



**First Year of the New Period in Syria**

# **Expectations, Field Dynamics, Policy Recommendations for the EU and Türkiye**

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May 2026



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May 2026  
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## **“Suriye’de Yeni Dönemin Birinci Yılı : Beklentiler, Saha Dinamikleri ve Politika Önerileri / Suriye Saha Araştırması Raporu”**

(“The First Year of the New Era in Syria: Expectations, Field Dynamics and Policy Recommendations / Syria Field Research Report”)

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(This publication has been prepared by Pros & Cons Research Company with the aim of contributing to the humanitarian aid work to be carried out by SGDD-ASAM. The authors are solely responsible for the content of this publication, and it does not reflect the official view of the SGDD-ASAM)

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# Foreword

As of December 8<sup>th</sup> 2024, a new chapter has started for Syria following years of protracted war, mass displacement, severe destruction of infrastructure, losses in institutional capacity, and deep social fractures. The change that has taken place at the political level has strengthened expectations for peace, stability, and reconstruction in the country, while also creating a new space of hope both within Syria and at the regional and international levels. Nevertheless, the situation on the ground shows that this hope will not automatically turn into lasting improvement, and that humanitarian needs, security risks, infrastructure problems, and economic fragilities continue to persist in a multidimensional manner.

The main purpose of this report is to assess, in a holistic manner, the humanitarian needs, field dynamics, security and infrastructure conditions, and problems related to access to basic services that have emerged in the first year of the new period in Syria; and, in line with this assessment, to establish a realistic and applicable foundation for the activities to be carried out.

The challenges currently faced in Syria are not independent of one another. The shelter crisis, property issues, unexploded ordnance and landmine risks, inadequacies in access to clean water and hygiene, losses in health and education infrastructure, the weakening of income generation activities, and the erosion of social trust are all parts of the same whole. Therefore, any intervention to be developed in one area must be addressed together with the needs and risks in other sectors. While fragmented and short-term responses focused solely on immediate humanitarian needs may help reduce existing vulnerabilities to some extent, they remain insufficient to support sustainable recovery, long-term resilience, and lasting social stability.

As the Association for Social Development and Aid Mobilization (ASAM), our decision to operate in Syria is grounded in the responsibility to assess the needs on the ground through a holistic lens and to develop sustainable responses that place human dignity at the center. From the perspective of our Association, the current situation in Syria is considered a comprehensive field of intervention that requires not only emergency humanitarian assistance, but also the strengthening of local capacity, the enhancement of social resilience, the support of production and employment opportunities, and the restoration of the functionality of basic services.

This report aims to provide a guiding framework for all actors seeking to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the expectations, realities on the ground, and emerging needs observed during the first year of the new period in Syria. We hope that this study will not only help establish ASAM's engagement in Syria on a stronger, more accountable, and more realistic basis, but also contribute to efforts toward building a safe, dignified, and sustainable future for the country.

**İbrahim Vurgun Kavlak**  
Executive Director

# Acknowledgements

The preparation of this report required a multidimensional assessment of the situation in Syria, a meticulous analysis of the information obtained from the field, and intensive teamwork. The effort and dedication demonstrated at every stage of the process were decisive in bringing the report to its final form.

We extend our sincere thanks to Prof. Dr. Serhat Ahmet Erkmen and Dr. Hatice Varol Dağdelen, who prepared this report, for the intensive effort, dedication, field knowledge, and analytical assessments they demonstrated at all stages of the study. Their meticulous research process, comprehensive assessments, and strong field perspective were decisive in the emergence of this study.

We also thank the associations, institutions, organizations, representatives of public institutions, and relevant individuals who contributed to the study by sharing their knowledge, views, and experiences during the research process. The field information, institutional assessments, and local observations shared made an important contribution to addressing the areas of work in a more comprehensive, realistic, and multidimensional manner.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to all individuals and teams who supported aforementioned distinguished authors during the fieldwork carried out in Syria and contributed to the information gathering, observation, and coordination processes in the field. Their assistance under challenging conditions played a vital role in ensuring that the report accurately reflects realities on the ground.

Special recognition is extended to ASAM Syria team who contributed with their knowledge, experience, and field perspectives during the implementation of the study, for their dedicated work in the preparation, coordination, and assessment stages of the report.

