The Strategic Policy Alternatives Framework

Issue II

UNITED NATIONS
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Shared Prosperity **Dignified Life**

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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

The Strategic Policy Alternatives Framework
Issue II

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
National Agenda for the Future of Syria (NAFS) Programme

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Overcoming despair – towards a future for all Syrians

About this report

The Strategic Policy Alternatives Framework (SPAF) report emanates from the work of the National Agenda for the Future of Syria (NAFS) Programme and its belief that all Syrians have the responsibility and the right to engage in discussions about Syrian national interest. A core assumption underlying all NAFS work, including the present document, is that the analysis and recommendations presented here have been developed in the interests of all Syrians regardless of their political persuasion and affiliation. The report presents a comprehensive picture of Syria today while also being concerned with its past and future. It seeks to help preserve the rich cultural heritage of Syria, a key part of the collective memory and identity of Syrians, to uphold the interests and well-being of current generations of Syrians, and just as importantly, to safeguard the rights of future Syrians to live in an inclusive and just society, with equality

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between men and women, and a strong democratic State capable of delivering on their needs and wants in an ecologically sustainable natural landscape.

Audience and scope

In addition to its painful human cost, the Syrian conflict has undoubtedly left a complex and multi-layered set of challenges for Syrian society to overcome. The present report was written to consider these challenges and has multiple audiences in mind. First and foremost, the main audience is Syrian society itself, that is to say, individual citizens as well as civil society, various social and political forces, and de facto Syrian powers. We hope that Syrians will find useful reference points in this report that explain the current context as well as recommendations as to where Syria should be heading in the near future if it hopes to escape conflict and achieve a path of sustainable peacebuilding. Second, the present report and the policy proposals herein also speak to the efforts being made at the regional and international level to bring about a peaceful

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and just resolution to the Syrian conflict and to start addressing the challenges of recovery. We therefore believe that various actors of interest to

peacebuilding in Syria will find in this document a more comprehensive picture of the conflict context and the key challenges in multiple sectors. The report presents recommendations relating to four priority pillars, and within each pillar, different policy recommendations have their respective audience.

Third, the present report is a key output of the work of the NAFS Programme. Developed by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the NAFS Programme has served as a platform for dialogue between a wide spectrum of Syrian stakeholders since 2012 and is based on the collaboration of active networks of actors in civil society, the private sector and international institutions. Its inclusive and technical approach has set it apart from other platforms. The NAFS Programme was launched and continued at a time when polarization within Syrian society was significant. It succeeded in bringing together Syrians who, despite their disagreements, shared common values and principles. Most importantly, NAFS network worked to provide policy alternatives on the most pressing economic, social and governance issues. This report therefore represents the culmination of NAFS work in Phase II (February 2017-June 2021) as well as a reference point for the work of its experts in Phase III (started in July 2021). NAFS Phase III will then use the present report as a general roadmap which will inform the development of specific working groups, feasible policies and more detailed guiding notes for implementation.

Underlying the previous and current SPAF reports is the aspiration and belief that all Syrians deserve to live in peace under a new social contract that respects the principles of citizenship, equality, democratic governance, rule of law, social justice, and equitable and sustainable development. All Syrians deserve a dignified life without daily fear of violence, imprisonment, displacement and oppression.

In 2011, shortly before the conflict began, the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report ranked Syria 124th out of 135 countries, with women making up only 22 per cent of the labour force.[1] In 2021, Syria was ranked 152nd out of 156 countries, with female participation in the labour force dramatically dropping to 15.8 per cent.[2] This report recommends that gender equality and gender sensitive policies should be at the forefront of and central to peacebuilding and recovery efforts.

The first SPAF report, published in 2017 toward the end of the first phase of NAFS, henceforth referred to as SPAF I, identified and analysed the root causes of the conflict to ensure that policy deficiencies of the past would be addressed and would not be repeated when developing policy alternatives for the future. SPAF I also developed the principles of the NAFS Programme, agreed upon by the Syrian NAFS experts, for a vision for Syria in 2030 in order to set forward-looking policies. Those principles were, in the NAFS experts' views, the common denominators which most Syrians, regardless of political opinion, could agree upon.[3] In addition, SPAF I developed scenarios for how the conflict may end, in order to have a realistic starting point for reconstruction and recovery and to adjust the policy alternatives accordingly.[4]

The principles and scenarios developed by the NAFS Programme, in addition to United Nations principles and relevant resolutions, were necessary given the absence of either a negotiated settlement or a clear national post-conflict consensus. The NAFS Programme required inclusive reference points upon which to build its work. To achieve this, NAFS has regularly studied the impact of the conflict to ensure that the policy options developed in SPAF I remained relevant and up-to-date. This has included various periodic documents and policy briefs looking at macro-economic developments, as well as sector-by-sector damages, needs and coping

mechanisms. The main findings were published in the *Syria at War: Eight Years On* report, a comprehensive assessment of the impact of the conflict up until that point in the economic, governance and social domains.[5]

The present report builds towards the future and the possibilities for a path of just and inclusive peacebuilding as well as equitable economic recovery. It does so by providing policy recommendations in four different areas of concern: social policy; economic governance; political governance and institutional rehabilitation; and reconciliation and social cohesion. Each of these areas are multisectoral and exist as a nexus of different areas of concern.

The situation in Syria is complex and fluid, and data generation in conflict-ridden contexts is known to be difficult. The goal of the report is to offer a diagnosis of underlying dynamics and longer-term trends and suggest policy frameworks to address them. This report has done so by analysing the most up-to-date and accurate empirical data. However, the report acknowledges that reliable data is often scarce and there are

occasionally contradictory estimations of the same indicators due to different underlying assumptions or methodologies. In most cases, the data included is sourced from NAFS outputs, such as the *Syria at War: Eight Years On* report, background papers, papers by other offices and agencies of the United Nations, including ESCWA, and research by Syrian, regional, or international organizations. Moreover, the report also indicates areas needing further research or evidence and where the best-available data used is, even if slightly dated. In many cases, NAFS itself is leading the process of data generation and evidence-based analysis of the impact of various policies.

Future Vision for Syria 2030

An underlying reference for a future vision for Syria emanates from the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The year 2020 marks the 75th year of the establishment of the United Nations. Peace, conflict prevention and conflict resolution were central to its founding. The Preamble to the United Nations Charter states that the institution was created to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" and the first clause of Article 1 further elaborates on the purposes of working toward international peace and security. The 2030 Agenda, adopted in September 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly, provides 17 interlinked goals and 169 targets that explicitly link the United Nations mission for peace

with that of sustainable and inclusive development and balances three dimensions: economic, social and environmental. The goals of the 2030 Agenda are applicable to all countries including Syria, which is one of the signatories.[6] Reference to the 2030 Agenda is a reminder that Syrians have a right to aspire to the same goals as citizens of any other country, regardless of their particular circumstances. It is also a reminder to the international community

of its commitment to "Leave No One Behind", a principle that is particularly applicable to countries in conflict, which have seen significant regression rather than progress on almost all the main indicators and targets, with developmental implications not just for Syria, but the entire region.[7]

Box 1. United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

In 2015, 193 countries in the world, including the Syrian Arab Republic, agreed on the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which envisions achieving 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals represent the world's best plan to build a better world for people and our planet by 2030. Adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, the SDGs are a call for action by all countries – poor, rich and middle-income – to promote prosperity while protecting the environment. They recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and address a range of social needs including education, health, equality and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and working to preserve our ocean and forests.

To balance the economic, social and environmental dimensions, it is important to understand their linkages and interactions. Promoting sustainable development and helping to prevent a relapse into conflict means minimizing negative impacts and risks arising from trade-offs among the dimensions and maximizing the positive potentials or synergies among the different dimensions. Approaches that have an environmental focus can help to better balance the different dimensions of sustainable development because efforts in a post-conflict country normally focus on the social and economic sector. There are two sets of approaches that are most suitable for the Syrian Arab Republic, especially if used in combination: (1) approaches that link pro-poor economic development with the environment, because their focus is on livelihoods and poverty (and therefore relates to the social dimension) and they link economic and environmental sustainability, and (2) approaches that link the environment and natural resources with peacebuilding, because they provide the missing link to peacebuilding.

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), "Guidance Notes: Developing National Sustainable Development Strategies in Post-Conflict Countries", ROA 105, 2011.

Additionally, the 2030 Agenda takes a holistic approach, "in which democracy, good governance and the rule of law as well as an enabling environment at national and international levels, are essential for sustainable development, including sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development, environmental protection and the eradication of poverty and hunger".[8] The attention to environmental issues is particularly important and relevant, as will be elaborated on throughout this report. The toxic legacy of the conflict implies that a green recovery for Syria is an essential matter of life and death for millions of Syrians.[9] In addition to the 2030 Agenda, NAFS has worked to develop a common framework to support the vision for the Syrian Arab Republic.

To develop this common framework, SPAF II took several steps that started with establishing four fundamental underlying premises that the NAFS experts believed the vast majority of Syrians would agree upon regardless of their political affiliation and vision for the country. These principles are worth reiterating today as they have become increasingly relevant.

1. Underlying principles

- **The first** is that Syria is and must remain a unified country within its political boundaries and that any attempt to fragment and partition Syria will have severely negative consequences on all sectors of Syrian society, as well as negative implications for the region as a whole.

- **The second** is the belief that Syrian society has the creativity and capacity to rebuild Syria and achieve equitable and sustainable economic development for current and future Syrian generations.

- **The third** is an appreciation and recognition of the richness and diversity of Syrian cultural heritage. This heritage, which dates back to the birth of civilization itself, has always been and will continue to be a source of pride for all Syrians and part of a collective memory that works to unite them.

- **The fourth** is the recognition that Syria has a unique geopolitical position that gives rise to a particular set of challenges. This fact was tragically borne out as "the struggle for Syria" witnessed regional and international powers contribute to plunging the country into a destructive conflict of annihilation and hindering the capacity for resolution of the conflict.

Participants in the NAFS platform agreed on the Future Vision for Syria 2030 as a unifying future of their country. It is there to be shared and discussed through extensive social dialogue as this is solely the decision of the Syrian people and the Syrian society.

The NAFS network of experts believe that in order for Syria to engage in a meaningful peacebuilding phase, the political culture of Syria has to move away from the zero-sum logic and extreme polarization of the military conflict. This means not only accepting the other in practice but also in speech and political rhetoric. Political struggle is a normal aspect of all societies and the task during the peacebuilding phase is to move it from violent to non-violent means, that is, to initiate a positive peace. Key priorities are to forge a new social contract and enhance State legitimacy through a consensual process of reforming the governance structure and rehabilitating political institutions in a representative manner, to undo the impact of the war economy, and to rehabilitate public administration, as well as implement appropriate measures for administrative and fiscal decentralization.

2. Aspirational principles

The underlying premises also implied aspirational principles that should guide the work of a future vision. These include:

1. The belief that all components of Syrian society seek to achieve a voluntary, safe and dignified return of the displaced Syrian people. Return is treated as a long process of reintegration that involves the rehabilitation of Syrian social capital.

2. Syria is a country where political will is carried out solely through peaceful means and regulated by inclusive and empowered democratic institutions. Ensuring the safety and security of the people is a major priority. Both peace and human security find in national reconciliation the foundation for nationally-owned peacebuilding and state-building processes. Priority should be given to rebuilding the culture of peace and eliminating structural violence.

3. Syria is a country built on full active citizenship, solidarity and mutual cooperation, where the diversity of the people is protected and fully empowered.

4. Syrians are represented and empowered in the public sphere in accordance with the principle of active and equal citizenship.

5. The public institutions of Syria are qualified and accountable and earn citizens' trust. A comprehensive, inclusive and transparent national administrative structure is established with subsidiarity and administrative decentralization as its key principles. The national economy supports comprehensive, balanced, citizen-centred development, which provides social protection to all segments of the population and includes citizens in all aspects of the development process.

6. Syria is a country striving to achieve a balanced and just recovery. This entails physical and social reconstruction, the generation of knowledge and innovation to sustainably administer and protect resources, and the use of information technology and communication to consolidate peacebuilding and support growth.

3. Sustainable peacebuilding principles

Taken together, these guiding principles lead to the principles of peacemaking and peacebuilding in the next phase:

7. A political transformation of the Syrian Arab Republic, based on Security Council resolution 2254, that guarantees a culture of democracy is

built and practiced, mutual political trust is re-established among the main political players, and the rule of law, equality and citizenship are established. Based on Security Council resolution 1325, special attention is paid to the role of women as victims of war and leaders in the peacemaking process.

8. The right of displaced persons and refugees to a safe, dignified and voluntary return to their homes (or to any other location inside the country they voluntarily choose to return to).

9. A national reconciliation to which all Syrians are invited and encouraged to contribute.

10. Balanced and equitable citizen-centred development that: (a) directly contributes to stability, peacebuilding and reconciliation at local and national levels, (b) is tangible and reflected in the availability of rehabilitated social and physical infrastructure, and (c) empowers people, especially the most vulnerable and poor, to attain their basic needs.

11. Moving towards a governance framework and national administrative structure that is comprehensive, participatory, transparent and accountable, and that increases gender equality.

Box 2. NAFS mandate

The mandate and statement of ethics of NAFS contains six principles: Inclusivity, Syrian ownership, impartiality, advocacy, relevance and conflict sensitivity. NAFS fulfils these principles by drawing on a network of experts from across the spectrum of Syrian society and from all walks of Syrian life. Whether in technical dialogue or discussions on policy alternatives in governance, economic and social sectors, they aim to represent and advance what they see as the Syrian national interest from their respective positions and fields of expertise. NAFS regularly reviews its work's relevance through Syrian and non-Syrian expert and stakeholder dialogue and consultation meetings.

Since its inception under the auspices of ESCWA, the NAFS Programme has been clear that it does not aim to substitute any formal or informal process of dialogue. Rather, NAFS has always seen itself as presenting a diagnosis of the problems confronting Syrian society with the aim of reducing conflict and advancing justice during the current and post-conflict phase. The discussions and policy alternatives presented here and in all of NAFS' work are primarily aimed at Syrians and secondarily at the international community in the hope that they may be of benefit and service in advancing these causes.

From SPAF I to SPAF II: continuity and change

The goals of both SPAF documents were to present a common vision for the post-conflict phase of the NAFS approach, including its Syrian network. The main ethical guidelines underlying the work of NAFS have remained the same since its inception. However, the process of producing this document required revisiting several elements of SPAF I. These include the structure and logic of the document, the scenarios for the resolution of the conflict and the time horizon.

Box 3. Contents and main contributions of SPAF I

- Main (internal) structural contributing causes of conflict.
- Socioeconomic consequences of conflict.
- End-of-conflict scenarios.
- Principles of Future Vision for Syria 2030.
- Strategic principles for peacebuilding and state-building.
- Development priorities and macro-economic model.

SPAF I reflected the context and time period in which it was produced, as it was published in 2017 and represented the work of the 2013-2017 time period. However, a number of key changes have necessitated significantly changing the structure of SPAF in its second version:

- Syria is confronting new political and military dynamics that are likely to shape possibilities in the coming period.

- Syria is increasingly referred to as a "frozen conflict", as the political process has significantly slowed down.[10]

- The de facto partition of the country and the existence of multiple foreign forces including from the Russian Federation, the United States of America, Türkiye and the Islamic Republic of Iran (in addition to the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan) have created new and possibly enduring realities.

- In addition to the "root causes", there are new drivers of conflict that did not exist in 2011, such as deep poverty and economic deprivation.

- SPAF I did not trace the origins of the conflict to a single cause; rather it concluded that the root causes were complex and interrelated, pointing to key problems in the governance structure as well as various inequalities. However, the socioeconomic consequences of the conflict until then were taken to be deteriorations from a 2011 baseline. The magnitude of destruction and economic collapse has significantly increased since.

Box 4. Example of the impact of SPAF I on the agricultural sector

Building on the key recommendations from the SPAF I report, particularly those related to the "activating the indigenous drivers for economic recovery" scenario in the post-conflict Syrian economy to create jobs and generate income, the agriculture pillar of the NAFS Programme was able to prepare a post-conflict agricultural livelihoods recovery strategy for Homs Governorate. This involved examining how agricultural livelihood assets in Homs, which were severely damaged during the conflict, might be restored through a value chain approach to support early recovery and resilience at a sectoral level, and create a conducive enabling environment to reduce livelihood barriers for self-organized return. The recovery strategy was complemented by two case studies conducted in neighbouring countries hosting a significant portion of Syrian refugees from Homs, in particular Lebanon and Jordan, to understand livelihood programming under forced protracted displacement. This was influenced by the SPAF I nexus related to emergency response and humanitarian work, where voluntary return, reintegration and local response were identified as key issues.

Structure of the document

Today a new baseline is needed that radically rethinks the conflict landscape and offers a new framework for thinking about the possibilities of the coming period. The goal of the NAFS approach is to be holistic in its diagnosis and understanding of the problems. That is why, from early on, NAFS designed inter-sectoral, overlapping approaches, rather than siloed approaches of analysing individual sectors in isolation. This holistic approach allowed the broader picture to emerge, highlighting the connections between food security, economic governance and broader regional issues. Syrian experts and civil society themselves were keen on exploring the inter-connections between the different challenges and dynamics. Furthermore, emphasizing the nature of the conflict and analysing it through these interconnections had an impact on discussions and policies of the conflict. This approach highlighted the importance of all major actors in the Syrian conflict taking into account the broader picture. Single-minded solutions that focus solely on governance changes or economic growth are necessary but not sufficient for putting Syria on a transformative path for sustainable peacebuilding. At the same time, this

> The goal of the NAFS approach is to be holistic in its diagnosis and understanding of the problems

approach comes with its own dilemmas. A holistic approach may reveal the interconnections but might be too comprehensive to be useful. For policies to have resonance, the practical steps may have to be incremental, robust and resilient. This is why the logic of SPAF II attempts to blend the strengths of both of these approaches by emphasizing interconnections but also putting forward key realistic outcomes in each area of challenge.

As such, SPAF II builds towards the future and the possibilities for a path of a just and inclusive peacebuilding as well as equitable economic recovery. It does so by providing policy recommendations of its four priority pillars of concern. It is important to note that these pillars are of equal importance and are inter-connected.

Chapter 1 of this document addresses the need for a new baseline and conflict landscape, while acknowledging the new drivers and fault lines of the conflict. The chapter also indicates that there is a new regional and international landscape in which the situation in Syria plays an increasingly minor role. The economic crisis in Lebanon, the COVID-19 pandemic and political shifts in Europe and North America have changed international priorities, including those of humanitarian aid towards the conflict.

Chapter 2 discusses the scenarios for the conflict in Syria. Given the significant changes, there was also the need to rethink the "end-of-conflict scenarios" explored in SPAF I. Given that a negotiated settlement seems out of reach at the time of issuing this document, despite the start of negotiations and the establishment of the Syrian Constitutional

Committee (SCC), the NAFS Programme assembled a special expert meeting of Syrians and non-Syrians with deep knowledge of the Syrian landscape. These experts provided insight into the interests and policy priorities of the main external actors to update the end-of-conflict scenarios, along with a discussion of their implications.

Chapter 3 discusses the first priority pillar: "Social policy and basic needs". The chapter emphasizes social protection as a framework and a starting point for responding to the dire socioeconomic impacts of the conflict as well as the multiple regional and global economic and public health crises. Thus, this chapter provides a holistic approach to attending to basic needs by focusing on social protection, food security, education, public health – including Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All (WASH) – and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees.

Chapter 4 deals with the second priority pillar: "Economic recovery and undoing the war economy". The chapter discusses economic revival as a bridge from peacebuilding to state-building and emphasizes best practice in the field of economic governance. This pillar also covers the importance of a green recovery based on decent work principles and the importance of indigenous drivers of economic growth to accelerate a sustainable and inclusive economic recovery.

Chapter 5 covers the third priority pillar: "Political and administrative governance and institutional reform". The chapter covers issues related to administrative local governance stemming from longstanding challenges with State capacity, public administration, public institutions and the civil service, as well as the centre-periphery relationship and inequality between governorates.

Finally, chapter 6 covers the fourth priority pillar: "Social reconciliation, social cohesion and the revival of civil society". This chapter focuses on aspects of both social and structural processes along with a discussion on the potential role of civil society and the media.

The conflict and post-conflict context

01

A. Introduction

After more than a decade of conflict, the Syrian landscape is multifaceted and complex, and many of its key dynamics extend beyond the political boundaries of Syria or are related to foreign actors and countries with presence inside Syria. The present chapter provides necessary context for understanding the policy framework and recommendations discussed in the following chapters.

The SPAF I document used 2010/11 as a statistical and conceptual baseline. Continuing to use a 2010 baseline may be useful for statistical purposes, for example, to measure the counterfactual GDP growth in order to estimate total losses. However, the transformation brought about by a decade of conflict necessitates a new framework. The present chapter provides this framework. The goal is not a comprehensive explanation of the conflict nor an attempt to capture its entire dynamics, histories and narratives. That is something beyond the scope of this and any single report. An overview of the conflict's different phases can be found in the *Syria At War: Eight Years On* report, prepared by ESCWA and the University of St Andrews.[11]

Understanding the context of the Syrian conflict requires an assessment of the current conflict and post-conflict environment along different axes. The present chapter divides these into structural factors and enabling conditions based on established peace and conflict studies literature.[12] However, the goal is to think through the Syrian specific reality of these axes in order to develop context and conflict sensitive policies.

There are several advantages of adopting this approach: first, it provides a new and comprehensive baseline framework of the Syrian landscape that incorporates the main social, political and economic factors. Second, it recognizes the multiple actors and factors involved in shaping the possibilities over the coming phase rather than assuming that a

> After more than a decade of conflict, the Syrian landscape is multifaceted and complex, and many of its key dynamics extend beyond the political boundaries of Syria or are related to foreign actors and countries with presence inside Syria

single actor can shape the outcomes. Third, it allows a focus on the stabilization initiatives required to improve the quality of life for Syrians and indicates how these interventions can create virtuous cycles and positive feedback impacts for peacebuilding in Syria. Likewise, it warns against inappropriate policies that might relapse the country into conflict, or further plunge the country into economic collapse.

Structural factors are defined as enduring features that are rigid or can be taken as given in the short term and provide the broad boundaries within which the outcomes in the next phase are likely to be shaped. Alternatively, these are factors that no single actor has full control over meaning it would require the joint effort of multiple key actors working in the same direction to effect positive change.

The structural factors discussed are: (1) the balance of powers, (2) the level of economic and human development, (3) natural resource extraction and

the war economy, (4) State capacity and revenue mobilization, (5) conflict fault lines and types of horizontal inequalities, (6) the neighbourhood or regional environment, (7) the history of relations with the outside world, and (8) the presence (or absence) of an agreement on a final status.

Enabling conditions are processes within the control of individual actors which could result in positive and direct improvements to the lives of Syrians and build an environment of trust if there is a political will for a sustainable peacemaking and peacebuilding process.

Taken together, these factors shape the boundaries of the current conflict landscape

and help determine the possibilities for change. Unlike structural factors, some of these enabling conditions are within the control of the de facto powers in the short term and could play a role in a successful recovery and inclusive peacemaking and peacebuilding process. These are: (1) personal security and safety, (2) the rule of law and the justice system, (3) economic and social policies and political inclusivity, and (4) the regional and international response.

There are no rigid boundaries between the structural factors and enabling conditions and there can be a two-way relationship between them. For example, governments may work on enhancing State capacity and revenue mobilization through improving service delivery, which in turn enhances government legitimacy in the eyes of the population.

B. Structural factors

1. Balance of powers

Entering 2022, Syrian territory is de facto divided into several areas of territorial control. The largest area, comprising most southern and coastal areas of the Syrian Arab Republic as well as its eastern borders with Jordan and Iraq, is under the control of the Syrian Government and its allies, including forces from the Russian Federation and Islamic Republic of Iran. In the north-east, bordered by the Euphrates River, lies the "Democratic Autonomous Administration (DAA)" area, which is controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces and its allies, including the United States. A third region in northern Syria (northern Aleppo Governorate) is controlled by the Turkish Government and its allied forces, and a region in north-west Syria (largely covering Idlib Governorate) is largely controlled by Hay'et

Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), designated as a terrorist organization by all the main parties in the conflict. There is an additional area along the border with Iraq and Jordan that is controlled by the United States forces at At-Tanf. This is in addition to the longstanding Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan in the south of the country. Within each area outlined above, there are also a number of powerful actors with which the main de facto authority is continuously negotiating over key decision-making.
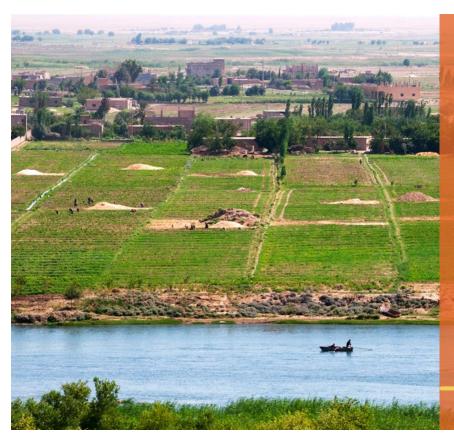
While each side declares their commitment to a political solution, the shape of this solution and the interpretation of its content is contested and unclear. There is little evidence of seriously engaging with Security Council resolution 2254. The SCC, which emanated from one of its clauses, is the main venue for political discussions. There are continuous informal discussions among all parties,

given the practical necessity of exchange within the political boundaries of the Syrian Arab Republic. However, the territorial division carries within it a significant overall cost to the Syrian economy and more importantly to Syrian social cohesion.

The development within each de facto area of its own economic, social and political dynamics deepens Syrian fragmentation and polarization and is further exacerbated due to the intersection of geographically uneven distribution of natural endowments coupled with unilateral coercive economic measures (henceforth to be referred to as "sanctions") in some territories over others. Armed conflict has been replaced with struggle over control of the borders and access points, trade routes and enforcement of sanctions. Some of these tensions extend beyond the borders of Syria to control over sea and land routes. As the economic deterioration continues, and with continued tensions, the low-level conflict over those border zones and territories could relapse into major conflict.

Given the multiplicity of powerful forces in Syria, no single actor or country can dictate the entire outcomes of the conflict. A negative implication of this is that several actors have both veto power over a full-scale solution and the ability to make the conflict – and the suffering of Syrian people – significantly worse. Conversely and more positively, this also means that many actors – should they choose to do so – can significantly improve the quality of life for many Syrians even in the absence of a comprehensive solution.

While there are often discussions that bring the different sides together regarding the humanitarian situation, advancing the political process and ending the territorial fragmentation of the country is the key priority.

Prior to the conflict, an advantage of the Syrian economy was its relative diversity, with agriculture, industry and tourism all making significant contributions to GDP

2. Level of economic and human development

Syria entered the conflict as a lower-middle-income country. In 2007/8, it ranked 108th in the Human Development Index, ahead of other countries in the region, such as Egypt (112th) and Morocco (126th).[13] Life expectancy at birth was estimated at 74.6 years in 2010,[14] which would have placed it among the medium-to-high human development countries. While these indicators hide deficiencies in the health and educational systems as well as significant inequalities between regions, they still indicate significant developmental progress at least in terms of aggregate poverty, health and education compared to previous decades. Deep poverty or economic deprivation were not thought to be among the reasons behind the protest movement. This reality has significantly changed. Economic revival through policies that significantly boost employment and livelihoods, as well as addressing the dire humanitarian situation must be a key priority. The dire economic situation has left millions food and aid dependent, disempowered and prone to exploitation.

Prior to the conflict, an advantage of the Syrian economy was its relative diversity, with agriculture, industry and tourism all making significant contributions to GDP. A five-year average before the conflict (2006-2010) shows that the three largest sectors in terms of average contribution to GDP were mining (including oil) and manufacturing (23 per cent), agriculture (19.3 per cent) and transport and communication (12.2 per cent).[15] Syria had also historically placed a premium on food self-sufficiency. Overall, these factors made the Syrian economy more resilient. Macroeconomic indicators were also highly favourable entering the conflict, with foreign exchange stability as well as proportionally very low levels of debt and debt servicing. The debt-to-GDP ratio of the Syrian Arab Republic, which was 25 per cent, made it among the least indebted countries in the world.[16]

The conflict has led to massive deterioration across all human development indicators, economic destruction in all sectors, increased debt and dependency on the outside world, as well as other noteworthy transformations in gender roles and inequalities. Informality and illegality have increased, which need to be addressed if the economy will return to growth and development.

Banking over-compliance has resulted in limiting transactions that are theoretically permitted under the coercive measures. In general, further studies are needed to fully understand the economic scope and impact of these measures.

Between 2011 and 2021, the NAFS Programme estimated the total financial cost of the conflict, which is estimated from the losses in GDP, at $532.9 billion. In addition, the *Syria at War: Eight Years On* had estimated the losses from the destruction of physical capital, between 2011-2018, at $117.7 billion.[17] Macroeconomic indicators have also significantly deteriorated. The economy suffered from the collapse of the Syrian currency and hyperinflation. The currency witnessed frequent waves of depreciation. By June 2019, when the financial crisis in Lebanon started to emerge, the Syrian pound had already lost 92 per cent of its value, registering at 600 Syrian pounds (SYP) to the United States dollar, compared to 46.5 SYP to 1 USD in 2010.[18] By September 2021, the Syrian pound had lost about 83 per cent of its value compared to June 2019,[19] as a result of the multiple crises that hit the Syrian economy, the most significant of which were Lebanon's financial crisis, COVID-19, and the United States Caesar Act which tightened sanctions against Syria.

Subsequently, by September 2021, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) had increased 32-fold compared

to 2010, with only a fraction of this increase (an 8.5-fold increase) taking place between 2010 and June 2019.[20] This severely reduced the real-terms income of households and increased poverty. At the time of writing this report, Syrian foreign exchange reserves have been depleted and the country is now in significant debt largely to its main allies.

Based on the most recent estimates available, total employment decreased sharply during the conflict from 5.2 million in 2011 to 2.6 million in 2016 but increased gradually to 3.7 million in 2019 driven by optimism about recovery. As such, according to official data, the unemployment rate jumped from 8.6 per cent in 2010 to 48.4 per cent in 2015, then gradually went down to reach 31.2 per cent in 2019 with the prospect of recovery increased by the considerable drop in violence.[21] However, the unemployment rate is estimated to have made dramatic jump in 2020 to reach between 50 and 60 per cent – although no official data is available yet – due to the COVID-19 crisis and the tightening of unilateral coercive measures against Syria.[22]

Overall, based on the most recent available official figures, the female unemployment rate increased from 22 per cent in 2010 to 43 per cent in 2020, representing 20.4 per cent of the total labour force, whereas for men it was 6 per cent in 2010 and 13 per cent in 2020. Massive lay-offs and closures of a significant number of factories and firms, high informality as a coping mechanism, and significant movements of people and economic activities from conflict zones into relatively stable and safer ones resulted in increased joblessness and high regional inequality in labour market outcomes. This also led to the economic dependency ratio surging from 4.1 persons per employee in 2010 to 6.4 persons per employee in 2019,[23] with 55.4 per cent of the Syrian population economically dependent on others in 2020.[24] Women were particularly affected in the agriculture sector, where the share of female employment dropped from 15.3 per cent in 2010 to 6.9 per cent in 2019.[25] However, at an informal level, women

are taking on new roles and responsibilities, and in many cases have become primary breadwinners.[26] A CARE 2020 Survey found that women are taking on new roles and responsibilities since the conflict began with 72 per cent of respondents inside Syria and 83 per cent of Syrian refugee women indicating that they had at least one new livelihood strategy since the start of the conflict.[27] It is important to study these trends further. Women may develop more autonomy in terms of earning a livelihood during conflict, though this situation might be reversed when life goes back to "normal" if traditional norms are reverted to, unless women's empowerment is explicitly advocated at multiple levels (legal, cultural and economic).[28]

The massive population displacement, which created both refugees and IDPs, has also meant a significant exodus of skilled labour and professionals. Though reliable data is difficult to come by, it is estimated that some 15,000 doctors had left the country by the end of 2015,[29] leaving one Syrian doctor for every 10,000 civilians.[30] Many teachers have also left the country, nearly 40 per cent since 2011, which consequently led to a significant increase in the student-to-teacher ratio across all of the Syrian Arab Republic.[31] At least 100,000 students who have graduated from university have also left the country as a result of the conflict.[32] The challenges and requirements for voluntary return for refugees and women refugees in particular are discussed in chapters 3 and 6.

Agriculture was a dynamic sector in the Syrian economy, increasing productivity, which contributed positively to GDP growth and had important linkages with other manufacturing sectors such as food processing, textiles, construction and utilities. However, the sector in general has been experiencing a decline since the early 2000s as a result of a number of factors including water mismanagement, changing climatic conditions and reduced subsidies on the prices of agricultural inputs.[33]

Compared to more physical capital-intensive sectors, agriculture has suffered a small percentage of physical capital destruction because of the conflict, but the damage has surfaced in other ways. This includes massive displacement of the agricultural population, destruction of agricultural land and livestock as a result of the armed combat, general degradation of land due to pollution and fires and intentional acts of agricultural destruction within armed conflict.[34] Agriculture's contribution to GDP decreased from an average of 19.3 per cent over the period 2006-2010 to 15.1 per cent in 2019 and reached 16 per cent in 2020.[35] With the reconsolidation of territory by the Syrian Government and the cessation of hostilities in other areas, agriculture was the sector most directly affected by the lack of hostilities and increased security; agricultural production rebounded after 2017 and 2018 but suffered from unprecedented drought in 2021.

