

Aid Fund for Syria (AFS)

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Approach

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The AFS Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Approach builds on the Aid Fund for Northern Syria (AFNS) GESI Strategy developed in 2023 and translates its commitments into a practical framework for implementation. The original strategy was informed by the combined expertise of the AFNS GESI Advisor and the AFNS GESI Focal Point, including systematic assessments of partners' GESI capacities during proposal reviews. The analytical steps underpinning the strategy were guided by the Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS) and relevant global gender equality frameworks.

The updated GESI Approach reflects changes in the Syrian context, the revised [AFS Strategy](#) following the transition from AFNS to AFS, and lessons learned from GESI mainstreaming across AFS programmes over the past three years. It also reinforces established linkages with other AFS strategic frameworks, including [Localisation](#) and [Accountability to Affected People and Community Engagement \(AAPCE\)](#). These linkages operate both at the level of strategic objectives and at the operational level, particularly regarding partner engagement and implementation modalities, ensuring coherence and mutual reinforcement across frameworks. In addition, the GESI Approach will be further aligned with the forthcoming AFS Social Cohesion and Peacebuilding Approach, contributing to AFS's broader strategic objective of supporting longer-term recovery across Syria under the Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) Nexus.

This interconnected Approach ensures that the strategy remains adaptive, responsive, and well-informed by the evolving context in Syria.

1.2. Purpose

The purpose of the AFS GESI Approach is to strengthen the quality, accountability, and impact of AFS-supported interventions by translating the Fund's GESI commitments into clear operational guidance for programmes and partners. The Approach supports consistent integration of gender equality and social inclusion considerations across funding decisions, programme design, implementation, and monitoring.

In line with the AFS Strategy 2025–2030, the GESI Approach operationalises AFS's commitment to inclusivity, equity, and meaningful participation, while reinforcing coherence with related strategic frameworks. By addressing structural gender inequalities and social exclusion through locally grounded programming, the Approach aims to strengthen the leadership and participation of women and other marginalised groups, amplify their voices, and enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of humanitarian and recovery efforts across Syria.

1.3. Context

The humanitarian crisis in Syria continues to be shaped by prolonged instability, repeated shocks, protracted and new displacement, and the sustained erosion of basic services, livelihoods, and governance structures, further exacerbated by significant international funding constraints. Political and institutional transitions have opened limited pathways for recovery but have also introduced new risks related to capacity gaps, fragmentation, and uneven access to assistance, particularly for displaced populations and communities with reduced coping capacities. As highlighted in the AFS Strategy 2025–2030, these dynamics have entrenched structural inequalities and heightened vulnerabilities for women, children, youth, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised groups, including through constrained participation in decision-making and unequal access to services and resources. Without deliberate and inclusive recovery approaches, existing gender inequalities and patterns of social exclusion risk being reinforced across affected communities.

In addition, limited participation of women and marginalised groups in the design and implementation of response efforts has contributed to programmes that do not fully reflect their specific needs or address

underlying drivers of marginalisation. This reinforces existing power imbalances and constrains progress towards more equitable and sustainable outcomes across Syria.

Category	GESI Challenges
Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased risk of gender-based violence, including sexual violence and exploitation. Disruption of education, limiting access to schools and hindering girls' and other marginalised groups' future opportunities. Increased responsibility for household and family care, including caring for sick or injured family members. Limited access to healthcare, particularly reproductive health services, leading to increased maternal and infant mortality. Economic hardship and poverty, leading to early and forced marriage as a coping mechanism. Psychological trauma and stress due to violence, loss of family members, and ongoing insecurity.
Displacement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of social support networks and community structures, increasing vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. Overcrowded living conditions in camps or temporary settlements, increasing the risk of gender-based violence and disease transmission. Difficulty accessing education, healthcare, and other essential services. Increased risk of human trafficking and forced labour, particularly for women and girls without male family members.
Earthquakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Destruction of homes, infrastructure, and community resources, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and limiting access to essential services. Increased risk of injury or death, particularly for those living in poorly constructed or damaged buildings. Disruption of education and healthcare services, further impacting long-term opportunities and well-being. Post-disaster trauma and stress.
Diseases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased risk of illness and death, particularly for those with limited access to clean water, sanitation, and healthcare services (e.g. Cholera). Heightened vulnerability to disease due to crowded living conditions, especially in displacement sites. Disruption of healthcare services, including reproductive health, leading to complications and increased maternal and infant mortality. Increased caregiving responsibilities for women and girls, impacting education, employment, and overall well-being.
Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events, such as floods and droughts, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and resource scarcity. Impact on agriculture and food security, leading to malnutrition and increased caregiving responsibilities for women and girls. Forced migration due to climate-related factors, further disrupting social networks and increasing vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.
Cultural & Social Norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited decision-making power and participation in political and community life, perpetuating gender inequality and disempowerment. Societal expectations and norms restricting women's and girls' access to education and economic opportunities. Harmful practices, such as honour killings, female genital mutilation/cutting, and child marriage, negatively impacting women's and girls' well-being.
Humanitarian Aid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inadequate funding and resources to address the specific needs of women, girls and other marginalised groups in crisis situations. Insufficient gender-sensitive programming and protection mechanisms, increasing vulnerability to abuse and exploitation. Limited access to essential services, such as education, healthcare, and psychosocial support, particularly for marginalised and displaced populations.

