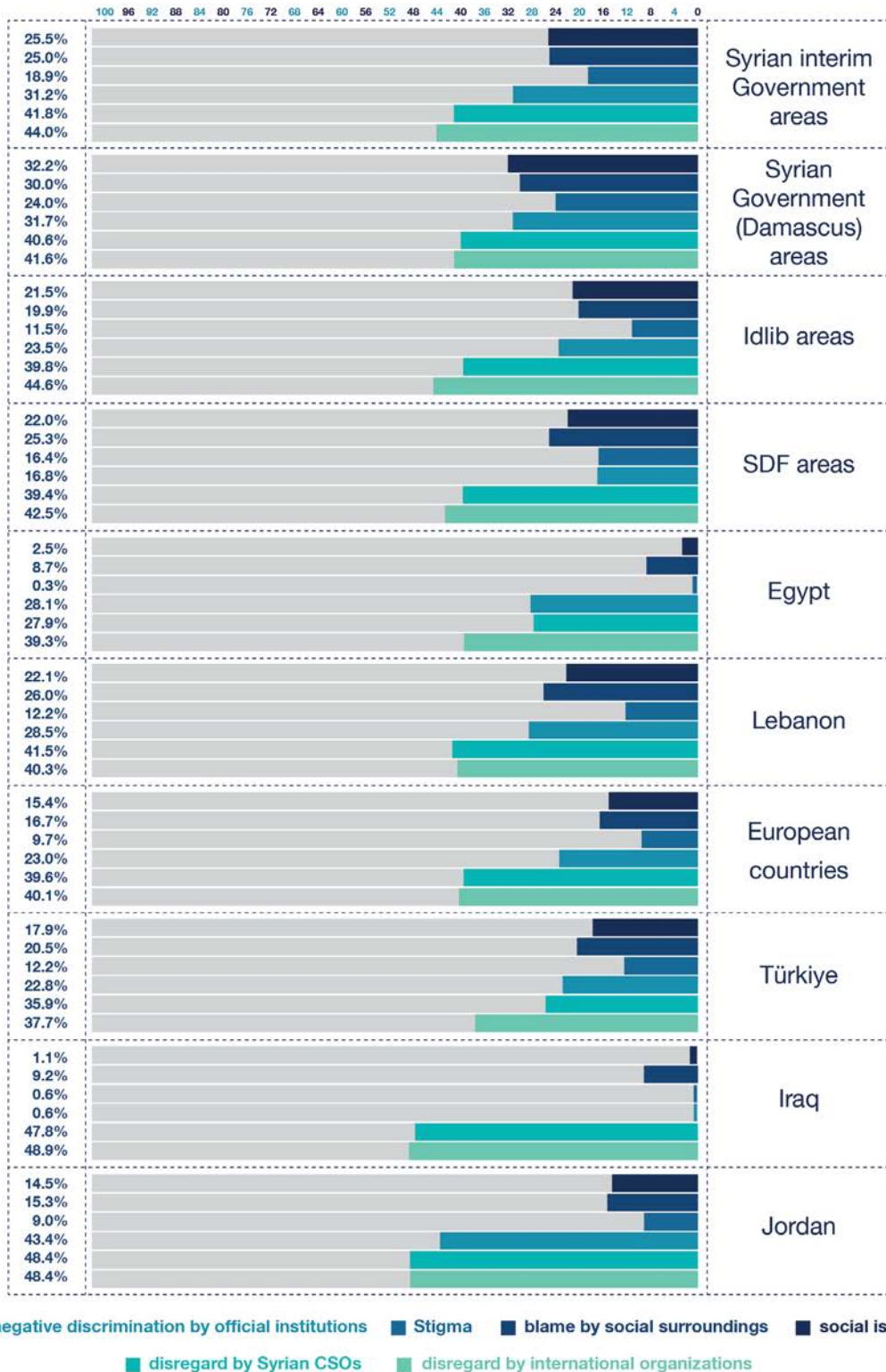


Figure (13) social impacts of disappearance in relation with the current place of residence

It should be noted that the variable of current place of residence, in relation to the social, psychological or legal impacts does not mean the impacts on families of the missing persons in areas they are residing in, it rather means that they were subjected to such impacts at the time of the incidence of missing or disappearance in relation with their original communities in the first place, taking into consideration having impacts on the families of missing people in some host countries which have political and military relation with the incidents taking place in Syria, such as Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.

As for the relation with degree of kinship, kinship of the first degree was the most affected by the social impacts of disappearance, whereas the percentages grew lower with other degrees of kinship.

### Social Impacts by Degrees of Kinship

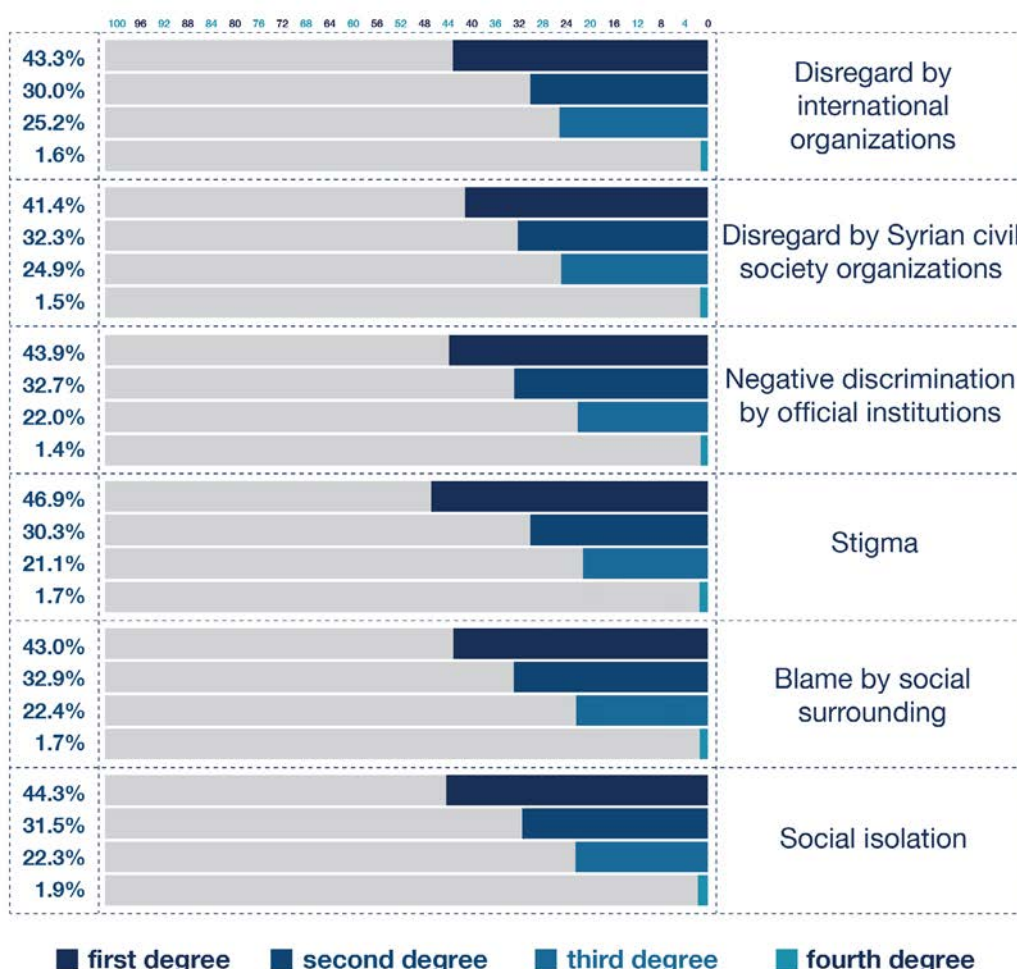


Figure (14) social impacts of disappearance by degree of kinship

As for the years of disappearance, the period of the early years was more impactful on the families of missing people, then it started to gradually decrease in the following years. This is most likely attributed to the psychological coping of the families with the situation of missing a loved one, as well as due to their engagement in the details of their daily life and livelihoods.



## Social Impacts by Years of Disappearance

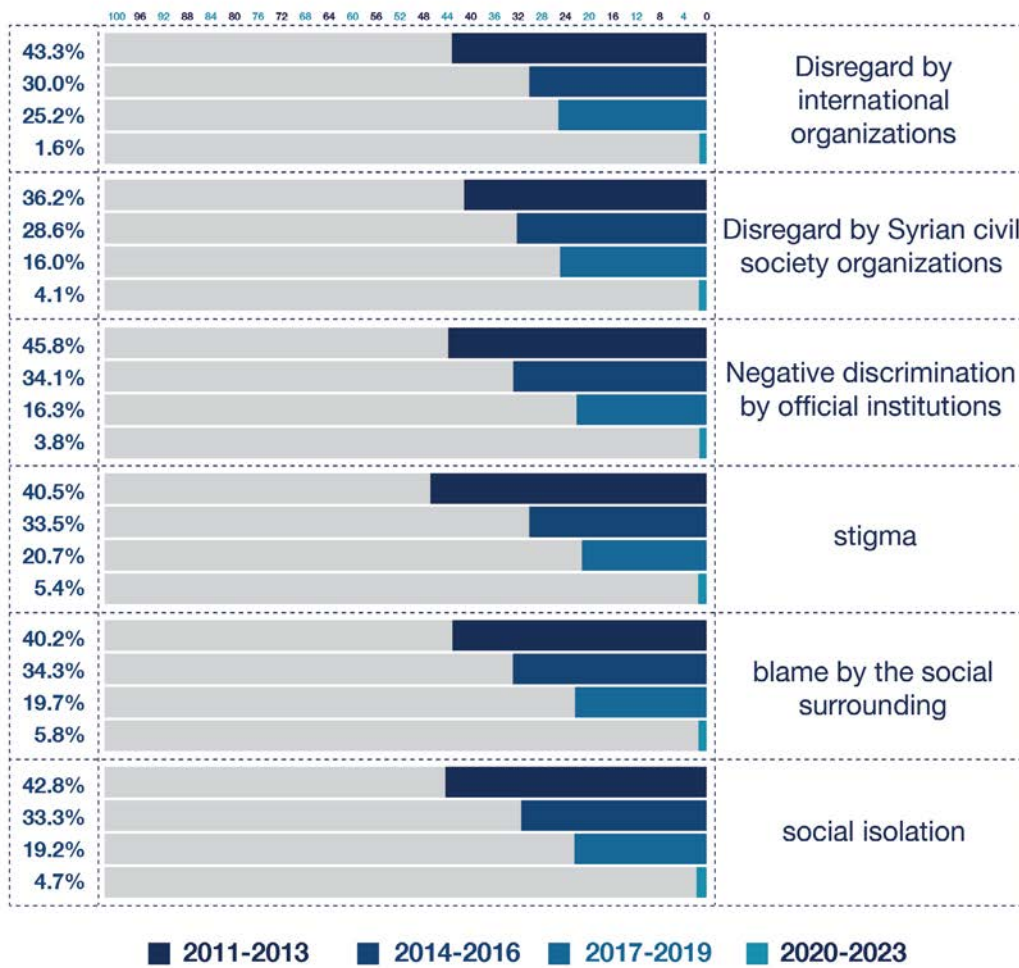


Figure (15) social impacts of missing a person by years of disappearance

## 2. Psychological Impacts of Disappearance

### Psychological Impacts of Disappearance

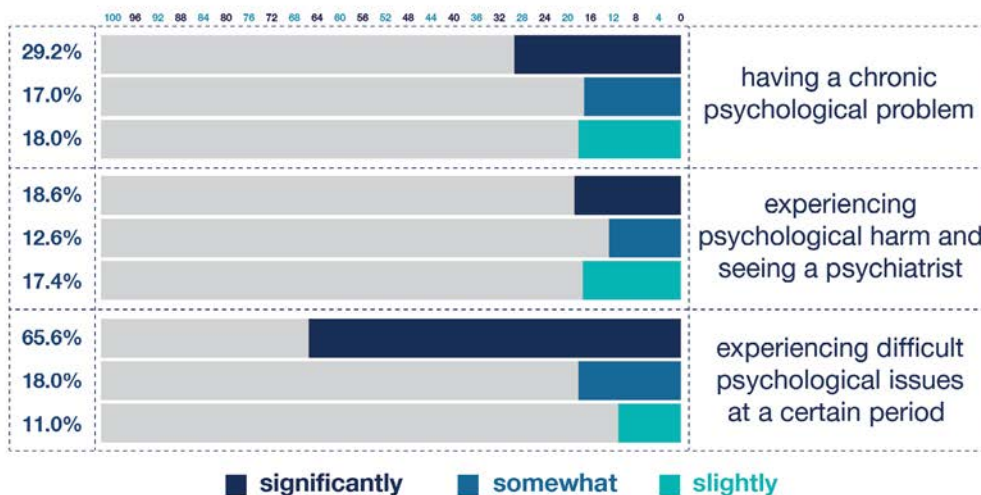


Figure (16) psychological impacts of missing a person

The study sample of the families of missing people experienced several cases of psychological impacts because of the incidence of missing in their families. Families of the missing person suffered at the beginning of the disappearance and in its early stages from several difficult psychological conditions, and some of them continued to experience those conditions which turned into psychological harm that required seeing a psychiatrist. Some of those respondents stated that because of the disappearance, they experience ongoing ‘chronic’ psychological problems, which require continuous treatment and medical supervision.

Psychological effects are among the most negative consequences for the relatives of the missing person after the disappearance, because of their role in creating a state of distraction and waiting due to the absence of the missing person and thinking of scenarios whether or not the person will ever return, and the confusion that accompanies the feelings of his family and the impact on life decisions.

There were some very negative impacts of disappearance, even to the extent of “suicidal wishes in children or the wife,” and the death of one of the parents as a result of a stroke or the deterioration of their health condition as a result of the detention of their children. These are among the physiological issues emanating from psychological stress experienced by the relatives of missing people in varying ways and degrees. These effects include chronic diseases, such as: diabetes, hypertension, stroke, and miscarriage. The disappearance of a person also affected their children in some cases, such as loss of speech and severe depression.

### Psychological Impacts per Sex

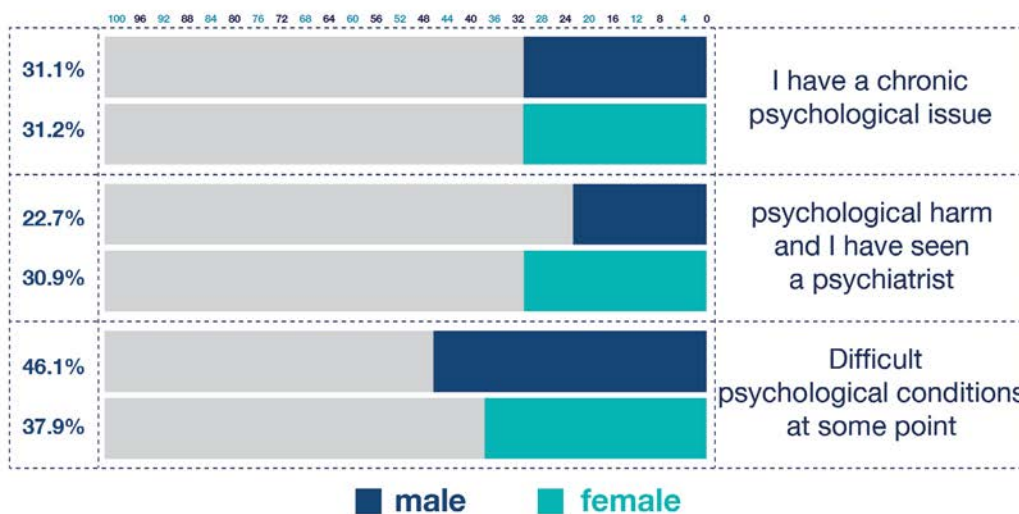


Figure (17) psychological impacts of disappearance by sex of respondent

In terms of the sex variable, both sexes equally experienced different psychological conditions and impacts in general. Psychological impacts on the relatives and families of missing people vary based on their personality types more than their sex.