Significant urbanization, with over 50 per cent of Syrians living in cities by 2020, had resulted in large dependence on markets for food security. From interviews conducted in February 2021, the World Food Programme (WFP) found that more than half of households (55 per cent) had no regular access to markets and had poor or borderline food consumption, an increase of 8 per cent since December 2020.[36] In 2010, the agricultural sector accounted for 16.1 per cent of the GDP of the Syrian Arab Republic – though lower than its five year average of 19.3 per cent of GDP before the conflict because of drought – and 23 per cent of its exports in products such as cotton, sugar, tomatoes, potatoes, oranges, apples, olive oil, sheep, cattle and meat.[37]

As discussed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), much of the country's crop land lies in the north-eastern, northern and central parts of the country, especially in the governorates of Al-Hasakeh, Ar-Raqqa, Aleppo, Hama, Homs and Rural Damascus. Agriculture in the western governorates largely involves the cultivation

of citrus fruits, apples, olives and vegetables. While the Badia region is primarily used for livestock grazing, which has traditionally been an important sector for the Syrian Arab Republic, the country's main staple is wheat, although it also produces barley, cotton, tobacco, sugar beet, lentils, chickpeas, fava beans, peas, vegetables, citrus fruits, olives and herbs. Up to 40 per cent of wheat grain is cultivated in Al-Hasakeh, with Ar-Raqqa, Aleppo, Hama and Homs contributing much of the remaining 60 per cent.[38] Some wheat is also cultivated in Rural Damascus and in the southern governorates of Dar'a and Quneitra and in the irrigated land of Deir-ez-Zor. As a result, much of the wheat trade flow goes from north-eastern and northern parts of the country towards western and southern Syria. This is why territorial fragmentation plays a direct role in undermining food security.

Life expectancy at birth plummeted from 72.1 years in 2010 to a low of 69.8 years in 2014, then went back up to 71.8 years in 2018,[39] and was reported at 72.7 years in 2019.[40] Drops in life expectancy are most starkly evident when broken down by gender: for men, life expectancy at birth declined from 68.1 years

In February 2021

55%

of households had no regular access to markets and had poor or borderline food consumption

As reported in the *Syria at War: Eight Years On* report and in numerous United Nations and OHCHR findings, the conflict has resulted in gross **violations against women and gender-based violence**

in 2010 to 66.6 years in 2018. The conflict has resulted in a dramatic rise in persons with disabilities. In 2020, the United Nations Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme (HNAP) found that 29 per cent of the entire population (aged 12+) inside Syria[41] and 36 per cent of all IDPs have a disability.[42] Persons with disabilities are more exposed to the impact of the conflict and less likely to have access to support. There is a gendered impact of this phenomenon. A total of 23 per cent of females with a disability are widowed, compared to only 5 per cent of men with a disability and 5 per cent of females without a disability.[43] Findings confirm the discriminatory effects of aging in conflict-affected areas, where older women are less likely to be cared for, especially if widowed, disproportionately exposing them to disabilities. Households with disabilities are also less likely to be able to relocate due to security threats (or gender-based violence for girls and women) than other households.[44]
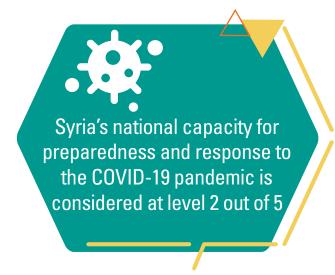
As reported in the *Syria at War: Eight Years On* report and in numerous United Nations and OHCHR findings, the conflict has resulted in gross violations against women and gender-based violence. According to a sample survey conducted by WFP across 13 governorates in Syria (excluding Idlib Governorate), 12 per cent of households are female-headed households.[45] Gender inequalities in access to social protection, explored further in chapter 3 section B, mean that Syrians cope with this dilemma by either migrating or resorting to negative coping mechanisms, including child marriages. The share of marriages among female minors is reported to have surged from 7 per cent in 2011 to about 18 per cent in 2020.[46] For most of these children, human capital accumulation ceases with their early marriage.[47]

A stark example of human development deterioration can be found in public health. Public health has been deteriorating sharply before the COVID-19 pandemic due to death and

injury coupled with the targeting of the health and medical infrastructure, which is in violation of the laws of war. The 2019 Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study has shown how the main causes of death in Syria have changed between 2009 and 2019.[48] Particularly notable changes have been the increase in conflict related deaths and the increased number of non-communicable diseases in the top ten in 2019. The World Health Organization has estimated that non-communicable diseases account for 45 per cent of all mortality in Syria.[49] While heart disease and stroke remain at the top, kidney diseases, cirrhosis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) have moved up the ranks to be among the leading causes of death. There are specific groups inside Syria who are more likely to have poor access to healthcare, such as IDPs, with data showing increased mortality rates. The risk of premature mortality from noncommunicable diseases fell far behind global targets in 2016, with a probability of 25 per cent for males and 19 per cent for females in the 30-70-years age group.[50] Disparities in health services and lack of access to healthcare proliferated throughout the conflict, with regions hosting larger numbers of refugees, such as Idlib and rural Aleppo, seeing a dramatic decline in health services.

Countries experiencing violent conflict are at a significant disadvantage in terms of preparedness and ability to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. With severely weakened healthcare infrastructure and an increase in vulnerable people across virtually all groups and indicators (such as IDPs, persons with disabilities, informal workers, women and girls, and the poor), the socioeconomic and health impacts of the pandemic are amplified. Syria's national capacity for preparedness and response to the COVID-19 pandemic is considered at level 2 out of 5, based on the International Health Regulations (IHR) annual report 2019, where 5 is the highest capacity. This indicates the health sector's limited capacity that requires technical and operational support.[51] Taking into account regional disparity,

Syria's national capacity for preparedness and response to the COVID-19 pandemic is considered at level 2 out of 5

regions such as Aleppo and Idlib, which host the majority of Syrian IDPs, have significantly fewer medical staff and facilities per capita. Syria has the largest number of IDPs in the region by a significant margin: over 6.8 million Syrians were internally displaced in 2022.[52] While the region's comparatively young population meant lower initial hospitalization and mortality rates, the youth will suffer the immediate and long-term socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic, with many schools and universities closed and fewer employment opportunities available.[53] The pandemic also threatens to increase food insecurity due to interruptions in global food supply chains, where Syria is particularly at risk with 12.4 million people classified as food insecure as of September 2021 (a jump from 9.3 million prior to the pandemic).[54]

Finally, the conflict has left a toxic legacy on Syrian ecology. The environmental damage in Syria has received less attention than other destructive aspects of the conflict but may be the longest lasting as it extends over generations and impacts all Syrians. The conflict has exacerbated previous environmental problems and created new ones. Harmful material has been released into the air through the destruction of infrastructure, while destruction of electric grids and power stations has released toxins such as polychlorinated biphenyl (PCBs) into the air. Drinking water

The environmental damage in Syria has received less attention than other destructive aspects of the conflict but may be the longest lasting as it extends over generations and impacts all Syrians

has been contaminated due to the targeting of water supply networks, in addition to waste dumping and cessation of waste management services. The toxic runoff from crude oil extraction, often through informal mechanisms by non-State actors, resulted in what has been called a "river of death" in the north-east of Syria.[55] PAX has identified four areas of environmental pollution deserving particular attention: (1) targeted industrial facilities and critical infrastructure; (2) damaged residential areas and exposure to rubble; (3) weapons-based contamination from large scale and prolonged use of various munitions, and; (4) breakdown of environmental services.[56]

Based on the financial tracking service of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the total amount of received humanitarian aid for Syria and the immediate neighboring countries since the start of the conflict until 2021 is estimated at $76.2 billion, or 1.3 times that of 2010 Syrian GDP. The fragmented Syrian and regional response therefore missed an opportunity to pursue human development-oriented policies. Not only was there a lost decade due to the conflict, but there was a constant cycle of humanitarian

assistance that could have been used for more longer-term policies.

3. Natural resource extraction and the war economy
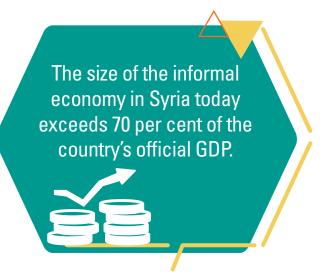
The ability of different actors to secure financing through natural resource extraction or illicit means can create new dynamics and drivers of conflict that didn't exist before. War economies often develop when government or non-governmental groups attempt to secure financing from illicit means. Checkpoints, borders and other areas have become key points where de facto groups can extract revenue or facilitate illicit exchanges. In the Syrian case, the concept of the war economy can be considered as broadly encompassing the transformation of the economy in light of the conflict, and may include, in addition to illicit accumulation of wealth, regional and international investments in the conflict that sustain it, including through military and non-military aid.[57] The conflict has also seen the rise of new war profiteers and middlemen who are seeking to entrench and legitimize their newfound

wealth through political influence. Extraction of natural resources by foreign powers or allies of the Syrian Government as well as the attacks on economic infrastructure and food security by all sides have had a highly negative impact on the economy and social divisions.

Wider dynamics of natural resource extraction may be found in the split in natural resource endowments between regions in a way that might create new fault lines of conflict or entrench existing ones. The struggle over natural resources is mapped out over geopolitical and domestic fault lines of the conflict given the prevalence of oil wells in the north-east, an area controlled by DAA forces and backed on the ground by troops from the United States. In the context of overall economic decline, these imbalances have the potential to deepen divisions among Syrians.

During the conflict, and similar to other countries experiencing protracted civil conflict, informal, illegal and criminal sectors expanded dramatically and have attracted a major share of employment. Narcotics-related crimes have increased, with Syria witnessing significant production, consumption and export of drugs such as the fenethylline drug Captagon and trafficking in Tramadol.[58] The economic sectors during the conflict can be classified according to four types of employment: formal and legitimate; formal and illegitimate; informal and non criminal; informal and criminal.[59] The size of the informal economy in Syria today exceeds 70 per cent of the country's official GDP.[60]

The boundaries between those areas were in some areas stable for several years and sometimes in flux on a daily basis. However, for at least a period of time during 2015, there was a stalemate and more defined spheres of influence. Each of these areas of control contained their own governance projects with their administrative structures, security, judicial and even educational systems often mirroring the ideology of the dominant political formations.

> The size of the informal economy in Syria today exceeds 70 per cent of the country's official GDP.

The relationship between them was complex and not uniform, alternating between conflict and cooperation. This is not unique to the Syrian conflict as conflicts often result in complex wartime political orders and the relationships between State and non-State armed groups are fluid and alternate between hostility, passive cooperation and active cooperation.[61] In Syria the cooperation was sometimes strategic, sometimes tactical and pragmatic. In the case of the DAA area for example, the region gained its de facto autonomy in 2012 following negotiations with the Syrian Government in the aftermath of the withdrawal of government forces, yet administrative ties were maintained.

For example, Syrian Government agencies maintained the operation of civil records (registering births, deaths, marriages and divorces) in areas controlled by the Democratic Union Party (PYD), particularly Afrin and Al-Hasakeh even when it discontinued them in other areas that fell outside Government control, often with the same employees and the supervision of the official Government institution.[62] On the other hand, pragmatic concerns characterized the cooperation between other areas. All areas engaged in trade or bartering with one another in agricultural products, electricity supply, crude oil and illicit goods. This exchange along with smuggling, kidnapping, theft extortion, and other activities

gave rise to a war economy that entrenched the power of middlemen and warlords, as well as allowed many armed groups to finance themselves for long periods of time. As economic opportunities dwindled, more of the population was involved directly or indirectly in the war economy.

The war economy further entrenches itself as the conflict drags on and is based on competition over smuggled goods and black markets, control over natural energy resources in the east and north-east, and foreign funding flows, whether intended for humanitarian or militaristic purposes. Though the roots of economies based on smuggling existed before 2011, these illegal economic links were fortified by the rise of armed opposition militias and the fragmentation of the country into areas controlled by the government and the opposition, which necessitated the rise of local, informal economies rather than a unified national economy.

4. State capacity

It has been argued that among the endemic problems in the Middle East and North Africa region is the fiscal weakness of the Arab state.[63] In Syria, as in other conflict torn countries, there is a significant mismatch between economic needs and available revenue. There is a consensus from other conflict-ridden countries on the importance of enhancing State capacity in conflict and post-conflict environments.

State capacity usually involves multiple dimensions including military and security capacity; bureaucratic, administrative and legal capacity; and the quality and coherence of political institutions.[64] Administrative capacity and political institutions are closely connected. They affect the ability of countries to consistently raise revenues, formulate economic policy that meets national priorities and then carry these policies out, alongside a functioning bureaucracy and a judicial system that preserves rights and

enforces contracts. The availability of oil rents has been thought to result in Arab states having overdeveloped redistributive institutions and weaker extractive ones. In the long run, this "fiscal weakness", or inability to generate public revenue, and the ensuing need of States to address this inability in times of low oil prices or other financial downturns, generates a number of challenges. Fiscal weakness can impair States' abilities to meet the rising expectations of their populations and can result in side effects of increasing informal economies and corruption.[65]

In the case of Syria, the 1970s were the "golden years" of economic growth and total factor productivity that was also accompanied by significantly rising living standards, investments in human development and attempts at structural change and growth through investments in modernizing the agricultural and industrial sectors. However, since the 1980s there has been a pattern of economic crises followed by ad hoc economic reform. Business opportunities expanded, economic and business networks connecting holders of wealth and power achieved greater influence and privilege.[66] These networks facilitated wealth accumulation in an environment characterized by low trust between the State and private sector, and crony capitalism, overall resulting in sub-optimal national economic outcomes. In this environment, the private sector remained divided and weak, focusing on small-scale enterprises, and short-term approaches to capital accumulation.

The post-settlement phase must create a healthy balance allowing an environment for the private sector to emerge and assume its social responsibility, while combatting cronyism and networks of privilege.

Today, the central State has been weakened as the State's political and economic institutions have been severely damaged or left non-

functional. In the various areas outside Syrian Government control, administrative structures are also relatively underdeveloped and there is a significant reliance on foreign aid, international actors or foreign countries, such as Türkiye, for service delivery and even infrastructure. The DAA areas, which perhaps have the most advanced institutional development, still rely significantly on international assistance.

Institutional decay implies among other things, the inability of government ministries and bureaucracies to perform key functions such as assessing policy effectiveness, measuring policy outcomes, providing services, monitoring or regulating, and being responsive to citizen demands. This in turn means that the State's reach into society, its ability to undertake infrastructural projects, its ability to tax and spend, and its ability to regulate the economy, let alone undertake new investments, is limited. It is limited in both the fiscal sense, since resources were expended in the war effort, and in terms of its capacity.

Within the territorial borders of Syria, there are de jure administrative divisions including governorates, cities, towns, municipalities, districts and sub-districts. Alongside these, the conflict has created de facto administrative structures governed by non-State actors or foreign countries, along with traditional institutions such as kinship, religious, ethnic and tribal networks. At the same time, the pursuit of armed conflict and the evasion of economic sanctions has also led to the rise in the power and authority of a new group of armed actors, warlords, war profiteers and intermediaries.

The role of the Syrian Government increased dramatically during the conflict and continued to increase as the conflict's intensity rose. In the face of the country's near-total economic ruin, the government and most government institutions have maintained a rather impressive degree of resilience.

> The conflict has witnessed an erosion of State capacity, both due to the actual physical destruction but also due to the proliferation of new sets of paramilitary armed groups, warlords, and war profiteers whose role and power have increased

With the continuing collapse of the economy, private sector activity deteriorated sharply, and the government was forced to provide countervailing measures. State institutions did not collapse and most public sector workers continued showing up for work. In 2013, it was reported that over 2 million government workers across the country were still receiving salaries. Some of these employees are even located in areas controlled by the opposition in Aleppo, Deir-ez-Zor and elsewhere. Salaries are arranged to be sent in cash by trucks, through meetings organized by communicating with opposition groups via fax and messenger. The Government further attempted to weather the storm, by taking a more active role in the buying and selling of daily goods, tightening price controls and maintaining State-employee wages.

Syrian State fiscal weakness predated the conflict. International organizations have found that fragile states have an average tax-to-GDP ratio of 14 per cent, while the average is 17 per cent in developing countries and 34 per cent in OECD countries.[67] In the Syrian Arab Republic, in the decade prior to the conflict, tax revenues equated to around 11 per cent of GDP or less, and during the conflict, shrank to 5 per cent on average between 2011-2021.[68] After

the conflict began, there were attempts by the Government to increase revenue collection and enhance State capacity. Armed conflict leaves substantial negative effects on public revenue that have long-term implications. Empirical evidence shows that public revenue and tax collection do not improve substantially after the end of the conflict relative to conflict levels and relative to regional standards.[69] Some countries, however, experience a jump in public revenue compared with conflict levels as a consequence of the automatic economic recovery in the early aftermath of conflict.[70]

Enhancing State capacity is crucial if the Syrian Arab Republic is to have a chance to restore its developmental accomplishments. However, this must be seen as an integral process of a new social contract that is connected to wider processes of governance transformation and societal reconciliation.

5. Fault lines and narratives of conflict

As discussed in SPAF I, among the main problems in the Syrian Arab Republic prior to 2011 are longstanding problems in the governance and institutional structures of Syria. These issues interacted with economic and social development in complex ways to exacerbate and magnify the problems in each of those domains. Political life was stifled as large sectors of the population were excluded from meaningful participation in political deliberation. The extreme centralization and concentration of power coupled with the near absence of civil and political rights (and the impunity with which various State security organs operated), and serious issues with the integrity of the judicial system, served to undermine the rule of law. It also served to undermine citizen trust in governmental institutions' ability to respond to their needs and to mediate societal disputes. The

Syrian Arab Republic was also in a complex and increasingly polarized and militarized regional environment. Longstanding regional inequalities were exacerbated by mismanagement of traditional sectors such as agriculture which had been witnessing a decline even predating the droughts of 2006-2008. The geographic position of the Syrian Arab Republic and its political ideology, its historic role in the Arab-Israeli conflict, or its regional alliances implied that the Syrian Arab Republic was an object of geopolitical attention.[71]

In 2011, the demonstrations in the Syrian Arab Republic started alongside the wave of popular protests sweeping the Middle East and North Africa region for political and civil rights. Initially consisting of small protests alongside sit-ins and vigils in solidarity with demonstrations in countries like Egypt and Libya, the conflict erupted in the South of the country in Dar'a and grew with snowballing cycles of repression and further demonstrations. Throughout the months from March through summer 2011, protests spread to many cities and were largely non-violent in nature. However, during these months in 2011 and early 2012 there was growing militarization of the conflict and various external actors began to intervene in various ways, which eventually transformed into a proxy conflict.

During the years of the conflict, various United Nations fact-finding missions documented extensive human rights violations by all sides of the conflict.

Among the main problems in the Syrian Arab Republic prior to 2011 are longstanding problems in the governance and institutional structures of Syria

The rise of extremist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) coupled with increasing destructiveness of the conflict ushered in international intervention by the United States, the Russian Federation, Türkiye, Iran and various armed groups such as Hizbullah and a variety of others.[72] Other forms of international intervention included directly arming and financing the conflict and providing combatants with protection or passageways to the Syrian Arab Republic.

The drivers of conflict have therefore been the policies of the major State and secondarily non-State actors in their pursuit of the conflict. In pursuit of their interests, these actors have often instrumentalized cultural, sectarian and ethnic identities. As a result, it has been easy to confuse cause and effect and to portray the Syrian conflict mistakenly as a battle of unchanging "identities".

While a decade of conflict has undoubtedly increased tensions in relation to identity, and some of these may have long lasting effects, these tensions should not be exaggerated, as there are far more examples of continued co-existence and desire for reconciliation than examples of inherent conflict between the various groups in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Today, the pursuit of material resources, food security, energy systems and other forms of economic resources are far more important as drivers of conflict, and in turn these fault lines are exacerbated by territorial divisions within the country. Divisions between Syrians have extended far beyond the "loyalist-opposition" binaries, and exclusive practices and repertoires exacerbate them. Therefore, alongside the evolution of the conflict itself, it is also important to understand the power of narratives over the conflict.

Narratives are important as a means for Syrians to understand their reality, but they can also be forms of cultural violence if they are exclusivist, or if they show little attempt to understand or empathize with Syrians who have had radically different experiences or whose own perspective lies elsewhere along the spectrum.

This problem is heightened when conflict entrepreneurs seize and mobilize these narratives for their own short-term ends. Such polarized discourse is uncontrollable and difficult to reverse. Furthermore, for some Syrians, conflict narratives exclusively blame the conflict on the actions of the Syrian Government, whereas for others, narratives primarily blame regional and international actors. While there are elements of truth within both narratives, there are multiple other perspectives that are not captured in either one. Many Syrians do not find themselves represented by these prevailing binary conflict narratives, and there is also a significant silent – or more accurately silenced – majority.

During conflict, such diverse narratives take hold regardless of the empirical evidence of their validity and continue in part due to the "bonding" social capital role they perform, which serves as a coping mechanism. Addressing them must be part of a conflict-sensitive approach to recovery and societal reconciliation, not as irrefutable truths but as lived realities that have meaning for Syrians, whether living inside Syria, as refugees in neighbouring countries, or in the growing Syrian diaspora.[73] In moments of severe cultural violence, where narratives are mobilized

to perpetuate the conflict, or justify dehumanization, silence is a political act and can represent a refusal to participate in or further the logic of violence.

Practitioners engaging in peacebuilding should pay attention to the silenced or marginalized voices, which are not represented in existing narratives.

As the conflict enters its twelfth year, there is ongoing debate about the importance of addressing root causes as opposed to new drivers of conflict given the significant changes that have taken place over the time period. This includes the dramatic levels of violence, displacement and destruction, the rise of new actors, territorial fragmentation, new ideologies and forms of governance, and changing societal roles. Some scholars have argued that attempting to address root causes is likely to be unproductive.[74]

First, there is no academic consensus on the root causes of the Syrian conflict. Different studies have focused on authoritarian governance, inequalities and elite capture due to neoliberal economic policies, climate change and drought, institutional bottlenecks and stagnation, which have created mismatches between societal expectations and governmental ability to adapt.[75] Second, the different warring parties are not likely to agree on the root causes which are part of the fault lines and meta-narratives of conflict that each of them have advanced to justify their actions and win sympathy and support of domestic and external allies and actors. As meta-narratives harden, these root causes become part of the identity and collective bonding and a testament of the suffering endured by each side. Attempting to claim a root cause may be counterproductive as it imposes the narrative of one side over another. Third, there is a difference between the root causes of the protest movement and the evolution of the armed conflict as well as between the causes of the conflict and causes of violence in conflict. The latter is likely to have

Practitioners engaging in peacebuilding should pay attention to the silenced or marginalized voices, which are not represented in existing narratives.

developed its own drivers which may be local and affected by multiple factors unconnected to the origins of the conflict. Assuming that violence, looting and the subsequent illicit and destructive behaviour are all extensions of pre-conflict root causes is not only misleading but dangerous and divisive as it gives credence to essentialist readings of society and the polarized narratives that encouraged mobilization according to identity, sect and ethnicity. These factors are more likely to be outcomes of the violence and a way for the de facto powers to ensure mobilization, rather than underlying driving causes.

Nevertheless, ignoring the topic of root causes also carries with it certain dangers. Precisely because the root causes are tied up to meta-narratives of the conflict, they have deep resonance and significance to Syrians, giving meaning to the various sacrifices they have made. Simply ignoring or dismissing these trivializes the suffering of Syrians. Second, narratives from all sides have strong elements of truth to them even if they do not necessarily capture the entire picture and complexity of how the conflict evolved. Third, a significant number of the root causes suggested by NAFS analysis and experts are tied to key problems in governance, basic freedoms, civil rights, political representation, the judicial system and democratic governance. Whether or not these are root causes, they are widely established as problems plaguing the Syrian State and

addressing them is appropriate regardless. The NAFS Programme, as covered in SPAF I or the inception document, was certainly aware of the need to avoid simplistic explanations of root causes, which is why the programme has always argued that the root causes are complex and overlapping and cannot be reduced to simple causality.

6. The neighbourhood

The role of neighbouring countries, their interests, and the dynamics of the region in which a conflict occurs will have a significant impact on the success of peacemaking and peacebuilding. The concept of a "regional conflict complex" was developed to capture the dynamics of the conflict that extend beyond its political boundaries. A regional conflict complex refers to "transnational conflicts that form mutually reinforcing linkages with each other throughout a region making for more protracted and obdurate conflicts".[76] Scholars have also discussed the importance of understanding borderlands as areas of weak sovereignty where new economic circuits, political dynamics and identities may form.[77]

Regional and external factors have been as crucial in shaping the trajectory of the of Syrian conflict as internal dynamics. In the two decades leading up to the conflict, the Syrian

Arab Republic was part of an increasingly militarized and polarized region due to wars and invasions in Iraq and Lebanon, long-standing Israeli military occupation and increasing inter-State cold wars. In the early 2000s, the Syrian Arab Republic faced significant geopolitical pressure from Western countries especially in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq.[78]

The onset of the protest movement was unleashed through internal political dynamics. However, the regional factor became evident in the early months of 2011, at first through political and diplomatic actions by regional countries and increasingly through material and political support to segments of the Syrian opposition. Increasingly, border zones became destinations for displaced populations as well as conduits for the influence of regional actors through facilitating humanitarian aid as well as financing and arming non-State armed opposition groups inside the Syrian Arab Republic, in addition to being conduits for external fighters who come to the Syrian Arab Republic to support different sides of the conflict. The regional dimension is also reflected in the refugee exodus to neighbouring countries as well as the vast international humanitarian effort, made up of international institutions such as agencies of the United Nations and major humanitarian organizations, as well as civil society movements, private donors and actors engaged in both local and cross border aid.

There are other crucial aspects to the regional dimension. First, the ongoing discussions about the fate of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the international agreement with Iran, is a major point of regional tension that is more widely tied to inter-State regional tensions. Second, the deep intertwining of the Lebanese and Syrian economies implied a major two-way impact on both as a result of the conflict. Longstanding political, economic and social ties also imply that stability and instability in each will impact the other, and therefore, we can expect a significant "peace dividend" to affect both

> The programme has always argued that the root causes are complex and overlapping and cannot be reduced to simple causality

> Regional and external factors have been as crucial in shaping the trajectory of the of Syrian conflict as internal dynamics

> The World Bank estimates that the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic has been solely responsible for annual reductions in economic growth of 1.2 percentage points in Iraq, 1.6 percentage points in Jordan, and 1.7 percentage points in Lebanon in the last decade while the conflict also drove up poverty rates by 6.0 percentage points in Iraq, 3.9 percentage points in Jordan, and 7.1 percentage points in Lebanon.[82]

countries. Trade, tourism, real estate, finance and banking, are among the most hard-hit sectors as a result of the conflict and crisis in both countries.[79]

> The financial crisis of Lebanon which became evident in the months of August-October 2019 has had major effects on the Syrian economy given the role that Lebanon played as a lifeblood for trade, financial flows and other exchange between Syrian territories and the outside world.[80]

For example, the sharp devaluation of the Syrian pound directly followed the first devaluation of the Lebanese lira which occurred in August 2019 and was further exacerbated by October 2019. However, it is not clear whether one was affecting the other, or both driven by a third unobserved variable. Therefore, further studies about the multiple direct or indirect channels of transmission are needed.[81]

Third, it is important to consider the direct and indirect cost of conflict on neighbouring countries, and to consider the potential dividend that a sustainable peace might have on a regional basis. These costs are owed to the overall destabilization and poor investment environment, reduction in production, decreasing transit trade, the crisis of displacement and other factors.

7. Relations with the outside world

Related to but also distinct from the regional setting is the question of relations to the outside world. Since independence, the Syrian Arab Republic was historically outside the orbit of Western powers and the United States in particular, and rejection of the legacy of colonialism and post-colonial interventions was a dominant theme uniting most Syrian politicians regardless of official ideology. So was the embrace of Pan-Arabism as the Syrian Arab Republic was a leading country in Arab Nationalist politics starting in the 1960s, and in the 1970s and 1980s it established closer ties to the Soviet Union. After the 1990s, the Syrian Arab Republic navigated the downfall of the Soviet Union through selective engagement with the West, as well as solidifying a regional alliance with other countries outside the Western orbit.

The Syrian Arab Republic and the United States had conflicting strategic interests in the region for long, over such issues as the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Arab Nationalist project and US hegemony in the region.[83] Their overall relationship has had its highs and lows; the former have included the Syrian Government backing the 1991 Gulf War. The US post-2011 sanctions added to pre-existing

ones the United States had imposed on the Syrian Arab Republic since 1979. Sanctions by the United States before the conflict were invoked on various grounds, including alleged Syrian support for terrorism, threats to US security, interference in the internal affairs of Lebanon and Iraq, and concerns over money laundering.

The conflict itself could not have lasted as long as it did without external intervention of various kinds in the form of financing, arming, training and allowing the passage of combatants as well as diplomatic and political cover for the various warring sides. However, in this case, the conflict may have less to do with the Syrian Arab Republic itself rather than the broader geopolitics and East/West divides and tensions. This geopolitical settling of scores inside the Syrian Arab Republic has had a most destructive effect and has gone on for too long. At the same time, geopolitics aside, many Syrians brutalized and displaced by the conflict see these measures as a form of accountability for human rights abuses, or as a last resort while pathways for peaceful, inclusive and just settlements are blocked.

Prior to the conflict, the Syrian Arab Republic was increasingly trying to pursue a more open foreign policy that balanced its traditional alliances with opening up to Western countries. The conflict has reversed this, and significantly increased the relationship and dependence between the Syrian Arab Republic and its main allies, something further exacerbated by the unilateral coercive measures.

While traditionally peace accords unlocked international aid, it is possible that the absence of a peace accord, coupled with reduction in armed conflict might further result in the Syrian Arab Republic looking away from the West to the East for investment, trade relations and growth.

Syrians often express the sentiment that they are victims of regional rivalry, East-West tensions, growing global multipolarity and competition between the great powers. All efforts must be done to find ways at reducing tensions and allowing Syrian concerns to be elevated.

8. Final agreement

Though the armed conflict is ebbing in various parts of the country, the lack of a comprehensive peace settlement according to Security Council resolution 2254 has implied, in various ways, the continuation of all the negative trends of the conflict. There have been multiple parallel peace processes sponsored by international actors. The United Nations-led political initiative (known as the Geneva Process), based on Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) and facilitated by the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, has involved several rounds of negotiations, beginning with the June 2012 Geneva I Conference. Alongside this, there has been an ensemble of initiatives, starting with the Astana process in January 2017, which focused on military and security issues. They resulted in a series of actions, most famously the creation of four de-escalation zones. By early 2020, the Astana process had gone through more than 12 rounds of negotiations. In early 2019, the United Nations Secretary-General appointed Gere Pederson as the fourth Special Envoy charged with leading international efforts to implement resolution 2254 and the 2012 Geneva Communiqué. The focus has been on two aspects of the resolution, namely the establishment of a constitutional committee and internationally supervised elections. The final list of committee members was announced in September 2019. By and large, however, the 2019-2020 period saw momentum stalling in the settlement process due to external and internal factors, including the tightening of sanctions by the United States, the Turkish invasion of the north of the Syrian Arab

Republic, and the battle by the Government and allied forces to recapture Idlib. In 2021 and early 2022 witnessed more rounds of the constitutional committee with much anticipation though without a clear outcome. This was occurring while the economic humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic was in freefall as a legacy of the conflict, the regional financial crisis and the economic fallout of the global COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.
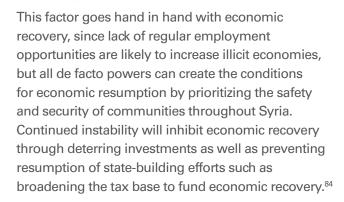
C. Enabling conditions

As opposed to the structural factors mentioned above, enabling conditions are variable factors that could help or hinder the process towards a sustainable peacebuilding process.

1. Personal security and safety

The extent to which Syrians on the ground might feel progress towards a post-conflict phase will depend on whether they feel safe and secure from armed conflict, displacement, lawlessness, criminality and impunity of State or non-State security actors.

This factor goes hand in hand with economic recovery, since lack of regular employment opportunities are likely to increase illicit economies, but all de facto powers can create the conditions for economic resumption by prioritizing the safety and security of communities throughout Syria. Continued instability will inhibit economic recovery through deterring investments as well as preventing resumption of state-building efforts such as broadening the tax base to fund economic recovery.[84]

The conflict has given rise to looting and pillaging as well as export of conflict related materials. This is in addition to increase in kidnapping instances, and in some cases illegal organ trade and export of archaeological material.[85]

Beyond the rise of criminality and illegality is the continued impunity with which the security sector and armed groups operate. Many Syrians live in an atmosphere of daily fear: of arbitrary detention, extortion at checkpoints and other forms of violence.

Syrian women are disproportionately affected by insecurity. Studies have demonstrated that Syrian women face greater risks and restricted mobility. The conflict has exacerbated an already restrictive environment for women in the Syrian Arab Republic, reinforcing patriarchal traditions and attitudes. Syrian women face greater risks in access to livelihoods as well as in personal and family security. This restricted mobility is particularly challenging in an environment that also requires women to access services and markets or support systems at a greater rate than before the conflict because men mostly engage outside the home, are on the frontlines, or have become victims of armed conflict.

The lack of security, economic and social opportunities, and protection measures have intensified exposure to gender-based violence among women and girls. Accurate statistics on the number of rape cases that have occurred since

the start of the conflict in Syria are unavailable. Nonetheless, rape and sexual assault have been used as a weapon of war throughout the conflict, with thousands of victims across Syria and in refugee camps reporting its occurrence.[86] Furthermore, some sources have reported that one in ten households is worried about threats of sexual exploitation and abuse at the community level.[87] Forced abductions of young women and girls at checkpoints to spread shame and stigma upon their release (as a weapon of war, along with sexual violence) have also been reported. As a result, the fear of sexual violence and its consequences is one of the leading causes of displacement of many families. Exacerbating the situation is the lack of services for survivors of violence as well as the lack of opportunities to overcome the stigma and alienation. An overwhelming majority of those surveyed (70 per cent) across the country agree that there is a lack of clinical care for rape survivors.[88]

The feeling of personal insecurity is also linked to various kinds of deprivation, including deprivation from basic needs such as shelter and housing, water and sanitation, livelihood and daily nutrition, as well as limited freedom of movement, ability to voice one's opinions, and freedom to mobilize collectively to advance one's interests or ideas.

Taken together, these economic, social and political needs are lacking for Syrians in all areas, including Syrians who are refugees in neighbouring countries.

For all Syrians, freedom of mobility, their legal status and their ability to voice their concerns and have representation are key aspects of personal security and rights.[89]

For example, due to some government legislation, many refugees are under the threat of losing legal status or property rights due to being displaced or unable to return. Such aspects of personal security can be addressed by all de facto internal and external powers.