We also thank all ASAM staff who provided support at different stages of the report process for their effort, attention, care, and professional contributions in the areas of technical support, coordination, process management, editing, and design.

This report is the result of the collective effort, commitment, and dedication of many individuals. We extend our deepest appreciation to all persons and institutions who contributed to its development.

# Executive Summary

This study aims to analyse the humanitarian situation in Syria within a holistic framework and to address the discussion on stability from a perspective that places human life at the centre. The main approach of the report is that lasting stability cannot be achieved without a systematic approach aimed at improving the living conditions of individuals. In this regard, the study seeks to contribute to the review of current policy approaches by decision-makers and relevant actors.

The research is based on a mixed-methods approach in which quantitative and qualitative methods are used together. Desk-based analyses of international reports, interviews with civil society organisations operating in the field, and direct observations carried out in different regions of Syria constituted the main data sources of the study. In addition, the current situation in areas such as shelter, health, education, livelihoods and security were systematically assessed through a comprehensive survey prepared with the participation of experts and field actors. The data obtained were analyzed comparatively to increase reliability and to present a multi-dimensional picture across the country.

The findings show that mutually reinforcing structural problems continue in many areas in Syria, from security to the economy, and from health to education. Serious vulnerabilities are particularly evident in shelter, health and access to basic services, while the sustainability of partial recoveries observed in education and the economy remains uncertain. It is understood that most existing interventions provide short-term relief, but have limited capacity to generate long-term stability.

Although security in Syria has improved significantly compared to previous years, it would not be accurate to say that the whole country has yet reached an institutionalised and sustainable level of stability. The economic situation stands out as one of the most determining areas of daily life in Syria. Due to the long-standing embargo and war, production capacity has narrowed considerably, income levels have declined, and the economy has moved away from the dynamics of sustainable growth. The rapid increase in the costs of rent, food, energy and basic services causes large segments of the population to face difficulties in meeting their living expenses. Significant external investment is needed to develop agriculture and industry. The fact that the country is in the early stages of its transition process causes foreign investors to act cautiously.

For this reason, the expected economic recovery has not yet been achieved. When the difficulties in shelter, problems in WASH infrastructure, serious shortcomings in the health system and deep losses in the education system are considered together with economic fragility, it is seen that the humanitarian situation in Syria involves multidimensional and mutually reinforcing systemic problems. In particular, weaknesses in education and health also limit the long-term capacity for economic recovery.

Within this framework, the study emphasises the need for a holistic transformation approach that does not completely exclude humanitarian assistance, but reduces aid dependency, and places production, employment and institutional capacity at the centre. It argues that security, economic development, social cohesion and state capacity in Syria need to be strengthened simultaneously; otherwise, progress in any one area will not be lasting. Based on this approach, the report develops policy recommendations, as presented in the table below, on the basis of a Holistic and Systematic Humanitarian Approach Based on Capacity Development, Reconstruction and Economic Empowerment.

## Policy Recommendations for a Holistic and Systematic Humanitarian Approach Based on Capacity Development, Reconstruction and Economic Empowerment

Policy Recommendation Area	Policy Recommendation	Expected Result / Impact
<b>State Capacity</b>	Strengthening the institutional capacity of public institutions, local authorities and law enforcement agencies, with due consideration for transparency and accountability.	Ensuring effective public administration, continuity of security services and institutional stability.
<b>Reconstruction Process</b>	Developing regional, multi-sectoral and holistic reconstruction programmes instead of partial and short-term projects.	Ensuring more effective use of resources and lasting physical and social recovery.
<b>Economic Recovery</b>	Implementing policies that increase production capacity, particularly in agriculture and industry, support local production and create employment.	Ensuring more effective use of resources and lasting physical and social recovery.
<b>Humanitarian Assistance – Development Balance</b>	Continuing humanitarian assistance in the short term, while gradually transitioning to a production- and employment-oriented development model in the medium and long term.	Acceleration of economic recovery, reduction of unemployment and improvement of income levels.
<b>Security and Political Process</b>	Strengthening inclusive political dialogue mechanisms and developing negotiation platforms that include different actors.	Reducing aid dependency, strengthening economic resilience and creating sustainable living conditions.
<b>Return Processes</b>	Implementing integrated and planned return strategies that include shelter, security, health, education and economic opportunities.	Making returns sustainable and reducing the risk of reverse migration.
<b>Social Cohesion</b>	Implementing inclusive, context-sensitive and long-term social cohesion policies.	Reducing social tensions, preventing polarisation and strengthening social integration.