## Psychological Impact and Place of Residence

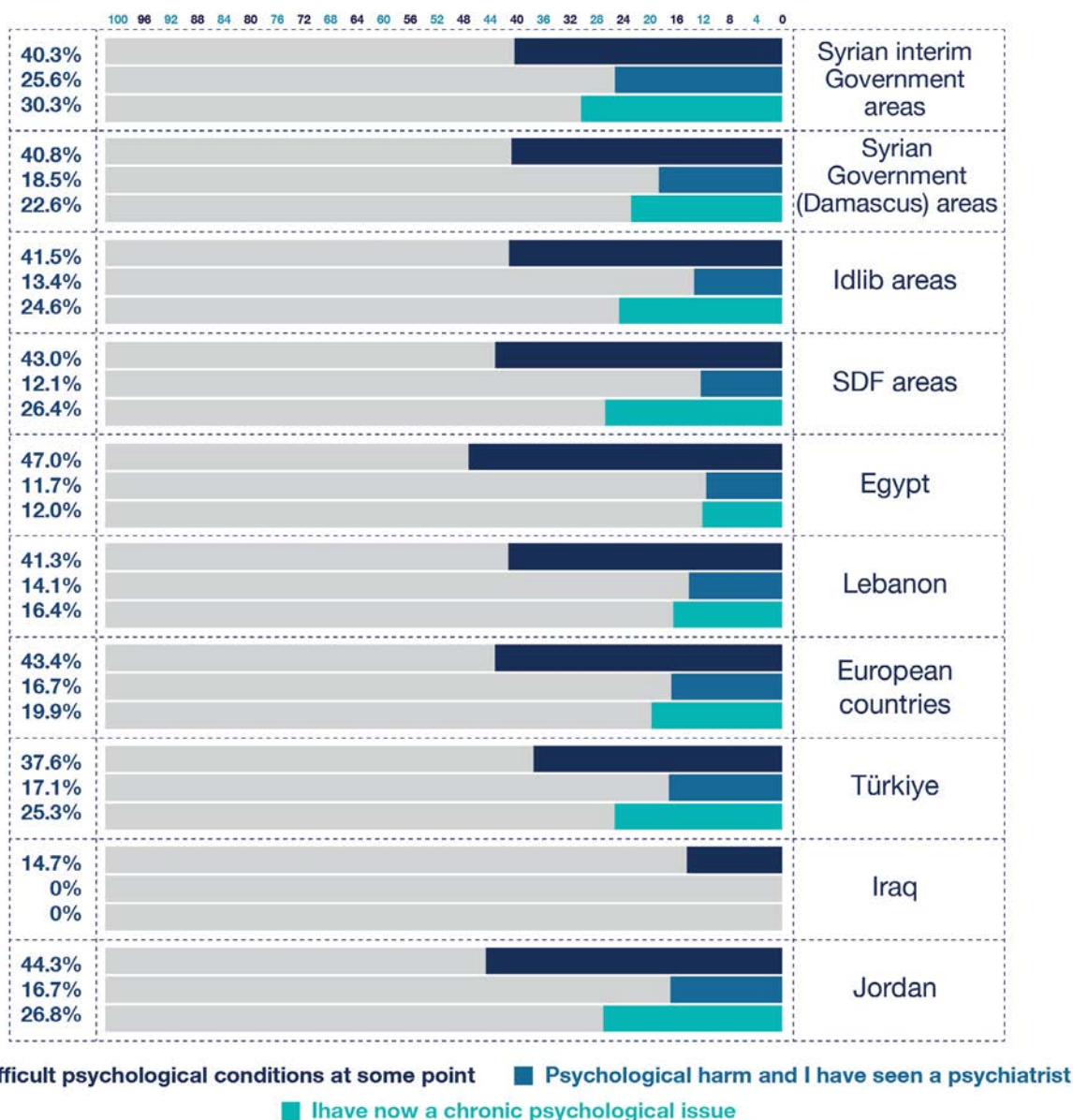


Figure (18) psychological impacts of disappearance and place of residence

In terms of the variable of current place of residence, the percentages of psychological impacts on the families of missing people varied based on the country of their current residence; but they were significant anyway. This indicates that there is no significance or



significant differences for the variable of place of residence in the increase or decrease of the psychological impacts of missing a loved one. The place of residence may sometimes help in terms of access to psychological specialists and psychological support for the family of the missing person, but the psychological impacts of disappearance do not end simply by changing the place of residence.

In relation to degrees of kinship, people of the first three degrees of kinship were affected the most by the psychological consequences of disappearance. In fact, the psychological impacts of disappearance are not limited only to first-degree relatives, but may extend to subsequent degrees of kinship, depending on the type, degree, and intensity of the relationship with the missing person and first-degree relatives.

### Psychological Impacts by Degree of Kinship

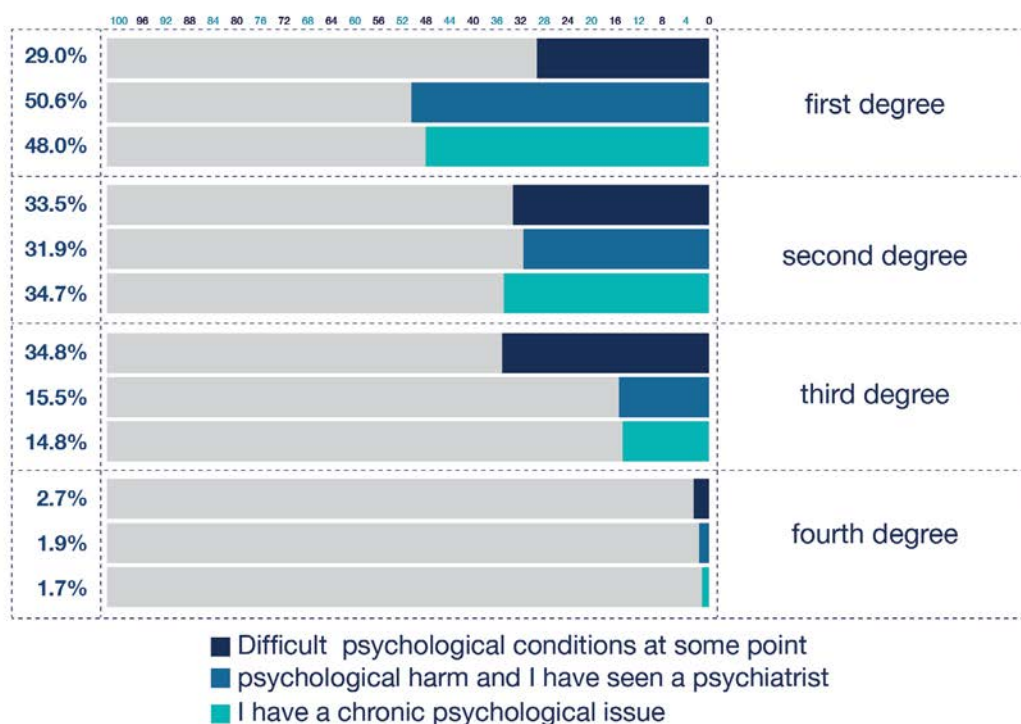


Figure (19) psychological impacts of disappearance and place of residence

The years of disappearance were psychologically harsher for the families of the missing in the early stages of the war due to the level of violence and the fact that families of missing persons had little expectation they would survive. But these impacts began to decline over the years, without accurate details about the status of missing people. This may be due to the period of time that is usually sufficient to “get used to” the absence, in addition to the changes that may occur in the family’s situation, whether in relocating or immersing in daily life concerns.

However, the decrease in psychological impacts does not in any way mean their disappearance. Individuals usually adopt defensive psychological mechanisms towards the problems they face in order to adapt to new situations, and that is what apparently happened with the families of missing persons.

### Psychological Impacts by Years of Disappearance

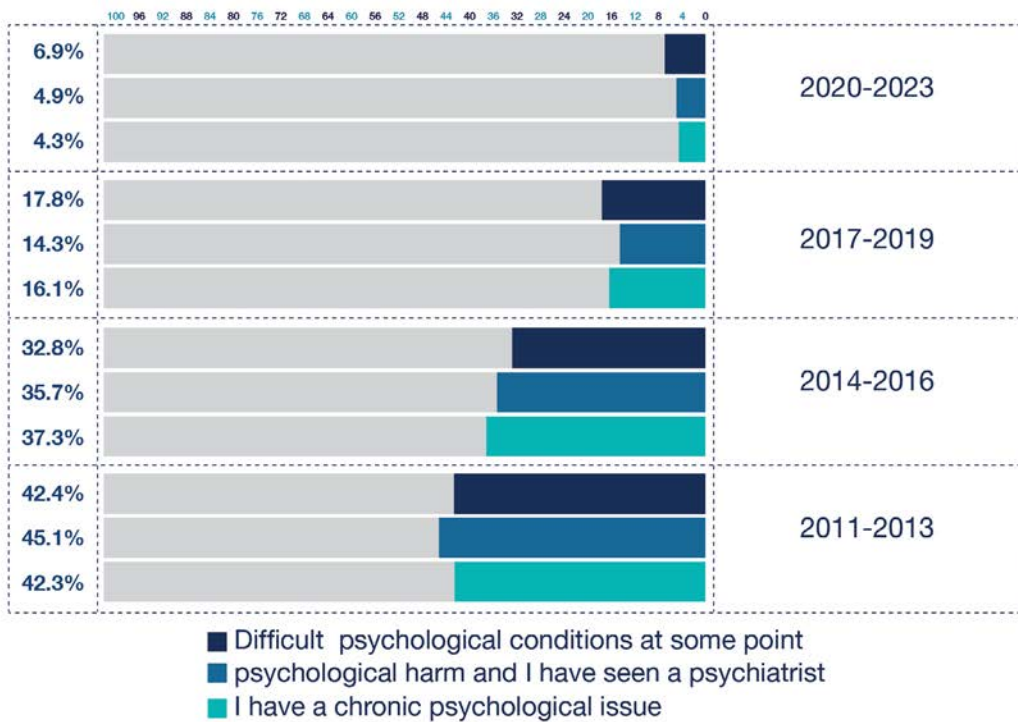
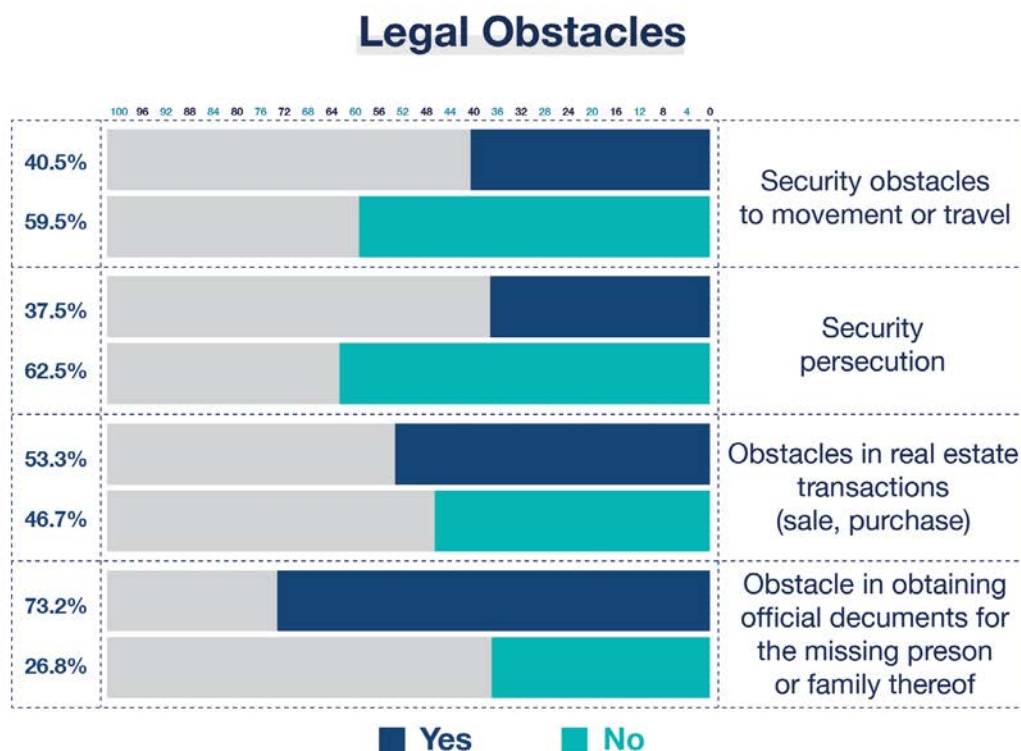


Figure (20) psychological impacts of disappearance by the years of disappearance

### III. Legal Impacts of disappearance

#### 1. Legal impacts and consequences



**Figure (21) Legal consequences for the family of missing people**

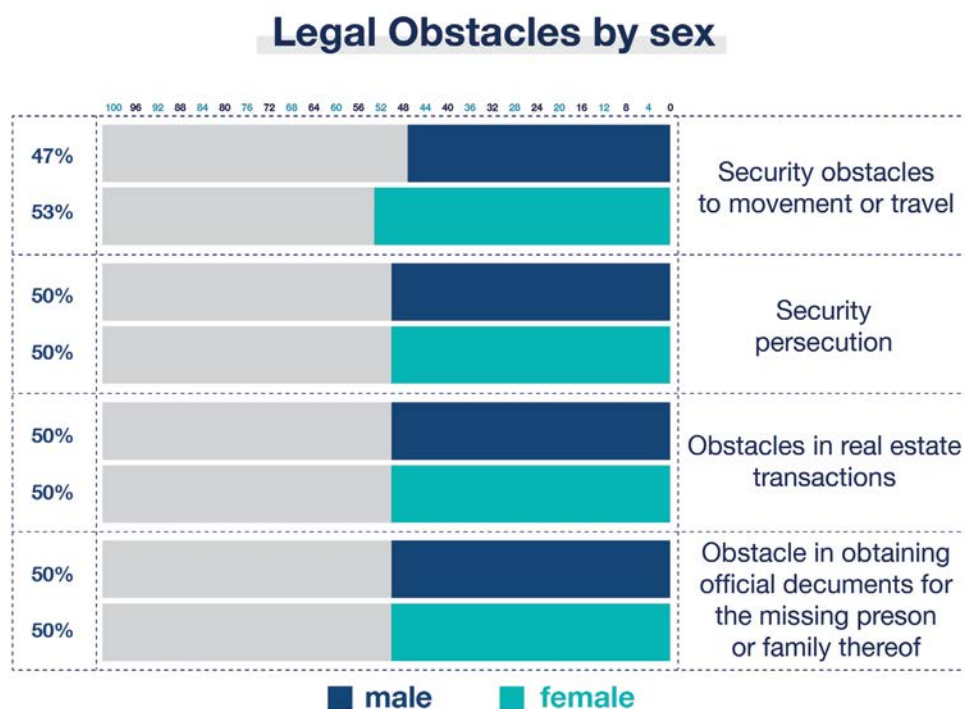
Revealing the fate of the missing paves the way for achieving peace, accountability, and reparation, but actors responsible for disappearance, most notably the Syrian regime, refuse to acknowledge the missing people inside prisons and sites of mass graves revealed by witnesses including Caesar, the Gravedigger, and human rights organizations. Rather, violations extend to include families of the missing. Respondents of the study sample experienced many difficulties and legal and security obstacles due to the state of disappearance. 62.5% of the study sample was subjected to security persecution; which is common practice by security agencies in areas under the Syrian regime control against families of missing persons. This applies to other de facto authorities, where families of missing people were subjected to restrictions in their movement, especially the issue of travel, at a high percentage of 59.5%.