2. The rule of law and the justice system

A comprehensive assessment of the rule of law in the different parts of the country in 2017 by the International Legal Assessment Consortium found two encouraging findings: one that all

groups working in areas not controlled by the government "recognize, and in fact embrace the concept of courts or similar structures to settle disputes, provide justice (however defined), and handle routine administrative tasks" and additionally that "legal professionals in all of Syria share a pride in their profession and a commitment to professionalism in their respective role. Judges and lawyers living on either side of the frontlines universally express their deep respect for colleagues on the other side, maintaining that they simply try to do their best to achieve fairness in an unfair system".[90]

> **Building an independent judicial system in the Syrian Arab Republic is an urgent priority regardless of any current or future arrangement as it is the foundation and bedrock of justice legitimacy and societal trust**

The report argued that these two factors are significant for the future of the Syrian Arab Republic and should be considered in any reconciliation efforts between the different parties.[91] These bright spots exist in a context of severe challenges to the rule of law in the Syrian Arab Republic, past and present. The challenges of rule of law prior to the conflict were documented in SPAF I. Today, Syrians live under two parallel justice systems. One is the regular court system that handles civil, criminal and personal status claims and the other is a web of exceptional courts without fixed procedure and with no clear

limitations on jurisdiction.[92]

Building an independent judicial system in the Syrian Arab Republic is an urgent priority regardless of any current or future arrangement as it is the foundation and bedrock of justice legitimacy and societal trust. The exceptional courts in any area are a fundamental obstacle to this process. Their continued existence is a sign that regular courts still maintain a semblance of independence, something all powers are trying to undermine.

3. Economic and social policies and political inclusivity

Economic and social policies that are exclusivist, discriminatory, or pursue the conflict by other means through rewarding political loyalty and punishing dissent have caused deep fissures in the Syrian Arab Republic. They build and exacerbate the legacy of authoritarian governance, top-down economic and social policies, with minimal public participation and few avenues for accountability.

First, it is key that all policies affirm the universality of human rights and that the right to food security, public health, education and housing must be provided to all without politicization or discrimination. The Syrian Government and all de facto powers must actively be providing these services to the best of their ability either through ceasing to target the vital infrastructure or through active policies that rehabilitate all damaged sectors.

Second, the shifting of expenditure towards the armed conflict has reduced expenditure on social and human development policies throughout the country. In areas outside Syrian Government control, human development was partially addressed by civil society, non-governmental

> In recent years, horizontal inequalities or inequalities between regions or culturally defined groups have become increasingly recognized as a cause of and contributor to conflict. Inequalities are defined in terms of economic opportunities, unequal access to land and natural resources, standards of living, and poor performance in other basic socioeconomic indicators

organisations (NGOs), or international organizations. Actual current and development expenditure composition changed, from 65 per cent and 35 per cent in 2010[93] to 85 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively, in 2017.[94] Recent planned budget figures for 2022 show that 85 per cent and 15 per cent of the total public expenditure were allocated to current and development expediter respectively.[95] This was due to the increase in military and social expenditure – for which no breakdown is available – which reflects a drop in development spending in absolute terms, using the annual average of free market exchange rate, from $5.2 billion in 2010 to $0.53 billion in 2022.[96]

Public subsidies have fluctuated, and estimates vary but they have generally decreased as a percentage of the current GDP from 20.2 per cent in 2011 to 13.1 per cent in 2014. Price liberalization subsidies dropped to 5.1 per cent in 2015 and 4.9 per cent in 2019. As a result, the

public budget deficit with off-budget subsidies dropped from 23.6 per cent in 2013 to 8.8 per cent in 2019.[97]

Another set of policies relate to horizontal equality. In recent years horizontal inequalities or inequalities between regions or culturally defined groups have become increasingly recognized as a cause of and contributor to conflict. Inequalities are defined in terms of economic opportunities, unequal access to land and natural resources, standards of living, and poor performance in other basic socioeconomic indicators. Some studies even claim that such inequalities are larger drivers of conflict than vertical inequalities (between rich and poor).[98]

In the case of the Syrian Arab Republic and across the board, there are clear indicators of significant regional inequalities in terms of expenditures on public health, education, human development and

other sectors. Areas in the Syrian Arab Republic that were among the largest providers of mineral resources and agricultural production were also among the poorest.[99]

This leads to the last set of policies which relate to the political inclusivity of State practices at a broader level than simply economic and social policies. In broad terms, these are policies that continue the logic of the conflict by other means: by dehumanizing the other, dividing Syrians, or entrenching geographic, political or other divisions. Such policies include political speech that doesn't recognize diversity in the political spectrum or experiences and political processes such as elections that de facto exclude a significant number of Syrians from participating.

4. Regional and international response

The international response to what is taking place in the Syrian Arab Republic is also a key enabling or hindering process. Though the path of dependence and legacy of past relations

cannot be changed in the short term, it is important to consider the possible short-term responses that may either alleviate or continue the conflict.

What complicated the conflict, and exacerbated fragmentation, was not just the external backing of various groups with weapons and funds, and the arrival of combatants, but also the increasing rivalry between these external backers.

As discussed earlier, unilateral coercive measures started with the United States and the European Union, followed by the Arab League and Turkish sanctions. At the same time, they are extremely complex, overlapping and ambiguous, and potentially apply to anyone dealing with the Syrian Arab Republic even at the most basic level of humanitarian aid. The threat of heavy sanctions by European Union legislators and the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) in the United States have in turn created de-risking measures by commercial banks who block Syria-related transactions.

Post-conflict scenarios and guiding principles for policy framework

02

A. Conflict scenarios

The underlying principles and the normative stance of the NAFS Programme aim towards peace and reconciliation among all Syrians and hold that governing the Syrian Arab Republic is the sole right and responsibility of its people. As stressed in chapter 1, a comprehensive settlement under the United Nations that brings all the major actors to the table to agree on a settlement with a formal negotiation and transition remains the ideal way to move from the conflict to post-conflict phase. However, a large number of Syrians and international observers are increasingly sceptical of its possibility in the short or even medium term.

SPAF II updates the SPAF I scenarios to better reflect the current conflict setting. The scenarios were set through a participatory approach and consultation with key informants. They involved understanding the interests of the various actors, political and economic elites, military and security institutions, regional and international powers, armed groups, religious groups and social structures, and their interactions. At the same time, participants raised awareness of potential actors that might have an interest in prolonging the conflict, or who reject the basic principles discussed in chapter 1, which are seen as essential building blocks for peace as well as common denominators among all Syrians.

A post-conflict situation usually involves factors such as cessation of hostilities and violence; the signing of peace accords and political agreements; demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR); refugee repatriation; the establishment of a functioning state; the achievement of reconciliation and societal integration; and economic recovery.

A formal peace accord is usually a prerequisite for the post-conflict phase. This would usually

> SPAF II updates the SPAF I scenarios to better reflect the current conflict setting. The scenarios were set through a participatory approach and consultation with key informants

bring together the main political parties who pledge to work towards peace, recognize the other internal political actors as legitimate interlocutors and partners in the country, and make key pledges. The peace accord then provides benchmarks against which to measure progress, and a reference point and mandate for post-conflict policies.

However, even in conflicts that end with a formal peace treaty, such a treaty is at best a declaration of intent and largely aspirational. Peace accords are rarely if ever fully implemented, even in the best of circumstances, and often many internal and external actors, work to undermine them or delay their implementation. Conflict relapse, increased violence and continuing injustice may occur even when peace accords exist. SPAF II therefore emphasizes inclusive policies that are more likely to advance the Syrian Arab Republic towards an inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding process in support of a potential formal peace accord.

With these caveats in mind, we discuss some of the possible scenarios for the next phase as advanced by NAFS experts and consultation meetings:

1. Scenario 1: Status quo/ frozen conflict [likely; undesirable]

The first scenario, or status quo, implies continued deadlock in the political process with the main actors maintaining their current posture vis-à-vis the conflict. The status quo has come about through a reduction in armed combat in most parts of the country, a de facto partition of the Syrian Arab Republic into at least three or four governance zones, significant economic sanctions and downward economic spiral and pressure on areas controlled by the Syrian Government, and no progress on the political track towards a comprehensive and inclusive settlement or accord except for the SCC. The status quo has meant that most actors have switched to managing the conflict rather than attempting to seriously solve it. This conflict management has in fact been taking place for several years now, where the borders of the Syrian Arab Republic have been sealed and a "fire pit" approach of war and destruction can continue taking place inside the country so long as it remains contained. Of course, this has come at tremendous cost to Syrians themselves, and in fact, the fallout has not been contained, whether through massive outmigration or the rise of international extremist groups like ISIL. This resulted in a gradual dying down of the armed conflict, but with political deadlock as main actors entrenched their interest.

We find that this deadlock is likely to continue in the short run as no major party or actor to the conflict sees their interests changing. There are some positives to this scenario: the lack of armed combat has reduced the levels of death, destruction and displacement. Also, in almost every area where armed conflict ended, there has been at least a slight improvement in human development. Until COVID-19 hit and the sanctions were tightened, several parts of the Syrian Arab Republic under government control were experiencing a revival.[100]

> The status quo has meant that most actors have switched to managing the conflict rather than attempting to seriously solve it

However, the positives are outweighed by the negatives. First, status quo does not mean stasis, which is impossible. It in fact entails deterioration in all governance, economic and social levels, a lack of prospects for voluntary return of refugees and IDPs, and the immiseration of entire society.

Moreover, the status quo might not resume even if all the actors wish it to do so. For one thing, continued economic suffocation might eventually lead to the collapse of State institutions. Second, there might be a resumption and relapse into armed conflict. Finally, there might be a "wildcard" event; whether through natural or other causes, an unexpected event might cause a chaotic sequence of events, the resumption of violent conflict, or the re-emergence of violent extremism.

Therefore, this report will take the status quo as the likely but not desirable option. The policies and frameworks will try to point to the dangers of lack of movement on the political front, as well as point to policies that encourage short term and longer-term considerations that move the conflict from an "unstable" equilibrium to a stable and positive equilibrium.

2. Scenario 2: A comprehensive solution based on Security Council resolution 2254 [unlikely; desirable or best-case]

The second scenario, which we may refer to as the ideal or best-case scenario, is a peaceful resolution of the conflict with national, regional and international consensus based on Security Council resolution 2254. The settlement sets out concrete achievable milestones relating to major political issues, alongside international recognition and significant economic support. The positives include: international legitimacy; the lifting of blanket sanctions; the mobilization of resources for reconstruction; benchmarks for inclusive governance and political transformation; the possibility of safe, dignified and voluntary return as conditions improve; territorial re-integration; and addressing warlordism and other legacies of war.

There will still likely be pockets of violence, not all parties might accept the solution, and societal polarization and the legacy of the conflict must be confronted. There is still a very low starting point for recovery and questions of justice and accountability need to be addressed in an appropriate and context sensitive way. Even in the best-case scenario after the lifting of sanctions, international aid might be far more limited and fall short of the financing needed.

Therefore, even in an ideal solution, the Syrian Arab Republic faces significant challenges in the short-term. However, the consultation process concluded that this scenario, though ideal, is not likely in the short-term. Nevertheless, the policies and frameworks in this report are also compatible with this outcome, in that they are recommendations in the national interest that support positive holistic change and do not contradict a comprehensive solution.

2

3. Scenario 3: Piecemeal bargains [likely; second-best case]

The third scenario assumes that there is no major political settlement but that in order to alleviate the economic situation and the resulting tensions, there are individualized and piecemeal agreements between the different actors that revolve around humanitarian aid or are based on trust building measures. This implies a continuation of the de facto partition of the country in the medium term, while bargains are made within and between the de facto powers to ease humanitarian conditions, revive the economy, and improve political governance issues and security measures. These agreements are not comprehensive but imply a "more for more" approach between the different internal and external actors. They are met with limited and incremental progress on the political front.

On the positive side, they imply improvement in humanitarian conditions, potential political or governance reforms over time, the mobilization of some resources for recovery and local development.

The third scenario assumes that there is no major political settlement but that in order to alleviate the economic situation and the resulting tensions, there are individualized and piecemeal agreements between the different actors that revolve around humanitarian aid or are based on trust **3** building measures

4. Scenario 4: Resumption of warfare [unlikely; undesirable]

The fourth scenario implies resumption of warfare on one or more fronts of the country among the main actors, or among secondary actors. This scenario is highly undesirable, but it seems also unlikely, given that there is at least tacit agreement of ending the major armed conflict. A relapse of conflict would be disastrous for Syrians.

Though unlikely, this cannot be ruled out entirely. Grinding poverty, the increasing geographic fault lines and uneven international response may well lead to such an outcome. The international response even inside the political boundaries of the Syrian Arab Republic implies tightening unilateral coercive measures on some Syrians while investing in other areas. There are new drivers of conflict due to geography, ethnicity and other factors, even if the old drivers have ebbed. As discussed in previous scenarios, an unexpected though not unusual event, even if accidental, can quickly spiral out of control. This reinforces the need to avoid maintaining the status quo.

Israeli attacks on Syrian territory have increased and become frequent over the

On the negative side, with the de facto partition of the country and continuation of sanctions, there is a limit to the improvement that can happen and the Syrian Arab Republic would remain impoverished and in an unstable equilibrium. Second, the multiple de facto actors may not find an incentive for governance reform or justice and accountability measures. There would also be no unifying framework for recovery across the Syrian Arab Republic, leading to a highly unequal recovery (and therefore potential new drivers of conflict); the persistence of (at least some) unilateral coercive measures; the persistence of the war economy; and no basis for safe return.

As negative as this scenario is, it is second best to the comprehensive solution, and might generate momentum towards a more permanent and sustainable solution. However, the policies and frameworks discussed here will not be geared towards entrenching the status quo or solely encouraging piecemeal agreements; rather they will consider such agreements as part of a comprehensive push towards nation-wide change.

The fourth scenario implies resumption of warfare on one or more fronts of the country among the main actors, or among **4** secondary actors

past years. Such attacks increase tensions and though they might not result in direct confrontation, further exacerbate regional tensions, especially when coupled with events elsewhere in the region.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the NAFS experts were fairly pessimistic about the possibility of serious political change in the coming time period, at least in the short run. Many Syrian experts were frustrated with the seeming "conflict-management" of the conflict and the way geopolitical priorities are having a crushing impact on the Syrian people and exacerbating the drivers of conflict rather than reducing them.

On the other hand, the experts called on various actors (such as the United Nations and European Union) to exercise greater agency in advancing a political settlement. In particular, it was widely emphasized that reducing regional tensions and the various low-level conflicts, proxy conflicts and other issues (such as JCPOA resumption) will have positive spillovers on the Syrian Arab Republic. Therefore, diplomatic and political efforts furthering regional ties, and bringing together the regional powers to negotiate on their main grievances will reflect positively on the Syrian conflict. Furthermore, finding areas of cooperation such as the COVID-19 pandemic, food security, energy systems, regional trade and other such initiatives can help create positive momentum in other areas.

B. Guiding principles and logic of policy alternatives framework

The policy alternatives discussed in the following chapters draw upon the work of NAFS and an appreciation of the Syrian context. They do not aim at comprehensive coverage of all sectors but try to emphasize the inter-connectedness within and between areas of concern while focusing on key policy areas that can be turned into policy programmes in the future work of NAFS.

The following considerations have guided the policy alternatives:

1. *From unstable to stable equilibrium.* Though the armed conflict has been greatly diminished over the past few years, the situation is, at best, moving from a vicious cycle to an unstable equilibrium within a steady deterioration of human development. The multiplicity of actors on Syrian territory, the geopolitical manoeuvring that continues
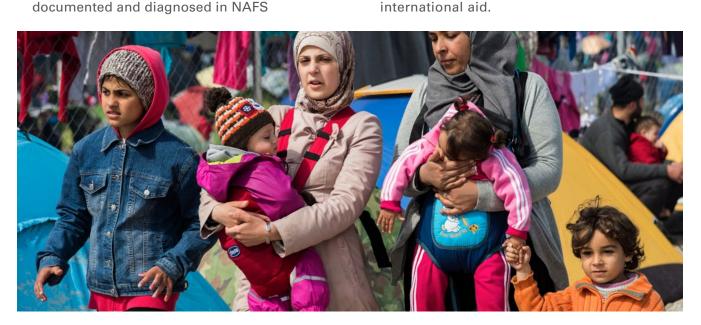
and the severe deterioration that has taken place at the economic and security level, coupled with the rise of lawlessness and other poverty induced problems, not to mention the toxic ecological legacy of the conflict, imply that an unexpected though likely event can significantly lead to conflict relapse, not necessarily according to previous conflict lines.

2. *Social protection with gender equity for all Syrians.* Social protection includes the traditional notion of economic measures and safety nets as well as protection from lawlessness, organized crime, arbitrary violence, arrest, detention, harassment and impunity of security services, paramilitary groups and warlords. Social protection without discrimination based on social or political identity, ethnicity, religion, or gender is the starting point for social reconciliation,

economic recovery and political transformation. This prerogative implies a responsibility for all actors to reduce the suffering of all Syrians.

As elaborated further below, the Syrian Arab Republic is witnessing an economic freefall and overall human development deterioration, to be added on to the legacy of the conflict, which includes vast human rights violations. This has elevated social protection to be an absolute necessity and necessary though insufficient condition for any further improvement in other aspects of the conflict, whether in relation to internal social reconciliation or political transition.

3. *Building on the developmental and cultural heritage of the Syrian Arab Republic and restoring ties between Syrians.* Prior and subsequent to 2011, Syria was home to millions of citizens, workers, professionals, scientists, educators, farmers, civil servants and others who have built its developmental heritage. This heritage has shortcomings, documented and diagnosed in NAFS

documents and SPAF I. However, it is also an important part of the collective memory of Syrians, providing a source of strength and pride that should not be erased. Regardless of the form of government that the Syrian Arab Republic takes, they will have to contend with this heritage and build on it. Building on this heritage does not contradict the aim of correcting past and current injustices.

4. *Restoring State capacity and territorial contiguity.* Without restoring State capacity and territorial contiguity of the Syrian Arab Republic, no government, regardless of form, will be able to sustainably deliver on the goods and needs that Syrians need and want. Nevertheless, while many actors proclaim that they support the territorial integrity of Syria, there are many other actors who are in fact entrenching these divides. Destroying the Syrian State or fragmenting it cannot be an acceptable policy agenda for any actor as it robs from current and future generations and sets the stage for permanent conflict. In addition, the geographic distribution of natural endowments and population density imply that restoring internal contiguity is a prerequisite for restoring self-sufficiency and relying on indigenous capacities, particularly in light of the likely reduction in international aid.

Without restoring State capacity and territorial contiguity of the Syrian Arab Republic, no government, regardless of form, will be able to sustainably deliver on the goods and needs that Syrians need and want

5. *Full recovery of citizenship and equal citizenship, rights and dignity.* All Syrians have the right to equal citizenship and to enjoy the rights of their citizenship, including newly born Syrians in areas outside governmental control. Citizenship rights cannot be contingent on political loyalty. Other rights as well, including property or housing rights and rights to return or not to return to Syria cannot be contingent on political loyalty. Syrians must not be faced with a choice of forced return in order to protect or preserve their property or housing rights.

6. *Indigenous drivers of recovery.* The deteriorating economic and social conditions of the Syrian people inside the Syrian Arab Republic dictates that the highest priority has to be given to preventing economic collapse and ameliorating the humanitarian situation. Nevertheless, given the general decline in international aid, the Syrian Arab Republic must rely on developing indigenous drivers of recovery, which means creating the conditions for human capital, which the Syrian Arab Republic is presently losing, as well as resumption of economic growth.

7. *Justice in its broadest sense: economic, political and social justice.* A key part of undoing the Syrian war economy, as well as pre-conflict negative legacies is promoting economic equality, solidarity and social justice at the expense of crony capitalism, warlordism, and alliances of wealth and power. Equality means reducing massive gaps in wealth that have been exacerbated in the Syrian Arab Republic, but it also implies horizontal equality between regions and groups.

8. *Compromises between Syrians but not at their expense.* All war-torn societies have had to make compromises to end the warfare and to move to rebuilding their societies and attempt to build sustainable peace. However, more often than not, these compromises are driven by elite interests for internal political or geopolitical reasons. This report argues that Syrians could wisely choose the path of compromise when needed. However, these compromises could be made on their behalf or at their expense.

Social policy and basic needs

03

A. Introduction

This section suggests social policy priorities during the short to medium term and the need to address basic needs within an overall framework of social protection. Social policy includes policies on food security, public health (including WASH), education, housing, basic incomes and livelihoods. As these are connected to economic performance, the present chapter and the following chapter address poverty and livelihoods within an overall framework of economic revival and undoing the war economy. However, the present chapter will also discuss the main issues related to IDPs and refugees, not in terms of basic needs and services, but in terms of their rights during the coming phase.

Understanding the dynamics of the 2017-2020 period is important since it was not a linear process of decline. Rather, various indicators of human development as well as other measures showed improvement in the 2017-2019 period when the reconsolidation of territory under Syrian Government rule and the reduction of armed conflict in various other areas slowed the decline and allowed a slight recovery.

However, this improvement was reversed in late 2019 and throughout 2020 when the economy was in freefall due to the COVID-19 pandemic's economic and public health impact, Lebanese and regional financial crisis as well as the tightening of the economic coercive measures. This highlights the necessity of understanding the structural and enabling factors, as well as the role of different actors. The ending of armed activities opened a space for a political process. However, this space was limited when the conflict was pursued by other means.

The net result is that Syrians are facing unprecedented and suffocating conditions. The Syrian conflict witnessed direct targeting of the basic infrastructure essential for food security, health and education. This is not only catastrophic to Syrians alive today but will impact the livelihoods of future generations who hope to live in a peaceful, democratic, pluralistic yet strong State that can provide the goods and services that its population needs.

According to OCHA, by the end of 2022, the number of people in need in the Syrian Arab

The Syrian conflict witnessed direct targeting of the basic infrastructure essential for **food security, health and education**

Republic increased to 15.3 million people, compared to 14 million people in the previous year. These needs relate to food security, basic health and education, and access to livelihoods.[101] Improved access to basic needs and services has a crucial role to play in the peacebuilding process.

B. Social protection

In response to the issues outlined above, this section proposes "social protection" as a framework and entry point for responding to the dire socioeconomic impacts of the conflict as well as the multiple regional and global economic and public health crises. Social protection is an entry point, a necessary but insufficient condition for progress on other fronts, and a gateway for societal empowerment.

Social protection has a long history in Syria. However, what is proposed in this section builds on the past but with a more encompassing vision that includes a system aimed at increasing personal safety, belonging and dignity. Such a vision is a prerequisite for any attempt to forge a new social contract between the State and society, as well as within the various components of Syrian society. Enacting meaningful social protection implies a key behavioural change for all actors and thus acts as a major enabler of a multitude of other factors including social reconciliation, social cohesion and a political transition. Without a change in behaviour, those other markers may reflect elite bargains that have few direct positive implications for millions of suffering Syrians.

During the conflict, social protection suffered a marked decline, and a concomitant rise in actors, as the government withdrew from many areas and was no longer able to provide protection due to material constraints. Refugees were provided for by neighbouring governments, NGOs and UNHCR, and the de facto powers in many areas outsourced protection. The deteriorating economic situation during 2020 and 2021 reversed any improvement witnessed in the previous years.

This section proposes "social protection" as a framework and entry point for responding to the dire socioeconomic impacts of the conflict as well as the multiple regional and global economic and public health crises

Social protection is commonly understood as a set of public actions which address not only income poverty and economic shocks, but also social vulnerability, thus taking into account the inter-relationship between exclusion and poverty.

It usually entails three components: social safety nets for the poorest and most vulnerable population groups, social insurance and active labour market policies.[102] In non-conflict-ridden societies these include income or in-kind support, targeted or general transfers and programmes designed to increase access to goods and services.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) uses the term "social protection floor" to refer to the minimum social protection that all should have access to, in terms of access to public health –

including essential care and maternity care – basic nutritional and educational care; other necessary goods and services for families, the elderly and children; basic income security in cases of sickness, unemployment, maternity and disability; and basic income security for older persons.[103]

In fragile or conflict-ridden countries, the concept of social protection takes on wider dimensions and serves multiple functions. For example, World Bank studies show some evidence that social protection can provide a platform for promoting participation in programme processes, improving social inclusion and equality through temporary labour market participation, and smoothing social tensions and building trust in response to sudden shocks as well as longer term fragility.[104]

According to the 2011 World Development Report, State legitimacy is strengthened and confidence in State institutions is restored through the delivery of stability, security, justice and jobs, which in turn lessens the probability of further conflict and fragility:

"For instance, through the provision of short-term employment to disenfranchised individuals, public works programmes have the potential to restore a sense of identity to individuals and confidence in the ability of the state to deliver services and improve social inclusion and equity".[105]

As discussed in chapter 2, the Syrian landscape is characterized by acute poverty and deprivation, significant displacement and destruction, and a significant polarization brought about by a decade of conflict and human rights abuses. Though armed conflict has reduced, insecurity remains high.

At a basic level, the two aspects of social protection mentioned above combine protection from need with protection from fear, while reviving and enacting social and economic solidarity. These must be done in equitable ways without consideration of political loyalty or affiliation and without discrimination of any kind, such as that based on gender, ethnicity, sect or any other identity or status. It implies achieving food security as well as having the basic human development needs, of public health and education as well as shelter and housing and basic services met. Given the crisis of refugees and IDPs, social protection must extend particularly to those refugees in neighbouring countries.

Box 5. Social protection in Syria: an entry point for peacebuilding

Rewriting the pact between citizens, service providers and the State can happen when short-term service delivery improves, is accountable and includes the voices of citizens, and therefore instils trust and confidence, while improving social cohesion.

In Syria, the system and policy mindset of social protection must:

1. Offer protection against risks such as loss of income and food insecurity, as well as loss of livelihood and lack of access to health, education and basic services.
2. Offer personal security and safety, equal and full rights and freedoms, gender equity and dignity. It must be based on recognizing every Syrian's right to freedom and human dignity through transparency, increased participation and accountability, and acknowledging the roles and responsibilities of the State, civil society, the private sector and other relevant actors.

Social protection as a framework for the next phase of conflict has several advantages over an approach framed merely in terms of humanitarian aid, even if it is inclusive of traditional emergency measures

In this chapter, there is a focus on refugees' rights. This does not imply that they face greater needs than residents or IDPs. However, with increasing discussion of return, there is an urgent need to discuss refugees' rights, expectations, and the conditions in which the process and consideration of return must take place. Second, social protection must be expanded to include citizens' rights to safety, security and dignified non-discriminatory treatment. Social protection must imply freedom from fear of random violence, arrest, torture or undignified treatment. It means upholding the rule of law and equitable treatment.

Social protection as a framework for the next phase of conflict has several advantages over an approach framed merely in terms of humanitarian aid, even if it is inclusive of traditional emergency measures.

First, unlike humanitarian aid as an emergency measure, social protection is an all-encompassing system that bridges aid with early recovery and development as it works to develop societal institutions in a human development-oriented way.

Second, the concept of social protection is part of the developmental heritage of Syria. However, while it was an underlying aspect of the Syrian social contract in the decades preceding the conflict, as a concept, it focused primarily on economic deprivations without sufficient attention to other questions, such as the ability to voice opinions and concerns, rights and protection from fear.

Social protection is directly relevant to rebuilding the horizontal and vertical social capital that has been shattered by the conflict – and which is a prerequisite for social cohesion. As a broad approach it can also involve a wide range of actors from international organizations to governments, de facto authorities, as well as civil and local society.

Finally, and most importantly, applying social protection in an equitable, non-discriminatory, gender sensitive and human rights-based approach is a key aspect of forging a new social contract.

Social protection in Syria prior to the conflict

Social protection provided by the State was part of the implicit social contract of Syria. The constitution in effect since 2012 states that "the state shall guarantee every citizen and his/her family in cases of emergency, sickness, disability, orphan-hood, and old age" and that "the state shall protect the health of citizens and provide them with the means of prevention, treatment and medication", while declaring that health and social services are basic pillars and aim for balanced development among all regions of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Social protection systems in Syria include three components: the labour market component (which regulates labour and decent work standards), the social security component (which oversees social safety nets, the generation of employment opportunities for the poor, cash and in-kind transfers programmes, and social insurance programmes), and the social services component (which provides social support funds, direct support programmes, health services and housing services).[106]

Social insurance was first introduced in 1959 under the socialist reforms of President Gamal Abdel Nasser through Law 92 of 1959. Over the years, the main fund for social insurance has been the General Establishment for Social Insurance (covering public, private and joint sectors), which is overseen by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MoSAL) and takes the form of a pay as you go system with defined benefits, with separate rules on employer versus employee contributions by sector. However, there are other insurance schemes for professional associations such as doctors and engineers. Benefits generally include old-age pension (for men over 60 and women over 55), lump-sum payments for end of service, disability pension, work injury benefits, survivor's pension,

paid sick leave and maternity protection. Unemployment insurance is currently not in place, though it was introduced in the Eleventh Five Year Plan for 2011-2015, as part of a shift towards income rather than jobs protection.[107]

Social protection provided by the State was part of the implicit social contract of Syria

The second component of social protection is social assistance in the form of subsidies, in-kind assistance, cash transfer schemes, microfinance schemes, social assistance through government sponsored charities, various schemes to support the families of deceased members of the armed forces,[108] and housing.[109] For many decades, consumption subsidies for energy and food were the main social assistance policy tool designed to reduce poverty.[110] The State also provides a range of health care services, discussed in section C of this chapter.

The Tenth Five Year Plan (2006-2010) for socioeconomic development in Syria signalled a shift towards more targeted assistance rather than blanket subsidies – as blanket subsidies were considered regressive in a context of low capacity – to identify the targeted beneficiaries and those of low middle-income status among the population. In 2009, attempts to tie eligibility of in-kind assistance to indicators such as income, electricity bills and phone bills resulted in chaos and misuse. It is also the case that some types of subsidies (in the case of both food and energy) are predominantly consumed by poorer population groups as evidence from Egypt shows.[111] There is a danger that such a shift will have a significantly negative effects for middle class, working class and poor Syrians.[112]

During the conflict, cuts were made to subsidies for energy, bread, rice, sugar and water. In July 2021, the price of diesel for household use

reached twenty-five times that of 2010. In 2018, the Government budget allocated to social support, subsidized bread, sugar, rice, water, electricity and free WASH services had decreased by more than 50 per cent compared to 2017.[113] Budget figures have recently shown improvements in the ratio of announced social spending to total spending, which has increased from 23.5 per cent in 2018 to 41 per cent in 2021.

Several initiatives took place. For example, the National Social Assistance Fund (NSAF) was officially established in 2011 by Legislative Decree 9 and was managed by MoSAL after it had been piloted and planned in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), with funding from the European Union. Its purpose was to provide nation-wide cash transfers to heads of households, on a conditional basis which related to school attendance and vaccinations. Beneficiaries were to be identified through proxy targeting means, and eight formulas were developed based on geographic location. Though the fund was active early on, the 2017 Syrian Government budget contained an allocation of $685,862 and NSAF has switched to microfinance grants instead of cash transfers due to the mushrooming of needs and budget limitations.[114] Furthermore, in 2017, a Family Protection Unit was established under MoSAL, aiming to protect women and children from violence. A national programme to support women post-conflict was also drafted by the Syrian Commission for Social and Family Affairs. In-kind assistance increased during the conflict, and the Syrian Government has issued vouchers (smart cards) which function like credit cards through which card holders can purchase food or fuel at specific shops or stations. This bolsters the local economy and gives a margin of choice while allegedly preventing unnecessary purchases.[115] Social protection measures have also included a labour market component

(discussed in the next chapter), with efforts to reduce unemployment – including through the microfinance schemes mentioned above – agricultural and rural support funds, and other forms of support for basic needs.

However, the social protection system must overcome a series of old and new challenges, such as addressing questions of financing, coverage (particularly in relation to the absence of unemployment protection) and institutional capacity, as well as questions of discrimination and equitable treatment.

The conflict also introduced demographic changes, in terms of shrinking and transforming the population pyramid, the loss of documentation – particularly in relation to identity – and changes in the social position of women. As discussed in chapter 2, actual expenditure on both social protection and subsidies as a percentage of the budget has declined. However, there are wider structural issues.

Despite efforts to include a large range of labour groups in the national social insurance system, large parts of the society remain unprotected, especially in the informal work sector. Effective coverage is limited to around one third of the working-age population.[116] New regulations allowing for the voluntary inclusion of self-employed persons in 2014 – the most recent available data on this during the conflict – represented significant progress as they concerned an estimated proportion of 30 per cent of all employees and 52.5 per cent of private sector employees, though the 21.1 per cent contribution rate they were expected to pay was very high – twice the employee contribution rate in the public sector.[117]

Existing social protection systems also perpetuate gender inequalities. Some of this is connected to the lower participation rates of women in the labour force (which led to women's contributions being lower) and is therefore a reflection of overall gender inequality rather than a primary cause of gender inequality itself. However, the consequence is that many women are not covered by the social insurance system or obtain their benefits through male relatives, increasing dependency and making women vulnerable in cases of divorce – a problem that has become magnified by the higher percentage of female-headed households due to the conflict. Significantly more generous conditions applied to benefits for survivors of male workers as compared to female workers also reinforces the traditional distribution of paid work. Moreover, placing the financial burden of maternity benefits on employers rather than including them into social insurance schemes may also lead to discrimination in recruitment processes.