Figure 1: Effects of GESI challenges in the context of Syria

Gender inequality and social exclusion remain significant barriers to equitable humanitarian and recovery outcomes in Syria. Funding and programming often do not sufficiently address the differentiated needs of women, girls, men, boys, and other marginalised groups, including access to safe services, protection, participation, and livelihood opportunities, which can heighten vulnerability to abuse, exploitation, and social tensions.

Addressing these gaps requires a GESI-informed approach across all interventions. This includes integrating gender and inclusion analysis into programme design, ensuring that services are accessible and responsive to diverse needs, and strengthening partners' capacity to implement gender-sensitive and socially inclusive programming. Meaningful participation of women and marginalised groups in decision-making, implementation, and leadership roles are essential to ensure that interventions are relevant, equitable, and locally grounded.

Promoting gender equality and social cohesion also requires engagement with communities, civil society, and governance actors to address structural drivers of exclusion and support inclusive norms, policies, and practices. By fostering inclusive participation and equitable access to resources and services, humanitarian and recovery efforts can reduce tensions, strengthen social cohesion, and contribute to more sustainable outcomes across Syria.

2. Principles and objectives

2.1. AFS principles and objectives

The table below outlines key components from the [AFS Charter](#), which are directly relevant to the GESI Approach:

Components	Contents
AFS Mission	AFS is an adaptive funding mechanism that channels principled humanitarian assistance to address basic needs, restore services, support recovery, and strengthen social cohesion across Syria. It empowers civil society, reinforces local systems, and supports communities to move from crisis to stability. By aligning humanitarian assistance with long-term priorities, and deepening local ownership, AFS lays the foundation for a more self-reliant and peaceful future.
AFS Principles	<p>AFS builds on the successful model of the Aid Fund for Northern Syria (AFNS), expanding it nationwide, adapting to Syria's evolving political, social, and economic conditions. It channels principled humanitarian assistance and supports local recovery initiatives across Syria, aligning short-term relief with longer-term resilience and stabilisation in line with its Adapt, Strengthen, Transition Approach. Relevant GESI-related key AFS principles are:</p> <p>(i) Humanitarian principles and best practices – All interventions comply with International Humanitarian Law, International Human Rights Law, the Core Humanitarian and Sphere Standards, ensuring that AFS remains firmly grounded within the humanitarian space while it enables linkages to longer term recovery and resilience.</p> <p>(ii) Localisation and ownership – Prioritise Syrian-led recovery by empowering civil society and local governance structures involved in essential service delivery, where such cooperation demonstrably addresses urgent humanitarian and basic needs.</p> <p>(iii) Inclusivity and equity – Commit to inclusive, locally led approaches that reduce exclusion and ensure meaningful participation of women-led, youth-led, and marginalised groups.</p>