As for obtaining official documents or commercial transactions in matters of purchases and powers of attorney, there were many obstacles faced by 46.7% and 26.8% of the sample, respectively.

It is known that the relatives of the missing person endure the consequences of the disappearance, especially in cases of detention. They are subjected to restrictions by existing authorities as a punishment for the actions of one of their members who dissented from the general consensus of the existing authority on issues of politics and public affairs in general.

In addition, the presence of a missing person in the family and the lack of an effective and independent legal and judicial system make proving the disappearance or detention of a person through verified official papers an extremely difficult issue, which will affect legal transactions with regard to the missing person, especially women/wives and their legal status, and the issue of real estate property, such as powers of attorney and commercial transactions such as buying and selling, etc.

In terms of the variable of respondent's sex, relatives of missing persons of both sexes were equally exposed to the same legal obstacles.



**Figure (22) legal obstacles by respondent's sex**

In relation to the variable of place of residence, legal obstacles were similar in general in different regions of residence. The differences in obstacles faced were moderate to little. The highest percentage for issuing official papers was in the Syrian regime-held areas, Lebanon, areas of the Syrian Interim Government, and Jordan, respectively. Areas of the Syrian regime were the most difficult areas in terms of real estate transactions, followed by Lebanon and Egypt.

As for security persecution, the highest percentage was for those in Jordan and Lebanon,

then areas of the Syrian regime and the Syrian Interim Government. The same applies to security obstacles to movement and travel, for which Jordan had the highest percentages, followed by Lebanon and Turkiye.

## Legal obstacles and place of residence

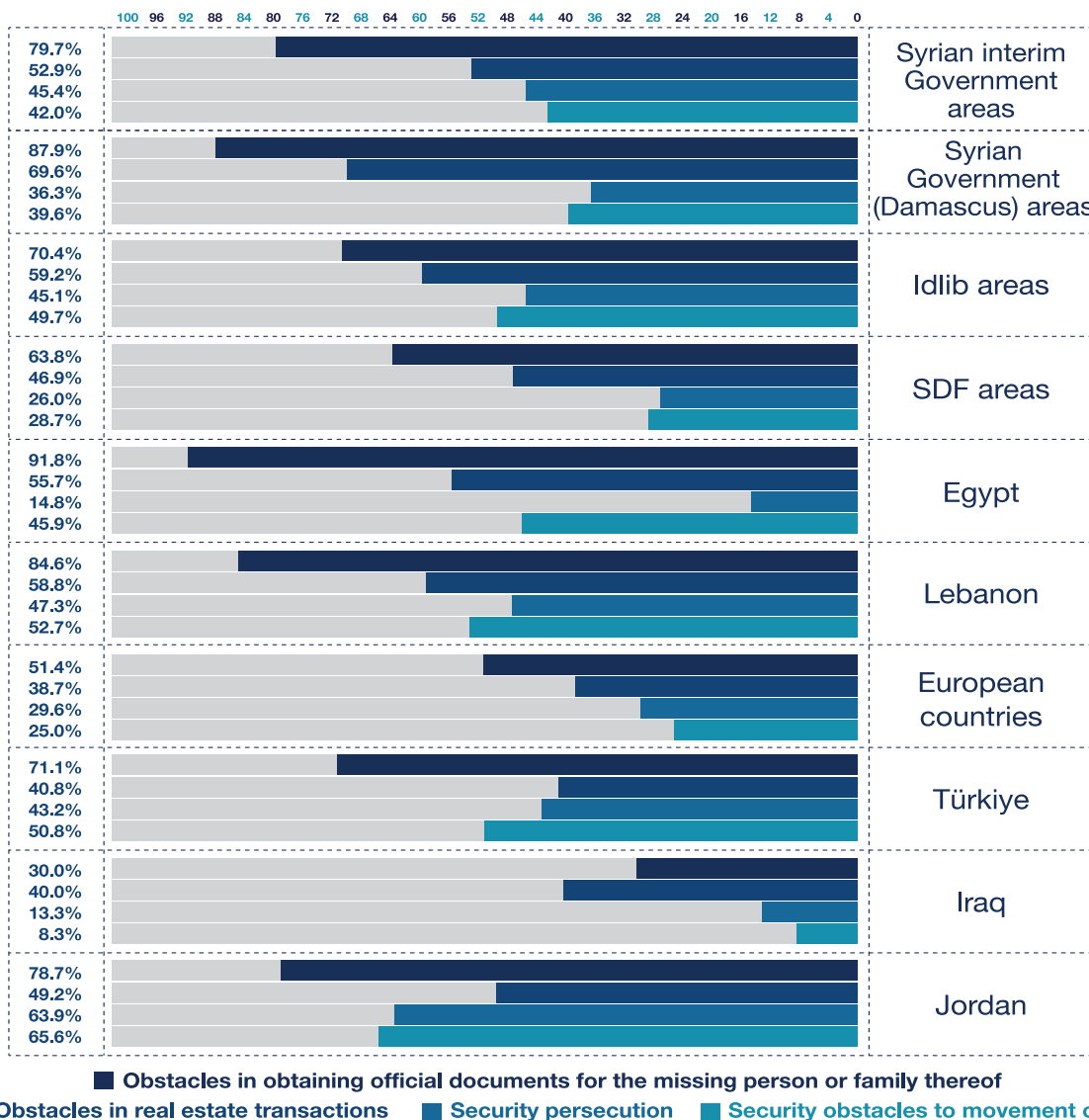


Figure (23) legal obstacles by place of residence

In relation to degrees of kinship, first-degree relatives of missing people endured the largest legal consequences and obstacles in the reported cases, which is consistent with the pattern of targeting relatives of the first degree (parents – children – spouse) as a kind of punishment.

## Legal Obstacles by Degree of Kinship

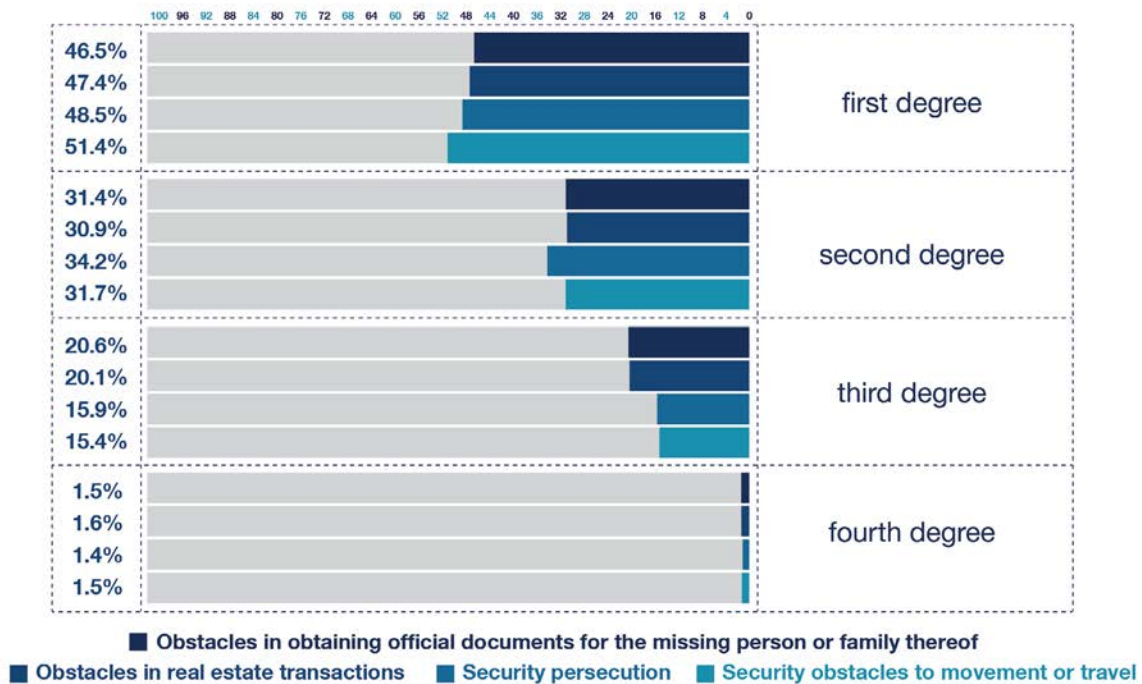


Figure (24) legal obstacles by degrees of kinship

As for the relationship with the years of missing and disappearance, the findings showed that the legal obstacles were more severe in the early years of the revolution and war, and that these obstacles began to become less difficult over time. The highest percentages were in the first stages of the revolution 2011-2013 and the lowest in the period 2020-2023.

However, this also does not mean the disappearance of these legal obstacles, as they remain present, but to lesser degrees than before, especially with the emergence of service providers from those with influence in state institutions or official institutions in other zones of control, in exchange for sums of money through complicated deals that benefit all parties. The relatives of missing people are often forced to follow this path in order to obtain their rights.



### Legal Obstacles by Years of Disappearance

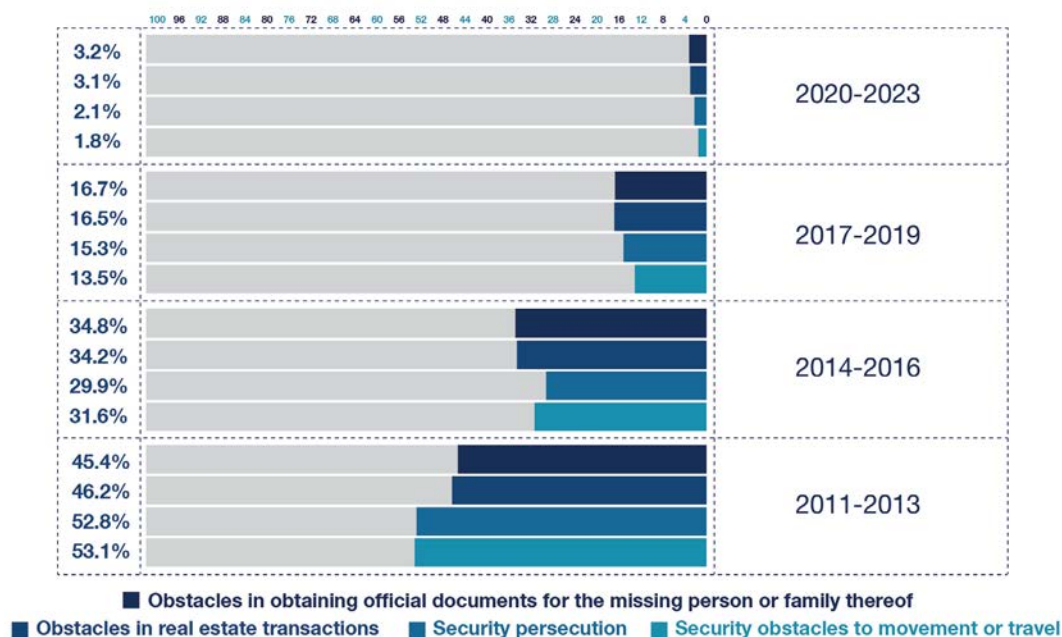


Figure (25) legal obstacles by years of disappearance

## 2. Forms of discrimination by the existing authorities

50.2% of the study sample of the families of missing people experienced negative discrimination by the existing authorities

### Discrimination by Existing Authorities

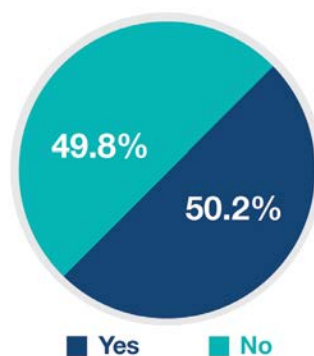


Figure (26) discrimination by existing authorities

There are many forms of negative discrimination against the families of missing persons by the existing authorities in every region of Syria, the most prominent of which was extortion in all its forms. It is well known that the families of missing people are constantly trying to find a way to have information about their missing loved ones, so they get exposed to

various forms of exploitation and blackmail by some people who claim to know sources of information and security sources. Extortion has become a source of making money from the families of missing people, who have to pay in order to obtain information about their missing person, without accounting for the extortions they are subjected to.

32.9% of the study sample were exposed to forms of moral and financial violence, which was experienced by many relatives of missing people and detainees during the period of revolution and war since 2011, as well as before that period. The Syrian regime and its security forces are used to punishing the families of those who oppose it by subjecting them to violence, arrest, or deprivation of civil rights. It seems that during the Syrian war, the same has become common practice by the other de facto authorities in all Syrian regions. 25.2% of the study sample stated that they had been subjected to arrest and detention, which is one of the methods used by repressive regimes or de facto authorities to put pressure on the families of the missing people or to punish them.

### Forms of Discrimination



Figure (27) forms of discrimination by existing authorities

In terms of the variable of respondent's sex, male and female relatives of missing people have been equally subjected to the forms of discrimination.

### Forms of Discrimination by Sex

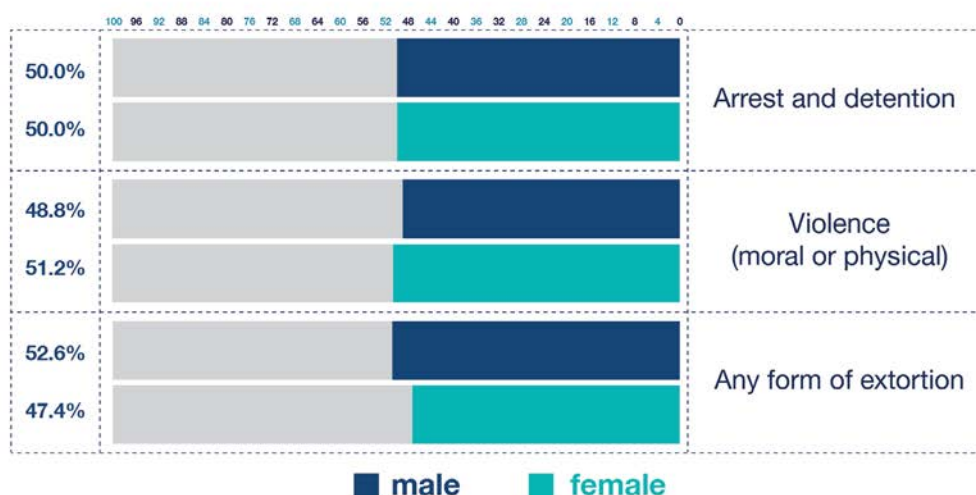


Figure (28) being subjected to discrimination by existing authorities

In relation to place of residence, the highest percentages of forms of discrimination including arrests, detentions, violence, and extortions were for those living in areas of the Syrian Government and least among those living in Iraq.