More broadly, research from Sri Lanka, Myanmar and other conflict situations shows how women generally assume a default social protection role that is uncompensated through increased care work under less supportive conditions. Conflict increases women's care burdens through: (a) the absence of relatives to share work, (b) a lack of care for women with disabilities, (c) the pyscho-social effects of conflict, (d) male recourse to domestic violence, and (e) increasing types of labour, such as searching for missing or disappeared relatives. Research has also found a continuum of violence against women, from combatants and landowners, as well as within the household. All of these have caused constant exhaustion among women; however, social norms and meta-narratives of conflict often portray this as endurance, thus erasing the daily pain and suffering women are experiencing or preventing them from sharing it and having it acknowledged.[118]

C. Food security and agricultural performance

A key component of social policy over the short and medium term is achieving food security. By the end of 2022, 12.1 million people in the Syrian Arab Republic are estimated to be food insecure, that amounts to 55 per cent of the population.[119] In 2021, more than 90 per cent of the Syrian population was estimated to be living below the poverty line,[120] compared to 62 per cent in 2015, (as estimated by ESCWA). Dramatic increases in food prices compound the issue of food insecurity. Moreover, a total of 15.3 million people in Syria need different forms of humanitarian assistance – a 9.2 per cent increase from 2021 and a 38.3 per cent increase from 2020.[121]

Food security and food sovereignty were historically among the key pillars of Syrian public policy. Prior to the conflict, food security levels were high. However, the Syrian Arab Republic

faced challenges related to sustainability and equality between regions. Agriculture in the Syrian Arab Republic played a pivotal role in sustaining the livelihoods of Syrians and supporting the country's economy. Before the conflict, the sector employed half of the population and contributed to 19.3 per cent of GDP during 2006-2010. The country was distinguished in terms of self-sufficiency in food production, whereas other Arab countries are highly dependent on imports. The Syrian Arab Republic had strategic self-sufficiency in wheat and other crops, which positioned the country to export food commodities to neighbouring Arab countries and Gulf States.

The conflict has extremely damaged agricultural livelihood assets including water, agricultural infrastructure and the natural environment. Among numerous other factors, territorial fragmentation

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played a key role in destabilizing Syrian agricultural networks, supply chains and food circuits. Female labour participation in the agriculture sector has dropped significantly overtime. In 2010 (pre-conflict), female employment in agriculture amounted to 15.3 per cent, compared to 6.9 per cent in 2019 (during the conflict period).[122]

ESCWA estimated the loss of capital stock in agriculture between 2011 and 2018 at $1.9 billion, equivalent to 1.6 per cent of the country's total capital stock losses over that period.[123] In turn, many Syrians were driven to the war economy due to lack of alternative sources of livelihood. Food insecurity was also used as a weapon of conflict through siege warfare, destruction of crops and targeting of popular markets, bakeries and water resources. Despite all these challenges, the agriculture sector remained an important contributor to the national economy with an average of 16.2 per cent of total GDP between 2011-2021[124] (during the conflict period) and a vital source of livelihoods, particularly in rural areas.

The productivity of the sector has declined with the onset of the conflict, reaching a low in

2017/18. With the slow return of IDPs to safer areas and comparatively high rainfall in 2019, crop harvests were significantly up from the low of 2017/18. Before 2011, more than 90 per cent of the total irrigable land was irrigated, with 45 per cent of the public irrigation network located in the Euphrates valley, and 55 per cent in the Orontes valley of the Dar'a Governorate. Irrigation systems primarily serviced wheat, cotton, potatoes, sugar beet, vegetables and citrus. However, conflict has caused widespread destruction of the irrigation systems. It is estimated that between 86 and 89 per cent of the water requirements of Syria are in agriculture and that the country's water deficit is around 10 per cent. Fertilizer use has greatly declined since 2011 due to low availability, high cost and restrictions on imports of nitrogenous fertilizers that can be used to make explosives due to sanctions. The main source of fertilizer is urea and manure. The main urea fertilizer factory in Homs was damaged in 2016 by anti-Government forces. However, it was reopened and fully rehabilitated, resuming production in 2019.

Moreover, as a result of the conflict, Syria transformed from having a wheat surplus to a

wheat deficit, which is the staple crop within Syria. As discussed in chapter 2, territorial fragmentation and the lack of internal contiguity contribute directly to food insecurity given the internal trading routes in the country. According to FAO, wheat is being imported mainly through its seaports as well as via the Beirut-Damascus road axis. Allies of Syria, such as the Russian Federation, have been assisting in covering wheat deficits.[125]

In terms of food availability, wheat production is estimated at 1.05 million tons in 2021, down by 63 per cent from 2.8 million tons in 2020 and only one quarter of the pre-conflict average of 4.1 million tons (during the period 2002-2011). Among the reasons behind this decline is the increase in fuel prices to operate pumps for irrigation as well as harsh weather conditions. It is worth noting that 2021's wheat production was at the lowest level in almost 50 years.[126] According to FAO, crop production in 2021 is forecasted at below-average levels since the vegetation conditions of crops in April 2021 were very similar to those in 2017/18 when crops were severely affected by dry weather conditions[127] and stood at 1.23 million tons.[128]

To reduce wheat sales on the black market, the Government recently increased the profit margin for wheat prices from 25 to 40 per cent. However, the price of wheat harvested in June 2020 was projected to be 400 SYP per kilogram compared to 180 SYP per kilogram in 2019 (a 122 per cent increase). Taking into consideration per capita wheat consumption (170 kilograms per year)[129] and the country's population, wheat availability was projected to be stable in 2020 without price fluctuations affecting consumer access, but official data is not out yet.[130] This was strengthened by the Government's bread subsidy policy for the most vulnerable. This stability scenario was dependent on the Government's ability to import wheat following the Caesar Act, to ensure adequate reserves, and the availability of seeds for the coming season. Furthermore, to avoid wheat shortages in the future, the Ministry of Economy lifted import restrictions on wheat and flour, which

> The conflict and its fallout have resulted in massive food price hikes. The underlying causes of price increases include constraints on land access, high costs of agricultural inputs, an overall reduction in food production and the devaluation of the Syrian currency

were usually limited to State entities and agri-food industries manufacturing pasta. The retail price of wheat flour has drastically increased from around 250 SYP per kilogram in April 2019 to around 2,264 SYP per kilogram in November 2021.[131]

For instance, according to the Agricultural Cooperative Bank, the price of urea was 164,000 SYP per ton during 2018/2019 and reached 1,366,000 SYP/ton in 2021 after subsidy removal in 2021. Similarly, the price of superphosphate increased from 184,000 SYP per ton to 1,112,000 SYP per ton.[132] The prices in the private sector are even higher as they are measured by the free market exchange rate.[133] Officially, the Government is the only legal purchaser of wheat from farmers, but during the conflict, the Government's ability to purchase wheat dropped with the loss of wheat growing areas (Al-Hasakeh, Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor) first to ISIL and later to the DAA. These areas accounted for 78 per cent of wheat production in the country.[134] Currently wheat under DAA control is sold to the private sector and to the Government in Damascus through intermediaries. However, sale to the Government dropped, as a result of an intense price competition with other parties purchasing wheat, and lately as a result of the Caesar Act

which forced the Self-Administration to ban sale of wheat to Government areas.

The conflict and its fallout have resulted in massive food price hikes. The underlying causes of price increases include constraints on land access, high costs of agricultural inputs, an overall reduction in food production and the devaluation of the Syrian currency. In October 2022, the national average food basket price was 357,593 SYP, which is 91 per cent higher than the average food basket price in October 2021 and beyond what most average workers in the Syrian Arab Republic can afford.[135] Disparities between

governorates were reported; in October 2022, the average food basket price in Al-Hasakeh was 306,538 SYP compared to 382,213 SYP in Homs.[136]

The Syrian Government has recently expanded food assistance through electronic vouchers to supply subsidized bread, rice, tea and sugar. The Ministry of Internal Trade and Consumer Protection claims to regularly check prices in markets and disseminate average prices to increase consumer awareness. However, the ability to control prices in local markets is limited, and retail prices are reported to be 15-20 per cent higher than what is officially published.

D. Education

The educational losses are among the most catastrophic of the Syrian tragedy and likely to have long-lasting implications. This has given rise to the oft-repeated phrase of a "lost generation" of Syrians, who are suffering current and future losses due to missing years of schooling. According to the *Syria at War: Eight Years On* report, more than 40 per cent of school infrastructure is out of service with one out of three schools damaged, destroyed or used as a shelter. The widespread use of schools as collective shelters for IDPs has increased pressure on the education infrastructure.

Approximately 6.9 million people – of whom 97 per cent are children – need humanitarian education assistance. Nearly 2.45 million children were out of school in 2020 and 1.6 million were at risk of dropping out.[137]

However, neither the statistical data nor the phrase "lost generation" capture the full extent of the problem. The NAFS approach to education has emphasized an emergency-humanitarian-development approach that emphasizes education as a key strategic sector for peacebuilding and an urgent priority. This

approach differs from the traditional emergency-humanitarian approach that emphasizes access to primary education.

Rather, the NAFS approach prioritizes critical and alarming issues to be addressed in a comprehensive and sustainable way. In addition to accessibility for children, the following actions should be considered: stopping the destruction and targeting of educational infrastructure, rehabilitating education infrastructure, addressing the significant number of youth dropouts (in the 12-24 years age group) and the lack of alternatives available to them in terms of vocational or other training, addressing the absence (with few exceptions) of accreditation and certification of the Syrian curriculum by international and regional organizations, including the United Nations, addressing the emergence of multiple curricula corresponding to different zones of control and their impact in terms of furthering fragmentation and undermining social trust and capital, addressing the marginalization of Syrian teachers and shortage of training support, and finally, finding innovative solutions to address the low quality of the education available.[138]

Adopting a gender lens reveals there are vulnerabilities and high drop-out rates for both men and women for different reasons. Educational strategy is also viewed as a key component of girls and women's empowerment. Child marriage of young and adolescent girls (in the 12-17 years age group) is reported as frequently occurring in 18 per cent of communities.[139] Community members also cited domestic violence, harassment, sexual violence, family separation and abductions as among the crises facing women, which among other negative consequences, are also obstacles to continued education. Young men are also susceptible to dropping out due to the pressure placed upon them to become primary breadwinners, as well as

other forms of conflict induced pressures, child-labour and recruitment to fighting groups.

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E. Public health

After almost a decade of conflict, the health system of Syria is nearly destroyed, and what remains was fragmented and already under severe stress before the COVID-19 pandemic. The health losses due to the conflict have been immense, as it was among the most damaged sectors. Health and healthcare have been weaponized, and health infrastructure targeted in a disastrous way for civilian life.

Though Syria enjoyed tremendous achievements in health and medicine production, with a healthcare industry that was considered quite advanced, the healthcare sector hid many flaws in governance structures as well as regional inequalities.

Health infrastructure has seen extensive destruction with 41 per cent of public hospitals and 43 per cent of primary health care (PHC) facilities either not functioning or partially functioning.[140] Attacks on healthcare infrastructure, of which there have been more than 600, have been one of the key drivers of displacement, among other widespread negative consequences. Attacks on healthcare have had a

detrimental effect on healthcare workers, many of whom have been forcibly displaced, imprisoned or killed. This has occurred alongside increasing and changing health burdens, such as increasing disability, emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases, mental health needs and an increase in non-communicable diseases.

As the *Syria at War: Eight Years On* report demonstrates, health facilities and staff have been indiscriminately targeted during attacks, with a detrimental impact on civilians. The availability of services has sharply declined, in terms of both quantity and quality. In 2018, health facilities and workers were attacked 142 times, a significant increase compared with 2017.[141] In 2020, only 58 per cent of hospitals and 53 per cent of primary healthcare centres (PHCs) were fully functional.[142] Despite the de-escalation in several regions, attacks on health facilities were persistent in 2019. The number of people in need increased at the end of 2022 to 15.3 million[143] across the country compared with 11.3 million in 2018.[144] Additionally, widespread displacement continues to put a strain on health infrastructure affecting those in need of urgent

After almost a decade of conflict, the health system of Syria is nearly destroyed, and what remains was fragmented and already under severe stress before the COVID-19 pandemic

treatment. Electricity disruptions due to damaged infrastructure have also become an impediment.[145] The delivery of basic life-saving medical supplies is obstructed, often affecting populations in acute need located in hard-to-reach areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the importance of robust health care systems and showed how robust, efficient, accessible and non-discriminatory health care systems are at the centre of the social, governance and economic nexus. To that end, this section examines addressing the health care sector as a key component of the social protection phase and a requirement for an inclusive recovery.

Among the key health burdens in Syria today are the direct effects of violence on the rise of non-communicable diseases, communicable diseases and vaccine preventable diseases, as well as on the health of women, child and adolescent health, mental and psychosocial disorders, injuries and disability.[146]

1. Healthcare as a component of social protection

A wide number of health services are provided for free or at reduced cost, and Iraqi refugees who resided in Syria had access to the same services as Syrian citizens (Palestinians were administered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)).

Since the onset of the crisis, the government has prioritized health spending. Allocation to the Ministry of Health has almost tripled in terms of its overall share of the state budget, from 1.4 per cent in 2011 to 3.7 per cent in 2020, and then decreased to 2.4 per cent in 2021.[147] The latest data available on the ratio of the Syrian Government's expenditure on health amounted to 3.75 per cent

of GDP dates back to 2013,[148] low by regional standards at that time. Planned public expenditure allocated to the Ministry of Health, the only available figure for the conflict period, has almost tripled in terms of its overall share of the State budget, from 1.4 per cent in 2011 to 3.7 per cent in 2020 reflecting the prioritization of spending on health. Nevertheless, this indicator decreased to 2.4 per cent in 2021.[149]

Public hospitals and health centres were the main providers of health-care services, including primary, secondary and tertiary care, and were operated by or received funding from several sources including the Ministries of Health, Higher Education, Local Administration, Defence, Interior, and Social Affairs and Labour. Provision is overseen by directorates in each governorate, that in turn allocate funding to the health centres under their purview. This led to the characterization of the Syrian health care system as both centralized and fragmented.

Syrian Government figures reveal that in 2019 there were 113 public hospitals with a total number of 20,994 beds, compared to 391 private hospitals with 9,577 beds. However, these hid significant disparities; for example, Damascus had 2.5 beds per 1000 population as compared to Idlib and Al-Hasakeh (0.8 beds per 1000 population) a disparity that was even wider in 2005 (4.2 beds per 1000 population in Damascus versus 0.6 and 0.9 in Idlib and Al-Hasakeh). Similar regional differences apply to the distribution of hospital staff, with 24 physicians per 10,000 population in Damascus compared to only 8 physicians per 10,000 population in Idlib and 9 in Al-Hasakeh in 2016.[150]

Alongside the public free services there are a wide range of private for-profit providers that are generally considered to be of higher quality but also significantly higher costs. The low quality and lack of availability of health care meant that in 2012, about 54 per cent of health expenditures were paid out of pocket by Syrian households.[151]

Professional associations, and workers and teachers' unions and public sector entities also provide access to health benefit schemes, thought to cover between 15 and 22 per cent of the population before the conflict.[152] Government supported charities also contributed to health care access. The result is a lot of overlapping schemes.

The introduction of a social health insurance to a contribution based social model has been on the agenda due to increasing costs and declining revenues, and a health insurance law was approved in 2003. This would provide the basis for a General Organization of Health insurance to be funded from public, private, and joint sectors.

2. Health systems inside Syria

Within Syria, there are now at least **four sub-national health systems** which are broadly geographically based in the north-east, areas controlled by the Government (the central and southern parts of the country, which make up around two thirds of the country), and the north-western and northern areas controlled by Türkiye. Each has evolved throughout the course of the conflict with different governance structures, leadership, funding and infrastructure. Institutions and facilities outside areas under Syrian Government control are left with a power vacuum of unrecognised universities and independent initiatives, which affects the training and accreditation of healthcare workers. Collaboration or even communication across the health systems is minimal or non-existent which has contributed to poor healthcare responses and rises in outbreaks of communicable diseases such as polio.

An ideal future vision is of a unified health system based on the principles of equity, non-discrimination, accountability and gender equality that would ensure geographic and economic accessibility, active engagement

with the community and civil society, while protecting the rights of vulnerable groups and providing cost-effective, high-quality care. It would hold legitimacy and have organisational and institutional resilience with sufficient resources to serve the population.

The World Health Organization (WHO) building blocks framework is still widely used as it defines the six elements of the supply side of health systems: (1) service delivery, (2) healthcare workforce, (3) medical products, vaccines and technology, (4) leadership and governance, (5) health financing, and (6) information, learning and accountability.

3. Subnational health systems

As the opposition acquired territories and the Syrian Government no longer supported healthcare in areas controlled by the opposition, the opposition established institutions, healthcare facilities and civil society organizations (CSOs) to meet the health needs of local populations. These efforts were challenged by a lack of resources, expertise and competition among stakeholders. In 2014, the Syrian Interim Government (SIG) was created to oversee different sectors of which health was one. However, SIG did not have legitimacy among all actors on the ground, particularly armed opposition groups, and this led to the establishment of local actors including Health Directorates. This led to a state of fragmentation in the provision of healthcare in areas controlled by the opposition with weak governance structures, poor planning of services and increased competition for resources.

As the conflict progressed and the Syrian Government regained control over territory, leaving only the areas in the north-east and north-west of Syria outside of its control as of 2020, it is increasingly evident that there is more than one health system present within Syrian borders. Each

has their own governance structures, funding streams, stakeholders and challenges. This has become increasingly evident as the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the areas differently with different responses established.

Multiple subnational health systems in Syria have evolved within different micro-contexts, subjected to different influences and affected by violence, displacement and funding in different ways. The subnational health systems have different characteristics which affect the provision of healthcare for the population.

In areas under Syrian Government control, the health system places more emphasis on secondary or tertiary care, with an under-developed public or primary healthcare system, inequitable access to services, and accusations of government interference with health and humanitarian aid and favouring populations loyal to the Syrian Government. The health system in the north-west has been heavily influenced by the presence of Syrian and international NGOs, many of which provide cross-border humanitarian aid via Türkiye; this is coordinated by the WHO-led health cluster which is based in Gaziantep in Türkiye. Though the response is fragmented and significantly under-funded, there are promising initiatives which emphasize primary healthcare, midwifery training programmes and mental health initiatives. Areas under Turkish control share health services and structures which are aligned to the Turkish national model of healthcare; this health system has been the least explored in the literature. As in pre-conflict times, the north-east remains under-resourced in terms of funding and healthcare services with poor investment and insufficient health services for the needs of the population. It is decentralized with some reliance on Syrian Government areas for health and humanitarian aid with some degree of community participation.

Table 1. Health provision across Syria

	Areas controlled by the Syrian Government	North-east Syria	North-west Syria	Areas under Turkish control (little info about this area)
Service delivery	• The Syrian Ministry of Health (MoH) is the main stakeholder alongside the private sector and local and international organisations, such as the United Nations and WFP, who are mandated to work through the Syrian Government in Damascus. • Primary healthcare is weak with a heavier emphasis on secondary and specialised services. • Specialist services are more concentrated in the main urban cities (e.g., Damascus) leading to inequality between urban and rural areas.	• Main providers: the Health and Environment Authority, private sector and local and international NGOs. • There is poor availability of specialist care and travel to areas under Syrian Government control is limited. • The primary healthcare system is poor. • There have been some attempts at decentralisation.	• Main providers: multiple stakeholders, leading to fragmentation and duplication. • Local councils and health directorates are the main organisations which provide oversight. • The WHO-led health cluster in Gaziantep leads and coordinates the healthcare response. • There has been increased investment in Primary Health Care. Mobile health clinics have emerged due to attacks. • An Essential Package of Health Services (EPHS)[a] has been launched with mixed success.	• Turkish health authorities have established new hospitals and health centres in line with Turkish standards. • NGOs like Syria Relief and Development, Union des Organisations de Secours et Soins Médicaux (UOSSM) and the Independent Doctor's Association were allowed to establish primary healthcare and maternity centres in these areas.
Health workforce	• Uneven geographical distribution of the health workforce: **MoH data estimates 1.45 and 1.27 doctors per 1,000 people in Quneitra and Tartous respectively** (the world average is 1.5) compared to **0.11 doctors per 1,000 people in Dar'a** (an area previously outside Syrian Government control). • Providing healthcare to those considered against the Syrian Government has been criminalised. • Healthcare worker training institutions have been politicised and weakened during the conflict. • COVID-19 placed extra strains on healthcare workers with many deaths reported. • Insufficient salaries and poor working conditions are key drivers for healthcare workers (especially during COVID-19) to leave the country.	• Little available information. • Among the worst doctor-population ratios at **0.10 doctors per 1,000 people.** • No healthcare worker training facilities. • Healthcare workers face numerous challenges working in a severely under-resourced health system.	• **0.14 doctors per 1,000 people.** • Some healthcare workers travel between Türkiye and Syria. • There are no Syrian Government-led training institutions. This affects the supply of high-quality healthcare workers. • However, public independent institutions have been established, for example, by Free Aleppo University and private institutions of mixed quality. • These institutions do not have international recognition, which affects how the degrees and postgraduate training is accredited. • Doctors are paid more than those in areas under Syrian Government control by NGOs due to the higher security risks of working in these areas.	• Syrian healthcare workers are employed alongside a smaller proportion of Turkish healthcare workers and work under Turkish managers.

	Syrian Government controlled areas	North-east Syria	North-west Syria	Areas under Turkish control (little info about this area)
Medicines	• The destruction of the pharmaceutical industry infrastructure (e.g., factories), the high cost of manufacturing and difficulties in importing raw materials (which some assert is due to sanctions though materials for medicinal use are exempt) have adversely affected the industry. • It is also more lucrative for manufacturers to export products rather than distribute locally.	• The main source of medications is from Syrian Government controlled areas and across the border with Iraq. • This has been challenging due to costs, a lack of consistent regulations regarding pricing and availability, and the closure of Yaroubieh border crossing in January 2020. • There is poor availability of high-cost medications e.g., oncology.	• The main sources of medication are the Syrian Government, Türkiye and international aid, which includes products imported via cross-border aid. • Only one local pharmaceutical factory was operating in the area, but it stopped provision to north-west Syria after the Syrian Government regained control over Aleppo. • The main problems are the absence of oversight, quality assurance and poor regulations. • Medications for chronic disease and life-saving medications are mostly provided by local and international NGOs or through charitable pharmacies.	• Little is known about medicines in this area.
Leadership and governance	• Syrian Government leadership and governance in the area of health is weak with little emphasis on its development, both before and after the onset of conflict. • The Syrian Government has stifled many aspects of health system governance with little accountability or transparency in the delivery of healthcare. • Accusations have been made around politicization of aid and discrimination according to areas deemed politically loyal.	• Numerous stakeholders influence healthcare with little coordination or collaboration; this includes the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), the Syrian Government and international and local NGOs. This is in addition to a lack of strategic vision, public participation, responsiveness to people's needs and unified governance.	• Health directorates under the SIG and WHO-led Health Cluster in Gaziantep, Türkiye provide leadership alongside local councils. • However, there is poor governance in the area with inadequate funding, poor transparency, poor community participation and poor accountability as key features. • Governance is further adversely affected by the numerous stakeholders that provide care and short-term funding strategies, the ongoing attacks on healthcare and continuing violence. • NGOs have a large influence on health governance as funding recipients and services providers.	• While information from key informants suggests that good quality care and services are provided, many challenges face the sector. • For COVID-19, it is noted that bureaucratic processes and poor communication with the adjacent health system in north-west Syria could have negative consequences for health.

	Syrian Government controlled areas	North-east Syria	North-west Syria	Areas under Turkish control (little info about this area)
Health financing	• The Syrian Government funds the health system however, most revenue is collected through out-of-pocket payments, most of which go directly to the private sector. • Some private sector **health insurance** initiatives provide limited services to individuals, mainly those working in the private sector or with international NGOS. • There is no taxation specifically for health. • Procurement is done through the Ministry of Finance, though the Ministry of Health is responsible for providing plans for financing the health service and supervising bids for health services. • The recent economic collapse, which led to poverty rates of 80 per cent and rising unemployment, adversely affects services users' ability to pay with consequences for health system funding.	• There is heavy reliance on international health and humanitarian aid. • MoH makes some provisions and is accountable for some of the funding however does not meet the local needs.	• International donors supported health delivery programmes, for free or minimal out-of-pocket expenditure. • Procurement for the health sector is undertaken by bilateral external donors.	• The Turkish Government is the main provider of health financing in the area. • Some NGOs provide healthcare services with varied sources of funding.
Health information system	• There is little digitalisation of health centre and patient record data. • This results in information gaps at the population level. • The WHO Early Warning, Alert and Response System (EWARS) is operational in areas under Syrian Government control.	• There are no standardised data collection or recording methods; some records are digital while others remain paper based.	• Due to multiple service providers, there are multiple health information systems; some are digitalised while others remain paper based. • There have been attempts to standardise data collection through the health cluster; a new Health Information System is to be launched to support improved data collection to allow health service planning. • The Early Warning Alert and Response Network (EWARN) surveillance system is run by the Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU).	• Little is known about the health information system in this area though it will be based on Turkish standards of data collection.

Note: The concept of an essential package of health services (EPHS) is used by the WHO to refer to a detailed list of priority health interventions and services available in fragile settings, usually endorsed by the government or other actors in areas outside of government control. Source: WHO, "Working Paper on the Use of Essential Packages of Health Services in Protracted Emergencies", 2018.

At present, there is little collaboration or commonality of approach among the different health systems across Syria with different areas facing different challenges. In north-west Syria the multitude of stakeholders, who often have competing agendas, play different roles across the region leading to a fragmented response with little sustainability. In areas controlled by the Syrian Government, there have been accusations that public health services and humanitarian aid are diverted according to political loyalty. Areas such as Rural Damascus Governorate and Dar'a which have fallen back under Syrian Government control still contain populations which had and continue to oppose the Syrian Government; these and similar areas may not receive equitable access to resources which flow through the MoH from the WHO, organisations of the United Nations or international NGOs which still operate through Damascus. For north-east Syria, the closure of the Yaroubieh border crossing in January 2020 has had a detrimental effect on cross-border humanitarian aid into the area from Iraq; the justification had been that aid would flow through Damascus to reach the north-east of Syria, but this has been challenged by bureaucratic processes and differential access to aid.

F. IDPs and refugees

1. Internally displaced persons (IDPs)

The crisis of internal displacement within Syria is extremely severe and, as with other impacts of the conflict, is of lasting consequence. However, it receives minimal coverage compared to the question of refugees in neighbouring countries.

By the end of 2022, the total number of IDPs was estimated at 6.8 million people.[153] According to OCHA, in 2019 the majority of the IDPs – around 55 per cent – were in areas controlled by the Syrian Government. Approximately 30 per cent of the IDP population were located in north-west Syria, while 15 per cent were living in Kurdish-controlled areas (prior to the Turkish operation).[154] It is also noted that the governorates of Idlib, Rural Damascus and Aleppo have the highest number of IDPs and refugees.[155]

The de-escalation agreements made in 2016 led to a partial restoration of basic services, including water and electricity, in many areas. This led to a decline in internal displacements in early 2017, and a wave of voluntary returns, estimated at 721,000, to communities of origin.[156] About 90 per cent were IDP returns.[157] A similar pattern in return movement continued in 2018 as more areas regained relative stability. According to OCHA, 1.4 million spontaneous returns were reported in 2018, over 95 per cent of which were IDPs. However, every subsequent escalation in military conflict leads to new waves of IDPs, often people who have already been displaced multiple times, and as borders have been virtually closed, IDPs are constantly searching for safe areas within the country.

The IDPs in all areas suffer from a series of severe challenges at the level of basic needs but also in terms of the ability to voice opinions and concerns as well as representation. As OCHA states, sustained humanitarian access to people inside Syria remains a major challenge due to active hostilities, interference in humanitarian activities by armed actors, administrative regulations, the presence of explosive remnants of war, as well as insecurity and criminality. Advocacy and respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) continue to be required to improve the quality of humanitarian access to people in some parts of the country.

By the end of 2022, the total number of **IDPs** exceeded **6.8 million**

40%

Recent studies of the determinants of forced migration, including internal displacement reveal that armed conflict is not the only driver of displacement. Non-inclusive governance and negative institutional performance, economic deprivation and destruction, loss of social capital, and environmental destruction are also key drivers. This further implies that positive social and economic policies are key in questions of return and that we should not automatically expect the reduction in armed violence alone to encourage return.[158]

As people who are absent from their places of origin, they also suffer from loss of income and livelihoods but also fear losing property and housing rights in their former areas of origin. There should be a special focus by all actors on addressing the needs, rights and fears of IDP populations.

2. Refugees

Finding just solutions for refugees must be a central pillar of both short- and long-term considerations in the peacebuilding process. This of course includes attention to the basic human development needs of refugees and IDPs as well as a wide range of socioeconomic rights. However, this report will focus on the question of refugees and voluntary return given the increasing attention paid to this question regionally and globally, with a particular focus on when and under what conditions return is truly voluntary. These are particularly urgent in light of the growing backlash against refugees and xenophobic pronouncements as well as the apparent decline in armed conflict in parts of Syria. The goal of this section is to fully explore the question of what the range of conditions can constitute "voluntary return".[159]

The conditions addressed are: (1) the challenges facing refugee return, (2) the rights that must be guaranteed to refugees whether or not they choose to return, and (3) meaningful participation of refugees in all aspects of the political process. The present section will focus on the first two of these aspects with the third taken up in the following chapters.

A common principle of all the recommendations below, and one that is addressed to all relevant parties, including the Syrian Government, neighbouring countries and the international community, is that the right of voluntary return should be upheld while separating the rights of refugees from the question of whether or not they choose to return to Syria.

Respect for refugees and IDPs' well-being and dignity are key elements of thinking about appropriate solutions for those who have been displaced by the conflict. It implies fair and respectful treatment, enabling them to return without conditions if they freely choose to do so, as well as respecting the desire for families to stay together, and for refugees and IDPs to fully recover their rights and for respectful treatment at the hands of all de facto authorities.

Refugees should not have to be forced between a binary of cruel choices of either an undignified displacement or return. Achieving appropriate and durable solutions for the plight of Syrian refugees rests on three pillars: (a) upholding and reaffirming the concept of voluntary return and non-refoulement, (b) understanding refugees' fears about return as well as affirming their rights, and (c) refugee participation in the political process.

The rights of refugees to a voluntary, safe and dignified return to their country of origin are guaranteed by international declarations, norms and treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,[160] the International Covenant on Political and Civil rights 1976[161] and the International Covenant on the Elimination of All forms of Racism.[162] Similarly, these rights are upheld in the Syrian constitution which states in Article 38 that "it is not acceptable to deprive any citizen from returning to their homeland".

International treaties and norms have also understood this right as "voluntary" and therefore non-voluntary return is a violation of the principle of non-refoulement. As stated by UNHCR, "repatriation of refugees should only take place at their freely expressed wish; the voluntary and individual character of repatriation of refugees and the need for it to be carried out under conditions of absolute safety, preferably to the place of residence of the refugees in their country of origin, should always be respected".[163]

Questions of voluntary return and of the possibilities of return have taken up significant commentary, particularly as various regional and international countries have closed their borders to Syrian refugees. There has also been a xenophobic backlash against refugees, one that has emanated from political entrepreneurs as well as right-wing forces within various countries which have been increasingly urging refugee return, in practical terms, violating non-refoulement principles.

Regarding the question of voluntary return, it is important to keep the concerns of Syrian refugees themselves in mind. Between February and March 2023, surveys were conducted by UNHCR in Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq to plan the return of Syrian refugees to Syria within the following 12 months. 93.5 per cent of those surveyed answered that they did not intend to return in the next 12 months, 1.1 per cent expressed their desire to return, and 5.4 per cent were undecided.[164] These results are consistent with previous surveys, with the sixth survey indicating a similar split (90 per cent, 2.4 per cent and 7.6 per cent respectively)[165] on the same question. For those surveyed, a series of issues were listed as influencing their decision to return. Among the top issues were personal safety and security. A significant number of Syrian refugees were concerned about the lack of personal safety and security inside Syria due to random violence of increasing lawlessness, warlordism, the impunity of both paramilitary

and organized crime groups, targeted violence, reprisals, arrests and detainment due to actual or suspicion of anti-governmental activity. Safety and security were cited by more than half of all respondents as the top consideration related to return, followed by livelihood opportunities, housing and access to basic services. About 8 per cent of those surveyed were concerned about forced recruitment into military services for them or their children. A full 43 per cent thought a significant improvement in the security situation would make them more likely to return. Lack of shelter or housing was another main concern, mostly for people who hailed from areas destroyed due to armed combat or fear of having their properties being taken over. Another concern was the lack of livelihood opportunities or expected income on return. In general, Syrian refugees have consistently sited a multitude of factors that range from economic to political and security related issues.[166]

Based on the surveys of refugees as well as various studies of refugee conditions, we can identify the following major challenges and obstacles for refugee return:

1. The need for a political solution: There are a number of issues of concern for refugees connected to the need for a political solution, related to the sense of a new political era, the impunity of the security sector and the fate of detainees, particularly as many of them have either taken public stances (or have been involved with activism or militancy) or fear they may be guilty by association. For many, the lack of progress through political negotiations have made them increasingly pessimistic and validated their cautious stance about return.

2. Security fears: These do not solely relate to traditional fears of being wanted by the government or security sector and therefore the fear of detention or torture, but also to the random violence and murder happening in areas of Syria on a daily basis. This also includes the increasing and lethal dangers from

a toxic and deadly legacy of conflict, including landmines, fighting and active war zones or ones that might re-witness fighting.

3. Military service/conscription: Fear of military service, or of penalties associated with avoiding conscription or escaping Syria to avoid service, also dominate the concerns of many families particularly due to the harsh potential penalties in the Syrian Military Penal Code. Military conscription fears are not limited to areas controlled by the Syrian Government, given that conscription laws have also been passed by DAA.

4. Pardons: Significant numbers of refugees may be implicated in a number of crimes as a result of leaving Syria and would not return without guarantees or clarity about their fate in light of these infractions. These include concerns about: (a) the scope and purview of counter-terrorism laws (specifically Laws 19 and 20 of 2012), as well as a lack of independence and due process within the Terrorism Court; (b) crimes related to deserting civil sector or public sector jobs (Article 364 of the Syrian Penal Code) which may apply to many former civil servants who left the country without officially submitting their resignation. These range from a potential 3-5 years in prison as well as monetary penalties; and (c) other legal cases that stem from non-criminal issues including commercial and other disputes. For example, a number of returnees who have made settlements or have been offered guarantees or pardons by the Government have been arrested for lapsed payments on cars or cell phones as the latter have to do with personal or private sector legal proceedings that cannot be included in governmental pardons.

5. Civil record documents: A number of key civil documents were lost, left behind in the rush to leave the country, never issued – such as birth or marriage certificates – or have expired, such as passports. Similar problems affect the certification of educational degrees.

6. Housing, land and property (HLP) issues: These relate to recovering property, housing or residency rights, having shelter or housing after the destruction of property, and properties that were registered to the male head of household who has since disappeared or been killed.