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# Introduction

Almost no one expected that the Detering Aggression Operation, which began in Syria on 27 November 2024, could bring an end in a very short time to the authoritarian Baathist regime that had ruled the country for more than 40 years. For almost all actors, from the planners of the military operation to the external supporters who provided it with material and political support, what would happen after the liberation of Aleppo from the Assad Government was uncertain. However, a combination of factors changed the course of history in Syria: the decay of the Assad Government, the serious blows suffered by Iran in Lebanon and Syria, the weakening of Russia's military presence in Syria due to the war in Ukraine, and the view among anti-Assad opposition forces that "such an opportunity may never come again" against a collapsed opponent. The civil war in Syria, which had lasted for 13 years, ended in 12 days.

As in many states that have experienced prolonged conflict, one part of society in Syria began to act with a sense of victory, enthusiasm and hopeful expectation, while another part started to observe developments with a sense of anxiety caused by defeat and uncertainty. On 8 December 2024, Syria did not experience only a change of power. For decades, Syria's governance had been in the hands of a group of family-based networks that supported the social alliance they had built among minorities through the military and civilian bureaucracy. The former regime was not built on a single ethnic, religious, ideological or class basis. Similarly, the actors who ended the former regime did not come to power on the basis of a single social group, class or ideology. On the contrary, from 2011 onwards, the most important common point bringing together people from rural areas of different Syrian provinces and from the suburbs of cities was the aim of changing the former government. It remains unclear what kind of administration these different groups, united around a shared strategic objective rather than a common ideology or economic expectation, will build in place of the former regime, or even what kind of administration they plan to build. However, two basic points are clearly visible. The first is the new administration's effort to move closer to the Western world without alienating the former regime's friends, such as Russia and China. The second is that the social groups on which political power in the new period seeks to rely are different from those of the past. While the state in Syria is trying to reorganize itself on the basis of social, political and even economic transformation, the people are trying to adapt to the new conditions.

Before 8 December 2024, life in Syria continued under extremely difficult conditions due to the corrupt political and economic order of the Assad Government, the complete devastation of the economy by the civil war, and the destruction of residential areas as a result of the conflict. Since 2011, millions of Syrian citizens had left the country and tried to build new lives under difficult conditions. For much of the world, Syria had become associated mainly with migration, radicalisation and war. At the current stage, it can be said that a perception has become dominant along the following lines: "The war is over; Syria is returning to the international community; things will gradually improve from now on; humanitarian assistance and economic support will meet the needs of Syria and Syrians."

However, what is clear is that, while the state is being rebuilt in Syria, the emergence of different needs is being overlooked. After years in which the war devastated the economy, cities, social structure and collective psychology, assuming that Syria's problems ended with the change of power is not only a moral problem, but also a flawed strategic perspective.

For real stability to be achieved in Syria, there is a need for an established political order, social consensus, economic recovery and the prevention of new conflicts. This study has been prepared in response to the need to develop a realistic and comprehensive strategic vision. However, as can be seen throughout the study, the report highlights a different strategic perspective rather than focusing mainly on security issues such as the political situation in Syria, the components of the government, the structure of the army, balances among armed groups, military conflicts, the presence of radical groups, and the transformation of Syria into an arena of competition through external interventions.

This study focuses on human life as the basis for a broader strategic vision for Syria. The country has gone through a severe period of conflict; means of production have been destroyed; places of residence have been damaged; access to the most basic human needs has started to be seen as a "luxury"; and the trauma of conflict has weakened the will to live together among some segments of society. Under these conditions, rebuilding life can no longer be seen only as the outcome or responsibility of an individual's own capacity. For this reason, the core perspective of this study is that improving human life must be placed at the foundation of building a safe and stable order in Syria in the long term.

## **Purpose of the Research**

Within the framework of the basic perspective outlined above, the overall aim of the research is to present an up-to-date picture of the humanitarian situation in different regions of Syria from a holistic perspective, and to contribute to a review of the ways in which relevant actors think about security and stability.

For this reason, the report does not provide detailed data for each individual province. It also avoids allowing the main focus of the report to be overshadowed by lengthy presentations of data and statistics gathered during the study. Instead, the data and statistics obtained through the method described below were brought together and analysed from a holistic country-wide perspective.