### Forms of Discrimination by Place of Residence

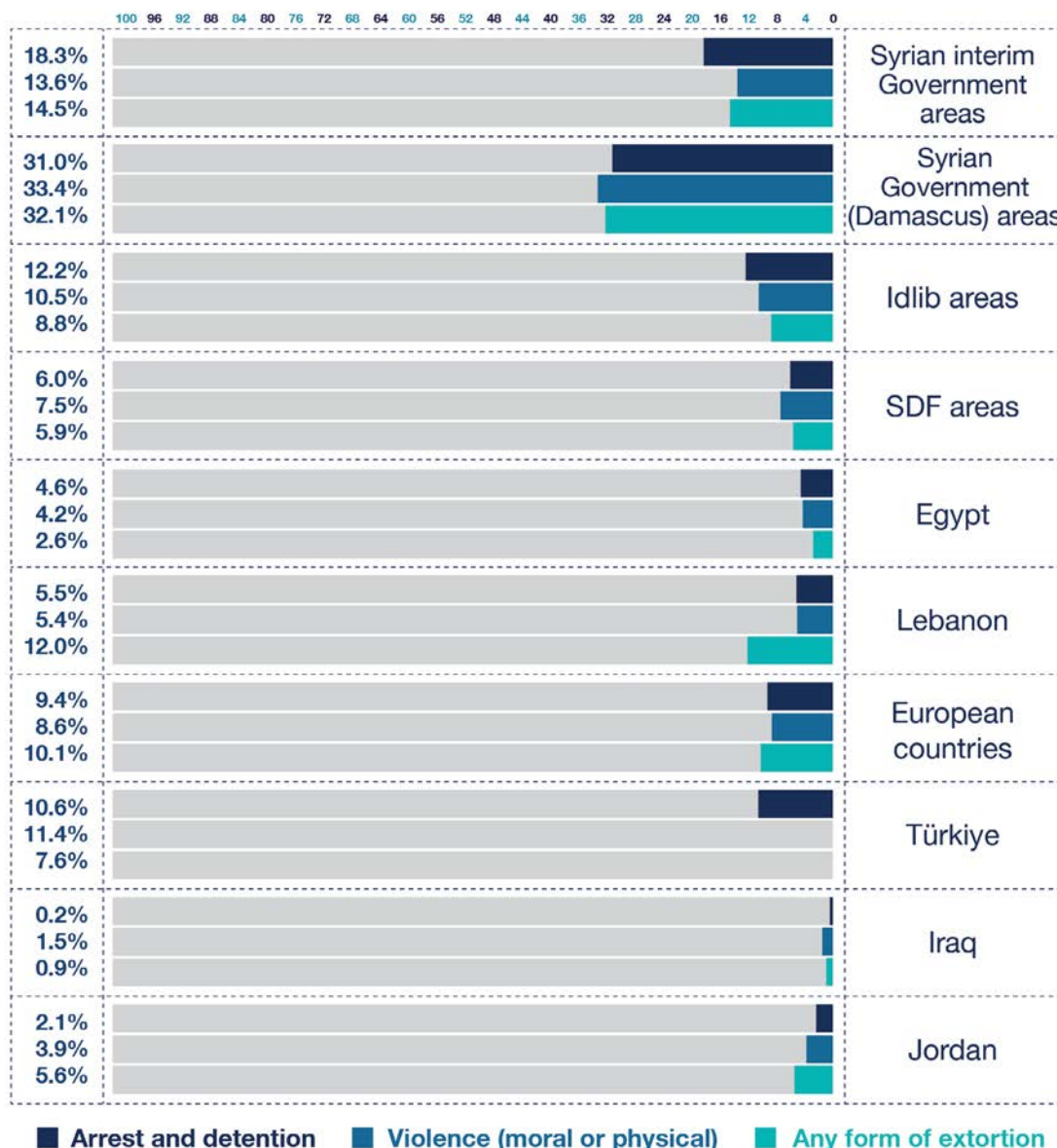


Figure (29) forms of discrimination by place of residence

In terms of the years of disappearance, the early years of the revolution and war were the most severe in terms of discrimination by the existing authority, in all of its forms. Although it continued over the following years, it decreased gradually over the years.

## Forms of Discrimination by Years of Disappearance

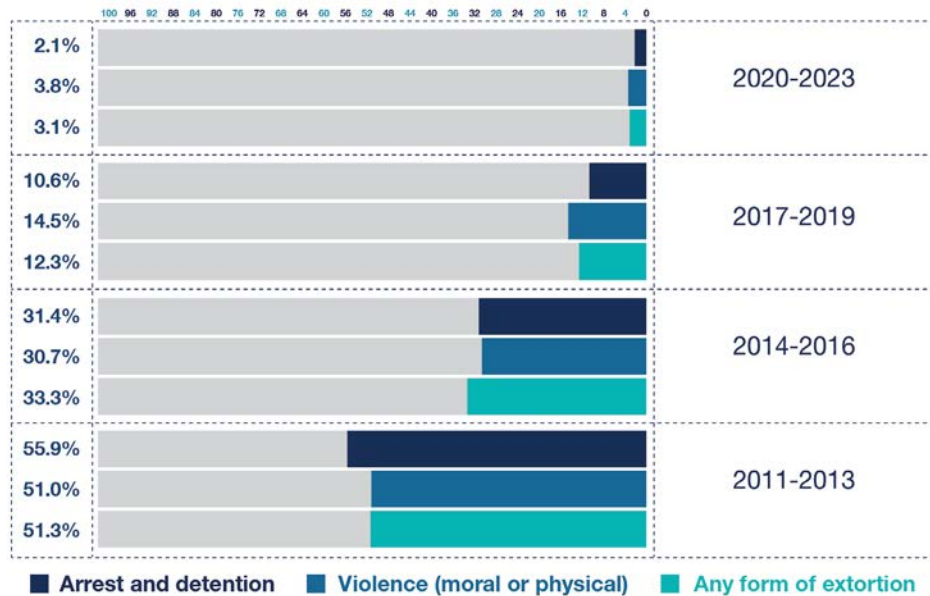


Figure (30) forms of discrimination by years of disappearance

The same applies to the variable of degrees of kinship, as relatives of the first degree endured different forms of discrimination more than the other degrees of kinship, although the latter also endured different forms of the said discrimination.

## Forms of Discrimination by Degree of Kinship

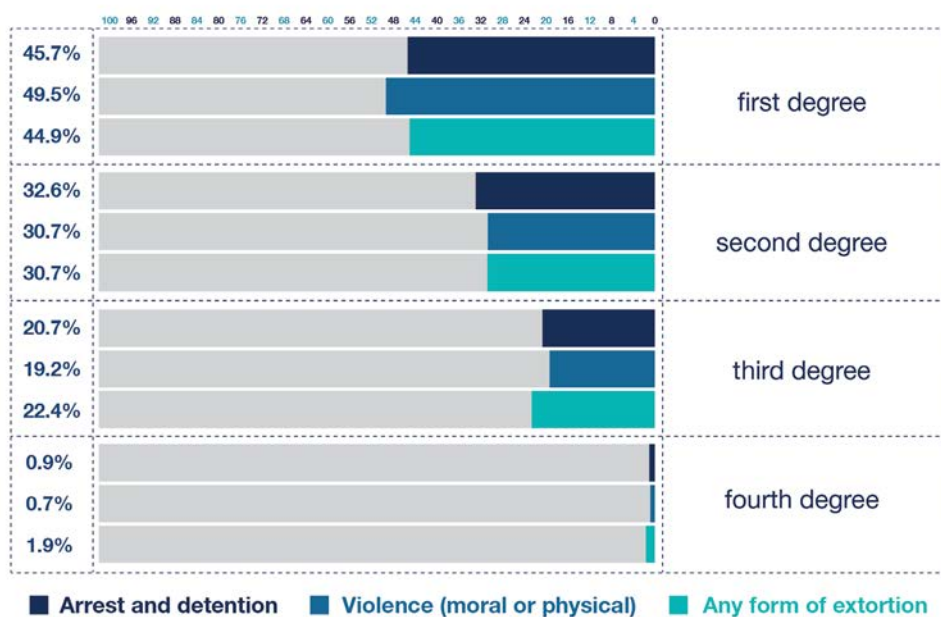


Figure (31) forms of discrimination by degree of kinship

## IV. Economic Impacts of Disappearance

71.7% of the study sample reported economic impacts they have endured due to the disappearance.

### Economic Impacts of Disappearance

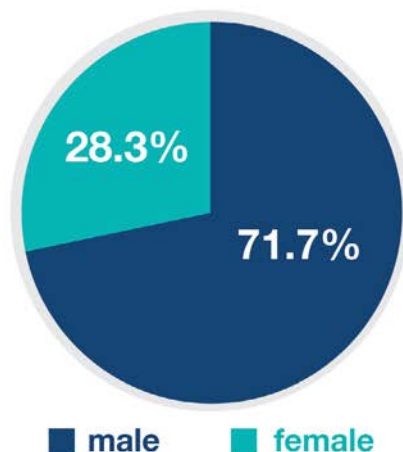


Figure (32) economic impacts of disappearance

Families of missing persons have been greatly affected economically due to the disappearance, which is linked to the position of the missing person within the family, whether he/she is a breadwinner or not. 66.8% of the study sample reported that they had suffered from severe hardships in living conditions, which is related to the absence of an economic productive force and a source of income, which could be the only one for the family.

However, this hardship may not only be related to the individual's position in the family and his economic role, but it may also be associated with other economic impacts that affect the decline in the quality of life for the families of the missing. Among these difficulties and impacts is dismissal from work, whether in official or private institutions, and denial of employment opportunities by many employers, which was reported by some respondents of the sample.

Some respondents reported that one of the consequences of disappearance was enduring many economic impacts, such as "paying off debts for the missing person" and "spending all the savings as a result of losing the breadwinner." Some of the sample subjects were subjected to "confiscation of the missing person's property," not to mention "financial exploitation and extortion by brokers and lawyers."



## Economic Impacts of Disappearance



Figure (33) forms of economic impacts of disappearance

In relation to the variable of respondent’s sex, both sexes suffered from the economic impacts of disappearance. But male relatives of missing people suffered more in terms of “continuing work at their jobs in official institutions”, whereas female members suffered more from denial of employment in private institutions.

## Economic Impacts by Sex

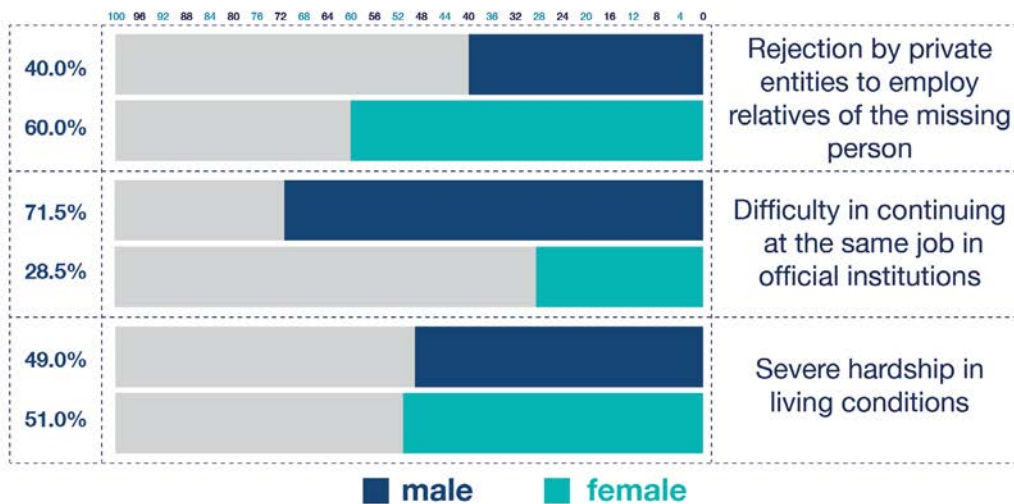


Figure (34) economic impacts by respondent’s sex

In relation to place of residence, the highest percentages of economic impacts on the relatives of missing persons were on those living in the Syrian Government areas of control (Damascus), which is in line with the general atmosphere whether at the political or



social levels in these areas. They experienced difficulty in continuing their work in official institutions and they were rejected by private employers mainly, which put them in hard living conditions.

### Economic Impacts by Place of Residence

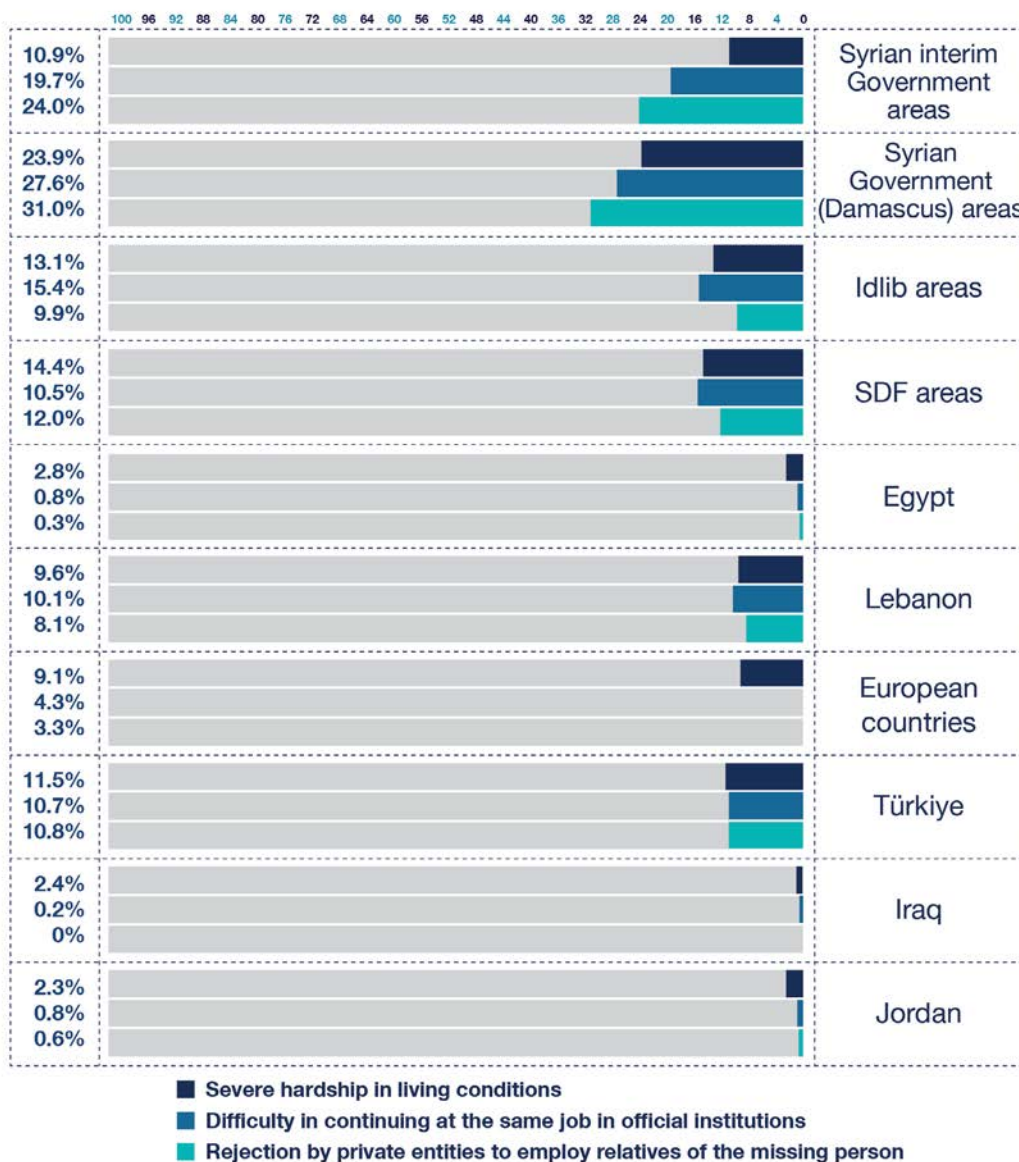


Figure (35) economic impacts by place of residence

In terms of relation with degrees of kinship, the highest percentages of being subjected to economic impacts were among relatives of the first degree, gradually decreasing with other degrees of kinship.