	<p>(v) Resilience and economic fairness – Support economic revitalisation, sustainable livelihoods, and community-driven solutions that strengthen local resilience and reduce aid dependency.</p> <p>(viii) Reconciliation and social cohesion – Support locally led initiatives that foster social cohesion and promote civic trust, ensuring that humanitarian assistance contributes to stability and inclusive recovery.</p> <p>(ix) Conflict-sensitive and risk-informed programming – Integrate robust risk management and conflict-sensitive Approaches to ensure that interventions do not exacerbate tensions, generate grievances, or compromise humanitarian principles. This includes rigorous oversight of any engagement with governance actors to ensure principled essential service delivery.</p>
<p>AFS Objectives</p>	<p>(i) Strengthen local leadership and governance capacity – Support Syrian civil society, and technical governance bodies to lead humanitarian and recovery-linked service delivery, strengthening local ownership and resilience through targeted capacity-strengthening support where this contributes to effective, inclusive, and accountable service provision in response to humanitarian and basic needs.</p> <p>(ii) Bridge humanitarian response with recovery and resilience – Ensure that humanitarian assistance contributes to shared outcomes by linking emergency relief with early recovery, service restoration, livelihoods, and community stabilisation.</p> <p>(iii) Promote inclusive, community-driven solutions – Empower women-led, youth-led, and marginalised groups to shape inclusive, locally led humanitarian and recovery-linked initiatives that reflect community priorities and reduce exclusion.</p> <p>(iv) Improve aid effectiveness through coordination and innovation – Improve the effectiveness and coherence of humanitarian funding by aligning with broader recovery frameworks, piloting innovative financing models, and promoting coordination across sectors and actors.</p> <p>(v) Foster economic recovery and livelihoods – Support livelihoods and local economic resilience through humanitarian programming that includes vocational training, small business support, and responsible engagement with the private sector to promote immediate income opportunities and reduce dependency.</p> <p>(vi) Ensure principled, risk-managed funding – Provide a transparent, accountable, and flexible humanitarian funding mechanism that is risk-managed, compliant with donor requirements, and capable of operating effectively in politically sensitive environments.</p>

2.2 Strategic aims of the GESI Approach

The GESI Approach aims to integrate gender equality and social inclusion considerations across the Fund’s operations, with the following specific objectives:

- Encourage annual review inequalities and gender roles, norms, and dynamics within the Fund’s context.
- Identify and strengthen positive norms that promote equality, inclusion, and an enabling environment, while elevating diverse community perspectives and priorities from the ground.
- Advocate for the improved status of women, girls, people with disabilities (PWDs), the elderly, displaced persons, and other diverse groups intersectionally¹. It aims to transform social structures, policies, and

¹ "Intersectionality" is a framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities (gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, etc.) might combine to create unique modes of discrimination and privilege. In the context of this Strategy, "intersectionally" refers to the application of this framework. It means considering multiple overlapping social

societal norms that perpetuate gender inequalities by amplifying these groups' voices in the Fund's Steering Board.

- Foster a shared understanding of gender responsive and gender-transformative programming within the application context, as well as in relation to intersectional and emerging considerations such as security situations and context shifts.
- Offer practical guidance to stakeholders on translating commitments to gender equality and increased gender awareness and sensitivity into tangible actions for women’s and girls’ empowerment and gender transformation.

2.3. Specific objectives of the GESI Approach

The AFS GESI Approach comprises five strategic objectives – two dedicated to the Fund itself, and three focussed on its Implementing Partners:

For the Fund

1. To strengthen regional, national, and local responses to harmful practices by applying gender-responsive and socially inclusive Due Diligence and Capacity Assessments (DDCA) of potential partners, and by supporting the development and implementation of AFS GESI Action Plans.
2. To strengthen gender equality and social inclusion outcomes across AFS’ portfolio through GESI-informed review and scoring of proposals and GESI-focused Third-Party Monitoring (TPM) during project implementation.

For Implementing Partners

3. To use the Fund as a platform to advance gender equality, social inclusion, and human rights – particularly for marginalised groups – by ensuring collection of disaggregated data and implementation of inclusive, gender-responsive programming that addresses intersecting vulnerabilities.
4. To strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability to gender-based violence and social exclusion by applying GESI criteria throughout project design and implementation, including continuous monitoring of partners’ capacities and GESI Action Plans.
5. To operationalise AFS’ commitment to gender equality and social inclusion by strengthening partnerships with local and national stakeholders through ongoing feedback during proposal review, implementation, and partner reporting.