7. Educational attainment: This relates not only to students being out of educational system but concerns about exposure to multiple educational systems.

8. Livelihood opportunities: Given the steep freefall of economy, such opportunities are now less likely to be attractive.

9. Availability of basic services such as public health (including WASH) and education.

10. Lack of trust in governmental promises: This is either due to failed promises of amnesty and rearrests or rumours about these failed promises which both result in lack of trust in the safety of an individual upon return.

3. Refugees' rights

1. **The right to make an accurately informed and voluntary decision.**[167] This includes the right to make a free and informed decision away from political or psychological pressure. This may occur when host countries increasingly make it impossible for refugees to stay within their borders through the reduction of services, moving them to hostile anti-refugee areas, or denying them services either deliberately or through lapsing their credentials. The voluntary nature of return may also be violated through incentivizing return by providing misleading or false information about the dangerous consequences of staying in the host country (or returning to the country of origin), or incentivizing return through laws and legislations that might cause them to lose certain rights in Syria, such as property rights.

The second aspect is that the decision-making should be based on accurate information rather than rumours. This demand was repeated in the Fifth Survey conducted by UNHCR whereby refugees overwhelmingly expressed the need for accurate, periodic and trustworthy information from credible sources particularly regarding security conditions and service provision. The main sources of information have been family, governmental media, friends, the local community, social media and non-governmental media. Surprisingly, participants in the survey mentioned neither United Nations organizations nor non-governmental organizations amongst these sources.

Finally, refugees must have accurate information that is periodically updated about the conditions they can expect upon return; the kind of services they may receive, including public health and education; any reintegration schemes or bureaucratic and other processes that can facilitate their return; and when

they might expect to return to the place they originally migrated from.

2. **The right to a safe, dignified return and re-settlement.** The actual journey back of refugees should not be merely thought of as a logistical or organizational challenge but as one whereby the human rights of refugees are respected, with the guarantee that they are not returning to conditions similar to the ones that forced them to flee in the first place. At a minimum, the question of return should not be raised until there's a sustained and large decline in violence that is coupled with guarantees of protection once refugees have arrived. Beyond that, several further issues must be considered.

First, the process itself should be coordinated through tri-party commissions including the host nation, relevant Syrian authorities and UNHCR, with the latter acting to ensure a human-rights based return and that the voices and concerns of refugees are well represented. A safe return means that the areas in which they are returning to must be rid of the toxic legacies of war, such as landmines, which have become just as deadly as weapons, particularly towards women and children. Second, all de facto authorities should ensure the personal safety of refugees and combat any retaliation or hatred, or any forms of discrimination as pledged by Parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, of which the Syrian Arab Republic is one. Third, maintaining family unity and protecting vulnerable women and children and other marginalized or disadvantaged populations. Fourth, legal guarantees and appropriate amnesties to crimes committed that are conflict related or inducted other than war crimes, economic crimes or crimes against humanity. Likewise, it is important for there not to be amnesties for those crimes that include severe violations of human rights, crimes against humanity, enslavement, torture and others as they perpetuate a culture of impunity and fear. The question of military service is a particularly important issue for vulnerable young men.

3. **The right to recover property and to compensation.** There are a number of serious complications related to housing, land and property for all Syrians but these have taken on added dimensions for displaced Syrians (both refugees and IDPs). The loss of property ownership due to displacement or destruction of records and the traditional exclusion of women from property ownership, are added to various other historical challenges about property rights related to maintaining public ownership of land that has been long transformed into private dwellings. However, HLP-related legislation passed during the conflict has legitimately raised the concern of many Syrians. For example, the Syrian Government has passed a series of laws regulating the reconstruction process. These include laws on foreign ownership (Law 11 of 2011), laws and decrees regulating processes of real estate development (Law 25 of 2011; Decree 66 of 2012; Law 23 of 2015; and Law 10 of 2018), a law regulating the removal and destruction of informal housing and building violations (Decree 40 of 2012), a law regulating local administrative development (Decree 19 of 2015) and a law regulating public private partnerships (Law 5 of 2016). These laws have raised a tremendous amount of fear about property seizure. The sequence of Decree 66 of 2012, Law 23 of 2015 and Law 10 of 2018, in particular, have caused concerns regarding land and property rights for displaced populations.

UNHCR has stressed that minimal requirements for refugee return, in addition to safety and protection, require that the Syrian Government must prepare competent and financially accessible mechanisms for refugees to resolve property issues with clear legislation about property recovery in accordance with international law and Pinheiro Principles (2005), which stipulate resolving HLP issues as a key pillar in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. In the Syrian context these lead to the following considerations:

(a) Syrians have the right to return to their property or not to return, and their rights cannot be lost due to their lack of return. All legislation that compels Syrians to return in order to claim property rights requires amendments;

(b) Syrians have the right to recover property or to be compensated for property they are unable to recover. Recovery or compensation are key components of restorative justice;

(c) Non-discrimination according to ethnicity, religion, gender, identity, or political affiliation;

(d) Rights of renters and tenants to return to areas and dwellings from which they fled;

(e) Rights of women to property and to compensation. It is key for laws to guarantee the rights of women and girls to ownership, use, inheritance and title of property including rights to joint ownership;

(f) Right to petition recovery of property to independent courts in a manner that is not complicated, inaccessible, or overly bureaucratically complex, and which guarantees no harm will come to petitioners. Renters and long term tenants as well as collective petitions for either renters or property owners should also be considered. The process must ensure the rights and participation of women as mentioned in point E, as well as the rights of children separated from parents. It is key to ensure that this process is available in multiple geographic areas, and accessible to those outside the country, including the possibility of mobile units that reach different displaced persons;

(g) Revoking unjust, discriminatory and arbitrary laws that deprive Syrians of property or tie return with rights;

(h) Rights to compensation. Compensation should occur either when property recovery is materially impossible, or the owner or renter has voluntarily requested it;

(i) Balancing the rights of property owners and secondary occupiers, leaving expulsion as a last resort and finding just, though time limited, arrangements for both.

4. **The right to receiving all appropriate civil documentation for enjoying full citizenship rights.** Losing documents, whether property deeds or any other civil documents, should not deprive Syrians of their HLP rights. The conflict has also resulted in numerous complications: property deeds lost, destroyed, or never registered; the issuing of property deeds and rights from non-governmental and non-recognized actors, or foreign governments. This right includes: (a) the right to have changes of status while displaced recognized, including marriage, divorce and the granting of citizenship to children of Syrians (this includes recognition of UNHCR issued documents as well as appropriate recognition of documentation issued by non-governmental actors); (b) the right to recognition of educational degrees obtained during displacement, and (c) the right of all Syrians, including children, to receive all documentation proving their citizenship and allowing them to benefit from the rights associated with their citizenship, including property rights, in a financially accessible and timely manner.

G.Policy recommendations

Social protection policies

- Adopt an inclusive and non-discriminatory social protection approach as a necessary condition for the next phase. This should be undertaken by all actors in the Syrian conflict.

- Promote context-appropriate social protection measures (in relation to food security, housing, public health – including water, sanitation and hygiene – and education), and synchronize them across the country. These could include economic and non-economic means to protect Syrians from material deprivations in the form of food insecurity, lack of housing, and public health and education issues, as well as non-material deprivations such as fear, violence and other forms of daily precarity.

- Renew the social contract between all sectors of the Syrian population and emphasize the interlinkages of social and economic justice with equal citizenship as the basis of this new social contract.

- Undertake extensive work to bridge the humanitarian-development-peace divide through adopting a comprehensive, contextual and sustainable local approach that prioritizes unity, peacebuilding, social justice and development.

- Integrate a gender lens into social protection policies through:
  - Understanding the legal and de facto barriers women face.
  - Addressing gender inequalities and gender-based violence.
  - Identifying the different ways that policies will affect men and women.
  - Recognizing the variety rather than assuming homogeneity in women's needs.
  - Including women in policy and decision-making roles.

- Enhance labour market policies to plan for adequate support for formal and informal employment through targeting vulnerable youth, enhancing vocational training and supporting work according to decent work principles.

- Review poverty-targeting policies to make sure they are well-coordinated and effective across the country and do not create imbalances, while monitoring and updating data on poverty and basic needs.

- Provide employment opportunities in the rural sector through supporting inputs and factors of production as well as marketing.

- Develop and promote accessibility to programmes – at all stages of conflict, early recovery and development – to help women and youth access education and skill-building opportunities, financial support and other tailored support to overcome barriers in an environment where women may not be widely valued or accepted in the workplace.

- Ensure women's access to critical protection and legal services. It is critical to safeguard women's access to support in relation to securing necessary civil documentation and navigating the legal systems and structures that may tend to undermine their ability to live and work independently of a husband.

- Facilitate secondary support systems – including safe, affordable childcare; care for the elderly; reliable, affordable transportation; and appropriate health and psychosocial care – to alleviate some of the stresses and barriers associated with the dual roles of caregiver and breadwinner that many Syrian women are undertaking.

- Recognize the impact of trauma on people's ability to recover, regardless of their socioeconomic status, gender, age, education level, or displacement status. This can be done by factoring the various psychosocial needs that all Syrians may have into all interventions, with particular attention to the different types and scales of risk and trauma that may have been experienced by women and men.

- Ensure that the inclusion of women in livelihood programmes is not through pre-identified sectors that reproduce traditional gender norms, particularly in employment and learning opportunities. Women's safe access to work should instead be ensured through introducing safeguards that are specific to women and defined by them.

- Review the legal framework and institutional structures of social protection – including social insurance, social assistance and labour market policies – to identify gaps in coverage and other inequities in order to address them.

- Thoroughly review housing policies to make sure housing needs are addressed and to ensure the rehabilitation of housing infrastructure, which could also be a source of employment for locals or returnees. This includes:

  ◊ Ensuring access to temporary housing for those who need it until they return to or gain access to permanent housing.

  ◊ Identifying existing housing projects and linking them to the needs of the displaced.

  ◊ Cancelling the development of housing projects that infringe on the property rights of absentee Syrians.

Food security policies

- Promote food security as a key right of all Syrians regardless of their affiliation to concretely demonstrate how actors are working towards facilitating the achievement of food security. At the very minimum, this means ceasing the targeting of agricultural infrastructure and resources and stopping the use of siege warfare or starvation tactics.

- Increase the investment and governmental budget allocated to rural development and agricultural production to revive the agricultural sector and provide alternative sources of livelihood as part of a general rural revival plan. This includes rehabilitating damaged arable land as well as irrigation systems, dams, agricultural machinery, wholesale markets and other productive assets.

- Provide small- and medium-scale farmers with access to inputs for agricultural production (such as pesticides, fertilizers and gasoline) at affordable rates. Subsidized quantities barely cover 20 per cent of the amount needed for optimal production.

- Encourage the establishment of independent agricultural cooperatives and unions in urban and rural areas and advance work to eliminate middlemen and war profiteers from agriculture and food security networks, as well as to prevent the monopolization of food distribution.

- Foster the participation of local communities as decision makers and undertake work to build community reconciliation and trust.

- Revive and subsidize food processing companies to add value to local production while also reducing food losses.

- Increase subsidies for foraging to reduce the costs of production for ruminant sectors while avoiding additional pressure on rangelands.

- Develop and support collective service provision units.

- Ensure women's participation in the agriculture sector, recognizing the important role they can play in contributing to household food security and financial expenses of the family.

- Promote investments in agriculture research and extension services to address current challenges.

- Encourage the production of local seeds, fertilizers and pesticides to replace the imported agricultural inputs in light of the devaluation of the Syrian Pound against the United States dollar.

- Promote household food security programmes with the aim of increasing food availability for self-sufficiency.

Ecological policies

- Conduct surveys and assessments to capture the destructive and toxic legacy of the conflict across the country.

- Adopt the green economy principle in reconstruction and development programmes and the investment of natural resources through circular and low-carbon economy methodologies.

- Build legislative, executive, institutional and social frameworks that allow for the environment in the Syrian Arab Republic and the role of various authorities (such as the State and its institutions, executive bodies operating at the regional level, civil society, public and private economic sectors, and the individual, among others) in restoring, protecting and preserving it to be redefined through a decentralized perspective.

- Develop laws as well as administrative, economic and financial procedures that allow for a move towards green investments by creating stimulating climates and setting standards that determine the environmental returns of investment and development programmes.

- Launch education, training and awareness-raising initiatives for the environmental transition with the aims of supporting local knowledge of how to protect the environment and biodiversity and encouraging customary sustainable use of natural resources.

- Promote the protection of forests by establishing forest reserves and specialized areas for eco-tourism and leisure for the population.

- Sustainably manage forests and forest areas by creating a relationship of mutual benefit and interest between the forest and the inhabitants of the villages in and around it.

- Develop and conduct climate research to determine future climatic scenarios and extrapolate their repercussions on agricultural production.

Education policies

- Acknowledge education and address it as a vital and strategic sector for recovery and peacebuilding within the Syrian Arab Republic, which requires a major shift from short-term to long-term solutions.

- Initiate an advocacy campaign among communities, civil society and education stakeholders to develop a uniform "Syrian Curriculum Framework" that, in the short term, does not include problematic or sensitive subjects such as National Education, History or Geography, but rather promotes education on citizenship and peacebuilding as well as the standardization of all other subjects to ensure quality, relevance and unity. These measures could be a first step that precedes and helps pave the way for eventually launching a revised national curriculum that should only be aligned with a new Syrian Constitution endorsed by the Syrian people in a post-conflict context.

- Support training programmes that focus on the professional development and empowerment of Syrian teachers, counsellors and principals to ensure that all education actors are well equipped to deliver adequate and relevant education.

- Provide access to e-learning platforms and capacity building in learning centres, local organizations and homes in order to disseminate the literacy campaign at the widest level, provide learning and accredited opportunities for youth, and bridge the huge gaps that developed throughout the conflict years.

- Give special attention and support to culture, art and sport programmes that foster peacebuilding, human rights and values, and embrace cultural exchange and social cohesion among communities.

- Mainstream psychosocial support across all formal and non-formal education curricula and interventions.

- Further elaborate and adopt the decentralized education model in a way that responds to the direct needs of communities while enforcing a national education agenda and vision.

- Develop and comprehensively reform the vocational and technical education sector.

- Recognize the vital role of women in bridging educational gaps by empowering them and engaging them as key players in educational solutions especially in the areas of early childhood education.

- Enhance the vital role of non-formal education as indispensable and complementary to formal education in times of conflict and post-conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. Local actors and civil society should be empowered and engaged for that purpose.

- Establish "Knowledge Diaspora" networks to connect expatriates to their country while also bringing together Syrian scientists, technicians and innovators and proposing new mindsets and action plans to be implemented in the Syrian Arab Republic post-conflict.

- Expand higher education institutions (public and private) towards more local and rural areas, rather than remaining concentrated in major cities, in order for higher education opportunities to be provided all over the Syrian Arab Republic.

IDP and refugee policies

- Enshrine the right to voluntary return for both refugees and IDPs. This includes the right to make a free and informed decision, away from political or psychological pressure, and free from misleading or false information about either staying or returning.
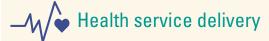
- Invalidate all laws, legislation and decrees that force Syrians either to return or lose certain rights such as property rights, citizenship rights, or other rights and privileges.

- Create personal and secure databases of displaced persons that are linked to comprehensive survey systems of their areas of origin, their housing, land and property situation, and whether they have documentation guaranteeing their property in preparation for eventual return.

- Develop a partnership with the United Nations to ensure the availability of credible and accurate information about conditions of return that is periodically updated and includes details of the services refugees might receive in relation to public education and health, reintegration schemes, bureaucratic measures, and when they might expect to return to the place they originally migrated from.

- Better coordinate the actual journey of return through a tripartite commission that includes the host nation, relevant Syrian authorities and UNHCR to ensure a human rights-based return and that the voices and concerns of refugees are well-represented.

- Ensure that return policies assure the personal safety of returnees at all phases of the journey, including the final destination, and protect them from retaliation or discrimination.

- Develop special programmes to address the double burden on women who want to return, particularly issues such as: the lack of opportunities; reduced capital, power and influence; lower social status; and reduced access to housing, land and property.

- Ensure that access to information on return dynamics is gender-equitable.

- Develop information dissemination strategies and approaches that can equitably reach men, women, boys and girls and support informed decisions regardless of gender.

- Encourage and promote women's participation in the development and formulation of refugee and return services.

- Involve refugees, including women and girls, in the decision-making processes for establishing the conditions for their return, including peace processes, the formulation of political solutions, humanitarian measures, reconstruction and recovery assessment, and planning.

- Implement support processes that enable decision-making for voluntary returns to be gender-equitable.

- Develop resources on how to assess and respond to forced return within the household.

- Ensure that return maintains family unity and protects vulnerable women and children, as well as other marginalized or disadvantaged populations.

- Address the question of military service for eligible men and ensure appropriate amnesties and legal guarantees are in place for crimes such as desertion or abandonment of public office. It is important that amnesties are not given for crimes that involve severe violations of human rights, crimes against humanity, enslavement, or torture, as they perpetuate a culture of impunity and fear.

- Ensure Syrian people's right to recover property and to compensation if property cannot be recovered. Recovery and compensation are key components of restorative justice.

- Promote impartiality and remove discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender, identity, or political affiliation.

- Ensure the rights of renters and tenants to return to areas and dwellings from which they fled.

- Ensure women's rights to property and to compensation. It is key that laws guarantee women and girls' rights to ownership (including joint ownership), use, inheritance and title of property.

- Ensure the right to petition recovery of property to independent courts in a manner that is not complicated, inaccessible, or overly bureaucratically complex and that guarantees no harm will come to petitioners. It is important that renters and long-term tenants are also granted this right, including through collective petitions for either renters or property owners. The process must ensure the rights and participation of women as mentioned in the point above, as well as the rights of children separated from parents. This process must be made available in multiple geographic areas, and accessible to those outside the country, possibly with the use of mobile units that reach different displaced persons.

- Revoke unjust, discriminatory and arbitrary laws that deprive Syrians of property or tie return with rights.
- Balance the rights of property owners and secondary occupiers, leaving expulsion as a last resort and finding just, though time-limited, arrangements for both.
- Ensure citizens are enabled to enjoy their full rights in relation to documentation. These include:
  ◊ The right to have changes of status while displaced recognized, including marriage, divorce and the granting of citizenship to the children of Syrians (this includes the recognition of UNHCR-issued documents as well as appropriate recognition of documentation issued by non-governmental actors).
  ◊ The right to recognition of educational degrees obtained during displacement.
  ◊ The right of all Syrians, including children, to receive all documentation proving their citizenship and allowing them to benefit from the rights associated with their citizenship, including property rights, in a financially accessible and timely manner.

Public health policies

- Assess existing functioning hospitals and health centres throughout the country.
- Emphasize the focus on rehabilitating all public health infrastructure.
- Review the impact of the conflict and COVID-19 on women's health, and ensure gender-equitable access to health care, including a wide range of women's health needs.
- Review water sanitation and hygiene and other public health needs throughout the country.
- Rehabilitate the infrastructure of drinking water and sanitation networks and supply of purified water to damaged neighbourhoods and shelters.
- Include the local community in the assessment of public health policies.
- Rehabilitate health and medicinal infrastructure in the Syrian Arab Republic. This should include reviving the pharmaceutical industry.
- Review public health systems according to the following characteristics:
  ◊ Health service delivery.
  ◊ Workforce.
  ◊ Medical products.
  ◊ Vaccines and technology.
  ◊ Governance.
  ◊ Financing.
  ◊ Information systems and accountability.

Health service delivery

- Ensure horizontal equity in service provision for primary, secondary and tertiary health care.
- Assess and expand successful public health service programmes, for example, in mental health, the Essential Package of Health Services, midwifery and training, among others.
- Ensure the affordability and quality of services, particularly in the private sector.
- Support community-led approaches to understand the challenges faced by patients.

Health workforce

- Introduce a national strategy that includes policies supporting the production, deployment and retention of health-care workers. This requires an understanding of the population needs across the country and the gaps in health-care staff.
- Given the shortage of doctors, there needs to be a shift away from the heavily medicalized system within the Syrian Arab Republic to one in which there is skill shifting (formerly task shifting) to support gaps, for example, through investments in midwifery-led delivery services for uncomplicated pregnancies.
- Introduce incentives to encourage health-care workers to engage in the public sector and to choose to specialize in essential but under-valued specialties or where there are gaps.
- Introduce regulations that ensure that the workforce keeps up to date with training, for example, via continuous medical education (CME) and possibly periodic revalidation models which ensure that health-care workers keep up to date with relevant skills.
- Develop strategies to improve coordination and monitoring of the health-care workforce to support workforce planning.
- Encourage the return of health-care workers who were forcibly displaced or who left the Syrian Arab Republic for economic reasons. This needs to include immunity for those who had fallen foul of laws which criminalized the delivery of health care to those who were considered to be opposed to the Syrian Government. There needs to be guarantees of safety and that they will regain the right to their properties (lost after Law 10 of 2018).
- Criminalize attacks on health-care workers with a zero-tolerance policy.

Medical products

- Support the rebuilding of the pharmaceutical infrastructure of the Syrian Arab Republic, particularly in the north where the effects of conflict were greatest. This is essential for re-establishing this industry; it will create jobs, encourage in-country and foreign investment, and support the economy.
- Strengthen the quality assurance of locally-produced and imported medical products. This requires strict anti-corruption measures and publicly available transparency protocols.
- Regulate the quality and prices of local pharmaceutical companies.
- Introduce more subsidies for medical products for the most vulnerable (currently, this category includes teachers and pharmacists), including those with chronic conditions, the elderly and children.
- Advance research that is needed to understand the impact that unilateral coercive measures have on medicinal products, especially if they continue; the import of medical and humanitarian products are exempt from unilateral coercive measures. However, if they are affected, exemptions need to be sought.

Health governance

- Promote strong political and multisectoral leadership that prioritizes the right to health across the country. This will support inter-sectoral decision-making, which will promote national leadership and strengthen the health system.

- Develop a clear strategic vision for the health sector that takes into account the changing and diverse needs of the population.

- Ensure communication, collaboration, transparency and equitable distribution between the subnational systems within the Syrian Arab Republic.

- Assess the appropriate levels of decentralization versus recentralization in the short and medium term to ensure adequate service delivery while maintaining the autonomy of health systems.

- Ensure bottom-up approaches, where community-led initiatives are encouraged and civil society organizations can advocate for vulnerable populations who are unable to advocate for themselves.

- Support the capacity for in-country leadership of programmes and services.

Health financing

- Review current health financing systems for the four different health-care systems that exist in the Syrian Arab Republic. Pooled funding could more effectively finance the health system, while avoiding duplication and a lack of transparency in spending. However, for this to be effective, it is crucial to have fair and transparent processes to select implementing partners who are accountable.
- Advance research on how overlapping unilateral coercive measures are impacting the health system financing.
- Ensure that international funding supports fair, equitable and transparent implementation across geographic areas.

Health information systems

- Identify existing areas of good practice in health information systems that could support programming based on identified needs in the population. This could also support health-care workforce planning, resource management and decisions on where to locate services.
- Invest in health institutions, particularly in staff, skills and required equipment. This could also improve the tenth revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10), classification coding, documentation and discharge summaries.
- Ensure that the registrations of births and deaths are kept accurately without political or other pressures on doctors who report them.

Economic revival and undoing the war economy

04

A. Economic revival as a bridge from peacebuilding to State-building

Experience from other conflicts often reveals that political and security-oriented policies alone are not sufficient for sustainable peacebuilding, and that conflict relapse is possible if social and economic policies are not synchronized, horizontal inequalities are not addressed, or serious investment is not made in human development.

Therefore, reviving economic activity and undoing the legacy of the war economy is presented as the fourth pillar of concern during the peacebuilding phase (0-3 years) and provides a bridge to the State-building phase (3-10 years).[168] Economic recovery should be a path to the reintegration of all Syrian territory, through the revival of value and supply chains, including internal trade and mobility, societal reconciliation through equitable employment and balanced growth across the country.

The paradigm of economic growth has long been the mainstream standard in measuring the success or failure of economies. However, a twenty-first century economic development model can no longer be predicated on the pursuit of economic development, and this is particularly true in post-conflict situations. Economic growth is at best, a flawed proxy. Evidently, none of the Arab countries performed poorly in economic growth in the lead up to the 2010/2011 social movements. In fact, various multinational institutions were praising market-oriented policies and increased foreign direct investment (FDI). However, a significant driver of growth was the expansion of sectors that were neither employment intensive (such as real estate and finance) nor significant contributors to skilled labour development, such as tourism.

Horizontal equality during the economic recovery process is vital for a successful peacebuilding phase. This entails reviving a national economic strategy that involves pursuing a green recovery based on decent work principles in order to pursue effective and equitable human development through sustained investment in human capital, the rehabilitation of physical infrastructure and the selection of strategic sectors, such as agriculture and manufacturing, for support and increased linkages.

National level plans will complement rather than substitute empowerment at the local level. Historically, regions such as those in the east have had the lowest investment, despite being the main source of wealth for the Syrian Arab Republic.

In Syria, the increasing alliance between holders of wealth and power resulted in reduced economic opportunities, speculative and wasteful investments, and increased inequalities. Meanwhile, entrenched interests continued to block rational industrial policy that would have

paid close attention to balanced development, particularly the manufacturing-agriculture nexus. Trade agreements, such as that with Türkiye, had negative impacts on domestic manufacturing by undermining local production, which exacerbated long-standing problems. In many ways, these trends were exacerbated during the conflict with the destruction, economic fragmentation and rise of the war economy.[169]

The destruction of physical infrastructure, the massive displacement of people within and outside the country, the rise of a war economy and the ad hoc construction processes have created the conditions for significant land and property disputes. The government, as well as other de facto governing powers, have passed laws that regulate reconstruction and HLP issues. These laws have exacerbated rather than lowered the potential for conflict and abuse, entailing a "victor's justice" that deepens polarization rather than reducing it. Addressing HLP issues in a fair manner that respects the rights of all Syrians should be central to any political agreement and transition. Given the importance of these material issues for ordinary Syrians and their economic stability and livelihoods, how they are dealt with will enhance or detract public trust.

At the same time, there is a need for Syria to confront the legacy of the war economy which has entrenched warlords and promoted distorted development, illegal forms of wealth accumulation and illicit transnational transfers.

The war economy is defined as both the way violent conflict shapes basic economic functions and how it provides an opportunity to further finance conflict as well as benefit from it.

 Aside from the war economy, the scale of destruction has given rise to a multitude of practices and, increasingly, laws that attempt

to regulate the reconstruction process. These laws, which affect almost all Syrians directly or indirectly, are passed with minimal social input, raising legitimate fears of land grabs and depriving Syrians of their basic rights. Additionally, many of these laws undermine each other, creating a confusing legal apparatus that increases fears of abuse.

In certain post-conflict situations, significant amounts of aid in the aftermath of peace accords usually creates problems of sustainability and dependency, as well as parallel public sectors. In the case of Syria, such large amounts of aid are likely not forthcoming, and for better or worse, Syria will need to rely on its indigenous capacities.

On the other hand, the presence of multiple actors implies Syria will likely still have to contend with an uncoordinated reconstruction process that is piecemeal and fragmented. The notion of creating "pockets of development and good governance" may be appealing for international donors, however, decentralized reconstruction carries within it significant likely unintended consequences that may have spillovers on social and security related issues. The key is neither to focus merely on localism nor to return to an excessive national centralization, but to assess what constitutes a healthy and peace-oriented process of recovery.

The building blocks of early recovery consist of a comprehensive framework for recovery based on decent jobs and a green sustainable revival that rests on equity and indigenous drivers of growth. A green recovery is not a luxury, but a necessity, both to address the toxic legacy of the conflict and to provide a source of employment. At the same time, there is a need to start addressing the other toxic legacy of the conflict, which is the entrenchment of the war economy. This chapter will also discuss the need for reviving industrial policy based on indigenous drivers of growth. It will then propose a framework for guiding industrial

policy in the next phase of a green revival based on decent work principles and axes of sub-regional development. Finally, it will end with a discussion of regional and international dimensions of recovery in Syria, as well as the financing needs.

B. Economic governance

The conflict has witnessed both continuity and change in economic governance. Economic governance is much broader than just policies. Rather, economic governance issues generally include the legal and organizational framework for public, private and cooperative sector activities and coordinating national and local level development. This includes the administrative, organizational and financial environment or the government-industry-finance nexus.

In the decades preceding the conflict, particularly since the late 1980s when more significant economic reform took place and business opportunities expanded, economic and business networks would bring together the public sector, the private sector and members of the political and military leadership, with the first two taking an active role in advancing network of interests and the latter taking on a behind the scenes passive role guaranteeing access and protection.[170] These networks facilitated wealth accumulation in an environment characterized by low trust between the State and the private sector, resulting in sub-optimal national economic outcomes. A cycle developed where economic crisis and foreign exchange bottlenecks forced the government to allow more space to private actors. However, the government followed this with attempts to curb the downsides of this increased power. The trend towards more private sector power was non-linear and would be reversed at various moments to regulate or re-assert government authority.

However, these negative trends were exacerbated by the onset of the war economy as the conflict allowed the rise of a new crop of connected

> Economic governance issues generally include the legal and organizational framework for public, private and cooperative sector activities and coordinating national and local level development. This includes the administrative, organizational and financial environment or the government-industry-finance nexus

war profiteers with considerable influence over governmental policy. As with prior to the conflict, there were clear efforts to enhance government capacity and rational planning within Syrian Government policies. For example, there were significant efforts at enhancing tax collection and import substitution to combat decimated public revenues as well as declining industry and the impact of the coercive measures. At the same time, the influence of the power-wealth nexus was also prevalent and will continue to block efforts for serious attempts at positive reform.

Therefore, a key aspect of economic governance reform must be to combat corruption and entrenched elite interests, which have historically blocked attempts at rationalizing economic policy or economic reform. Economic governance

can become a tool of peacebuilding. Regional economic development nodes in the most damaged areas can revive economic cycle, create decent jobs by rebuilding the social and economic networks and empower the economic foundations of all communities and regions.[171]

This process should also include a review of the market-oriented policies[172] that resulted in increased inequalities, rural-urban divides, and the increasing alliances between holders of wealth and power that were contributors to the root causes of the conflict.

Also needed is an appraisal of the long-standing issue of women's low participation in the formal labour force and the implications of conflict induced transformations in women's economic roles.

C. Green recovery based on decent work principles

It is vital to emphasize that recovery should uphold two key principles: decent work[173] and environmental recovery. The emphasis on these two aspects is not because these are the only important pillars, but because these are often neglected.

In a situation where destruction, displacement, grinding poverty and desperation abound, it is easy to think about protections for workers and the environment as luxuries. However, at their core, these two factors are protection of the two most fundamental aspects of social existence: land and labour.

This section will argue, however, that if the goals of development are re-oriented away from economic growth and towards human development, then upholding the sanctity of land and the dignity of labour are compatible and not at odds with economic revival.

On the one hand, there has been the rise of unemployment and informality as well as economic dependency, as discussed in chapter 1 section B (2), "Level of economic and human development". The percentage of employed people who are living below $1.90 per day in purchasing power parity increased dramatically from 3 per cent in 2010[174] to an estimated 60-65 per cent in 2020.[175] The overall poverty rate is estimated to have exceeded 90 per cent in 2021.[176] This decline in employment was also accompanied by deteriorating work conditions for those who were lucky enough to remain employed. While there are no updated surveys, the human status survey done in 2014 showed that the majority of workers (74.7 per cent) stated that they worked in poor conditions during the conflict.[177]

On the other hand, the conflict has left a toxic legacy on Syrian ecology. The environmental damage in Syria has received less attention than other destructive aspects of the conflict but may be the longest lasting as it extends over generations and impacts all Syrians. Harmful material has been released into the air through the destruction of infrastructure, while destruction of electric grids and power stations has released toxins such as polychlorinated biphenyl (PCBs) into the air. Drinking water has been contaminated due to the targeting of water supply networks, in addition to waste dumping and the cessation of waste management services. The environment itself, including water, has been weaponized by various actors in the conflict, leading to destructive results for the civilian population and agricultural production.[178]

The toxic runoff from crude oil extraction, often through informal mechanisms by non-State actors, resulted in what has been called a "river of death" in northeast Syria.[179] PAX, a peace organization in the Netherlands, has identified four areas of environmental pollution deserving particular attention:[180]

1. Targeted industrial facilities and critical infrastructure.

2. Damaged residential areas and exposure to rubble.

3. Weapons-based contamination from large scale and prolonged use of various munitions, and;

4. Breakdown of environmental services.

1. Labour markets in Syria

There are several major laws in Syria organizing employment, social security and unionization in the labour market.[181] However, the legal framework was marked by many weaknesses and shortcomings, particularly in terms of the enforcement of laws and legislation, which is supposed to ground the trust between social partners. This framework is also characterized by incompatibility between labour laws and social security laws, and the lack of efficiency and effectiveness of partner institutions in the labour sector. Finally, there are other shortcomings of labour laws which make it difficult for workers to achieve their goals.[182]

Labour unions and professional federations have been unable to achieve independence away from government control, and unionization has remained mostly located in the public sector. The structures and programmes of the labour unions have centralised around the demands and interests of workers in the public sector which prevented workers in the private sector from joining these unions.[183]

In 2015, the conference of the General Federation of Labour Unions set up some goals in relation to precarious employment (part-time, seasonal and temporary contracts with the State), as well as women and child labour rights. However, it did not specify the mechanisms for achieving them.[184]

2. Female labour participation

According to world development indicator data, the ratio of female to male labour force participation rate increased from 18 per cent in 2010 to nearly 20 per cent in 2019 while the female labour participation rate increased from 13.2 per cent to 14.7 per cent.[185] As the figure below shows, female labour participation increased during the conflict which could be attributed to the new responsibilities that many women were forced to take up as a majority of working men either died or were recruited in military service voluntarily or forcibly.

Moreover, female adjusted net enrolment rate was reported at 71 per cent in 2013, reduced from about 98 per cent in 2010. Although women's status and participation decreased during the conflict,[186] the significant proportion of female-headed households (in Syria as well as among Syrians in asylum countries) has resulted in increased Female Labour Force Participation in the private sector from 8 per cent (pre-conflict) to 15 per cent in 2018,[187] while in 2019, 43 per cent of the unemployed were women (based on the Central Bureau of Statistics and NAFS estimates).