## Economic Impacts by Degree of Kinship

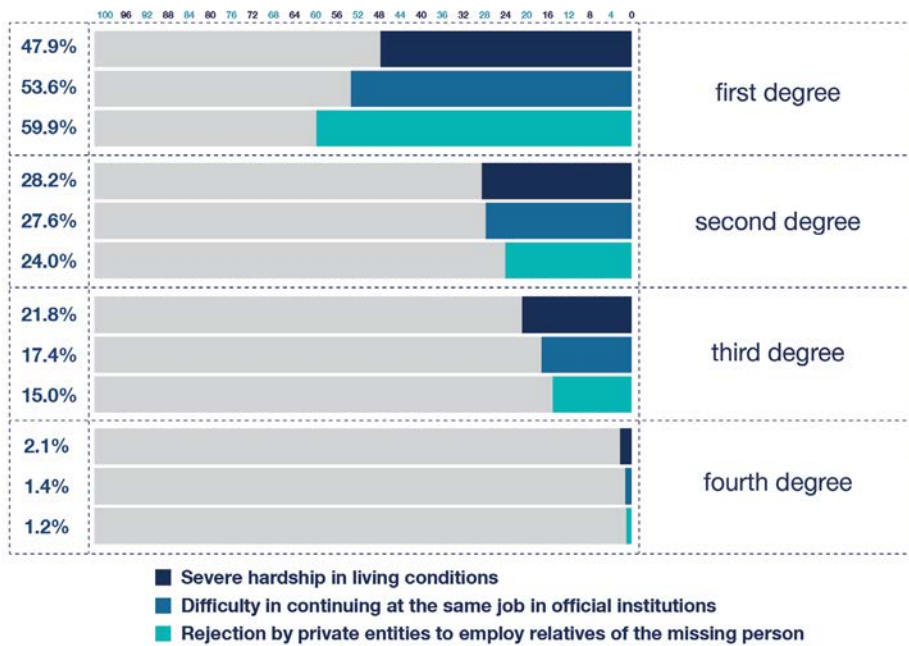


Figure (36) economic impacts by degrees of kinship

In relation with the years of disappearance, the early years of disappearance were the most difficult stages at the economic level for the relatives of missing people. With the subsequent years and the large numbers of missing people, those impacts started to decrease, often due to the support those families received from different local organizations, and the varying reasons of the incidence of missing or disappearance and the party responsible for the disappearance.

## Economic Impacts by Years of Disappearance

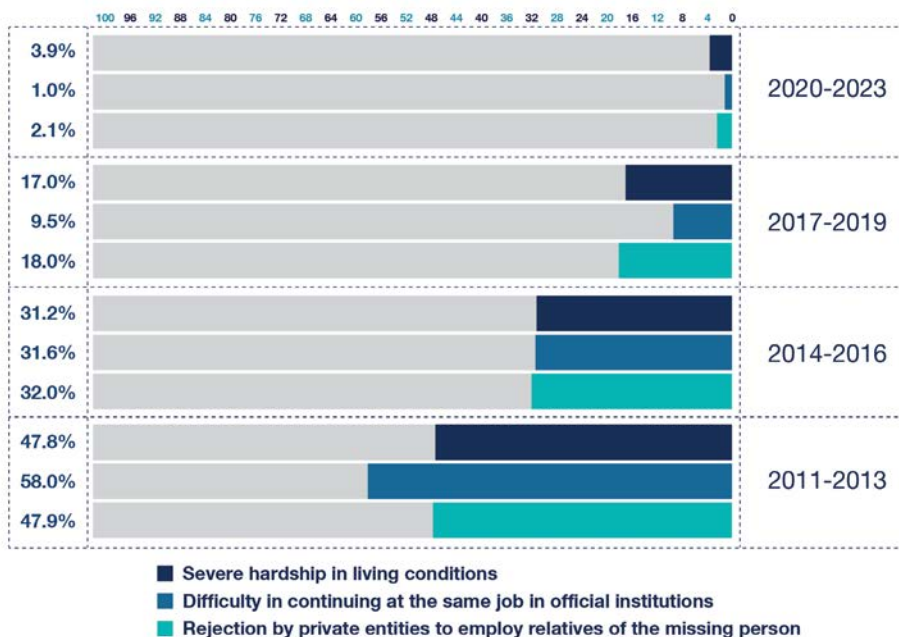


Figure (37) economic impacts by years of disappearance

## V. Relationship with associations and institutions

### 1. Reporting a case of a missing person to any entity (official, local or international human rights organization)

Approximately 68.4% of the study sample reported the incidence of disappearance or missing to the competent bodies, be them official, or local or international human rights organization, whereas 31.6% did not report the cases they had, probably due to the poor culture of legal and human rights, or out of fear from the existing authority, or maybe due to a sense of the futility of documenting the cases of missing a person following so many experiences of others that did not yield any result about knowing the whereabouts or situation of the missing people.

#### Reporting Cases of Disappearance

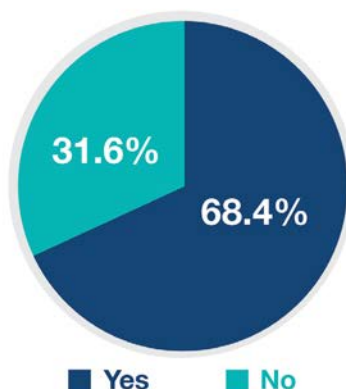


Figure (38) reporting cases of disappearance

### 2. Communicating with institutions

In this regard, 24.3% of the study sample did not communicate at all with any humanitarian organization or institution concerned with the issue of the missing. Whereas the remaining percentage of the sample continuously communicated with such bodies, with 20.7% of the sample communicating for 7 times or more.

### Communication with Concerned Institutions

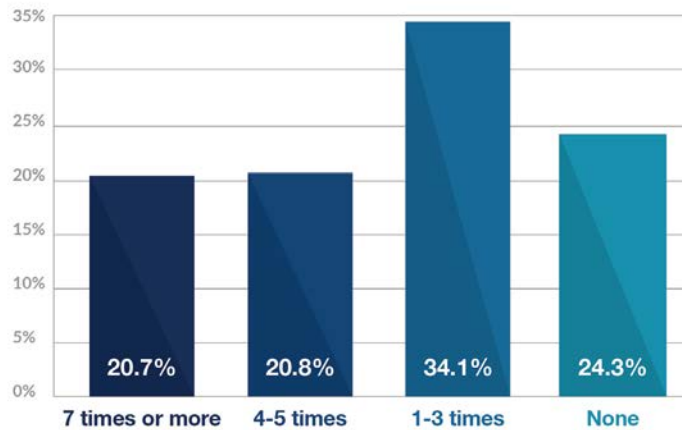


Figure (39) communication with concerned institutions

### 3. Joining associations of the missing

Only 6.4% of the relatives of missing people within the study sample affiliated with associations of the missing. We believe that this is not a matter that is linked to the relatives of the missing people as much as it is related to the work of the institutions and associations concerned with that matter, as many of the families are new to these cases, accompanied by extremely poor legal and human rights culture, and their awareness of the difficulty experienced by human rights organizations and associations concerned with missing persons in reaching tangible practical results, in light of their lack of powers other than tracking and verifying information. This makes these families see no point in affiliating with institutions that are unable to provide tangible results.

On the other hand, it is necessary to note the obstacles and challenges that these associations face, in terms of the work spaces available to them, funding or access to decision-makers and communication with the existing authorities in the currently divided geography of Syria.

### Joining Associations of the Missing

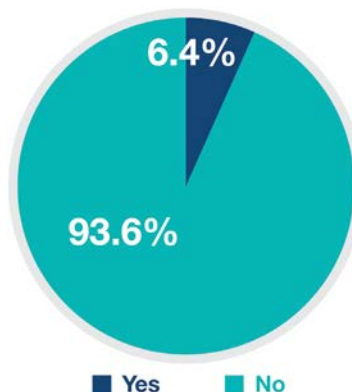


Figure (40) joining associations of the missing

#### 4. Knowledge of The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic

87.5% of respondents answered that they did not hear about the new international institution on missing persons in Syria. This could be due mainly to the fact that the magnitude of cases of missing people in Syria is beyond the capabilities of organizations and associations. However, this does not overrule some shortcoming on the side of NGOs and associations in terms of constant communication with the families of the missing people.

##### Knowledge of the New International Institution

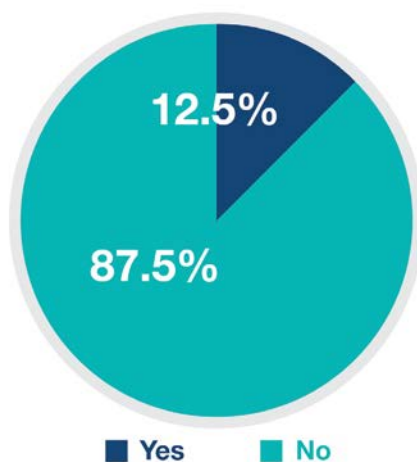
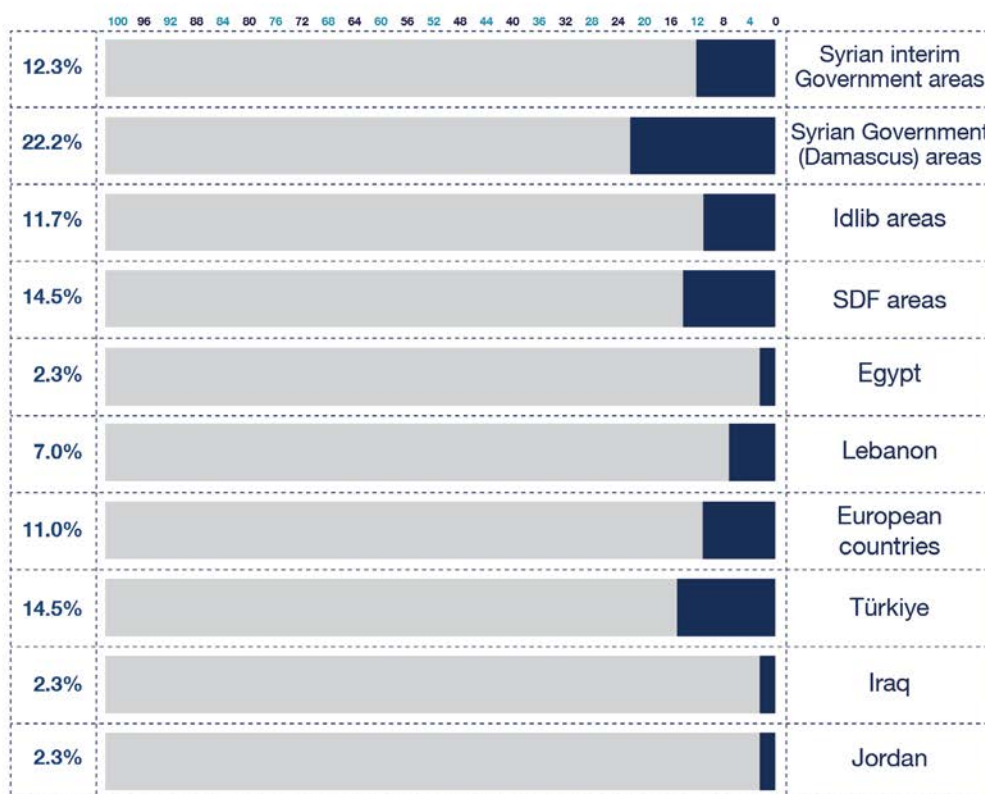


Figure (41) knowledge of The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic

In relation to place of residence, the highest percentage of those who had heard of the new institution (although generally low) was the families of missing persons living in regime-controlled areas, followed by the areas of SDF, the Syrian Interim Government, and Idlib. It was lowest in Egypt, Jordan and Iraq. Nevertheless, the low percentages of knowledge of the new institution indicate a kind of decline in the relationship and “coordination” between the associations concerned with the affairs of missing persons and families of the missing.

### Knowledge of the New Institution by Place of Residence



**Figure (42) Knowledge of The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic by place of residence**

The data collection team clarified and explained the creation of The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic for those who had not heard of it. They were introduced to the resolution and the actual start of its work and mandate. This was done for research purposes, as it would not have been possible to ask the sample about the New Institution if they had not heard of it. Hence this methodological note on the interaction of respondents.



## 5. Consultations with the families of missing people on The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic

The above findings are consistent with asking the study sample about the New International Institution, which the associations of missing persons and Syrian civil society organizations worked on. 19.4% of those who had knowledge of the New Institution of the sample stated that they were consulted on the new institution and its working mechanisms when it is launched. It is a very small percentage compared to the efforts of those associations and organizations and the interest of the families of missing persons in the issue.

### Consultations on the New Institution

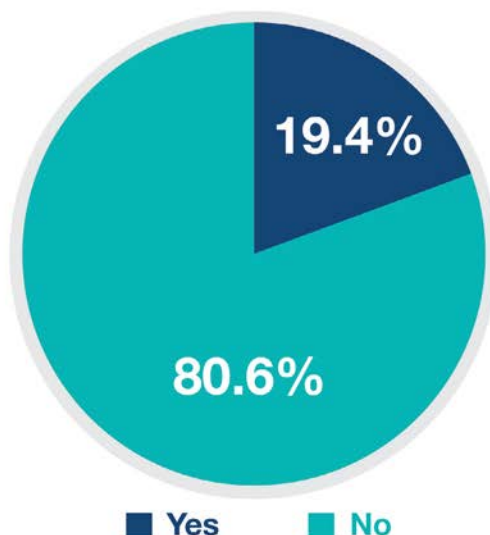


Figure (43) consultations with the families on The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic

## VI. Needs, Priorities and Expectations

### 1. Key needs and priorities

The study sample was approached with a general question about the key needs and priorities “in general” apart from the New Institution. Field findings have shown that “revealing the fate of the missing person” is still their highest priority, as well as holding those responsible for the disappearance accountable. Other needs and priorities clearly emerged as well, namely “reparation” and “providing legal support” such as obtaining official documents, inheritance statement, guardianship, and various legal consultations related to the status of the missing person, which can be interpreted as diminishing hope of finding accurate information or revealing what happened to the missing person. This is understood after long years of disappearance, the absence of true information and

the absence of true accounts about cases of missing people and disappearances. The concerns of daily life and the changes that have occurred in the situation of the relatives of the missing person may necessitate that they search for different forms of support to facilitate their lives. Therefore, percentages of financial support priorities and needs of the families of the missing have increased, as well as financial compensation for the years of harm to which the families of the missing have been subjected.