3. Key roles and responsibilities

Entity	Roles and responsibilities
Steering Board	Include gender equality and social inclusion experts to guide decision making and policy development. Conduct mid-annual review for AFS GESI impact on decision making.
Technical Evaluation Panel (TEP)	Ensure the committee reviews project proposals based on their potential to promote gender equality and social inclusion.
Fund Management Agent (FMA)	The FMA Team is responsible for ensuring that GESI principles are integrated into all aspects of the FMA own structure and the program and that partners are held accountable for their commitments. They are also responsible for

categorisations and their related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination when analysing a situation or implementing a strategy.

	providing the necessary resources to implement the strategy and for monitoring progress towards achieving GESI objectives.
Implementing Partners	<p>At the organisational level, Implementing Partners are responsible for integrating GESI principles into their projects, ensuring the promotion of gender equality, women's empowerment, and social inclusion. They are also expected to provide regular updates on their progress and challenges to the AFS through their Gender focal points, quarterly reporting and GESI Action Plans submitted in quarterly meetings.</p> <p>At the project level, staff should be trained on GESI principles. They are responsible for ensuring that their project activities are gender-responsive, inclusive, and promote equitable access and participation.</p> <p>Staff are responsible for monitoring and reporting GESI-related risks, concerns, and implementation gaps, and for escalating issues through established supervision and reporting mechanisms.</p>
Affected and targeted population groups	Affected and targeted population groups should be consulted and actively involved in the design and implementation of projects to ensure their needs and perspectives are taken into account. They should also be educated about their rights and given opportunities to participate in decision-making processes.

4. Roadmap from Assessment to Implementation

1. Due Diligence and Capacity Assessment (DDCA):

- Conduct a gender sensitive DDCA of potential partners to ensure their commitment to promote gender equality and social inclusion.
- Assess partners' capacity to collect disaggregated data and to design and implement gender-responsive and inclusive programming addressing the needs of marginalised groups.

2. Proposal Review and Scoring Stage regarding GESI:

- Execute a GESI-informed review and scoring of potential proposals to guarantee their dedication and capability to promote GESI.
- Score proposals based on their commitment to promoting GESI in their programs, and how designed intervention aimed at addressing gender and social inequalities.
- Assess how proposals integrate gender analysis throughout the project cycle and how they plan to measure the impact of their work on different genders and socially excluded groups.
- Provide constructive feedback and suggestions to the proposing entities on how to enhance their gender and social inclusion strategies, ensuring their interventions are effective and inclusive.

3. Monitoring During Implementation through TPM and Spot Checks regarding GESI:

- Execute a GESI-sensitive TPM during project implementation to verify the ongoing commitment and efficacy of partners in promoting gender equality and social inclusion.
- Evaluate the partner's capacity in real-time to gather gender-disaggregated data and carry out gender-responsive initiatives.

- Conduct spot-check visits conducted by GESI and grant focal points to monitor how effectively partners are integrating GESI into their operational procedures, and how their actions impact different genders and socially excluded groups.
- Provide feedback and suggestions based on the TPM reports to ensure continuous improvement in GESI-oriented strategies and practices.

4. Reviewing Partner Reports regarding GESI:

- Review partners GESI Action plans submitted in the inception phase to ensure partners' commitment to GESI promotion.
- Undertake a GESI-oriented review of reports submitted by partners to verify their ongoing commitment and capability to promote for gender equality and social inclusion.
- Evaluate the ability of partners to collect gender-disaggregated data and implement gender-responsive and socially inclusive activities, as reflected in partners' final reports.
- Analyse and provide feedback how partners are integrating gender analysis into their work and the impact of their actions on different genders and socially excluded groups, as detailed in the reports.

5. Special Conditions

- Where gaps in GESI capacity, policies, or implementation are identified during DDCA, proposal review, or monitoring and evaluation findings, AFS may issue GESI-related Special Conditions (SC) as part of the Partnership Framework Agreement (PFA) to enforce corrective actions and to strengthen partners' compliance with AFS GESI commitments throughout the project cycle.
- GESI-related SCs serve as a part of AFS's risk-informed programming approach by addressing institutional gaps that may increase exclusion, protection, and safeguarding risks, thereby strengthening partners' capacity to deliver inclusive and accountable humanitarian assistance.
- GESI-related SCs are aimed to operationalise GESI accountability when gaps in the following areas are detected:

Area	Type of GESI gap	Examples of GESI-Related SCs (for partners)
Policy	Missing or weak Gender policies or GESI strategy/approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Partner shall conduct a review of its organisational policies related to GESI to ensure that they comprehensively address equality, inclusion, and protection considerations. • Based on this review, the Partner shall develop or update a GESI policy or organisational GESI strategy, including a documented GESI Action Plan outlining responsibilities, timelines, and monitoring arrangements. • The Partner shall share the revised policy and action plan with AFS for review and feedback by AFS within an agreed timeframe and integrate relevant commitments into programme implementation.
Data	No disaggregated data and weak gender analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Partner shall establish systems to collect and report gender, age, and disability-disaggregated data for project beneficiaries and activities in line with AFS monitoring requirements. • The Partner shall strengthen gender analysis within programme design and reporting, including identifying barriers to access for women, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised groups. • The Partner shall ensure that project monitoring tools and reporting templates are

		revised where necessary to capture disaggregated data on GESI-relevant indicators.
Participation	Weak gender representation (i.e., women and marginalised groups are excluded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Partner shall review its community engagement and consultation mechanisms (GESI Action Plan) to ensure meaningful participation of women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised groups in project planning and implementation. The Partner shall report on measures taken to improve inclusive participation and provide evidence of consultations conducted with diverse community groups.
Protection	GBV risks and safeguarding gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Partner shall review its GESI, safeguarding and protection policies to ensure that they adequately address gender-based violence risks, prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PSEAH), and safe referral mechanisms. The Partner shall conduct a risk assessment and identify and incorporate risk mitigation measures to prevent harm or unintended exclusion of vulnerable or specific gender groups.
Awareness	Limited staff and stakeholder awareness on GESI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Partner shall organise GESI awareness and capacity-building sessions for relevant programme staff to strengthen understanding of gender equality and social inclusion principles and their application in project implementation. The Partner shall designate a focal point responsible for supporting the integration of GESI considerations across programme activities. The Partner shall ensure that key staff involved in project implementation receive training or guidance on inclusive programming, data disaggregation, and community engagement practices.

6. GESI Integration Across the Allocation Cycle:

- Integrate GESI analysis into allocation priorities to ensure funding responds to structural inequalities and barriers faced by marginalised groups.
- Apply GESI criteria in proposal review, scoring, and ranking to inform funding decisions.
- Use findings from TPM, spot checks, and partner reporting to assess GESI performance across the portfolio.
- Feed lessons learned and performance findings into subsequent allocation rounds to strengthen future guidance, scoring criteria, and partner support.

5. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

5.1 Monitoring

In line with the procedures outlined in the AFS Manual, the MEL of the GESI Approach is designed to ensure continuous improvement and effectiveness of the Fund’s programming. The Fund’s principles of transparency, accountability, and adaptability are reflected in the MEL processes of the GESI Approach,

ensuring alignment with AFS standard monitoring requirements and reinforcing accountability to affected populations.

- **Input Monitoring:** Tracking the resources allocated to GESI initiatives and activities aiming to promote partner’s GESI responsiveness including designed training and tailored/amended intervention to GESI needs.
- **Process Monitoring:** Evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of GESI implementation practices. This includes monitoring the integration of GESI considerations in project design, the involvement of women, girls, and marginalised groups in decision-making processes, and the accessibility and responsiveness of our projects to diverse groups.
- **Output and Outcome Monitoring:** Assessing the direct results and medium-term effects of the GESI efforts. This includes reviewing indicators related to the participation, benefits, and satisfaction of different groups (by age, gender, group, and disability) in our projects. This data is used to understand the differential impacts of implementing partners’ assistance on the targeted affected population groups.
- **Inclusive Monitoring:** Ensuring that women, girls, and marginalised groups are included in all MEL processes, including during TPM visits. Their perspectives and experiences are essential in understanding the effectiveness and relevance of the AFS GESI Approach.

5.2. Evaluation

In accordance with the standards delineated in the AFS Manual, the GESI practices will be evaluated regularly by independent evaluators. These assessments will examine the quality of GESI implementation, the results achieved, and the extent to which activities respond to the needs of diverse and marginalised groups.