Female labour participation rate in Syria, 2000-2019

Source: Modelled ILO estimate, 2020.

3. Child labour

Before 2011, the child labour rate in Syria was 4 per cent for children aged 5-14 years. UNICEF estimates that 10 per cent of Syrian refugee children in the region are engaged in child labour. According to OCHA's "Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023", children in the Syrian Arab Republic have continued to drop-out of school in 2022 in order to support

their families, with 48 per cent of families with children aged 6 to 17 reporting such cases.

4. Conflict impact on labour and informality

During the conflict, informal, illegal and criminal sectors expanded dramatically and attracted a

major share of employment. The conflict led to the emergence of many other illegal activities, such as the arms trade, the smuggling of antiquities, theft, prostitution, forced labour and slavery.[188] During the conflict, informal, illegal and criminal sectors expanded dramatically and attracted a major share of employment. Employment during the conflict can be classified as four main sectors:

1. The formal and legitimate sector: public and private sector work consistent with the constitution and human rights.

2. The formal and illegitimate sector: public and private sector work inconsistent with the constitution and human rights.

3. The informal and non-criminal sector: informal work with legal goods and activities.

4. The informal and criminal sector: informal work dealing with illegal goods and activities.

These sectors are linked to the local and global economy, regardless of their formality of legitimacy. The dark side of this connection is related to plundering, exploitation, terrorism, arms, human trafficking, smuggling and other aspects of war economy discussed in chapter 1.

5. Responses to decent work pre- and post-conflict

In 1997, the Syrian Government issued Legislative Decree 61 to encourage employers in the private sector to move their activities from the informal to the formal sector by granting tax benefits. In cooperation with the ILO, the Government developed a "National Program for Decent Work" for the period 2008-2010. However, the project ended without making significant progress in solving the problems of the informal sector. In 2010, the Government launched the "Legal Empowerment of the Poor and Regulating the Informal Sector" programme in cooperation with UNDP

> During the conflict, informal, illegal and criminal sectors expanded dramatically and attracted a major share of employment

within the framework of the "Seventh Country Cooperation Program for the Years 2007-2011".

After the onset of the conflict, Legislative Decree 2 of 2016 was issued to establish the General Board for Employment and Development of Micro and Small Enterprises, under the supervision of the Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade, which aimed at "creating an enabling business environment that contributes to the development of the small and medium enterprises sector and their transfer to the formal/organized sector".[189] Recently, the Government issued several laws to support SMEs and producers. For example, Law 19 of 2017 was issued exempting imported machinery and production lines for licensed industrial establishments from customs duties and other import duties. Moreover, Legislative Decree 172 of 2017 was also promulgated, which reduces customs and duties on the requirements of industrial production by 50 per cent. However, several stakeholders consider the Government measures as partial, late, slow and as not having a long-term and holistic vision.[190] In early 2021, the Government of Syria issued Law 8, allowing local and foreign investors – including individuals, companies and associations – to establish microfinance banks, which was described as an effort to secure the necessary financing for small-scale projects, small business owners and those with limited or no income by granting them operational loans in order to secure additional income for those people, create jobs and achieve sustainable development.

6. Moving forward: decent work principles and strategies

The objectives of decent work are connected to the overall strategic objectives of society.

There are two dimensions to efforts to establish the foundations of decent work: activities in the "work" sphere and activities in the "society" sphere. There are five main principles underlying work within these spheres: (i) social capital and solidarity, (ii) sustainability in relation to natural and economic resources, (iii) productivity, (iv) human capital development, and (v) justice.

There are three strategies that could assist in establishing decent work:

- The first strategy is one of regional development. It aims to increase economic growth, augment job options and job opportunities[191], proposes creating development centres in the most damaged areas, then integrating them by rebuilding the social and economic networks and empowering the economic foundations of all communities and regions through upgrading the cross-regional value chains and increasing their relevant participation in it. The strategy begins with food security targets, which enhance food production process and labour-intensive activities, encourage the agriculture and manufacturing sectors and act as the primary social safety net in terms of food security and social networks. This is in line with all decent work dimensions.

- The second strategy is to create job opportunities to address the toxic and ecologically destructive legacy of the conflict, as well as address long-term environmental trends.

- The third strategy involves dismantling the war economy which operates mainly to minimize the margin of an insecure environment and conflict-related activity and to stop draining resources.[192] The main policies that can be adopted are promoting the solidarity economy to attract people to a healthy, secure and productive economy; and prioritizing social justice by producing an integrated social protection system based on the society not only the State.

D. Mapping indigenous drivers of economic recovery (IDERs) onto early recovery needs

Nurturing the indigenous drivers of economic recovery, a locally-driven community-based approach to reviving and stimulating economies of countries emerging from conflict, implies utilizing and developing available national human, productive and institutional capacities to generate employment and reduce horizontal and gender inequalities, while accelerating sustainable and inclusive economic recovery.[193] The loss of human capital, physical capital damage, capital flight, weakened institutions, environmental degradation and expansion of informality and war economy are all key weaknesses of the coming phase.

On the other hand, the surviving institutions in Syria, the country's productive capacity and

natural resources, along with newly created institutions and human and physical capital among its diaspora, are potential sources of strength to be developed or included as part of a recovery plan in the post-conflict phase.

Mobilizing the diaspora in the coming phase will also be crucial, and there are already several initiatives underway to link the diaspora (in Europe, the Americas, Africa and Oceania) with Syrians inside the country as well as neighbouring countries. This should not only be to support reconstruction through material support but also through expertise, advocacy and mobilization for the reconstruction process.

Technical vocational training is also needed in the coming phase. Studies have found that workers with particular skills before the conflict, such as farmers, may prefer to return to the same profession rather than new lines of work. But for young workers and others, that may be difficult. In addition, there is an imbalance between some displaced youth and workers and those who were not displaced, where the former may have acquired new languages or skills during displacement, such as technology skills. This might create an uneven playing field.

At the same time, the significant informality, both in terms of labour and private sector production, must be addressed. While informality in non-conflict-ridden societies is a regular aspect of economic life, the way it has developed in Syria has entailed significant current and future costs to labour and productive potential.

To effectively revive employment and economic growth, existing capacities should be mapped onto key sectors that exploit historic and current capacities and expertise, as well as address current needs and inter-sectoral linkages through mapping and upgrading the main socioeconomic recovery-driving value chains.

> The surviving institutions in Syria, the country's productive capacity and natural resources, along with newly created institutions and human and physical capital among its diaspora, are potential sources of strength to be developed or included as part of a recovery plan in the post-conflict phase

Box 6. The concept of indigenous drivers of economic recovery (IDERs)

As indicated by UNDP in 2008, the indigenous drivers of post-conflict economic recovery (IDERs) approach is a locally-driven community-based approach to reviving and stimulating economies of countries emerging from conflict. It emphasizes the sustainability of engaging in economic recovery activities that are built on the grounds of local actors who possess the strongest and most intrinsic long-term incentive to do so. The local indigenous driver's perspective locates the efforts of individuals, households and communities in Syria and highlights them as the most viable platform on which to base post-conflict recovery and international support. If nurtured properly, these capacities could act as the engine for recovery by encouraging internal investments, creating employment and generating income. This aligns with discussions and efforts on early recovery activities in Syria with the aim to enhance resilience of local communities.

A strategic plan to nurture IDERs, guided by a long-term vision towards economic recovery and growth would help to define national priorities and channel any kind of external assistance accordingly. This implies that working on the IDERs requires understanding social and production relations, institutional dynamics and the relations of power that are at work in the aftermath of conflict.

Nurturing IDERs involves explicitly identifying the capacities, capabilities and tensions inherent in systems and processes and in organizational, community and even national dynamics as observed in the immediate aftermath of conflict. Recovery policies should respect these dynamics even as they determine where they may need to be modified or strengthened.

Policies to strengthen IDERs include rebuilding and rehabilitating productive capacities and infrastructure, improving the business climate to encourage domestic private investment, re-investing in human capital, reintegrating ex-combatants, generating economic opportunities and employment, strengthening local institutions, improving access to financial resources and enhancing governance.

Source: UNDP (2008). 'Strengthening the Indigenous Drivers of Post-Conflict Economic Recovery', Chapter 3 in Post-Conflict Economic Recovery: Enabling Local Ingenuity, Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR), United Nations Development Programme, New York, pp. 48-105.

1. Industrial policy and balanced development based on IDERs

(a) Industrial performance before and after conflict

Though never leading sectors, the public and private manufacturing and industrial sectors of Syria were important aspects of the country's diverse economy, and some industries such as textiles and medicine achieved success even at a regional and international scale. Among the Arab region countries, Syria's industrial contribution was in the middle ranges with a lower manufacturing contribution to GDP than countries such as Jordan, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia but higher than countries such as Algeria and Lebanon.[194]

> The public and private manufacturing and industrial sectors of Syria were important aspects of the country's diverse economy, and some industries such as textiles and medicine achieved success even at a regional and international scale

Nevertheless, examples of at least partial successes of industrial policy in promoting the private sector include the rise of the pharmaceutical industry which supplied 90 per cent of local needs and employed an estimated 14,000.[195] Some of the advantages of Syrian manufacturing included the geographic location of Syria, its natural resources, agricultural productivity, and a relatively cheap and competent labour force.

However, it also suffered from structural problems of weak and ineffective protection, low technological content, low value-added exports, and a lack of or weak coordination between different industrial activities. This can be added to the weak institutional support structure and a lack of appropriate finance channels, or research and development. Both the Turkish and Arab Free Trade Areas added to the decline of manufacturing, through undercutting domestic textile manufactures and using false certificates of origin (to take advantage of tax-free imports).

During the conflict, Syria witnessed severe destruction of its manufacturing sector.[196] However, reconsolidation of territory and the decline of conflict revived some manufacturing and led to the resumption of new enterprises (table 2). The Government initiated an import substitution programme for 45 (later increased to 67) essential commodities, including foodstuffs, chemicals, engineering products and other inputs for production which collectively made up 80 per cent on average of private sector imports.[197]

According to the Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade, benefits for domestic production include tax reductions on inputs, tariff protection, support in production and eventually exports, and designating land in industrial zones along with other forms of credit support. However, past lessons on import substitution efforts must be recalled to avoid the negative impacts which included a lack of technological upgrading, low-quality products, the use of smuggling to take advantage of protection and the treasury being deprived of tax revenue.

Table 2. Newly established investment projects Syria, 2017-2019

Project data	Medium-sized enterprises	Pharmaceuticals	Transportation	Tourism (mostly restaurants)	Small enterprises	Total
Number of projects	15	3	3	315	1 607	**1 943**
Investment costs (Millions of SYP)	6 400	1 162	594	167 000	39 400	**214 556**
Jobs created	1 770	450	56	2 765	7 883	**12 924**
Average cost per project (Millions of SYP)	427	387	198	530	25	-
Average number of workers per project	118	150	18	8	5	-

Source: Syrian Investment Agency (published data 2017, 2018, and unpublished data 2019).

(b) Industrial policy in Syria

As discussed in chapter 4, food security and agricultural revival are key priorities during the short and medium term. However, a sustainable economic recovery for Syria must include a comprehensive industrial policy that surveys and builds upon existing industrial capacity.

The manufacturing and industrial sector of Syria were not key engines of growth, and the manufacturing sector remains small and fragmented. However, in at least several sectors, including textiles, Syria boasted impressive manufacturing experience and in a variety of other sectors was able to achieve significant import substitution. The revival of labour-intensive manufacturing in the coming phase can become a pole for growth and skilled labour return, create linkages with agriculture, and linking regions within Syria as a source of increased social cohesion.

Historically, Syrian industrial policy was determined through its Five-Year Plans. While these initially succeeded in structural transformation they were always plagued by inconsistent implementation as well as a lack of accountability and monitoring, which increased over time.

In the 1970s, significant investments were channelled into industry and agriculture leading to a boom in both alongside rising living standards for Syrians. However, starting in the 1980s, some long-term trends of decline, mismanagement and increasing cronyism began to set in. Alongside these, a series of crises led to ad hoc liberalization measures to increase investment. Boom and bust cycles became predictable: during boom years, with increased oil revenues and foreign aid, public sector projects were launched or protection continued for some industries without a holistic assessment of viability, whereas during bust years there would be retrenchment and opening up of spaces for private sector to supply much needed capital injections or to facilitate international trade.

The Tenth Five Year Plan (2005) was perhaps the most reformist and ambitious in Syrian modern history. The Plan ran contrary to neoliberal policies and charted a developmentalist path for Syria with significant scope for the growth of both the public and private sectors. The Plan also increased the space for civil society and greater societal empowerment. The way it was developed was

> A sustainable economic recovery for Syria must include a comprehensive industrial policy that surveys and builds upon existing industrial capacity

also novel and relatively bottom-up, having been predicated on widespread local consultations throughout the country and involved a large number of independent economists, practitioners and technocrats. Unfortunately, a considerable part of the Plan was sidelined due to a lack of financing in addition to the fact that entrenched elite interests opted for increased capture of wealth, investment in unproductive assets, inappropriate trade deals and increasing corruption. As a result, downward trends in both industry and agriculture were exacerbated.

During the conflict, the severe shortage of revenue and the destruction of the economy coupled with the impact of the unilateral coercive measures forced the Government to resort once again to institutional reform, increased and necessary attempts at enhancing the extractive capacity of the State through empowering tax collection and combatting corruption and tax evasion, in addition to a series of measures aimed at import substitution. Necessity drove the Government towards more rational policy making. However, these measures were outweighed or dwarfed by the rise of warlords and war profiteers.

In terms of manufacturing production, official estimates have declared that a total of 1,548 private establishments have been damaged, of which: 1,100 were in Aleppo (with an estimated cost of 437 billion SYP), 346 in Damascus (60 billion SYP), 77 in Hama (2.7 billion SYP), and 25 in Homs (3.1 Billion SYP), together totalling 503

billion SYP in damage.[198] Unofficial estimates indicate these numbers may be conservative: the head of the Aleppo Chamber of Commerce has stated that of 40,000 establishments active prior to the conflict, only 4,000 are fully functional.[199] In terms of public sector enterprises, an estimated 60 establishments have been fully destroyed. This destruction has accompanied an exodus of capital to other countries in the region such as Türkiye, Egypt and Jordan, which now host a large number of Syrian establishments that produce for domestic markets as well as export to Europe.[200]

More importantly, the revival of industrial policy must aim for balanced development on multiple levels:

- First, as discussed in the previous chapter, surviving regional development centres must be supported as a nexus of economic and social progressive change and societal reconciliation.

- Second, development must be balanced through investment in historically marginalized areas through an appropriate linking of national and local development, appropriate administrative and fiscal decentralization and the empowerment of local civil society.

- Third, the development model must invest in both the agricultural and manufacturing sectors and the linkages between them.

The creation of an industrial development council with representatives from relevant ministries, the private sector, technocrats and civil society will work to reduce fragmentation in decision-making and coordinate efforts at monitoring and accountability.[201]

These require attention to multiple levels, discussed briefly in the subsequent sections:

1. Systems of economic governance.

2. Mapping IDERs onto economic needs through assessment of past, current and future industrial performance and connections with the agricultural sector.

3. Underlying infrastructure and energy system needs.

4. Investment in labour and vocational development.

5. Examining the finance gap and possibilities for international cooperation including South-South trade and finance.

2. Infrastructure and the energy system: current realities and future potential

Though there is often a focus on oil and natural gas as a source of revenue or driver of conflict, it is important to consider the energy system as a whole including generation, transmission and distribution.

During the coming years, the power generation sector will represent a key variable in the recovery process. Therefore, it is vital to answer the question of how Syria can satisfy the increased demand and achieve an economic recovery after several years of GDP decline and significant destruction.

Some countries are able to satisfy their electricity needs through imports (power or fuel and gas as combustibles). However, the available financial resources in Syria may not allow that, given that needs in other sectors such as public infrastructure, water, housing, education and health are not less important than those within the energy sector including the electricity sector. The issues affecting the energy sector are as follows:

1. There has been a degradation of generation, transmission and distribution capacities, as electricity production capacity decreased from about 9,344 megawatts (MW) in 2010 to nearly 5,150 MW in 2021.[202]

2. Total electricity production in 2012 was at 41,772 gigawatt-hours (GWh). In 2016, it had

decreased to 8,529 GWh. A slight improvement occurred from 2017 until 2019, with electricity production at 26,755 GWh (almost three times more than of 2016). However, with the mounting challenges in procuring oil and gas, production output decreased again to an estimated 24,959 GWh in 2020, which is 45 per cent less than in 2011.[203]

3. Per capita consumption of State electricity in 2021 was 15 per cent of what it was in 2010.[204]

4. The fuel supply system to power plants was seriously affected (such as gas pipelines, treatment plants, railways, roads, refineries and crude oil) by boycotts, sanctions and insurance, which was the main reason for decreasing generation capacities.

5. Nearly 70 per cent of Syria's power supply in 2020 was generated by gas-run power plants, with the remainder operating primarily on oil derivates.[205]

Box 7. Eleventh Five Year Plan for 2011-2015 from the Ministry of Electricity (Pre-conflict)

1. During the Tenth Five Years Plan, the Ministry of Electricity (MoE) and its establishments invested a total of 161 billion SYP (roughly $3.5 billion). The main projects involved putting in operation several power plants with a total installed capacity of 1760 MW.

2. The planned investments of the MoE and its establishments totalled 387.7 billion SYP (roughly $8.4 billion).

3. Expected demand for electricity in 2015 was 70,000 GWh, while the expected electrical energy peak load was 10,346 MW.

4. The main targets of the Eleventh Five Year Plan for 2011-2015 were:
   • To meet the demand for electricity by adding new power plants with total installed capacity of 4,400 MW.
   • Increasing the share of renewable energy as part of the Syrian energy balance by installing several wind parks and photo-voltaic plants with an installed capacity of 400 MW.
   • To promote energy efficiency and rational consumption of electrical energy.
   • To improve electrical energy services for consumers.
   • To decrease technical and non-technical losses in the electricity grid.
   • To develop partnerships with the private sector in generation and distribution.
   • To activate the role of interconnection with neighbouring countries.
   • To achieve a balance between the costs and profits of providing electricity by developing new tariffs.

5. The main material targets in the Eleventh Five Year Plan for 2011-2015 (Pre-conflict) were:
   • The installation of new power plants with a total nominal installed capacity of 4400 MW, including 200 MW wind turbines and a 250 MW diesel generator, by the private sector.
   • The installation of 26 new 400/230 kilovolt (kV) and 230/66 kV substations with a capacity of 7,055 megavolt-amperes.
   • The installation of new 400 kV and 230 kV transmission lines with a length of 2,095 km.
   • The installation of new 66 kV, 20 kV and 0.4kV distribution lines with a length 22,050 km.
   • The installation of 10,820 new 66/20 kV distribution substations, 20/0.4 kV distribution transformers and 0.4kV distribution transformers, with a capacity of 5,690 MVA.
   • An increase in consumers, with roughly 1 million new consumers, 920,000 using monophase meters and 80,000 using 3-phase meters.
   • The replacement of 1 million old meters.
   • The electrification of 300 new villages.

In addition to recovering the transmission and distribution capacity, the regulatory framework and management of the power generation sector must be rethought as well as regional complementarities. The energy sector must be evolved to significantly incorporate renewable energies as well as the capacity for the energy sector to become a source of peace, industrial policy planning and regional integration rather than conflict.[206]

3. Support schemes to promote the use of energy from renewable resources in electricity

Hydropower contributes significantly to electricity generation in Syria. Entering 2010, there were three large hydroelectric power stations on the Euphrates River under the control of the Ministry of Irrigation. The capacity of these plants was 1,500 MW.

According to a study on the Syrian electricity sector conducted in 2015, wind potential is significant in several areas of the country and the annual mean daily wind speed in some regions of the country reaches 8 metres per second (m/s).[207] Solar power is also extensive, and Syria has seen a solar boom during the conflict with rising solar panels in use throughout the country.[208] The annual average long-term solar radiation on a horizontal plane is around 5 kWh/m2/day or 1.8 MWh/m2/year. The average daily radiant flux varies from 4.4 kWh/m2/day in the mountainous areas in the west to 5.2 kWh/m2/day in the semi desert regions in the Badia. The annual sunshine hours also vary between 2,820 to 3,270 hours.

Table 3. Promising wind sites in Syria

	Area	Site name	Location	Annual wind speed Average m/s	Annual wind speed Max m/s
1 and 2	HOMS	SINDIANAH2-1	E 265,673 N3844,438	8	23.3
3	QUNEITRA	NABE ALFOAR	E 56.68 °35 N 14.04 °33	6.2	23.87
4	DAR'A	GHABAGHEB	E 15.801 °36 N 12.30 °33	6.6	23.7
5	HOMS	JANDAR	E 46,286 °36 N 28.397 °34	7.7	23.29
6		HASIA	E 47.956 °36' N 20.106 °34'	6.1	24.67
7	HOMS	QUTINA	E 281,407 N 3,839,060	7.8	24.03
8		ETHRIA	E 49.575 °37' N22,163 °35	6.2	24.57
9	DAMSCUS COUNTRYSIDE	ALHIJANA	E 41.939 °36 N 22.637 °33'	6.7	25.14
10	DAR'A	ALHARA	E 59.371 °35' N 03.609 °33'	7.6	22
11	IDLIB	IDLIB	E 38,981 °36 N 58.889 °35'	6.28	21.48
12	HOMS	TIAS	E 42.421 °37 N 32,591 °34	5.08	22.78
13		PALMYRA	E 14.286 °38' N 33.879 °34'	6.18	22.63
14	RAQAA	THAWRA	E 30.44 °38' N 48.63 °35'	6.3	19.91
15	HOMS	ALSUKHNA	E 49.86 °38 N 52,175 °34	7.18	24.22

Source: NAFS, "The Syrian Electricity Sector", 2015.

However, the framework for renewable energies in Syria has not kept up with its importance and potential though there are several paragraphs in Energy Conservation Law 3 of 2009 and Electricity Law 32 of 2010 to encourage use of renewable energy. There are also a series of directives by the Ministry of Electricity to devise and implement a Master Plan for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency.

E. Financing gap and programme for regional and international cooperation

1. Financing gap

As in other severely conflict-affected countries, however, Syria faces massive challenges in mobilizing adequate resources to finance the reconstruction process in the aftermath of the conflict. On the one hand, severe conflicts eradicate a substantial share of the wealth in the affected countries and undermine institutional capacities, including the capacity to collect domestic revenue. On the other hand, severely affected countries face tremendous financial needs to reconstruct the destroyed physical and social infrastructure, productive assets and human capital.

The required resources will emanate from domestic financing resources and external financing resources. The former group constitutes domestic public revenue, domestic private sector contribution, internal borrowing and seigniorage revenue. The external financing group includes external borrowing, FDI, remittances and foreign aid.

A quick look at the Syrian conflict reveals an unfavourable situation with regard to the financing needs for reconstruction, even in the absence of complex calculations of the reconstruction cost. Starting with the conflict intensity level, the Syrian conflict ranks high in human and economic losses indicators relative to other severely conflict-affected countries, including Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Somalia. The economic intensity of the Syrian conflict, measured in GDP loss during the conflict, is very high comparing to these severely conflict-affected countries.[209]

The relatively high level of industrialization of the Syrian economy before the conflict compared to most other severely conflict-affected countries, has made the economic impact of the conflict even more severe. As a result, the financing required to restore pre-conflict economic levels in the Syrian case is very likely to be greater than that of any other previous conflicts.

An upcoming NAFS study estimated both the costs of reconstruction as well as the likely revenue mobilization based on domestic and external sources, taking into account the various obstacles to external revenue mobilization (such as the unilateral coercive measures), using a dummy impact function and a fiscal sustainability model that is tailored to the Syrian economy.

The study explored the potential financing options for reconstructing post-conflict Syria and focused on the first post-conflict decade

as the main period of analysis. The analysis proposed two scenarios for post-conflict phase that correspond to two of the end-of-conflict scenarios discussed in chapter 3. The first one is based on Scenario 2, a comprehensive settlement. Although this scenario is highly unlikely, it serves a useful purpose for establishing an upper bound of financing expectations. It assumes the conclusion of the conflict with an internationally backed political settlement that brings sustained peace and stability, which is followed by a wide-scale reconstruction process supported by international and bilateral donors. The second scenario is based on Scenario 3, piecemeal bargains, which largely assumes the continuation of the current situation, accompanied with minimal economic and institutional changes that are necessary to keep the economy functioning.

2. South-South cooperation and mobilizing the diaspora

Another possibility that draws on the political and economic past policies of Syria is one concerned with promoting South-South economic cooperation. While this policy has been discussed in the past, it has rarely been seriously developed as a developmental direction that includes a comprehensive industrial production and trade strategy. However, the coming phase might be the time to do so.

South-South economic relations have become a major driver of trade and financial flows. Since the early 1990s, South-South trade has grown substantially, reaching as high as 28 per cent of world trade by 2013. The importance of South-South exports as a proportion of total Southern

exports has also increased substantially, reaching from around 20 per cent in the 1950s to 60 per cent in 2013.[210] In 2002-2017, intraregional trade among developed countries grew at a compound annual rate of 2.7 per cent. Whereas, intraregional trade among developing countries grew at a compound annual rate of 9.4 per cent and more than 10 per cent among emerging economies.[211] At the same time, South-South development finance has seen the creation of new institutions for development finance such as the Asian Infrastructure Development Bank and the New Development Bank, new investment programmes such as the Belt and Road Initiative, and the New Partnership for African Development – Infrastructure Project Preparation Facility (NEPAD-IPPF). Southern-led banks amount to more than $1 trillion and Southern-owned Sovereign Wealth Funds and

foreign reserves include more than $7 trillion. What South-South exchange offers is not just funds but also technology transfer, technical know-how and other forms of expertise and complementarities.[212]

F. Policy recommendations

Economic governance and decent work

- Enable the roles of consumer protection, civil society organizations and collective bargaining models in controlling monopolization as well as regulating workers' salaries, working conditions, benefits and other aspects of workers› compensation and rights for workers.

- Reduce or eradicate possible barriers to "doing business" through organizing registration and licensing procedures, as well as tax administration systems, in addition to reducing obstacles to business ownership by women and marginalized groups.

- Review current taxation laws and enforcement.

- Promote equality at work and in terms of employability. This includes gender equality as well as non-discrimination in relation to ethnicity, disability, displacement and religion. Strictly enforced bans on forced and child labour should also be introduced.

- Introduce proper amendments to Law 17 to support and represent workers' interests and ensure rights to strike and to collective bargaining, both in law and in practice.

- Ensure the right to lawsuits and appeals held in a transparent, simplified and fast manner.

- Encourage social dialogue between Government, the private sector, labour unions and other relevant civil society stakeholders.

- Facilitate the engagement and participation of local institutions in labour-related issues. Promoting social dialogue among key actors will help in mitigating the social tensions to reach a broad agreement.

- Promote social dialogue while emphasizing the involvement of employers' and workers' organizations, in particular for labour and peasants› cooperatives and unions, professional and craft unions, and chambers of commerce and industry. Collective bargaining can help ensure that measures taken during the recovery phase are beneficial to both workers and employers. This requires encouraging close cooperation with other civil society organizations in these situations.

- Enhance the role of civil society and the private sector by securing public and private freedoms, including freedom of expression, accountability and freedom of assembly.

- Emphasize women's empowerment by encouraging women›s involvement in the peace and reconstruction processes in all economic, social and political issues. The contributions of women to conflict as combatants and in other support roles, as well as their contributions at home during the conflict in sustaining communities, economies and individuals, are often unrecognized in demobilization, demilitarization and reintegration (DDR) and other reconstruction processes. However, women's empowerment during the conflict should not become temporary empowerment.

- Empower women's organizations and networks to combat marginalization in the aftermath of conflict and to consolidate the social and economic status that many women gained during the conflict.

- Empower women, especially in the most damaged areas, through offering credit facilities and long-term loans for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

- Give particular attention to women's education at basic and secondary levels and introduce legal penalties to fight early marriage, prostitution, human trafficking and forced labour.

- Take immediate action to prevent child labour by addressing these two policy areas:
  ◊ Legislative deterrence: Both forced and paid forms of child labour, which damage a child's right to develop as a full human being, should be criminalized and abolished immediately. However, the abolition of all child labour without the commensurate enhancement of family incomes and education facilities and social security may make policy less effective or even counterproductive. Associating family income enhancement policies with this legislation will secure minimum livelihood requirements for children such as giving monthly lump-sum payments to every child.
  ◊ Education enhancement: Educational programmes for children and youth, especially those who lost education opportunities due to the conflict conditions, should be prioritized. These should include a wide range of vocational training systems, intensive schooling programmes, community-based centres for learning and literacy programmes.

Poverty reduction

- Target young men and women for the provision of employment opportunities.

- Provide cash or food transfers to alleviate basic and immediate humanitarian needs.

- Produce educational and learning methods that target out-of-school children and workers who lost their skills during the conflict. The educational methods could involve learning by doing, vocational training and periodic training projects in the most demanded specializations in the labour market.

- Ensure the maximum national level of aggregate demand by expanding investment expenditure in infrastructure, energy efficiency, early childcare and education.

Green revival policies

- Introduce a concrete plan to create a green economy, including investments in new technologies, or retrofitting equipment, buildings and infrastructure. This would be a key driver of new employment and an opportunity to protect and transform existing jobs. With a well-designed plan, the management of environmental protection and resources can be undertaken in parallel with job creation and poverty reduction, while promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.
- Rehabilitate the arable land which was damaged during the conflict, given the destructive effects of the conflict and the environmental impacts of the different types of weapons used.
- Rehabilitate irrigation systems, dams, groundwater, and artesian wells that supply irrigated land with water.
- Set production requirements for agricultural producers in terms of competitive prices and expand access to agricultural loans with deferential benefits to producers according to the scale of damages, with job creation conditions.
- Support the renewable energy sector, alongside conventional generation and not only as a source of electricity, and the process of sustained development. Establish facilities for the manufacturing of equipment that can be used for renewable energy production such as material for photovoltaics, water heaters, wind turbines and insulation. This would enhance economic recovery, especially when established in economically disadvantaged areas, by creating jobs and promoting further development through other sectors such as the industrial and services sectors.
- Create a public entity (establishment, company or agency) for renewable energy. This entity – by itself or with the participation of the private sector – could generate and operate electricity from renewable energy projects and sell it to the transmission or distribution establishment.
- Ensure that strategies for the energy sector cover the shape of the sector in terms of its structure, public versus private sector roles, and the energy mix in terms of conventional and renewable generation.
- Install solar plants and farms (using photovoltaic cells) and establish factories to manufacture the components for the production of cells, solar farms and heaters, in areas with low investment and according to the solar radiation map (for example, Homs, Qatina and other promising areas according to the map). This would:
  - ◊ Secure electrical energy and energy independence.
  - ◊ Reduce the import bill.
  - ◊ Provide employment opportunities.
  - ◊ Raise local and total growth and increase the sustainable component of growth (preserving the environment).
- Establish factories for the components for wind energy and hydroelectric farms. This would deliver the same benefits outlined for solar energy.

Industrial policy

- Review current industrial policy with the goal of identifying existing resources and value chains, surviving manufacturing capacity and linkages with agriculture.
- Support continued import substitution for feasible products.
- Prioritize the following types of manufacturing: the production of products that are necessary inputs for reconstruction, the mutually reinforcing cross-sectoral value chains between the agricultural and manufacturing sectors, import

substitution manufacturing for labour-intensive products and products that meet local needs, manufacturing that leads to revival, and new medium- to high- skill manufacturing (such as manufacturing of pharmaceuticals).

- Prepare a programme aimed at developing micro-credit plans for small and medium-sized enterprises in local communities in urban and rural areas.

- Establish unions for small and medium-sized enterprises at the sectoral or regional levels in order to represent these enterprises in dialogues with the Government and the chambers of commerce and industry in the post-conflict phase.

- Form special administrative departments in the relevant ministries specialized in providing extension services to small and medium-sized enterprises during the post-conflict phase.

- Amend investment legislation and Syrian commercial laws so they become more supportive of SMEs, especially in relation to tax exemptions and granting commercial records and licenses.

- Adopt a national programme to modernize education, training and vocational training and link them to the needs of the labour market.

- Modify the educational system curricula to respond to the requirements of the age of technology.

- Grant tax incentives for inventions and innovations at sector and project levels.

- Grant tax incentives for technical and vocational education and training in the private sector.

Infrastructure

- In the short term:
  - ◊ Mend transportation and telecommunication networks as quickly as possible. These networks act as a support for national unity and for national trade and mending them is a means of bringing a country that has been torn apart back together geographically as well as socially.
  - ◊ Carry out an assessment of the entire infrastructure of the Syrian Arab Republic and its transportation networks promptly. Within the assessment, identify infrastructure needs by categorizing elements of infrastructure as undamaged, lightly damaged and repairable, destroyed, or non-existent, and then prioritize the action required in relation to the needs of Syrian citizens.
  - ◊ Prioritize any infrastructure that has a bearing on everyday life. Rehabilitate and make operational roads, water networks, sewage networks, electricity generation and distribution facilities, and importantly, schools and hospitals, with regard to service delivery.
- In the long term:
  - ◊ Establish an organized, comprehensive and inclusive national development plan that sets out concrete steps for implementation.
  - ◊ Address infrastructure bottlenecks through a combination of institutional reforms and well-designed, well-targeted infrastructure investments. First, strengthen the institutional framework for infrastructure backbone services – particularly in the power sector. Second, carry out essential public investments within a fiscally sustainable approach.

Political and administrative governance and institutional reform

05

A. Introduction

Analysis of political governance, institutions, rule of law in SPAF I identified problems in those areas as among the key structural factors leading up to the conflict. Demands to change these along more democratic, inclusive and human rights lines were among the key issues that motivated the protest movement of 2011 in Syria. The transformations wrought by the conflict, including the rise of the war economy, warlordism and human rights violations have made these questions just as important today as they were 11 years ago.