## Needs and Priorities

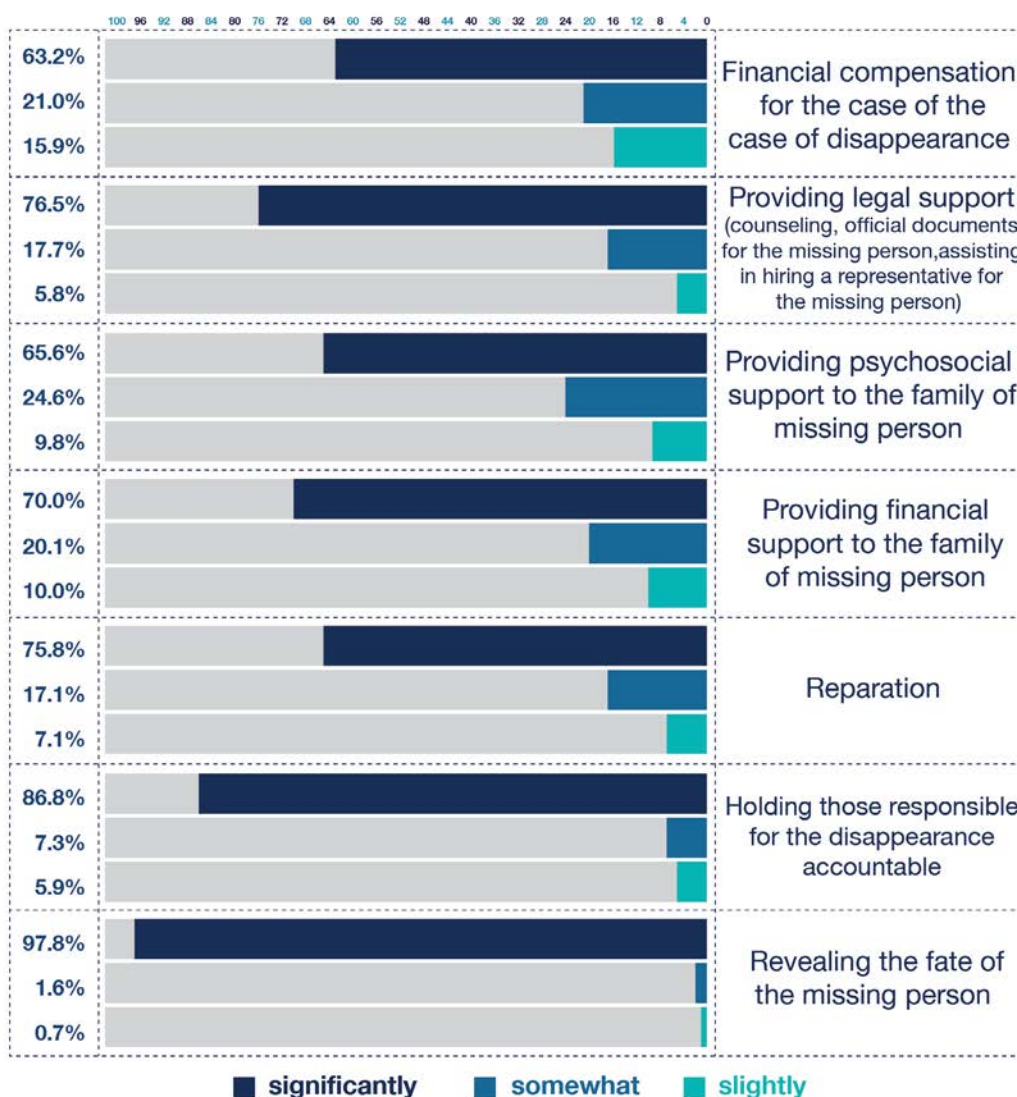


Figure (44) key needs of the families of the missing people

Other needs also reported by the study sample such as: “ending the persecution of the families of detainees; passing the mother’s nationality to her children in cases of marriage to a non-Syrian man, i.e. amending the Citizenship Law; and restitution of confiscated property”.

### Key Needs by Sex

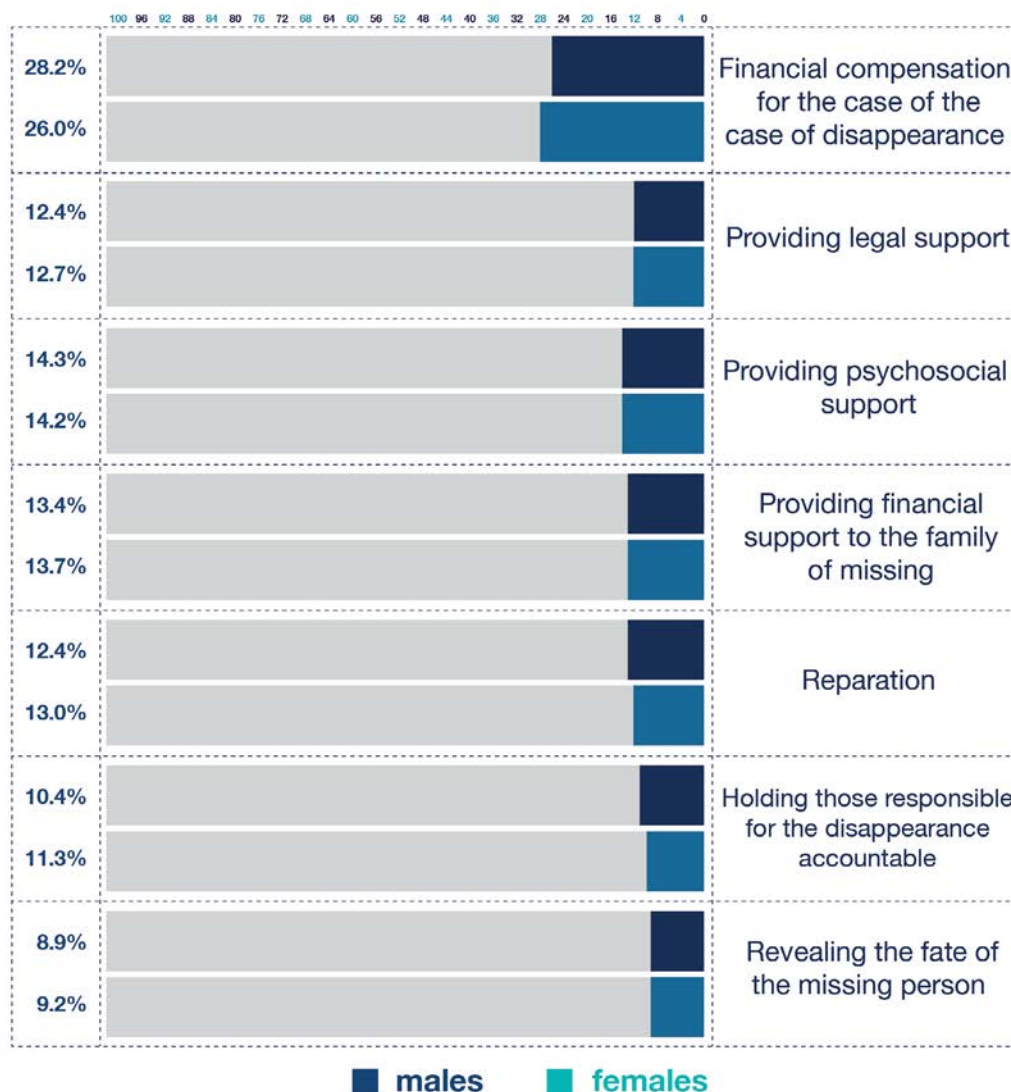


Figure (45) Key needs by respondent's sex

In relation with the variable of respondent's sex, the question contained degrees of needs that ranged between "highly, mildly, slightly". For all of those needs, in general, a process of statistical weighting has been made to give the absolute percentage for each need separately.

Through the statistical weighting process, we gave numerical marks for each one of the needs. The highest was given to the choice "highly" and the lowest was given to the choice "slightly". The absolute value was extracted as a percentage expressing each need separately. This has been applied based on the respondent's sex, separately for males and females.

## Weighting

It is a statistical process that leads to what is called “proportionate weights”. It is a method to measure the relative importance of the variables of expectation, which helps know the variables that contribute more to the value of the phenomenon in question. By calculating the relative weights, we can estimate the importance of the most impactful values. Usually, the relative weight is calculated by statistical software.

The findings showed that, with the prolonged period of disappearance, some life needs became a priority, while emphasizing the necessity of “revealing the fate of the missing person.” Other life needs have emerged, and needs related to financial compensation, psychosocial support, financial support and reparation have advanced. Changes in basic needs were similar for both sexes of respondents.

These discrepancies, “particularly between financial compensation for disappearance and other needs,” indicate the difficult living conditions that the families of missing people experience. This forced them to pay attention to improving their living conditions and demanding support and financial compensation with the prolonged period of disappearance.

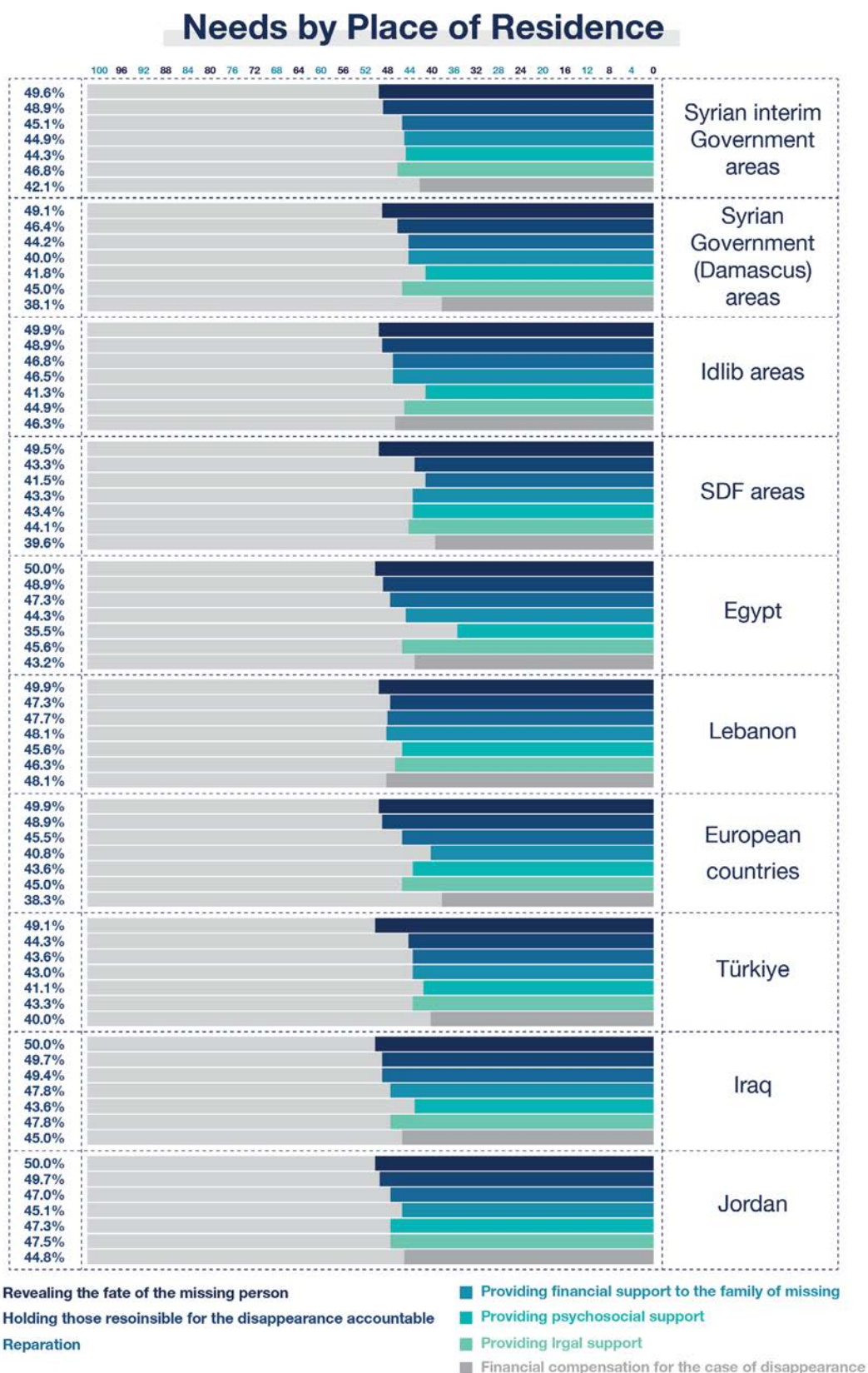


Figure (46) needs by place of residence

In relation to the variable of place of residence, the findings showed equal needs among the families of missing persons in different places of residence. However, it is noticeable

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that there are high rates of life needs related to compensations and reparations, in parallel with revealing the fate and holding those responsible accountable, which indicates the existence of life priorities related to improving life conditions as a kind of compensation for the years of harm under which the families of the missing have been living.

## **2. Expectations from The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic**

Opinions of the study sample varied in terms of their expectations of the New Institution's work. This disparity was in high or moderate expectations, but it can be said that the bar of expectations was moderate "in general" regarding the working mechanism of this Institution. Expectations of a "precise mechanism" for recording, documenting, and preserving missing persons' data yielded the highest percentage at 60.4%. It seems that the percentage of other expectations has been linked to the reality that the families of missing persons are experiencing. This can be seen in the high percentage of expecting official documents proving the case of disappearance, and the existence of a new mechanism to reveal the fate of missing persons.

In addition, there was an expectation that the New Institution would have liaison offices in Syria's neighboring countries, as well as a greater role for the families of the missing in the process of revealing their fate and sharing information and data related to the cases of missing people with their families. This may be explained by the absence of this working mechanism in relation with Syrian associations and civil society organizations concerned with the matter in the past.

It was also noted that there were expectations of financial compensations for the disappearance, which may be consistent with an attempt to look at the issue of the missing from a moral and financial perspective, which is one of the main rights of the families of the missing people.

Some opinions expressed the lack of belief that this institution would have any effectiveness and that it would only be a phony one without providing anything new on the issue of missing persons.



## Expectations from the New Institution

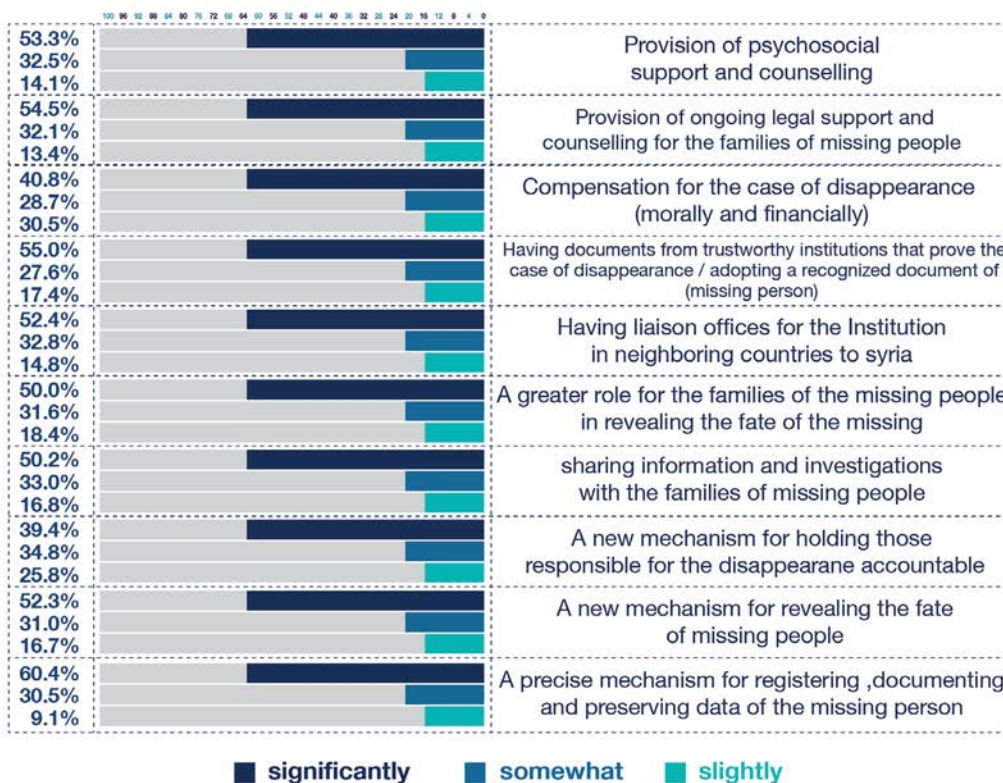


Figure (47) expectations from the work of The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic

In relation with the variable of respondent's sex, expectations from the work of the new institution were low among both sexes. In each separate sample, the results came as illustrated below:

### Expectations from the New Institution by Sex

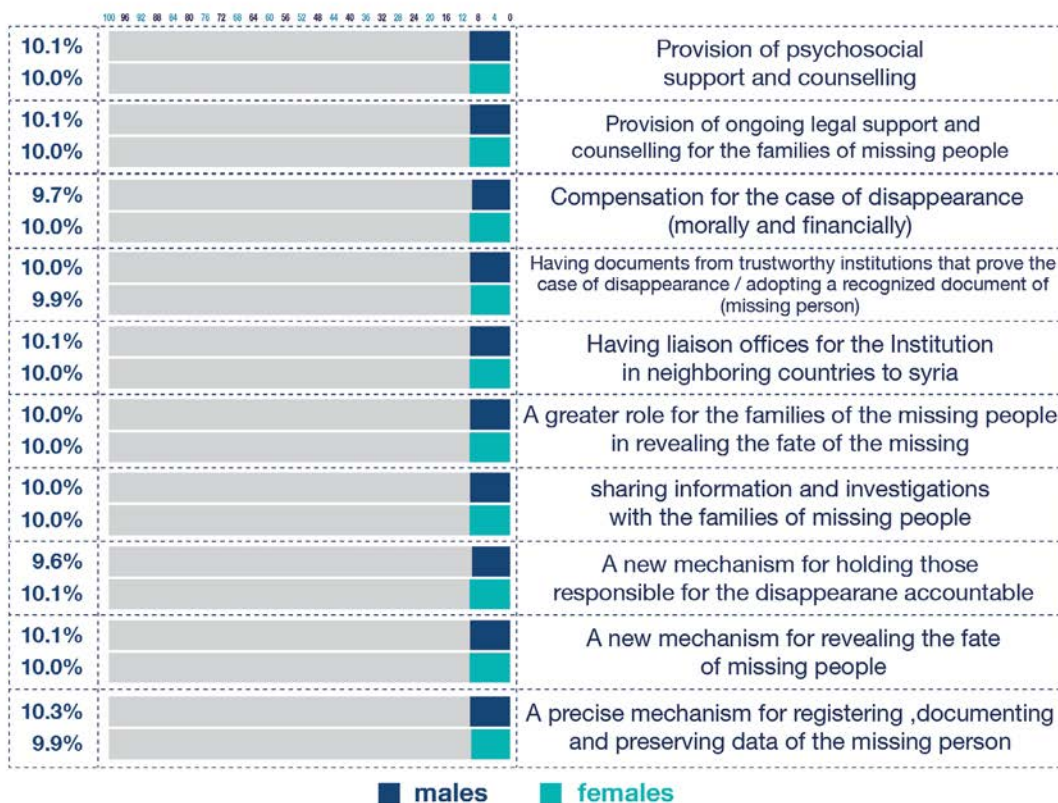


Figure (48) expectations from the work of The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic by sex of respondent

In relation with degrees of kinship, the expectations of relatives of the first degree were the highest, whereas the expectations dropped the further the degree was. This is likely due to having a high bar of expectations by the close family of the missing person to learn the fate of the missing.

## Expectations from the New Institution by Degree of Kinship



Figure (49) expectations from The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic by degrees of kinship



### 3. Needs of women members of the relatives of the missing people

Women are often the weakest link in the war environment and the most affected by its consequences, including necessarily all the arrests, cases of missing persons and disappearances that accompany it. This is reflected in previous findings regarding the social, economic, psychological and legal impacts on women. It must be noted that, although there is a low percentage of missing women in the study sample, the majority of the missing persons' relatives are women: wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters of the missing persons.

The study sample, both males and females, was asked about the priorities and needs of women who are members of the families of missing persons in the current stage. Field results have shown that women need financial and moral support and compensation to great degrees and importance, because they suffer from the effects of disappearance more than others.

The most prominent of these needs, noting the high levels of all needs, was to support the education of the children of missing persons, many of whom were forced to drop out of school or even not enroll at all due to difficult life circumstances. Another need was settling the status of unregistered children who are therefore deprived of education, health services and other civil rights, which is one of the problematic issues facing women who lost their husbands. This is linked to the military and civilian situation in the various stages of the war. Perhaps the most prominent cases are those related to the wives and children

#### Women Needs from the New Institution

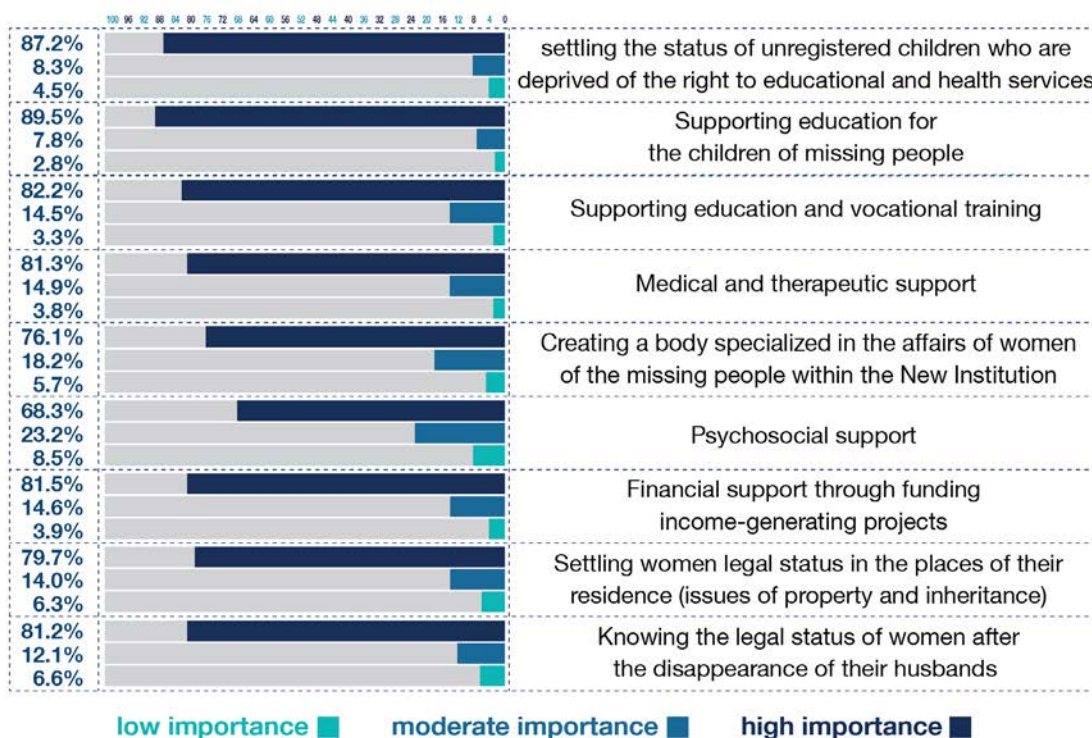


Figure (50) Women Needs from The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic

In relation to the variable of the respondent's sex, in each sample separately, the percentages of males and females were similar on the importance of women needs

### Women Needs from the New Institution by Sex

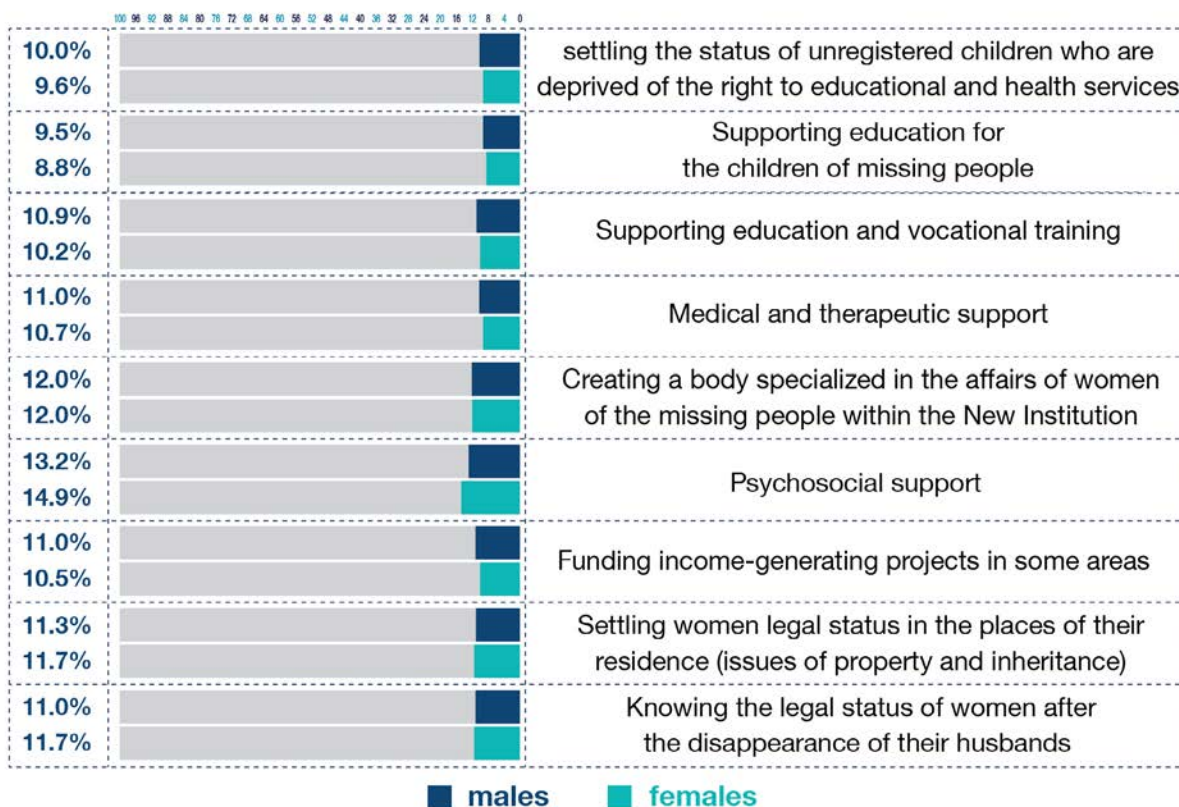
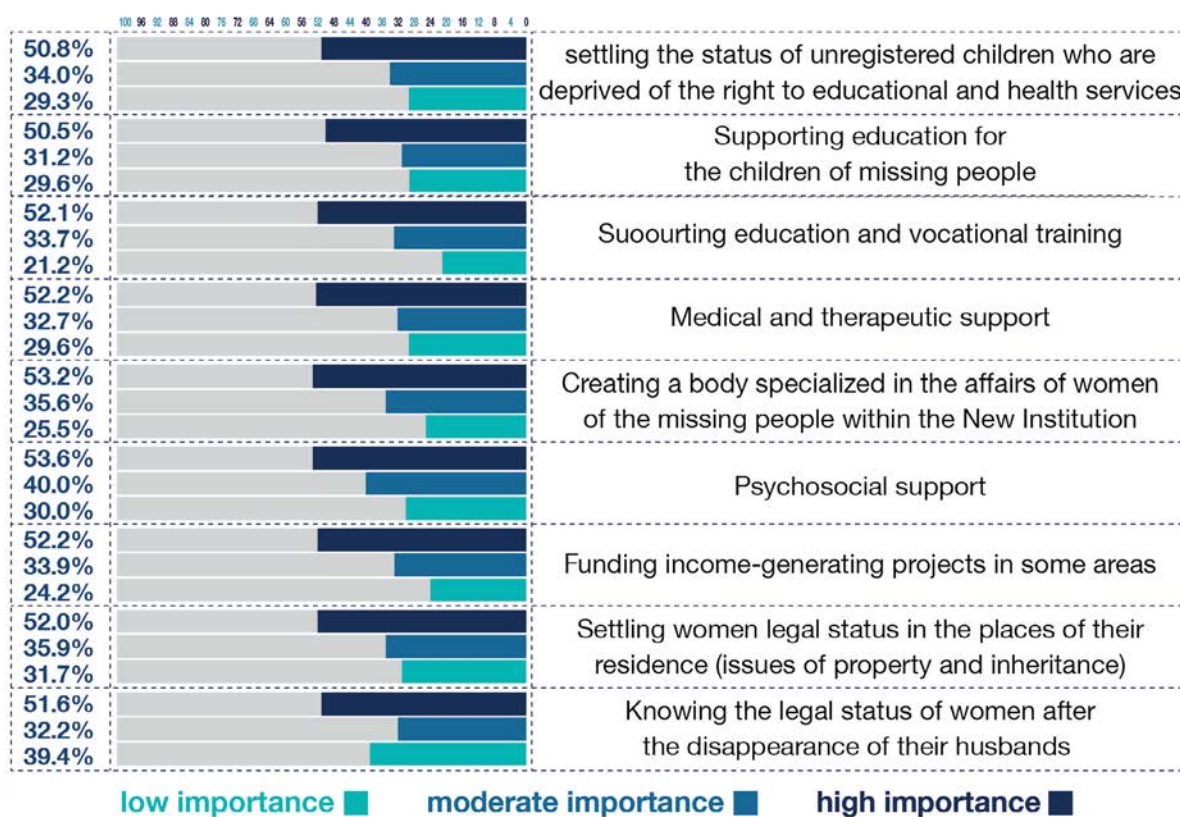


Figure (51) Women needs from The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic by respondent's sex

However, it is noted that the needs for “psychosocial, medical and therapeutic support” have received similar percentage with the settlement of the legal conditions of women and their children. Both agreed on the necessity of having a special, independent body for women within the work of the New Institution.

In the structure of the question about degrees of importance to women’s needs, the findings remained the same in terms of importance, before the “weighting” process mentioned earlier regarding the gender variable, as shown in the following two figures.

## Women Needs per Female Respondents



**Figure (52) women needs from The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic for female respondents**



## Women Needs from the New Institution per Male Respondents

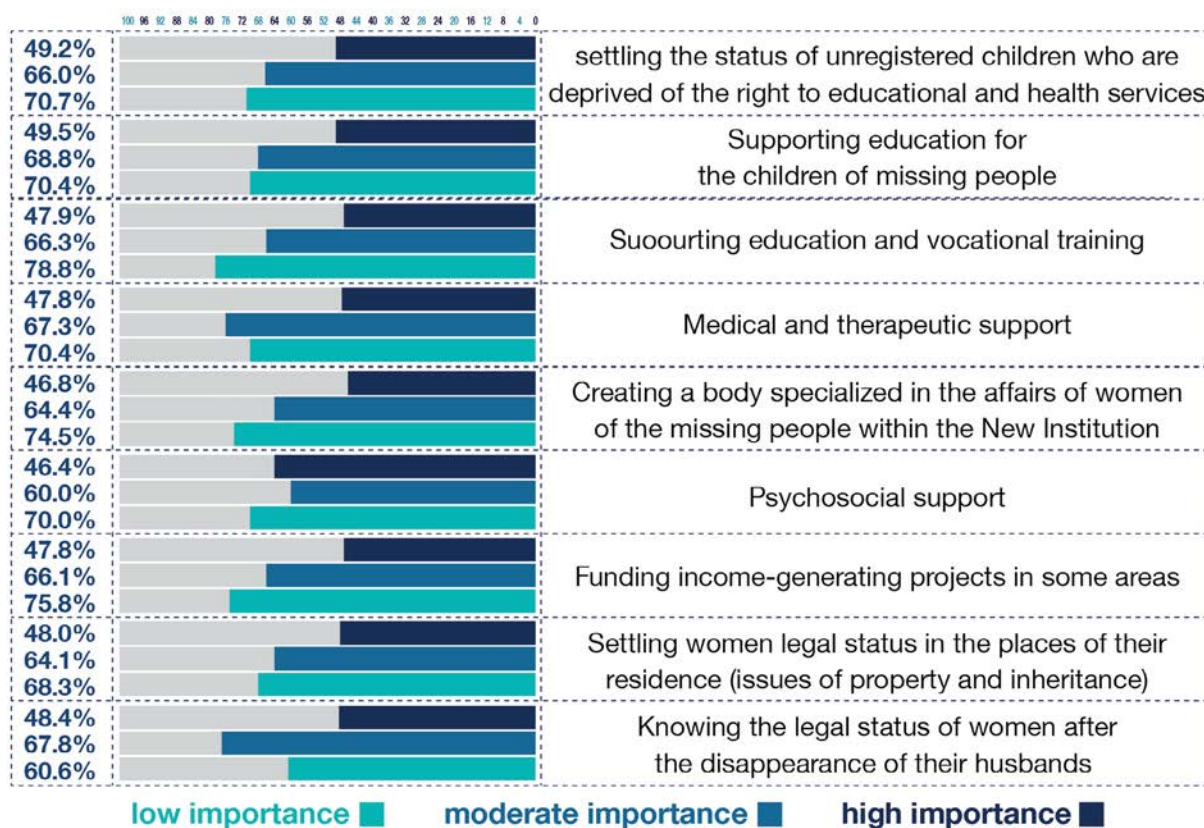


Figure (53) women needs from The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic for male respondents