This includes:

- **Effectiveness:** Evaluations will measure the extent to which AFS-led GESI initiatives are achieving their desired objectives. This will include assessing whether gender equality and social inclusion have been successfully integrated into partners’ projects.
- **Impact:** Evaluations will assess the longer-term changes to which AFS-led GESI practices contribute at fund level. This includes examining whether these practices have strengthened equitable access, participation, and inclusion of vulnerable groups. Impact analysis will be informed by data disaggregated by age, gender, disability, and other relevant diversity characteristics to capture differential effects across population groups .
- **Relevance:** Evaluations determine whether AFS-led GESI practices remain aligned with the evolving needs and feedback of the targeted diverse groups. This involves examining whether AFS-led GESI practices are responsive to the differential needs, capacities, and aspirations of women, men, girls, boys, and other marginalised groups in alignment with AFS context of intervention

5.3. Learning

Incorporating learnings into the broader AFS Strategy and GESI Approach is a critical component of the AFS MEL Approach. This process involves continuous reflection, learning, and adaptation to ensure the Fund effectively meets its commitment to gender equality and social inclusion. Learning is ensured through the following:

- **Collection and Analysis of Disaggregated Data:** The FMA utilises various sources, such as partner reports, TPM reports, Data Quality Assessments (DQAs), and field observations, to get insights. All project indicators, both output and outcome indicators that partners are required to report against are disaggregated by age, gender, group, and disability. This disaggregated data is utilised to assess both

the reach and outcome of AFS programming on all groups, thereby supporting an improved understanding of the differential impacts of AFS funded projects on diverse groups.

- **Reflect and Learn:** The FMA continuously reflects on GESI practices and results. The GESI Focal Point and MREL Lead play a crucial role in this step by ensuring the proper analysis and interpretation of disaggregated data.
- **Strategic Adaptation:** Based on learnings, the GESI Approach and action plan are regularly adapted to address identified issues and improve their effectiveness. These adaptations also influence broader policy decisions and Allocation Strategies.
 - **Policy and Practice Revision:** Insights from the implementation of the GESI Approach inform broader strategy and policy decisions, including potential enhancements to communication, localisation, AAPCE and other practices. They also support the improvement of the integration of GESI considerations into the overall Fund’s operation.
 - **Sharing Learnings:** All learnings, revised strategies, identified best practices, and lessons learned are shared within the FMA team and with the implementing partners during regular project review meetings. This not only promotes alignment of activities and supports continuous improvement, but also builds a stronger commitment to GESI among all stakeholders.
 - **Evaluations:** GESI-related learning will be reflected through relevant programme and Fund-level evaluations, which will also assess how the GESI Approach is being integrated and reflected across AFS-supported work. Findings and recommendations from evaluations will help ensure that GESI-related learning is captured, mainstreamed, and used to inform future implementation.
- **Contributions to Fund and Partner Learning:** The learnings obtained from implementing the GESI Approach is shared with partners and used to inform the Fund's overall operations:
 - **Influence Strategy and Policy Decisions:** The insights gained inform decisions on broader policies, potentially enhancing strategies for communication, localisation, AAPCE and other practices.
 - **Improve Project Quality:** The shared learnings assist partners in improving project designs and increasing their effectiveness.
 - **Inform Allocation Strategies:** Learning process inform the design of future allocation strategies, ensuring that they continue to align with the needs and priorities of all groups, irrespective of their age, gender, group, or disability.

5.4. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and specific GESI indicators

The MEL of the Fund’s GESI practices are integrated into the broader AFS monitoring framework. This integration ensures alignment and consistency in the Fund’s monitoring and evaluation approach. The following KPIs for GESI track the Fund’s performance in accountability alongside other organisational goals.

Indicators	Target
% of beneficiaries reporting that humanitarian assistance is delivered in a safe, accessible, accountable, and participatory manner (active AFS projects)	70%
% of beneficiaries reporting knowledge on how to report safeguarding incidents (cross-cutting with safeguarding & active AFS projects)	70%
% of beneficiaries reporting that they have been consulted about their needs and capacities (active AFS projects)	60%
Percentage of applicant organisations assessed and scored for GESI during DDCA	100%

Percentage of funded projects reviewed and scored regarding GESI	100%
Number of women led organisations (WLO) underwent the DDCA process	5

5.5. MEL Responsibilities

The responsibility for implementing the MEL process is shared across AFS, with specific roles assigned to the GESI Focal Point, MREL Lead, Quality and Impact Officers, PDU Managers.