A comprehensive and negotiated settlement to the conflict under the auspices of the United Nations remains the ideal outcome to the conflict. As argued in chapter 2 such an outcome cannot be imposed by any one actor in the conflict. Given the de facto fragmentation of the country under several areas of control as well as the existence of multiple foreign armies on Syrian land and the internationalization of the conflict, no one side can dictate all the outcomes.

However, pending a comprehensive agreement there are still a number of serious steps that all actors can undertake to advance positive change. Serious movement on the political process is a collective responsibility. Just as the transformation of the Syrian conflict into a proxy and international conflict is not the sole responsibility of one actor alone, moving forward is the responsibility of all the dominant actors on Syrian territory, including the Syrian Government but also the multiple other countries who maintain a military presence in the country.

All parties to the conflict have declared that there is no military solution to the conflict and the only lasting one will be political agreement. This has been a welcome declaration and was agreed by the national, regional and international community. It should be accompanied by serious and concrete actions that move away from the logic of war, or

> A comprehensive and negotiated settlement to the conflict under the auspices of the United Nations remains the ideal outcome to the conflict

the pursuit of war by other means. The declared or implicit actions of all parties should be the pursuit of peace and justice in Syria rather than pursuit of geopolitical goals or military stalemates or redrawing the boundaries of Syria whether de facto or de jure.

Despite these structural obstacles, there are numerous enabling measures that can be taken by the actors to enable a positive cycle to develop. At a minimum, it implies that all de facto powers uphold the rule of law, human rights, political and civil rights, and gender equality. Chapter 3 has discussed social protection as an entry point. In present section we further elaborate on other aspects of governance transformation, creating a new social contract among Syrians, and creating an inclusive legal framework for the coming period.

Building an inclusive legal framework implies a move away from the zero-sum game of winners and losers towards a consensus-based exercise that recognizes the rights of Syrians from across the political spectrum – both inside the country or in locations of refuge – and respects their human rights including empowering women.

Starting inside Syria, there is no substitute in the coming phase for the revival of political

life and freedoms. This is true for both intrinsic and instrumental reasons. Intrinsically, Syrians deserve to have their political and civil rights upheld. They should be free to organize peacefully and voice their ideas without fear of arrest or violence. Journalists and Civil Society role as watchdogs and advocates is key. Independent, free and professional media is essential to air the perspectives of Syrians from across the spectrum.

However, opening up political spaces are necessities for instrumental reasons. So long as dissent inside Syria is not tolerated, various dissident groups will continue to have political weight outside Syria. The existence of an exiled community of dissidents, while dissent inside Syria is restricted, is harmful for Syrian politics in the long run. Civil society groups must be allowed to organize in order to advance their own and the public interest. Civil society here implies far more than just non-governmental organizations, but also agricultural cooperatives, (formal and informal) labour unions, professional organizations, journalists and other groups. These organizations can contribute to the public interest in areas where political elites have reached dead ends. Allowing the resumption of political life lifts the burden of solving all of the country's problems from the political elites and allows them to focus on other aspects of governance and reform and economic recovery. All parties therefore must recognize their role and interest in this process.

The rise of civil society initiatives is evidence that Syrian society is capable of organizing itself and presenting Syrian solutions.

The governance reform process should be a period in which all sides come together to form the new rules. Consensus building rather than competitive proceedings over contentious issues should be the focus of peacebuilding. There must be a space for all voices to be heard in a meaningful matter on key governance issues.

The passing of laws, legislation and decrees during this period is particularly sensitive to their impact on the rights of the Syrian population. In addition, the manner in which these laws are passed is also important. NAFS analysis found that in the period of 2011 to 2018, more than 665 laws, presidential decrees and presidential decisions had been passed. Of that total, a remarkable 435 presidential decrees were passed, almost twice as many as the number of laws passed within the same time period. In principle, the large number of laws could have been the basis for a comprehensive reform of the rule of law and formed the basis for new rules of the political game. However, the laws passed and the policies implemented suffer from two issues. The first is the legitimacy of the laws and policies having been conceived, passed and implemented amid a devastating conflict, with massive death and displacement, and without the possibility of a national consensus process, particularly as many of these laws have a direct and at time irreversible impact on the basic human, political and economic rights or large sectors of the Syrian population. That gives these laws the same zero-sum connotation as the violent conflict itself and undermines their legitimacy. Without a comprehensive and inclusive political settlement, the legitimacy and intention of the laws will continue to be questioned as a source of national division rather than consensus. There are also issues with the actual substance and content of the laws and policies.[213]

Policies implemented during the peacebuilding phase should aim to restore trust in State institutions and to promote equal citizenship with attention given to reforming governance structures that impact people's daily lives.

Some of the policies discussed in this present section are applicable in the very short term and some in the short and medium term and others perhaps at later stages but they all represent guiding principles whether or not their applicability is feasible immediately.

Reforming judicial and security sector institutions in ways that adhere to the principles of the rule of law and human rights should be prioritized. Judicial reform policies fall into three categories those: (i) that reform the judicial system, (ii) those that enable judicial oversight over the executive branch and (iii) those that enable judicial oversight over the legislative branch. The judiciary can fulfil its monitoring and oversight role over the executive and legislative branches if it is guaranteed full independence. Autonomy of the judicial sector must be explicitly stated in any constitutional declaration or interim constitution.[214]

Security sector reform should be consistent with democratic norms and a human rights approach. It should seek reform while aiming for the long-term resumption of the State's monopoly of the legitimate use of force within its territory. Security sector organizations should be reformed in ways that make them accountable to civilian authorities, independent oversight agencies and civil society. Security sector reform and disarmament, mobilization and reintegration are closely linked and should be coordinated.[215]

> Autonomy of the judicial sector must be explicitly stated in any constitutional declaration or interim constitution

Similarly, there are issues related to administrative governance and decentralization stemming from longstanding challenges with State capacity, public administration and public institutions and the civil service as well as the centre-periphery relationship and inequality between governorates. These centre-periphery relationships have been transformed by the conflict and as a result local governance questions have risen to prominence alongside questions of decentralization.

B. Trust-building measures

The end of the armed conflict has resulted in an unstable equilibrium rather than a sustainable peace.

Though Syria faces a collective action problem, the individual policies of each actor are still significant. Changes in enabling factors will develop a positive climate to build upon. While no single actor can push the country toward a sustainable, stable equilibrium, a miscalculation or mistake by any one actor may lead to a spiral of violence. This is why there is an urgent need for serious, determined and irreversible steps toward peace, lest the country's free fall continue. Allowing the situation to continue would be first and foremost destructive for Syrians but would also have dangerous implications for regional and even global peace.

Second, the decline of State institutions in the country and decimation of State capacity cannot continue for much longer or the country will be unable to recover regardless of the form of political rule. That is why we propose the trust-building measures outlined in the present chapter as steps for transforming the conflict and moving towards the possibility of comprehensive negotiations and transitions.

C. Framework for economic, social and political justice

Even if Syrians cannot expect full or immediate justice on all accounts, regardless of the steps taken and compromises necessary, policies should aim to achieve justice in all its dimensions for all Syrians regardless of where they reside. The trust-building measures set out below should not be thought of as building towards mere agreements between the dominant actors. The needs and aspirations of the Syrian people must be placed at the forefront. An emphasis on multidimensional justice implies that inequalities, warlordism, deprivation and exclusion should be combatted regardless of the political source or the banner under which such action is undertaken. The proposed trust-building measures include the following elements:

1. *Regional de-conflicting measures*. Given the geopolitical and internationalized nature of the Syrian conflict, there is a need and possibility to explore avenues for cooperation around humanitarian, public health or other issues, as well as international efforts to resolve regional tensions. In addition to diplomacy between regional rivals, such measures could include exploring cooperation around the COVID-19 pandemic and public health, the resumption of humanitarian aid, tackling food security and agricultural revival in the region, cooperation over energy systems and alleviating the financial crisis in Lebanon.

2. *Territorial contiguity inside Syria*. The *Syria at War: Eight Years On* report urged the resumption of cross-border humanitarian access for all Syrians in a non-politicized fashion, as called for by Security Council resolution 2254. At the same time there should be a full, unhindered and non-politicized resumption of economic and social ties throughout the country. In addition, all parties

should refrain from taking measures that appear to be entrenching the de facto partition of Syria such as through the introduction of non-Syrian curricula, currency and other political, social and economic measures.[216]

3. *Investments in the rule of law, justice and accountability*. Chapter 4 discussed the need to invest in human development. However, a counterpart of this must be to shift resources towards rule of law, justice and accountability and improve the bureaucratic and administrative conditions of Syrians. This includes revisiting the sentences passed by the Counter-Terrorism Court, established in 2012 following a series of decrees and laws starting with the April 2011 lifting of the State of Emergency, which had been in place since 1963.[217]

4. *Release of prisoners and detainees or clarifying their fate*. The lack of progress on this issue is a signal of the continuation of the conflict by other means. This important matter has been repeatedly emphasized first and foremost by Syrian civil society, led by the families of detainees and the disappeared who have issued several pleas and initiatives towards all parties of the conflict. It has been reiterated by the United Nations and have been even included in a tripartite letter to the United Nations from Iran, Russian Federation and Türkiye.

5. *Shifting resources towards human development and green recovery*. These measures were elaborated on in chapters 3 and 4. There is a need for all actors to immediately take steps to avoid the economic collapse in Syria, which include paying attention to basic needs but also to the ecological destruction brought about by the conflict.

6. *Opening pathways to non-violent modes of discussion*. Among the conflict's biggest tragedies is that Syrian society has been side-lined as an agent of change in its own future. Evidence from the past decade has shown that under the right conditions and with appropriate mediation, Syrians are willing to engage with one another regardless of political affiliation. This includes paying special attention to women's organizations, youth representation and refugees in neighbouring countries. There are also a large number of Syrian civil society organizations, research centres, activists and practitioners who are contributing towards addressing the pressing issues facing Syria. The greatest successes in dialogue and conflict resolution have happened through bottom-up societal initiatives. While these have not been translated into high-level political solutions, now is the time to provide more platforms or forums to amplify their reach. Syrians' voices should be amplified and all parties in the conflict must help create fora for more independent voices to emerge, while conversely ceasing the instrumentalization of Syrian voices for geopolitical ends.

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7. *Guaranteeing personal security and freedoms, ending the impunity of security services, and ending arbitrary arrests, threats and intimidation.* Naturally, and related to points 3 and 4, there should be an end to arbitrary arrests or detentions by all de facto powers and an end to policies that target Syrians based on political affiliation or suspected political affiliation. These are essential if the culture of fear and precarity is to end in Syria.

8. *The natural resources of Syria belong to all Syrians.* Throughout the conflict there has been active targeting of economic and social infrastructure, including through

the use of sieges and food deprivation as a weapon of war. At the same time, the de facto fragmentation has led to conflict over the natural resources of Syria. These natural resources should remain a source of human development rather than being monopolized, controlled, or used as a weapon of war or condition of political loyalty.

9. *Ending exclusivist practices and political repertoires.* This should be accompanied by

the downgrading of political rhetoric that dehumanizes the other or uses inflammatory language to describe large sectors of Syrians. This element requires the acceptance of all Syrians regardless of political persuasion. Exclusionary practices, including political processes that de facto exclude a significant number of Syrians (due to displacement or inability to participate because of structural conditions) should be revisited.

D. Constitutional options and constitution making

The trust building measures discussed above are starting points rather than substitutes for a politically inclusive governance transformation process. In the present section, we outline the main elements of what the governance transformation process should entail with respect to constitutional options for the coming period.

Security Council resolution 2254 clearly emphasizes that the Syrian peace process ought to necessarily include a new constitution for Syria. A Syrian Constitutional Committee (SCC) was formally announced in 2019 after an initial agreement about its formation in 2018 in the Russian sponsored Sochi Conference. Importantly, the SCC is the only formal direct meeting place between representatives of the Syrian Government and opposition.

The SCC contains three blocks: the Syrian Government nominated bloc, the Syrian Negotiations Committee nominated bloc and a civil society bloc, called the middle third. The SCC consists of two main bodies. The first, tasked with drafting the constitution, is composed of 15 members from each bloc (comprising 45 members in total), while the second, larger body of 150 members is tasked with the general process of negotiating, revising and approving the constitution.

> Importantly, the SCC is the only formal direct meeting place between representatives of the Syrian Government and opposition

The work of the SCC is currently happening with limited inputs or participation by large sectors of the Syrian people. As political exclusion is among the key root causes of the Syrian conflict, it is therefore detrimental that processes meant to transition away from conflict are similarly exclusionary. That said, forming the SCC itself was a painstaking process. As stated earlier, there are no other forums in which Syrians from opposing political positions are formally negotiating. If appropriately empowered by all relevant national and international actors and if further avenues for greater Syrian civil society participation can be found, the SCC may be able to play a key role in the coming phase.

With these in mind, a number of key elements could be discussed as part of the deliberations in the SCC constitution:

- How to articulate the main goals of the transitional period, including a roadmap to achieving those goals, and second, whether this is a transitional or permanent constitution.

- If the SCC opts for a transitional constitution, the next question will be to decide on whether to include timescales and a roadmap for when a permanent constitution shall be adopted, as well as mechanisms and benchmarks for its adoption. Alternatives should be proposed in case the specified benchmarks or timetables are not met, for example if the majority of Syrian voters reject a proposed permanent constitution in a national referendum.

- The makeup, roles and powers of the main executive and judicial bodies in the transitional period.

- An emphasis on civil rights, human rights and other supra-constitutional principles which include equality based on citizenship, freedom of religion and belief, and political association.

- The legal framework guiding the humanitarian economic and legal impact of the conflict. The legal framework should include the right of safe and voluntary return of refugees and IDP's as well as transitional justice and reconciliation mechanisms. It should also resolve issues regarding citizenship and national identification as well as conflict specific property disputes and provide amnesty for political prisoners.

- Clear guidelines on the proper role of the army and security sector including civilian oversight over them.

E. Elections in Syria

In general, elections during this phase carry significant risks and negative consequences.[218] Elections – even fully free and fair elections – do not in and of themselves signal meaningful democratic participation or ascribe legitimacy to a governing authority if not conducted under the appropriate circumstances. The electoral process and results show that State-society dynamics in the Syrian Arab Republic have not progressed in a way that supports a comprehensive approach to a democratic future for the country's elections. The fragmented geography of Syria as well as the absence of political pluralism, political freedoms, independent political parties and normal political life make such considerations particularly difficult. Some parts of the country are still witnessing armed conflict, and there are millions of displaced Syrians who cannot participate. There are other practical concerns. Even in post-conflict settings (those following internationally sponsored peace accords), reliable polling is still not available and, alongside weak institutional capacity and poor turnout (in large part due to violence or threat of

violence), can severely undermine the legitimacy of election results. Moreover, the lack of programmatic parties often implies that those with the greatest resources, particularly former combatants can use elections to install themselves in power.

To facilitate political participation by citizens, it would be beneficial to focus on the following key areas:

- The right to run and to vote to all Syrians regardless of their geographical location.

- Structural reforms to the electoral process.

- Electoral monitoring, including domestic electoral observation by civil society.

- Ensure that women and members of marginalized groups have a full and meaningful opportunity to participate in the electoral process and in democratic governance.

- Revisiting some of the aspects of candidate categorization to guarantee representation for all Syrians.

- Political oppositions and ideologically diverse political parties should be permitted to participate in political processes.

- Discuss and define political party's regulatory framework.

- The role of independent media in covering elections.

- Safeguarding the rights to freedom of expression and assembly and access to information to ensure voters are well informed about the candidates and key issues in the election process.

F. Refugee inclusion in governance processes

This section discusses the importance of including refugees in governance processes related not just to their own conditions, but also the wider political process in Syria. This includes: (a) refugee inclusion or representation in any discussions or process of return, (b) refugee representation in the negotiating process, (c) refugee participation in the constitutional process and (d) refugee participation in electoral process.

Article 14 of Security Council resolution 2254 mandates the creation of appropriate conditions for the return of refugees and IDPs to their original locations. To this end, the Syrian Government as well as the Russian Government announced a coordinated initiative in August 2020. As such, the spokesperson for the Russian Foreign Ministry declared that the Russian Ministry of Defence as well as the Russian Centre for Reconciliation and the Syrian Government were coordinating with several foreign governments on the question of return. This was followed by the Syrian Ministry announcing the establishment of a coordination committee for the return of displaced persons outside Syria, which would coordinate with host countries to facilitate their return. The committee consists of the Syrian Minister of Environment and Local Administration, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, the Deputies of the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Health and Social Services, the Ministry of Labour, Communications and Technology as well as representatives of the Committee of Reconciliation and others. Similarly, in 2019 the Syrian Government established a Reconstruction Committee aimed at reducing obstacles to refugee return as well as studying legal and legislative conditions appropriate for their return.

However, these efforts have rarely included a consultative or other role for refugees and IDPs or representatives on their behalf. Ideally, representatives of refugees should have a role in any committee planning their return. Absent this possibility, channels for exchange of information, solicitation of responses, discussion of fears and concerns of refugees as well as identification of vulnerable or special needs groups must be established.

1. Refugee inclusion in political processes

Since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict there have been a number of political processes, including those emanating from the United Nations sponsored Geneva process, which dates back to June 2012, as well as the subsequent iterations in Geneva or Vienna, the Astana Process launched in January 2017 under the sponsorship of the Russian Federation, Türkiye, Iran and subsequent related conferences.

A common denominator of these processes so far has been the absence of refugee representation either as an independent bloc or as a member of negotiating committees. Several oppositional

groups such as the National Coalition for the Revolutionary and Oppositional Forces, as well as numerous formations underneath its banner or separate from it, have been formed without clear inclusion of refugees as a community of concern in the political process.

While most, if not all, of the external opposition forces contain Syrians who are themselves refugees, they participate as representatives of various political forces rather than as representatives of refugees. Similarly, where refugees participate in the Geneva or Astana processes, their participation is not primarily concerned with representing interests of refugees. More broadly, as with the question of return, there is no formal representation of refugees in the political process.[219]

2. Refugee inclusion in constitutional processes

The SCC and its various proclamations have not given the space for refugee representation as

such, and they are not explicitly included within the Syrian Government bloc, opposition bloc, or civil society bloc. As previously mentioned, these blocs include Syrians who are refugees as well as civil society activists knowledgeable and capable of discussing refugee related issues, but they are not there explicitly representing refugees, nor was there a mechanism for refugee representation on this committee. For example, the Bonn Agreement of 5 December 2001 for Afghanistan included explicit refugee representation, while the Loya Jirga (grand assembly) included 24 refugees elected from Iran and Pakistan, including 6 representatives of IDPs from three separate provinces.

3. Refugee inclusion in the electoral process

Article 4 of Security Council resolution 2254 of 2015 which expressed its support for a Syrian led political process facilitated by the United Nations in drafting a new constitution further expressed its support for "free and fair elections, pursuant to the new constitution, to be held within 18 months

and administered under supervision of the United Nations, to the satisfaction of the governance and to the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, eligible to participate as set forth in the 14 November 2015 ISSG statement".

This welcomed explicit inclusion of the Syrian diaspora faces many obstacles, including the fact that Syrian electoral law (Law 5 of 2014) allows Syrians who do not reside inside the political borders of the country to vote only in presidential elections and within a specific set of conditions. These conditions include voting in Syrian embassies, having their names listed in the electoral rolls, meeting legal requirements relating to documentation and having their passport officially stamped at exit points. While these laws may be acceptable under normal conditions, they certainly do not apply in the post conflict environment given that tens of thousands of potentially eligible voters will be excluded due to lacking all the necessary legal documents as well as lacking the official stamps, having exited the country unofficially.

Returning to the example of Afghanistan mentioned above, Afghan refugees were enabled to vote in the 2004 presidential elections due to the coordination efforts of the Afghan election committee, United Nations delegations, the

Government of Iran and UNHCR. Despite numerous obstacles, appropriate solutions to the problem of the lack of documentation were found.

In light of that and other international experiences, the electoral process and systems must answer the following questions: (i) who is eligible to vote?; (ii) what are the necessary identification requirements and how will refugees who lost the required documents be able to recover them or obtain new ones?; (iii) how will electoral precincts identify those voters?; (iv) what procedures will be followed to facilitate the voting process?; (v) how will the problem of fragmentation and the multiple locations of refugees as well as the varying relations with host countries be dealt with?; (vi) what will the actual voting mechanisms be? (for example, for voting in person at consulates, embassies or other locations, voting by mail or proxy, or voting in temporary locations?; (vii) what will the role of host countries be and how will electoral lists be safeguarded to ensure that the information contained is not used for other purposes?; (viii) how will communication be undertaken with refugees to ensure they understand their rights and the voting procedures and that candidates and political parties are able to inform them of their various political platforms?

G. Enhancing local governance

1. Introduction and framework

The proliferation of new local governance structures has been a noteworthy and important outcome of the Syrian conflict. In some cases, these governance structures grew out of oppositional communities who wanted

to coordinate and organize their activities independently of the Syrian Government's traditional governance structures. This resulted in new and innovative forms of governance that politicized youth and other groups through allowing them to participate in initiatives such as the local coordination committees. In other cases, these new structures emanated out of necessity and survival, in order to coordinate social, political, economic and juridical activities after the

withdrawal of Syrian Government or other de facto armed forces. This exploration and experimentation with new forms of governance, particularly in the early months and years of the conflict, was promising. However, even from the beginning, this took place under conditions that were far from ideal, and with the increased warfare, such experiments were also negatively impacted. In some cases, these new local structures displaced previously exclusionary forms of governance, but the new ones were exclusionary along different axes, for example, towards groups deemed loyal to the previous governing forces (whether Syrian Government or other). They also overwhelmingly excluded women in leadership positions. Second, these new structures suffered from lack of expertise in governance or economic management. Third, many became increasingly reliant or completely dependent on external aid for fulfilling basic services. Fourth, many increasingly suffered from splits along political lines or interference or outright domination of new de facto armed groups, including extremist groups, which prevented them from meaningfully exercising independence.

While de facto armed opposition groups were generally satisfied with allowing local governance structures to occupy themselves with economic and aid provision, they controlled many other aspects of governance including the judiciary, rule of law and security measures, as well as educational systems. Aid and economic development were also instrumentalized and captured in the form of taxes, checkpoint duties, or extortionary demands. Economic resources and natural endowments were also captured by de facto powers and licit and illicit trade was instrumentalized for the war effort. These critiques did not apply to all groups throughout the entire conflict but were generally true regardless of the de facto power or geographic location. What is undoubtedly true is that all forms of local governance and new structures took place in a polarizing, destructive conflict without a national consensus or dialogue. Even the best experiments were taking place under periods of

extreme transition. While these offered important examples and lessons, thinking through local governance in the coming period must be from the starting point of balancing: (a) existing, de facto realities on the ground, taking these as starting points, and (b) working to develop national consensus around these structures.

Empowered local governance is tied to a broader question of administrative and fiscal decentralization. Law 107 was issued to address what was perceived to be the excessive centralization of power. Political and fiscal authority in the central government and its organs were a long-identified problem in Syrian governance structures. An even bigger issue was the lack of autonomy and independence of whatever structures existed from the interference of the ruling party as well as the security apparatus. At a global level, the last thirty years have seen a general consensus rise on the possible positive effects of decentralization on a variety of positive factors. At the same time, decentralization may have its inherent downsides and unrealistic expectations. Many possible negative outcomes could be disregarded but should be avoided. Similarly, the possible positive outcomes should not be overstated (peace, rights for marginalized and minority groups, democracy, accountability, inclusiveness and reductions in inequality). While the pursuit of decentralization in fragile post-conflict countries may pacify warring groups, it is key to ensure it does not come at the cost of undermining national cohesion on the longer run. In fact, the mixed record of local administrative councils in areas controlled by the opposition illustrates the challenges of social inclusion and integration of minority groups in local structures in the post-conflict phase. Because citizens may lack a sense of unity and ideological commitment to decentralized governance, the process can be politically destabilizing. Care must be taken to prevent decentralization further entrenching subnational identities rather than planting the seeds of inclusive citizenship.

2. Legal framework

Administratively, Law 107 of 2011, which regulates the local administration in Syria, officially transfers oversight of public service delivery from the central ministries to local actors across six sectors, including health, education, higher education, transport, roads and solid waste management. The text formulates the responsibilities of local authorities to encompass studying and implementing public services projects, including improving facilities, in addition to coordinating with central agencies on the implementation of public policies in the localities. However, it is unclear to what extent the actual delegation of powers and authorities to municipal actors or even the governorates has actually occurred, a process that entails significant capacity-building at both the central and local levels and extensive restructuring of operational and legal-regulatory procedures.

In fact, there is a significant degree of overlapping powers across local-level councils, executive offices and central-level actors, thereby rendering accountability relations poorly defined. For instance, Article 33 of Law 107 empowers a governorate council to undertake all decisions and measures necessary to exercise the competencies of the Ministry, administration or central institution whose competencies have been transferred to the Local Authority in accordance with the National Decentralization plan.[220] However, the Law does not specify who has the power to dismiss director generals administering decentralized public services, with Article 46 only referring to the need of central ministries to consult governors on the appointment and transfer of director generals. Adding to the confusion, the legal text does not clearly demarcate functions, roles and responsibilities across central and subnational tiers, a situation which not only creates reform inertia but may also potentially open the door for struggles within the State. The conflation of administrative roles on the ground is such that managers at the district and sub-district levels have continued to supervise the implementation of laws, regulations and decisions, which technically also

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fall under the domains of both elected councils and executive offices.

The powers of municipalities remained seriously curtailed both vertically through direct interventions by appointed governors, and horizontally from competing local structures. The Baath party's local branches seem to influence decision-making processes at the subnational level, according to critics who stress the hegemony of the party over the State. While security actors have traditionally influenced local administrative structures, the militarization of the conflict has further increased their influence while the power of official administrative entities has been undermined. Security actors have been able to use various formal and informal mechanisms to secure their interests and power over local administrations, among which is the Security Committee (SC).[221]

Further compounding the picture is the lack of systematic efforts at cementing horizontal decentralization at the local level. Channels for social accountability require access to information, a minimum level of trust in the authorities, collaborative civil servants, and guarantees of civil and political rights. Although Law 107 officially stipulates a few mechanisms involving citizens in decision-making, including petitioning service centres and attending townhall meetings, and

there have been some pilot efforts to encourage participatory approaches to urban rehabilitation, reforms have yet to formally institutionalize channels for community participation. Collaborative principles of planning, policymaking and implementation, anchored on continuously engaging with community members and non-State actors, are not incorporated into the local administration system.

In regard to public finance, the country's local administration system allows for subnational actors to have separate budgets and for governorates to not just exercise significant expenditure powers, but also to develop public-private partnerships as envisioned in Decree 15 of 2012 for the purposes of revenue generation.

Indeed, access, availability and efficiency of public services have become rallying cries for ordinary Syrians, who also raise concerns about corruption of newly empowered local authorities. Furthermore, persistent concerns regarding relative territorial deprivation and inequitable distribution of resources, particularly revenues from oil, also highlight the need for transparent formulas for public allocations by the central Government.

As a result, the promulgation of a systematic strategy for decentralization in the country remains overdue. Given the ambitious scope of envisioned reforms, delays in developing a nuanced approach based on sequencing priorities and capacity-building needs have added ambiguity to the reform agenda. Indeed, the decision to restructure the local administration system, in the absence of larger fully fledged political reforms, raises questions about the goals of reform steps and their limits.

3. Assessing local governance in Syria

A full assessment of local governance in Syria should be a priority of the next phase. This starts with: (a) understanding the current legal framework within Syria in relation to decentralization and local governance, (b) mapping out the de facto landscape of local governance, and (c) bridging the gap between the two in a way that works towards a unified framework for the entire country. These are built upon principles of equity and democratic participation while also solidifying State institutions at all levels, and respecting the aspirations and needs of local populations. In other words, a Syria-specific, context sensitive approach to decentralization.[222]

The NAFS Programme has begun this process through a comparative case study of five different local governance experiences in Al-Tal (Rif Dimashq Governorate), Tafas (Dar'a Governorate), Atarib (Aleppo Governorate), Jarablus (Aleppo Governorate), Deir ez-Zor (Deir ez-Zor Governorate). At the time of study, Al-Tal and Tafas were under the control of the Syrian Government after the latter recovered lost territory in the conflict. Atarib was under the control of HTS with partial funding from the Syrian Interim Government that was created by the Syrian National Coalition opposition group, Jarablus was under the control of the Turkish Government, and Deir-ez-Zor was under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces.

The framework for comparing these local governance models focuses on five main dimensions: (a) autonomy of civilian-led local administration, as captured by unpacking relations across local administration bodies, and parallel structures of political parties, armed militias or security agencies; (b) mandates, responsibilities and actual powers of local councils, on the one hand, and executive authorities in charge of services provision at the national, subnational and local levels, on the other hand; (c) the degree of administrative decentralization, specifically relations between central-level line ministries and local executive offices in formally devolved sectors; (d) participatory and accountability credentials of

governance structures at the local level; and (e) effective fiscal decentralization, including the ability of local actors to impose levies and taxes and to maintain budget transparency and streamlined financial reporting.

The NAFS analysis showed commonalities in the different models. For example, executive offices with often appointed members exercise significantly more power than the city or local councils that are in theory at least democratically elected (even if in practice the elections are non-existent or flawed), with city councils still politically weak. Political loyalty to de facto powers is still a key factor in assuming positions of influence. This is an ever-present danger of decentralization without safeguards. The national level, even under authoritarian rule, can in theory be a place where multiple forces bargain for influence and can potentially balance each other out or where alliances with like-minded forces can be formed against more powerful interests. Such balancing is absent at the local level where dominant local powers have few viable rivals. Another common denominator is that often de facto controlling authorities exercise power through parallel or shadow structures such as security forces picking and choosing viable candidates for city council. Even absent shadow powers and political interference, the actual de jure structures are inefficient and must be rethought. Often the de facto governing power or central authority still exercises significant authority and acts as a hub for even the simplest administrative decisions such as initiating a new bus route.

Thinking further about local governance must be in line with overall thinking about political transformations in the country and must therefore be tied to the political process. Whatever process of de jure decentralization takes place in Syria, and whatever revisions or new pieces of legislation are issued, these must be commensurate with a process of building national consensus around these issues and the aim of localism based on geography rather than any other factor. Decentralization in Syria cannot

> Whatever process of de jure decentralization takes place in Syria, and whatever revisions or new pieces of legislation are issued, these must be commensurate with a process of building national consensus around these issues and the aim of localism based on geography rather than any other factor

be tied to any specific sector of Syrian society, nor must it increase inequalities between Syrians or become a new driver of conflict.

Key areas to be addressed

Mapping further local governance structures. This should be done according to the five dimensions discussed above in order to get a fuller picture of the landscape of local governance. At the same time, laws and decrees related to local governance, including Law 107, should be assessed and reviewed. In some cases, there may still be excessive de jure and de facto centralization that needs to be changed to allow fiscal and administrative decentralization and autonomy, as well as efficiency and room to manoeuvre for local structures. In other cases, the de facto decentralization may be excessive and there may need to be a recentralization, for example in relation to the electricity grid or other national scale infrastructure and public health systems. Recentralization does not necessarily

imply giving up local control but ensuring the integration of structures in ways that allow for scale economies and national standards.

Strengthening democratic representation and accountability as well as the inclusion of women. Several councils were formed without any form of elections. In many cases, dominant political actors and armed opposition groups select local council members top-down, in consultation with community leaders and representatives from notable families. Even if direct or indirect elections are held, candidates are screened based on their loyalty to the core interests. Research shows that the composition of councils often excludes women, minorities and impoverished groups. This deficit in democratic local governance highlights the importance of holding free and fair local elections in the future in order to cement accountability ties between citizens and

governance institutions at the subnational level. In order to adequately represent traditionally excluded groups, there is a need for quotas in local elections and administrative bodies.

Safeguarding and empowering local councils and their autonomy. Local councils are politically weak structures even though in certain contexts they are formally in charge of administering public services decisions specifically regarding the design and delivery. Public services are often centralized with lower tiers of government and dependent on non-automatic or conditional transfers by the centre even when a greater margin of powers is relegated to local actors. Executive offices tend to dominate local decision-making, given the prevalence of powerful parallel structures which are sometimes linked to armed actors' local councils, which are often relegated to exercising limited coordination functions.

Enhancing technical capacities of local governance structures. Local governance structures lack the necessary technical capabilities. Massive displacement and losses in human capital over the course of the conflict significantly undermined the ability of local institutions to perform their normal functions. Senior level local officials are hired by the central authority and local actors can only participate in the hiring process for lower-level positions or externally funded posts. Weak capacities have not just reduced the effectiveness and efficiency of public services but also the monitoring role of local councils. This explains the significant influence of parallel structures which to varying degrees steer the exercise of authority by local actors.

Exploring and expanding avenues for social accountability and decentralization, including participatory planning and monitoring. Weak links between the citizenry and local authorities is a pressing challenge. There are significant variations on the willingness of power holders to engage with societal actors, the bargaining position of former opposition activists and the juxtaposition of tribal actors versus civil society actors. It is also unclear to what extent emerging structures will be genuinely inclusive or open to enabling bottom-up accountability given the lack of transparency limited access to information and the focus on activating the structures at the governorate rather than local levels.

Enhancing the role of Syrian civil society and NGOs, alongside opportunities to support the process of local development and capacity building. This might also imply providing avenues for cross-pollination and coordination within Syrian civil society.

H. Policy recommendations

Principles of peacebuilding

- Ensure a political transformation based on Security Council resolution 2254 that guarantees a culture of democracy is built and practiced, mutual political trust is re-established among the main political players, and the rule of law, equality and citizenship are established. Based on Security Council resolution 1325, special attention should be paid to the role of women as victims of war and leaders in the peacemaking process.

- Ensure the right of displaced persons and refugees to a safe, dignified and voluntary return to their homes (or to any other location inside the country they voluntarily choose to return to).

- Develop a national reconciliation process to which all Syrians are invited and encouraged to contribute.

- Ensure a balanced and equitable citizen-centred development that:
    ◊ Directly contributes to stability, peacebuilding and reconciliation at local and national levels.
    ◊ Is tangible and reflected in the availability of rehabilitated social and physical infrastructure.
    ◊ Empowers people, especially the most vulnerable and poor, to attain their basic needs.

- Provide a governance framework and national administrative structure that is comprehensive, participatory, transparent and accountable, and that increases gender equality.