## **Conclusions**

1. The study sample comprised 2560 subjects (51.6% male, 48.4% female)
2. Balanced representation was observed in selecting the study sample in terms of the main variables (gender, age, duration of disappearance, place of residence).
3. Field findings showed that the incidence of going missing or disappearing was largest in the early stages of the Syrian revolution and war (2011 through 2016) which is consistent with the pattern of conflict during those stages where political and military tensions escalated with an upsurge of violence by all parties, let alone the impact of displacement processes which rippled through various areas of control.
4. 91.8% of the study sample know the place of disappearance (inside Syria, neighboring countries, on smuggling routes) while 8.2% do not.
5. The highest percentage (89.7%) of missing cases took place inside Syria, followed by smuggling routes to Europe (7.11%)
6. The study sample was exposed to negative discrimination by official institutions. Families of the missing were subject to negative behavior from the local community (social isolation, disregard, blame by social community, family and relatives, social stigmatization.)
7. Families of the missing have been subject to disregard and lack of attention from relevant international organizations as well as Syrian civil society organizations.
8. Women have been more prone to social isolation, community blame, social stigmatization and bullying than men.
9. The highest level of social impact have been in areas controlled by the Syrian government (Damascus) followed by areas controlled by the Syrian Interim Government, Lebanon and SDF-controlled areas.
10. In terms of adverse discrimination by official institutions, the sample from Jordan ranked highest followed by areas under the Syrian regime, SIG and Idlib.
11. Relatives of the first degree of the missing were subject to the largest level of social, psychological, legal and economic repercussions.
12. The study sample was subject to several levels of psychological impact attributable to the incidence of disappearance (serious psychological conditions, psychological

harm, chronic psychological issues). In rare cases, the impact reached the level of (suicidal wishes by the children or the wife).

13. The years of disappearance in the early stages of the war were psychologically harsher for the families of the missing becoming less severe proportionately with the pattern of missing cases or the places where the missing are.
14. The study sample experienced many legal and security difficulties and obstacles due to the incidence of disappearance. 62.5% of the study sample experienced security persecution in addition to difficulties extracting official documents or commercial transactions such as selling, purchasing and power of attorney.
15. Negative discrimination by existing authorities against families of the missing took various forms most prominent of which was 'extortion' of all forms. 32.9% of the study sample was exposed to forms of physical and moral violence. 25.2% of the sample was subject to arrest and detention.
16. The early years of the revolution and war witnessed the highest level of discrimination, of all forms, by existing authorities. Discrimination subsided gradually as the years of the war passed.
17. 66.8% of the study sample experienced severely dire living conditions due to the incidence of disappearance in addition to other impacts such as dismissal from work in public or private institutions and denial of employment opportunities by several employers.
18. The largest level of economic impacts on the families of the missing was in areas under the Syrian government (Damascus) as they faced difficulties keeping their jobs in official institutions and denial of employment opportunities by private employers mainly which gave rise to deteriorating living conditions.
19. 68.4% of the study sample reported the incidence of missing or disappearing to the competent bodies (official, local or international human rights organizations) while 31.6% did not report.
20. 24.3% of the study sample 'never' contacted any organizations concerned with human rights of missing persons affairs while the rest of the sample communicated repeatedly. 20.7% made such communication seven or more times.
21. Only 6.4% of the study sample are affiliated with missing persons associations.
22. 87.5% of the study sample never heard of The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

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23. 12.5% of the study sample heard of The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic.
  24. Only 19.4% of those who heard of the new institution have been consulted regarding the new institution and its working mechanisms.
  25. Revealing the fate of the missing continues to be the highest priority for the study sample while some other needs and priorities also surfaced including reparations and provision of legal support.
  26. The level of expectations from the 'new institution' was generally moderate.
  27. The highest expectation was the presence of an 'precise mechanism' to record, document and store the data of the missing (60.4%). Expecting a financial compensation for disappearance was also high.
  28. The most important need of women according to the study sample was supporting the education of the children of the missing and settling the status of unregistered children. Other needs related to vocational training and education for women, provision of financial support to fund income-generating projects and offering medical and psychosocial support continuously also surfaced.

## **Suggestions and Recommendations**

### **To Syrian civil society organizations:**

1. Broadening outreach to various strata of the families of the missing who have not been reached before.
2. Organizations must consult with associations before they design their activities on missing persons and during their implementation.
3. Programs of the organizations must involve facilitating access of families of the missing to The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic and all international platforms.
4. Helping families of the missing to form associations, empowering and training them and helping them advocate their causes.
5. Designing referral programs which help families of the missing access medical, psychological, legal, economic and other services.
6. Providing victim associations with legal support and ensuring the participation of families of the missing in advocacy activities for their cause.
7. Providing psychological support sessions for families of the missing with specialists.
8. Providing programs that ensure the economic empowerment of families of the missing, especially women, through professional training that helps them access the labor market.
9. Coordinating between organizations to collaborate with The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic so that the role of victim representatives is voluntary-based to avoid conflict of interest.
10. Respecting the principles of confidentiality and informed consent with relation to sharing the data of the missing by the family or organizations working on documentation and collection of evidence.
11. It is essential for feminist organizations to take part in order to provide the necessary technical support on gender diversification sensitivity among the missing and the disproportionate impact of enforced disappearance on women.

### **To victim associations:**

1. Collaboration between Syrian and international associations and organizations.

2. Giving more attention to reaching families of the missing inside Syria and neighboring countries.
3. Establishing associations which involve families of the missing in their geographical areas to enhance their position and demands in the community where they live.
4. Creating programs which target families of the missing as 'victims'.
5. Further engaging the missing in discussions around justice and updating them about developments in their causes.
6. Creating a space for families of the missing to talk about their experiences and demands and communicate them to various actors and the international institution through direct communication.
7. Focusing in particular on economic and legal needs of women from the families of the missing.
8. Focusing efforts and tools to serve the cause of the missing and their families as the core of the issue of the missing.
9. Encouraging families of the missing to form alliances and supporting them to advocate their cause.
10. Continuing collaboration and coordination among victim associations to ensure the efforts are coordinated and integrated.

#### **To negotiation delegations:**

1. Asserting the disclosure of the fate of the missing in accordance with UNSC Resolution 2254 and releasing them and linking unveiling their fate to the accountability question.
2. Asserting the realization of justice through a fair and transparent political system with independent and impartial judiciary.
3. Emphasizing the introduction of constitutional texts which protect families of the missing in order to achieve justice for the missing and their families and lay the foundation for a sustainable process for missing persons in future Syria.
4. Asserting fair trials which respect all the guarantees and rights enshrined in the international law for human rights and the national legal system under a state which upholds the principle of legitimacy.
5. Since the Syrian regime is responsible for most enforced disappearances, it must be held accountable for the physical and mental wellbeing of all detainees as per international law. In addition, parties to the conflict must be held responsible for missing processes.



6. Asserting the reform of security apparatuses and rule of law.
7. Seeking to establish a Syrian missing persons committee aiming to ensure the rights of families of the missing to justice, truth and compensations within a comprehensive transitional justice track.

### **To The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic:**

1. Supporting the efforts of victims, survivors and their families to learn the fate of their loved ones.
2. The work of the institution must be under the umbrella of a comprehensive sustainable solution.
3. The process of unveiling the fate of detainees must involve reporting places where they are held in custody, allowing visits and communication, and guarantees to release those who were arbitrarily arrested.
4. Addressing the legal and financial impacts for families and issues related to access to property, personal and real estate documentation, bank accounts, inheritance, child custody issues among others.
5. Eliminating the families fear of reprisal when reporting cases and not exposing them to extortion and bribery by ensuring direct contact between the institution and the families away from providing lists of missing persons names.
6. Introducing an effective approach which takes into consideration the Syrian regime's or other actors' potential failure to cooperate with any international mechanism to unveil the fate of the missing. This approach must include steps which may be taken in case the work of the mechanism is hindered including taking all possible measures against them.
7. The mandate of the institution must include identifying causes of going missing for all bodies, institutions and individuals responsible for disappearance.
8. Ensuring that the institution communicates and coordinates with all associations of families of the missing and relevant civil society organizations.
9. According special attention to women victims and women and children in the families of the missing.
10. Ensuring engagement of Syrian men and women in various geographical areas (representatives from inside Syria and neighboring countries) as the needs vary from one place to the other.

11. Seeking to access all formal and informal places of detention under all actors and the potential sites of mass graves.
12. It is essential to form an ad hoc sub-team specialized with cases of disappearance before 2011 so that the mechanism maintains its mandate based on the resolution and does not exclude pre-2011 cases of disappearance.
13. Mass graves and remains of the victims must not be tampered with now and should only be opened under international auspices.
14. The new institution must have access to all families including through establishing regional offices in neighboring countries.
15. Syrian and international human rights reports must be made use of in order to better understand the context of disappearance, hence helping to identify potential locations of the missing.
16. The new institution for the missing must cooperate with other international mechanisms such as the COI and IIM.

### **To the UN General Assembly**

1. Securing adequate political and financial support to enable The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic to meet the needs of the families of the missing and emphasizing the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions.
2. Mobilizing international political will to ensure the success of the new institution.
3. Security political will and political consensus among several international and regional parties to ensure the success of the institution.
4. Ensuring the work of international mechanisms is integrated and coordinated.
5. Putting pressure on the Syrian regime to cooperate with UN bodies and facilitate their work including the new institution.
6. Taking all measures to ensure putting an end to the use of torture and inhumane treatment against detainees in addition to extrajudicial executions outside the jurisdiction of independent and fair judicial system.
7. Putting pressure on the regime to abolish all the laws and decrees which contradict international laws for human rights including through abolishing special courts and minimizing the role of military courts to ensure they have no jurisdiction over civilians.

## Annex: Questionnaire of the Field Study

Questionnaire of the needs and priorities of the families of missing and forcibly disappeared persons

### First – Data of the respondent from the family of the missing person

<b>101</b>	<b>Name of respondent (optional)</b>		
<b>102</b>	<b>Sex</b>	Male	
		Female	
<b>103</b>	<b>Age</b>	18-27	
		28-37	
		38-47	
		48- 57	
		and above 58	
<b>104</b>	<b>Current place of residence</b>	Regime-controlled areas	
		Idlib areas	
		Syrian Interim Government areas	
		SDF-controlled areas	
		Lebanon	
		Jordan	
		Turkiye	
		European countries	

105	Degree of kinship with the missing/ disappeared person	Father	
		Mother	
		Son	
		Daughter	
		Brother	
		Sister	
		Husband	
		Wife	
		Grandfather	
		Grandmother	
		kinship from the side of the father's siblings	
		kinship from the side of the mother's siblings	
		Other (mention)	

## Second – data of the missing person

201	Name of the missing or disappeared person (optional)		
202	Sex	Male	
		Female	
203	Age at the time of disappearance	Below 18	
		18-27	
		28-37	
		38-47	
		48- 57	
		58 or above	
204	Date of disappearance (year)		
205	Missing/ disappeared and I know where he/she disappeared	Inside Syria	
		Neighboring countries	
		Smuggling routes to Europe	
		Other (mention):	
207	Missing/ disappeared and I do not know where he/she disappeared		

### Third – Psychosocial Impacts

301	have you suffered from the following due to the disappearance:	Significantly	Somewhat	Slightly	No
	Social isolation (negligence by local community)				
	Blame by (social surrounding, friends, family and relatives)				
	Stigma				
	(bullying) negative discrimination by official institutions				
	Feeling of disregard by Syrian civil society organizations				
	Feeling of disregard by international organizations				
	Other (mention)				
302	Have you experienced the following symptoms after the case of disappearance?	Significantly	Somewhat	Slightly	No
	Difficult psychological conditions at some point				
	Psychological harm and I saw a specialist psychiatrist				
	I have now a chronic psychological issue				
	Other (mention)				

### Fourth – Legal and Economic Impacts

401	Have you been affected by the following legal obstacles because of the disappearance:	Obstacles in obtaining official documents for the missing person or family thereof	
		Obstacles in real estate transactions (sale, purchase)	
		Security persecution	
		Security obstacles to movement or travel	
		Other (mention):	
402	Did anyone of the missing person's relatives get discriminated against by the existing authority?  If yes, what kind of discrimination?	Arrest and detention	
		Violence (moral or physical)	
		Any form of extortion	
		Other (mention)	



403	Have there been economic impacts on the relatives of the missing person after their disappearance, such as:	Severe hardship in living conditions	
		Difficulty in continuing at the same job in official institutions	
		Rejection by private entities to employ relatives of the missing person	
		Other:	

## Fifth – Needs, Priorities and Expectations

501	Have you reported the case of disappearance to any entity (official, local or international human rights organization)	Yes		
		No		
502	How often have you communicated with institutions or entities concerned with this issue			
503	How often did institutions or entities concerned with the issue communicated with you			
504	Are you affiliated with any association or entity concerned with missing persons?	Yes		
		No		
505	Did you hear about The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic	Yes		
		No		
506	If yes, have you been consulted on the New Institution and its working mechanism by any specialized entity?	Yes		
		No		
	If no, (data collector should explain to the respondent the New Institution and its creation)			
507	What are the most important needs and priorities for you?	Significantly	Somewhat	Slightly
	Revealing the fate of the missing person			
	Holding those responsible for the disappearance accountable			
	Reparation			
	Providing financial support to the family of missing person			
	Providing psychosocial support to the family of missing person			

	Providing legal support (legal counseling, securing official documents for the missing person, assisting in hiring a representative for the missing person)			
	Financial compensation for the case of disappearance			
	Other (mention):			
<b>508</b>	<b>What do you expect from the working mechanism of this institution?</b>	<b>Significantly</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Slightly</b>
	A precise mechanism for registering, documenting and preserving data of the missing person			
	A new mechanism for revealing the fate of missing people			
	A new mechanism for holding those responsible for the disappearance accountable			
	Sharing information and investigations with the families of missing people			
	A greater role for the families of missing people in revealing the fate of missing people			
	Having liaison offices for the Institution in neighboring countries to Syria			
	Having documents from trustworthy institutions that prove the case of disappearance/ adopting a recognized document of (missing person)			
	Compensation for the case of disappearance (morally and financially)			
	Provision of ongoing legal support and counselling for the families of missing people			
	Provision of psychosocial support and counselling			
	Other (mention)			

509	<b>What are the specific needs of women members of the families of missing people?</b>  <b>What are the specific needs of women members of the families of missing people?</b>	High importance	Moderate importance	Low importance
	Knowing the legal status of women after the disappearance of their husbands			
	Settling women legal status in the places of their residence (issues of property and inheritance)			
	Financial support through funding income-generating projects in some areas			
	Psychosocial support			
	Creating a body specialized in the affairs of women of the missing people within the New Institution			
	Medical and therapeutic support			
	Supporting education and vocational training for those who need it			
	Supporting education for the children of missing people			
	Settling the status of unregistered children who are deprived of the right to educational and health services			
	Other (mention)			
510	<b>Is there anything else you would like to add?</b>			







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