- GESI Focal Point:** The GESI Focal Point plays a key role in implementing MREL for GESI and AAPCE. The Focal Point follows up with partners, implements the planned capacity-building activities (where applicable), and monitors progress against all GESI indicators. The Focal Point also works closely with the MREL Lead to report on progress against these indicators.
- MREL Lead:** The MREL Lead supports the GESI Focal Point in data analysis and shares findings from the TPM reports, DQAs, and field visits.
- Quality and Impact Officers:** The Quality and Impact Officers support the integration of GESI principles in line with the GESI Approach by working closely with the GESI Focal Point to ensure inclusive participation and compliance with minimum data disaggregation requirements across field data collection and engagement activities. They also conduct Focus Group Discussions and consult with the community as directed by the GESI Focal Point. They serve as the primary contacts with the communities, collecting feedback and monitoring the ground-level implementation of GESI principles.
- Partnerships and Delivery Unit (PDU) Managers:** The PDU Managers support the GESI Focal Point in monitoring partners' progress against individual GESI Action Plans, input monitoring, follow-up with partners on the GESI findings, participate in the GESI regular review of the Fund.

6. Risk Management

Implementing the GESI Approach in the Syrian context entails specific risks. The following table identifies the main anticipated risks and the strategies planned to mitigate them, enabling continued progress toward objectives while minimising potential negative impacts on affected communities.

Key risk	Mitigation steps
1. Prevalent gender norms and inequality within local communities in Syria	Work closely with local partners to engage communities and present gender concepts in a culturally sensitive manner. Capacity-building of partners to effectively involve communities in the GESI Action Plan design and implementation.
2. Partners' policies are not contextualised to the local situation	Encourage and support partners to adapt their policies to the changing context of Syria. This could involve advocacy and capacity-building efforts with these partners.
3. Local partners' lack of capacity to understand and implement gender-sensitive interventions	Intensify capacity building and training for local partners on GESI. Make it a central part of partnership agreements.

Key risk	Mitigation steps
4. Limited understanding of gender equality among targeted communities	Support local partners in implementing sensitisation and awareness-raising campaigns on gender equality within the target communities. Ensure these initiatives respect local cultures.
5. Insufficient funding allocated to GESI-related expenses in proposals	Advocate for and provide guidance to partners on allocating more funding for GESI in proposals and budgets.
6. Limited availability of GESI resources and materials in Arabic and minority languages relevant to the Syrian context.	Collaborate with other organisations or support local partners in developing or translating gender resources into relevant languages.
7. Continued conflict and insecurity in the region	Support partners in conducting regular conflict analysis and ensure the GESI strategy remains adaptive, resilient, and responsive to changes in the security situation.
8. Limited access to certain regions due to conflict	Strengthen partnerships with local organisations that have access to these regions. Ensure robust remote management and third-party monitoring mechanisms are in place.
9. Resistance or backlash from local communities due to perceived threat to traditional norms	Work with local partners to engage proactively with community leaders to gain their support. Support partners in contextualising messages on gender to local culture.
10. High levels of displacement leading to changing community dynamics	Provide support and resources to partners for regularly updating community profiles and conducting analysis to understand changing dynamics. Ensure the GESI Approach remains adaptable for displaced populations.
11. High levels of trauma and mental health issues due to conflict	Incorporate mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) training within the capacity-building efforts for partners. Encourage partners to integrate trauma-informed care in their work.

Regarding all partner related risks see also chapter 4, point 5 on Special Conditions.