Trust-building measures

- Ensure regional de-conflicting measures explore avenues for cooperation (including in the areas of public health, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, humanitarian aid and food security).
- Pursue territorial contiguity to stop entrenching the de facto partition of the Syrian Arab Republic.
- Enable political life throughout the Syrian Arab Republic by affirming freedom of speech, assembly and association, as well as allowing civil society to organize itself and participate in public life.
- Ascertain the fate of the missing and detained and communicate this to their families and organizations. Foster a just system that detains for legitimate reasons and provides the right to a fair trial for anyone accused of a crime.
- Shift resources towards human development and immediate improvement in the quality of life of Syrians.
- Invest in the rule of law, justice and accountability.
- Open pathways to non-violent modes of discussion and deliberation, including through freedom of speech and assembly.
- Guarantee personal security and freedoms, ending the impunity of security services, arbitrary arrests, threats and intimidation.
- Ensure that national natural resources belong to all Syrians and are allocated as a source of human development rather than monopolized, controlled, or used as a weapon of war or condition of political loyalty.
- End exclusivist practices and political repertoires and reduce political rhetoric that dehumanizes certain groups, thereby moving towards the acceptance of all Syrians through the use of inclusive language.

Advancing the political process

- Give meaningful support to advancing the political process with a United Nations-led process of publicizing the work of the Syrian Constitutional Committee (SCC).
- Achieve a comprehensive consultative and educational process (facilitated by the United Nations) about the constitution and the political process, reaching all Syrians inside and outside the country.
- Consider holding a referendum or an inclusive consultation approach on the outcome of the SCC in which all Syrians inside and outside the Syrian Arab Republic are able to participate in legitimately.
- Ensure meaningful participation of refugees in the political process, and particularly in any elections or referendums that might take place.
- Incorporate the documents and demands of Syrian women's groups into the work of the SCC and in the political process.
- Create a new constitution that guarantees separation of powers, equality of citizenship and non-discrimination in relation to religion, ethnicity, gender and race.

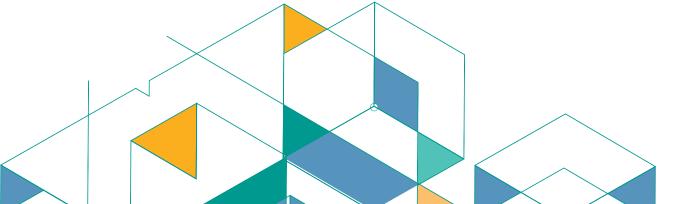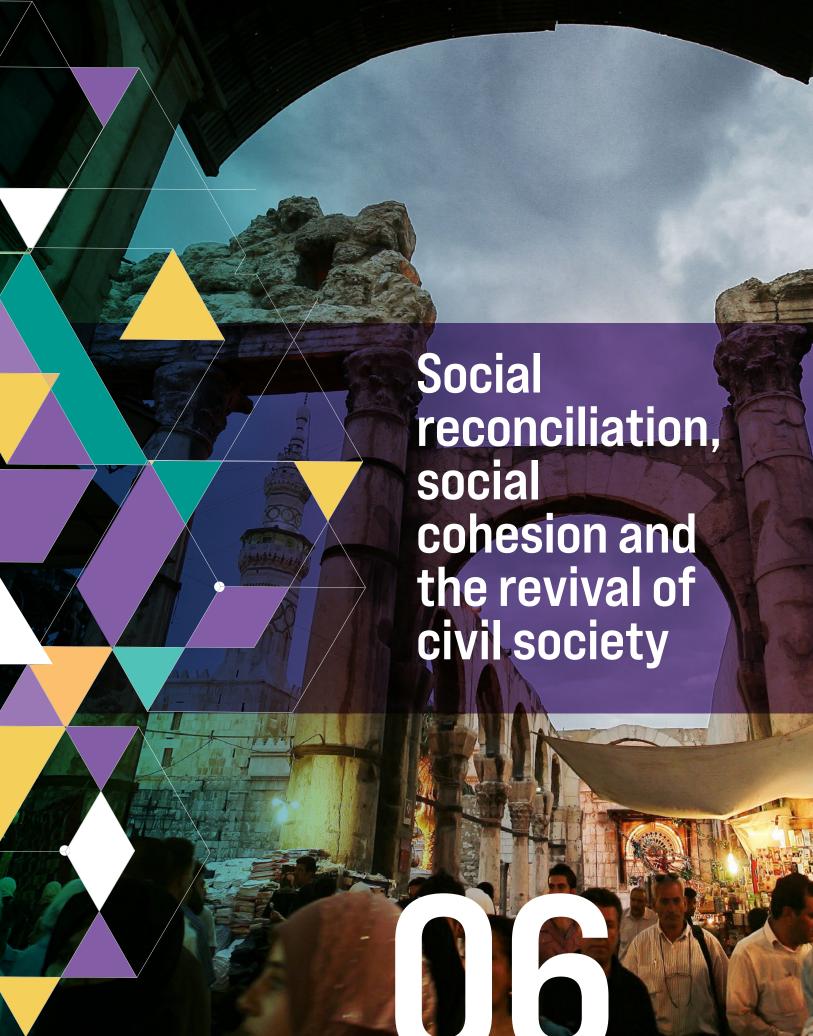# Enabling processes to reform judicial and security sectors

- Review and assess the current situation of the security sector, including the new security institutions that were created as a result of the conflict.

- Review the current situation of the judicial sector, including the new judicial institutions that were created as a result of the conflict.

- Implement structural reforms to the electoral process, such as publishing election results and information on voters per governorate to allow public scrutiny of such information. This would support the credibility of the elections and increase citizen trust in the State.

- Extend the right to run for elections and to vote to all Syrians regardless of their geographical location. To ensure the effective participation of the diaspora, a fair system should be set that does not favour candidates campaigning inside the Syrian Arab Republic over candidates in the diaspora. This would support the integrity of the elections and make State-society relations representative and inclusive. Special elections among voters in the diaspora, or quotas for diaspora-based candidates, either on the electoral lists or in the Syrian legislature, could address this issue, although other measures might also be effective.

- Implement electoral monitoring, including domestic electoral observation by civil society. This would support transparency and accountability and ensure the integrity of the election process. Having an active role for civil society in political processes in general would contribute to creating civil preparedness for democratic governance and support civil society in playing an active and positive role in State-society relations.

- Ensure that electoral law grants women and members of marginalized groups a full and meaningful opportunity to participate in the electoral process and in democratic governance. This would be in accordance with international standards and would contribute to establishing legitimacy. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, most notably through provisions for reserved seats or quota requirements in national or local legislative bodies, or political party requirements that women and other groups must be placed at or near the top of closed political lists.

- Guarantee the right of representation for all Syrians regardless of professional background through revisiting some of the aspects of candidate categorization, to increase social inclusion and widen political representation of different elements of society.

- Permit political oppositions and ideologically diverse political parties to participate in political processes. This would support widening the political space and pave the way for democratic governance.

- Activate the role of independent media. This would contribute to transparency and accountability and would support engagement between citizens and the State, which would help create a space for democratic governance.

- Develop an effective regulatory framework for political parties that details parties' activities, finances, funding and ethics in order to ensure the integrity of the democratic process.

- Develop effective frameworks to safeguard the rights to freedom of expression and assembly and access to information to ensure voters are well-informed about the candidates and key issues in the election process. This would encourage participation.

Local governance

- Map local governance according to the following factors:
  - ◊ The autonomy of civilian-led local administration.
  - ◊ Mandates and actual powers of local councils versus executive authorities.
  - ◊ The degree of administrative decentralization.
  - ◊ Participation and accountability.
  - ◊ Effective fiscal decentralization.
- Strengthen democratic representation and accountability as well as inclusiveness of women.
- Empower local councils and safeguard their autonomy.
- Enhance the capacity of local government structures.
- Enhance avenues for accountability, participatory planning and monitoring.
- Enhance opportunities for civil society participation in policymaking and their communications and partnership with local governance, and expand the capacity of civil society.
- Strengthen the fiscal abilities of local governing structures.

Social reconciliation, social cohesion and the revival of civil society

06

A. Introduction

Reconciliation is both a means and an end for the transition away from conflict and for peacebuilding. Social reconciliation implies improving ties between members and groups in society in the aftermath of conflict with the hope of a more positive coexistence. Structural or top-down reconciliation relates to institutional transformation, State-building, rewriting the social contract and reforming judicial, security and other institutions. The present chapter focuses on aspects of both social and structural processes along with a discussion on the potential role that can be performed by civil society and media.

The obstacles to reconciliation are many and are intertwined with the various obstacles to the ending of the conflict itself. The immense violence and suffering wrought by the conflict imply that any type of reconciliation is likely to be a long and an ongoing process that is organically linked to the construction of a pluralistic and inclusive national identity that begins with non-violent and democratic national consensus building.

Social reconciliation implies improving ties between members and groups in society in the aftermath of conflict with the hope of a more positive coexistence. Structural or top-down reconciliation relates to institutional transformation, State-building, rewriting the social contract and reforming judicial, security and other institutions.

Attempts at peacebuilding and reconciliation must be sensitive to the narratives of all Syrians, a constant effort to fully understand all parties

As understood by peacebuilding literature, there are multiple forms of violence during conflict: direct violence as a result of armed combat, structural violence due to conditions of poverty, exploitation, fear and need, and cultural violence which legitimizes both direct and structural violence.[223]

Attempts at peacebuilding and reconciliation must be sensitive to the narratives of all Syrians, a constant effort to fully understand all parties. This includes giving attention to the silenced narratives of those marginalized by the din of war. As with other war-torn countries, different sectors of Syrian society have radically different interpretations and narratives about what took place over the past decade. No one story or narrative can summarize the accounts of every Syrian of the conflict, nor do Syrians necessarily subscribe to the grand or master narratives produced by the various warring parties.

The conflict has generated new realities for all Syrians, and undoubtedly created deep cleavages within Syrian society. However, there are important concepts of identity that have evolved over the years, including the following:

- Syrian identity is pluralistic and expressive of Syrian cultural diversity. It cannot be reduced to any one of its components.

• Each Syrian carries multiple identities (including religious, sectarian, gender, ethnic, cultural, class and geographic identities) but equality of citizenship builds towards a common identity.

These common denominators must be bolstered by laws and regulations that emphasize equality, citizenship rights and the right to democratic participation without discrimination based on religion, sect, ethnicity, race or gender and must be seen as an integral process of a new social contract that is connected to wider processes of governance transformation and societal reconciliation.

This new social contract should be based on dialogue between government, citizens, private sector, labour unionizations and other relevant civil society stakeholders. Time and again, Syrian civil society has shown resilience in the face of the conflict. The post-settlement phase should allow Syrian civil society to be a leading actor in social reconciliation. In the past decade, it has shown itself capable.

The importance of media in peacebuilding is also crucial for the post-conflict phase and is discussed in the present chapter. The proliferation of Syrian media outlets has added a welcome diversity to Syrian media landscape. The rise of new media outlets contributed new and diverse ideas. They have contributed to attracting large numbers of people into citizen journalism, online commentary and intellectual life, and have exposed them to others working in similar domains.

However, there have been two main negative consequences. One is that media could contribute to, rather than bridge, the deep schisms in Syrian society. The second main consequence has been a crisis of authenticity and a culture of agitation with partisan news outlets. At the same time, hate speech, demonization of the other and agitation for more violence have become commonplace in many media outlets regardless of political persuasion.

All actors should encourage bridging and collaboration efforts by Syrian civil society, and national, regional and international actors should continue to provide for Syrian pro-peace voices to be amplified.

B. Social cohesion in Syria before the conflict

The question of Syrian identity and social cohesion in Syria is complex. As with other Arab countries, territorial State identity and loyalty compete with supra- and sub-State identities and trans-State networks. This implies that a distinct feature of MENA states is that "inter-state rivalry for leadership of supra-state communities… is endemic, expressed in recurring 'Cold Wars' in which stronger states deploy ideology and identity discourse to win over allies and subvert rival governments".[224]

The modern political borders of Syria were borne out of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire as a result of British and French colonisation. The belief that the current borders of the country were not due to national consensus but legacies of colonial Western intervention, the fragmentation of "historical greater Syria" and the desire for some sort of pan-regional solidarity (if not unity) was a key enduring narrative that shaped Syrian politics before and after the Ba'ath Party came to power. This does not mean there were no strong organic links between the various communities within Syria. In fact, a second enduring narrative is that various ethnic, sectarian and other communities within Syria rejected colonialism, particularly the French mandate designs of further fragmentation

along sectarian lines and chose a unified Syria under the banner of "Pan-Arabism". This, coupled with the reality of tolerance and celebration of the pluralism of Syrian identity, represents a counter trend. Syrians took pride in Syrian identity being pluralistic and inter-communal, and Syrians saw themselves as heirs of millennia of civilization. These two enduring public narratives exist side by side and form a key puzzle of Syrian national identity before the conflict.

However, alongside these were other realities that were marginalized or silenced. Pan-Arabism provided a framework for organizing public life and intertwined with political projects of liberation and unity against Western colonization and as part of the Arab-Israeli struggle. However, as with other States, management of difference was an enduring question. Further, there was a general marginalization of Kurdish ethnic and cultural identity.[225] The embrace of Pan-Arabism in the 1960s onward also coincided with a limited discussion about how the pluralistic society of Syria maps onto political representation and material equality. The plurality of Syria was celebrated constantly but never seriously discussed, to the extent that "invoking sectarian difference" was a well-known punishable crime.[226]

Syrian communities as a whole were not isolated from wider trends taking place in the region, which had seen increased polarization particularly in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq and the increasing instrumentalization of sectarian identity by State and non-State actors. At the same time, economic opening and liberalization coupled with rapid modernization in the region increased people's expectations for reform. Economic opening saw increased flows of goods, services and investment but were also coupled with increasing wealth concentration, elite capture and inequalities of various forms. There are important gaps in public understanding of the fault lines within Syria before the conflict, particularly the realities of semi-urban and rural communities, which have not been studied sufficiently.

The withdrawal of the State in Syria, which accompanied economic reforms, also increased the space for private initiatives and a hesitant "civil society". In some cases, this was composed of business networks wanting to enlarge the scope for market reforms.

In sum, the various communities of Syria did not enter the era of the Syrian conflict with a "blank slate". In the aftermath of the

conflict, the enduring public narratives began to share more space and clash with silenced narratives within Syria as well as regional narratives promoted by Arab media, State and non-State actors, and conflict and sectarian entrepreneurs. The unhealthy trend of lack of

public discussion about Syrian identity prior to the conflict had to contend with a new climate, where discussions about Syrian identity were instrumentalized by various conflict elites in their pursuit of political goals and later, the armed conflict.

C. Human rights violations and gender violence in the conflict

Serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law are common in conflicts. Any starting point for reconciliation must come to terms with the principles of upholding human rights and combatting the culture of violence and impunity.

Rights violations and war crimes are a haunting legacy of the Syrian conflict and lack of accountability is a threat to any attempts at a sustainable peace. The February 2018 Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations Human Rights Council wrote that "civilians have not only been the unintentional victims of violence but have often been deliberately targeted through unlawful means and methods of warfare" (A/HRC/37/72). Arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, torture, and sexual and gender-based violence have all been used against thousands of persons in detention by all parties. Vital civilian infrastructure has been decimated by repeated attacks on medical facilities, schools and markets. The commission went on to state that "no party has abided by its obligations, either under international humanitarian or human rights law, to protect civilians, the infrastructure that protects civilian life and livelihoods or specially protected sites that form the backbone of their communities" (A/HRC/37/72). The Human Rights Council noted that mass arrests, enforced disappearances, torture, and death in custody were disturbingly widespread throughout the country (A/HRC/31/CRP.1).

In turn, a Human Rights Council report on human rights of children revealed the scale of injustice befalling Syrian Children (A /HRC/38/29). Widespread human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law affecting children had been committed by all parties. The scale, scope and gravity of crimes committed against children were shocking.

The prevalence of gender-based violations and various crimes against women requires serious attention. In 2018, the special Human Rights council report on gender-based violence reveals that all parties committed grave violations against women including rape and sometimes gang-rape. Male detainees were raped with objects and subjected to genital mutilation (A/HRC/37/CRP.3). Sexual violence was used to terrorize communities, extract or force confessions, and the conflict also witnessed sexual slavery. As discussed earlier, fear of sexual violence was a significant cause of displacement, and women survivors often found themselves without help and unable to narrate their suffering. As a result of social stigma, it is likely that sexual crimes may have been underreported.

D. Multiple narratives, violations and reconciliation prospects

Peace studies scholar-practitioner, John Paul Lederach, argues that the motto for societies dealing with conflict and extreme violence should not be "forgive and forget" but "remember and change", given that traumatic war-time experiences remain "alive" in the minds of victims and survivors. This is particularly the case in situations of protracted conflict. Policies that do not acknowledge this will therefore be limited in their ability to transform violent conflict and build peace; developing strategies to deal with the present and future requires addressing the past, which many mediation and conflict resolution texts fail to do.

While Fact Finding Missions will allow Syrians to partially reconstruct what has taken place in the past decade, there are also the "personal truths" of how different sectors or individuals experienced the conflict. In the war of narratives promoted by conflict elites, many Syrians have been silenced. Silence in this situation is a political act and a political choice not to engage in the cultural violence of the conflict. Syrians cannot move forward in a peaceful and just manner without coming to terms at least

gradually, with what has taken place over the past decade. As the conflict developed almost all the main actors sought to instrumentalize and politicize factional and subnational identities (such as sectarian, ethnic, tribal and regional identities) and transnational (jihadist) identities in their pursuit of political goals.

Despite the rise of factional, subnational or transnational identities and the fragmentation of the Syrian national identity, most segments of Syrian society are strongly committed to the idea of a unified Syria and unified Syrian identity.

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The din of war and conflict, constant polarization and the very real grievances of the conflict imply that these commitments have no forum to be amplified or built around.

Nevertheless, over the past years various initiatives emerged promoting cooperation and solidarity and have resisted sectarian and exclusionary political polarization, whether inside or outside Syria. These have engaged in new cross-sectarian social formations that established positive initiatives in the field of humanitarian aid without discrimination.

Building lasting peace and establishing stabilizing elements for the post-agreement regime requires addressing sectarian and racist rhetoric and practices, rebuilding an inclusive Syrian identity, institutional rehabilitation and building legitimacy. The negative effects of the conflict on social cohesion cannot be addressed through violent means and arbitrary measures that violate human security.

E. Reconstruction and housing, land and property rights

The large amount of destruction of physical infrastructure, the massive displacement of people within and outside the country, and the rise of the war economy and on the ground ad hoc processes of construction and reconstruction have all created the conditions for significant land and property-based disputes in the country. These factors are cross-sectoral and have economic implications, but they are included in the present chapter due to their centrality to the question of reconciliation. Disputes over land pre-dated the conflict in Syria, and seizure of property as well as the loss of property and housing rights are among the most sensitive issues for many Syrians today.

The Syrian Government as well as other de facto governing powers have passed a series of regulations and laws to govern reconstruction and HLP issues. These laws have unfortunately helped exacerbate rather than lower the potential for conflict and abuse and have a "victor's rules" flavour which entrenches and deepens polarization rather than reduces it. Addressing HLP issues in a fair manner that respects the rights of all Syrians should be central to any

political agreement and transition and its nature will itself enhance or detract from the legitimacy of any peacebuilding phase.

Property and land tenure systems in Syria were complex and consisted of several types of land tenure including: (1) *mulk* (private ownership), (2) *amiri* (State land), (3) *matrukah murfaqah* (State land with collective usage rights), (4) *matrukah mahmiyah* (public land such as public gardens, roads, streets at all levels of governance), and (5) *khaliyah mubaha* (State land that hasn't been delegated), among other types of rights of usage such as renting, sharecropping, mortgage, leasing and others.[227] In reality, these form part of a spectrum and the public-private distinction is blurred due to rent, usufruct and other usage rights. Large amounts of informal housing existed where property ownership was unclear. The conflict has resulted in massive displacement of people from their lands, massive destruction of property and the forced displacement of people after seizing their property. Seizure of property of alleged dissidents has been a practice throughout Syria as has been attempts at forging land deeds.

As with political governance, the Syrian Government has passed a series of laws that address the impact of the conflict and the massive amount of destruction. These laws also regulate the reconstruction process. The Syrian Government has attempted to safeguard property rights through strict monitoring of buying and selling of property. For example, the Ministry of Justice issued a ruling mandating stricter verification of ownership claims to prevent forgeries in purchase and sale agreements (Mandate 20, 17/03/2014), mandating the personal identity card as sole proof of identity for notary publics (Mandate 16, 25/7/2012), mandating the verification of power of attorney privileges (Mandate 15, 24/6/2014) and banning purchase and sale in military zones (Decree 11 of 2016).

At the same time, however, the Government has also passed a series of laws regulating the reconstruction process. These include laws on foreign ownership (Law 11 of 2011), laws and decrees regulating processes of real estate development (Law 25 of 2011, Decree 66 of 2012, Law 23 of 2015 and Law 10 of 2018), a law regulating the removal and destruction of informal housing and building violations (Decree 40 of 2012), a law regulating local administrative development (Decree 19 of 2015) and a law regulating public private partnerships (Law 5 of 2016).

These laws have raised serious concerns.[228] The sequence of Decree 66 of 2012, Law 23

of 2015 and Law 10 of 2018 in particular have caused widespread alarm regarding the possible mishandling including land seizures and property rights deprivations of displaced populations.

The question of housing, land, and property rights is a crucial issue for sustainable peacebuilding and reconciliation. The complexity of the challenges in Syria implies that special attention needs to be paid to this sector moving forward. In particular, efforts at protecting properties abandoned by refugees and IDPs from unlawful use, looting, or destruction are required. It also includes ensuring that displaced persons are aware of their HLP rights and responsibilities and are provided with channels to pursue their rights individually or collectively, including by enabling them to obtain appropriate documentation. This is particularly crucial moving forward as Syria heads for an early recovery phase.

> The question of housing, land, and property rights is a crucial issue for sustainable peacebuilding and reconciliation

F. Media, communications and peacebuilding

1. Media environment prior to 2011

In the last decades, there has been a growing consensus about the key relationship between

media, communications and conflict. If armed combat is implicated in direct violence, and conditions of poverty, exploitation and fear create structural violence, then media and communications can be key drivers of cultural violence. Understanding the media environment before and after 2011 is important in developing

The rise of Syrian television drama in the 1990s and 2000s was somewhat of an exception. Television drama producers had relative freedom and could raise social, political and economic issues that were non-existent in news media

policies to support the role of media and communications in peacebuilding.

Prior to 2011, Syrian print, radio and television news media was tightly controlled by the Syrian Media law (in particular Legislative Decree 108). What was considered acceptable speech was limited to narrow parameters. It is worth noting that article 43 of the Syrian constitution guaranteed the freedom of the press, printing and publishing, the media and its independence in accordance with the law. Political issues, whether in domestic politics or foreign policy, exclusively reflected the views of the Syrian Government. Certain subjects such as the role of the ruling party, the security sector, inter-communal and sectarian relations and anything relating to the State institutions were presented in a manner in line with the views of the Government. The media, if it tackled controversial issues, often dealt with social and economic issues, low-level corruption, or problems of daily life or "citizens' concerns". Even there, however, there was limited discussion of big economic questions such as economic transformations from 2000 to 2010 or reporting on economic outcomes.

In the past, Syrian media was not seen as a contributor to social cohesion, nor a place for public deliberation of key societal concerns, nor a watchdog over the work of the Government or the public and private sector in a meaningful way. Cultural production on the other hand, was less tightly controlled. The rise of Syrian television drama in the 1990s and 2000s was somewhat of an exception. Television drama producers had relative freedom and could raise social, political and economic issues that were non-existent in news media.

The two challenges to this environment prior to 2011 were the rise of Arab and International Satellite television stations in the 1990s and of digital and new media in the 2000s. The Syrian Government did not adapt to this climate. For example, the Media Law was not amended to include digital media despite the existence of about 333 Syrian electronic news media sites. Rather, digital media was incorporated under the Syrian Electronic Crimes Law, particularly within Articles 28, 29 and 30.

2. Media environment post-2011

The onset of the civil unrest in the Arab Region significantly changed the nature of the regional

media environment, and Syria was no exception. It has been argued that the conflict in Syria was "the most socially mediated conflict in history".[229] The proliferation of new and social media initially, alongside the rise of "citizen journalism", was thought to have constructive effects that were widely celebrated as empowering large sectors of Syrians and Arabs who had been left out of the controlled medias.

For Syrians in particular, these new forms of expression represented an unprecedented opportunity for dissident and new voices to be heard. Syrians seemingly went overnight from a tightly controlled media landscape to one that was entirely wide open. The Syrian Government restricted regional or international news coverage within its areas of control and several regional and international agencies left the country by the early months of 2011.[230] Arab or foreign journalists and news stations were either banned or greatly circumscribed. Given that the media allowed in the country was thought to be loyal to the Government, this ironically meant that the preliminary means through which dissidents communicated their messages with the outside world was through alternative and social media.

As a result, media on all sides was instrumentalized for pursuit of the conflict and became part of the propaganda war. Digital media, despite seemingly being open and unfiltered, was in fact curated to present highly partial and distorted accounts of the conflict that was used by different sides for advocacy and mobilization. Both new and traditional media became tools of polarization, disinformation and dehumanization. Domestic and regional satellite media became a key part of the "cultural violence" of the conflict. Media on all sides suffered from a lack of credibility, since reporting was associated with advocacy rather than professionalism and journalistic ethics.

The lasting legacies of instrumentalizing media for war were destructive and form a key obstacle for peacebuilding. Different sectors within Syrian society became insular, following and believing certain news sources, while limiting their exposure to contrary views and networks. The sheer number of conflicting images, videos, posts, accounts and disproven claims contributed to a generalized crisis of credibility. Most importantly, professional, objective and marginal voices that pushed against the grain of polarization were marginalized.

3. Media and communications for peace

However, not all media voices were polarizing, and Syria also saw a proliferation of initiatives that aimed for professional media that would build bridges and contribute to peace and justice rather than dehumanization. These efforts varied in their success and degree of capacity and professionalism, but all shared a common intent: to escape from and provide alternatives to the logic of the conflict.

Research has shown that creative use of communications technology by local communities in war torn societies can support peacebuilding, overcome fear and isolation, build bridges and reform social bonds.[231] In Syria, there have been initiatives taken by some local radio stations which explicitly attempted to act as peacebuilders and bridges between communities. Online groups on social media or social media channels dedicated to food and cuisine were also instrumental in mobilizing the joint collective memory of Syrians and emphasizing their common identity.

There were also examples of Syrian TV drama as a space for Syrians to see their political reality reflected back at them. For example, while in Syria, media generally played a

negative role in the conflict by inciting violence, hate speech and sectarianism, there were also media interventions that challenged the violent discourse dominant in ideological media and contributed to peace efforts. One of the important few examples of the use of media for reconciliation and peacebuilding in the Syrian conflict was the Syrian television drama series Ghadan Naltaqi (We'll Meet Tomorrow) which focuses on the daily lived experiences of a group of displaced Syrians who rent separate rooms in one modest building in Lebanon. The group is composed of individuals coming from different social positions in pre-conflict Syria and representing diverse political views vis-à-vis the conflict. The series was seen as representing "the suffering of every Syrian inside and outside the country".[232]

As a strategy to encourage dialogue and reconciliation, Ghadan Naltaqi's team chose famous actors known for supporting or opposing the Syrian Government and assigned them opposite political positions in the show. Syrian audiences appreciated this strategy as an intervention to encourage audiences to listen to political views that diverge from their own and to acknowledge that no political side is solely responsible for the destruction of Syria.

4. Civil society

The history of civil society in Syria goes back to a very old time, and it can be said that the year 1880 witnessed the establishment of the first association in Damascus, the Quraish Charitable Orphanage Association.

In contemporary history, Syrian civil society limited to humanitarian and charitable work. Unions, syndicates, cooperatives, professional organizations and other forms of civil society had limited space to operate independently. Law 93 of 1969 (Associations Law), established role of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in controlling and monitoring the work of civil society.

Based on the literature, we could differentiate between the three generations of associative work, namely the charitable generation, the enabling generation (development) and the advocacy generation. The "advocacy generation" has two key roles: "supply" – meaning the role of civil society in providing services, implementing local development programmes and assisting government institutions in spreading and expanding their programmes geographically – and "demand", or the generation of pressure and influence on government authorities, or to remove discrimination and inequity of rights for social and cultural groups that are subject to discrimination. Civil society organizations advance their advocacy work by acting as a pressure group on public authorities and policy makers, whether through participation in the process of policy making or influencing these policies through pressure and participation in public campaigns. This type includes all organizations and associations that work in the field of defending individual rights and economic, social and cultural rights, women's rights, marginalized cultural groups and groups, refugees, victims of abuse or adoption of environmental issues, and that work on anti-corruption, integrity of public authorities and elections and community participation among other issues.

According to the basic distinction between the three generations of civil society organizations, we note that civil society organizations in Syria, which enjoyed a kind of space and freedom in their work, belonged to the charitable generation and somewhat the developmental generation after 2000, but the advocacy generation (represented by unions and human rights organizations) was not given adequate space to work. The advocacy generation was almost limited

to associations concerned with the environment and sustainable development, in addition to some associations closely related to the Government, such as the Syrian Trust for Development.

In 2000, the loosening of political restrictions resulted in the emergence of some independent media initiatives as well as a variety of independent public forums and associations. As for the period from 2000 to 2010, a growing number of organizations was formed, reaching 1,074 associations and publicized branches in various Syrian governorates.

In 2010, it was estimated that the NGO sector provided financial support and services worth 6.5 billion SYP, providing assistance to approximately 2.2 million Syrians, or 10 per cent of the population. Just over half of the beneficiaries received health assistance (cash or in-kind), while education and training constituted only 2.3 per cent of all support provided to beneficiaries.[233]

(a) Non-governmental organizations and initiatives since 2011

After 2011, Syrian civil society organizations flourished in an unprecedented fashion, with hundreds of civil society organizations eventually established throughout the country, in neighbouring countries and among the diaspora. Their presence diminished after 2016 as the Syrian Government re-established control in various provinces while organizations outside government control were facing increasing challenges to continue their work.[234] Reviving that role is important.

Some evidence on the impact of civil society representation on the success of peacebuilding has shown that peace agreements are 64 per cent less likely to fail when civil society representatives participate.[235]

Without attempting to comprehensively assess the Syrian civil society experience, we can confidently state that it played a significant role during the conflict yet was stretched beyond capacity. The previous section discussed aspects of new Syrian media, which were a major form of engagement. In addition, Syrian civil society organizations' work revolved around at least three modes of engagement. Each of these contained within them a wide range of Syrian organizations and a spectrum of political opinion, ideologies, successes and failures. The overwhelming majority of these organizations were located in areas outside Syria, such as in Lebanon, Türkiye and Jordan. It is also the case that some organizations attempted to play all three roles described below:

1. *Responsibility for service delivery in areas outside government control.* This role was undertaken either by choice or by default as de facto powers and non-State armed opposition groups in these areas offloaded their responsibility to civil society. This included food aid, healthcare and WASH services, rehabilitation, education and livelihood programmes, and capacity building.

2. *Focusing on social issues and humanitarian advocacy, and raising awareness about gender, ethnic and other injustices confronting Syrians.* Those taking this role were generally intellectual or cultural organizations advocating for civil rights and equal citizenship, lobbying for humanitarian, medical and educational programming and aid, as well as organizations raising awareness about women's status and violence against women.

3. *Explicitly political work.* Organizations taking this role sought to create alternative structures to those in areas controlled by the Government. They generally worked on lobbying, raising awareness and political advocacy, as well as documenting human rights violations and advocating for transitional justice. Professional associations

– such as Free Lawyers, Judges, Writers, Journalists and similar associations – were often also involved in this line of work and sought to create alternatives to institutions.

Nevertheless, Syrian civil society was also confronted with severe challenges. Some of these challenges mirrored those of the conflict. Civil society was confronting repression and then attacks on all sides and the destructive machinery of the conflict. The fragmentation of the country, and new fault lines of conflict refracted themselves onto civil society, and soon multiple fissures emerged.

As Syrian CSOs were a cross section of Syrian society, they included both polarizing organizations as well as those working against the grain of the cultural of violence. The loyalist/opposition binary was increasingly revealing other binaries including secular/religious and urban middle-class professionals/ rural working-class binaries, as well as binaries relating to ethnicity and eventually internal and external organizations.

Syrian CSOs also confronted challenges of funding and patronage, in terms of both securing funding to remain sustainable and active and remaining independent politically and in their objectives from the countries in which they operated or the agendas of their funders.

Syrian CSOs also faced legal barriers for registration in countries outside Syria and were subject to political and other administrative pressures, even forcing them to remove the term "Syria" from their name. Finally, unilateral economic measures have increasingly made it difficult for Syrian CSOs to operate as many saw their bank accounts closed and transactions subjected to de-risking strategies by banks.

G.Policy recommendations

- Engage extensively with Syrians as millions of Syrians have been unable to tell their stories or speak up about their suffering and instead remain silent. However, Syrians' suffering must not be instrumentalized to settle political scores or to wage rhetorical war against different groups.

- Enhance media capacity to enable it to act as a tool of social cohesion, empowerment for the marginalized, cooperation, education and community participation.

- Utilize mainstream television culture to create consensus about the importance of recognizing human rights. Ensure coverage of women's rights, freedom, gender equality, children's rights and education, among other issues.

- Create a legal space for civil society in the Syrian Arab Republic with constitutional provisions that grant the freedom of and safety for civil society.

- Gain knowledge from the experiences of Syrian Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working on professional training, livelihood development and income-generating programmes in neighbouring countries to transfer skills to the Syrian Arab Republic.

- Continue to have civil society participation in the monitoring of all plans connected to the issue of return as well as the monitoring of the political process aimed at ensuring the rights of all Syrians.

- Support the role of CSOs. CSOs have a great opportunity – and a responsibility – to influence the post-conflict phase, at both the design and implementation stages. They are key actors in ensuring that processes have local ownership, in helping raise awareness about certain issues and citizens' interests, and in acting as a tool for social accountability.

Endnotes

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