Annex I

GESI Action Plan for Implementing Partners

Organisational Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Action Plan				
Key deliverables	Timeline	Status (Completed/Planned/Ongoing)	Means Of Verification	Q1
A Leadership and Management Strategies for GESI Mainstreaming <i>Describe the actions that management will implement to support the integration and mainstreaming of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion principles throughout the organisation.</i>				Partner Update
1	Establish a GESI Committee/consider GESI in the Organisational Decision Making Committee <i>Create a dedicated diverse and inclusive team responsible for overseeing GESI implementation, providing expertise, and monitoring progress across departments.</i>		1- Official appointment letters or terms of reference for GESI focal points/committee 2- Meeting minutes from GESI committee sessions 3- Reports produced by the GESI focal point or committee	
2	Integrate GESI into Organisational Policies <i>Management should oversee the review and revision of all organisational policies, procedures, and guidelines to ensure they incorporate GESI principles and clearly communicate zero-tolerance policy/practice for GESI-based discrimination</i>		1- Updated policy documents reflecting GESI principles 2- Minutes from policy review meetings 3- Communications sent to staff about updated policies	
3	Publicly Declare Commitment to GESI <i>Publicly share the organisation's commitment to GESI through reports, website content, and other communications.</i>		1- GESI statements on the organization's website and publications (Consider using appropriate language that respects the culture of the Syrian context)	
4	Foster an Inclusive Organisational Culture and Decision making <i>Promote a workplace culture that values diversity and inclusion by encouraging open dialogue and respect among all employees.</i>		1- Records of team-building and diversity events 2- Initiatives promoting inclusivity and diversity 3- Meeting minutes indicating inclusive participation	
B Staff Capacity Development Initiatives <i>Outline the actions designed to enhance staff competencies, awareness, and skills in GESI, ensuring all employees are equipped to effectively contribute to GESI mainstreaming within the organisation.</i>				
5	Conduct GESI Refresher Training for All Staff <i>Organise refresher sessions on GESI principles and practices for all staff to reinforce understanding and commitment.</i>		1- Training reports 2- Attendance sheets 3- Photos 4- Active engagement of leadership during training	
7	Provide Training Opportunities for Women and PWDs (including leadership opportunities) <i>Ensure that women and PWDs employed by the organisation have access to leadership training and are allocated appropriate time within working hours to participate in these activities.</i>		1- Training attendance records	
8	Implement Mentorship Programs <i>Establish mentorship opportunities pairing experienced staff with women and PWDs to support professional growth with a GESI focus.</i>		1- Mentorship program documentation 2- List of mentor-mentee pairings 3- Feedback forms from participants	
C Human Resources and Project Management Strategies for GESI Integration <i>Describe the human resources and project management policies and practices that will be implemented to embed GESI principles, including aspects such as recruitment, retention, performance management, and project planning processes.</i>				
9	Include GESI in Staff Appraisals and 360 Reviews <i>Integrate GESI objectives and prompts into performance appraisals and 360-degree feedback processes for all staff.</i>		1- Updated appraisal forms with GESI oriented questions 2- Samples of completed appraisals showing GESI integration	
10	Integrate GESI into Job Descriptions <i>Incorporate GESI responsibilities into all program-related, HR, and management job descriptions.</i>		1- Samples of revised JDs	
11	Implement Inclusive Recruitment Practices <i>Adopt recruitment strategies that promote diversity, such as diverse interview panels.</i>		1- Recruitment policy documents 2- Records of diverse interview panels 3- Diversity metrics in hiring statistics	
12	Ensure Office Accessibility for People with Disabilities <i>Commit to making offices and facilities accessible to PWDs by assessing current offices and facilities and implementing necessary improvements.</i>		1- Accessibility assessment report 2- Action plan for office modifications (budget-conscious)	
13	Human Resources Policy Review to Eliminate Discriminatory Practices and Promote GESI <i>Conduct a comprehensive review of HR policies to identify and eliminate discriminatory practices, and promote GESI. This includes supporting women's reproductive rights by providing adequate maternity leave provisions, breastfeeding accommodations, and flexible work arrangements for females with family commitments.</i>		1- Completed policy review documents 2- Action plan for policy updates 3- Revised HR policies	
14	Gender Balance Across All Departments <i>Commit to achieving an appropriate balance of women and men in all departments by assessing current workforce demographics and implementing necessary measures.</i>		1- Gender balance assessment report 2- Action plan to promote gender diversity	
D Creating/maintaining Safe Reporting mechanism <i>Detail the measures aimed at establishing and maintaining safe, respectful, and inclusive environments for all staff members, where discrimination and harassment are actively prevented, and diversity is valued and celebrated.</i>				
15	Develop/maintain a Safe Reporting Mechanism <i>Implement confidential channels for reporting discrimination or harassment, ensuring protection and support for those who report.</i>		1- Documentation of reporting procedures 2- Communications to staff about reporting mechanisms 3- Logs of reports and follow-up actions (maintaining confidentiality)	