At the same time, the study also seeks to draw attention to the specific conditions experienced in some regions of Syria. In addition to field observations carried out during the study, interviews with representatives of civil society organisations operating in different provinces provided information on region-specific conditions and needs. In this way, while the study remained focused on its overall aim, care was taken not to overlook specific issues.

## Method, Scope and Limitations of the Report

The methodology of the project is based on a mixed-methods approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. The project methodology can be said to have three main components: desk-based data analysis involving international reports and survey work, interviews with NGOs and stakeholders, and field observations / local capacity assessment.

As part of the desk-based research, the study systematically reviewed analyses and reports prepared by internationally recognised research centres and think tanks, reports and situation analyses published by international organisations, information shared by humanitarian organisations on humanitarian needs assessments and projects, data made public by Syrian official authorities, reliable Syria-based news sources, and technical documents in certain sectors. The main open sources consulted during the study include, by way of example: the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)<sup>1</sup>, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)<sup>2</sup>, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)<sup>3</sup>, the World Health Organization (WHO)<sup>4</sup>, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)<sup>5</sup>, the International Organization for Migration (IOM)<sup>6</sup>, the Health Sector<sup>7</sup>, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)<sup>8</sup>, the International Labour Organization (ILO)<sup>9</sup>, the European Commission<sup>10</sup>, the European Union Agency for Asylum<sup>11</sup>, the Norwegian Refugee Council<sup>12</sup>, relevant sector working groups, and field notes of independent research centres.

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<sup>1</sup> Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Response in Southern Syria - Situation Report No. 2.  
<https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-humanitarian-response-southern-syria-situation-report-no-2-06-october-2025>

<sup>2</sup> The Impact of The Conflict in Syria  
[https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-02/undp-sy-seia-final-24022025\\_compressed.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-02/undp-sy-seia-final-24022025_compressed.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 15, 30 September 2025 <https://www.unicef.org/documents/syrian-arab-republic-humanitarian-situation-report-no-15-30-september-2025>

<sup>4</sup> Public Health Situation Analysis (PHSA) <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/public-health-situation-analysis---syrian-arab-republic>

<sup>5</sup> Syria Governorates IDPs and IDP Returnees Overview  
<https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syria-governorates-idps-and-idp-returnees-overview-27-nov-2025>  
Overview of Refugee and Asylum-Seeker Population in Syria (As of 30 Nov 2025)  
<https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/overview-refugee-and-asylum-seeker-population-syria-30-nov-2025>

Violations against civilians in Coastal and Western Central Syria in January - March 2025  
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iici-syria/report-coi-syria-august2025>

IDP Movement Intentions Survey - Syria <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/idp-movement-intentions-survey-syria>

<sup>6</sup> Syria Regional Refugee Resilience and Response Plan 2025  
<https://crisisresponse.iom.int/response/syria-regional-refugee-resilience-and-response-plan-2025>

<sup>7</sup> Health Sector Syria - Health Sector Bulletin - August 2025  
<https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/health-sector-syria-health-sector-bulletin-august-2025>

<sup>8</sup> International Migration Outlook 2025  
[https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/international-migration-outlook-2025\\_ae26c893-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/international-migration-outlook-2025_ae26c893-en.html)

<sup>9</sup> Syria: Promoting decent work in time of transition ILO’s programme of Support (POS)  
<https://www.ilo.org/publications/syria-promoting-decent-work-time-transition>

<sup>10</sup> Humanitarian Implementation Plan (HIP) Syria Regional And Lebanon Crises  
[https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/hip2024/echo\\_syr\\_bud\\_2024\\_91000\\_v8.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/hip2024/echo_syr_bud_2024_91000_v8.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Country Guidance Syria <https://www.euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-syria>  
COI Report - Syria: Country Focus <https://www.euaa.europa.eu/coi/syria/2025/country-focus/coi-report-syria-country-focus-july-2025>

<sup>12</sup> Beyond return: Ensuring sustainable recovery & (re)-integration in Syria  
<https://www.nrc.no/resources/reports/beyond-return-ensuring-sustainable-recovery--re-integration-in-syria>

Although the review of open sources was dominant, especially at the initial stage of the study, the later stages focused on NGO consultations and institutional information gathering in order to produce an original study. Within this framework, interviews were conducted with local and international NGOs actively operating in Syria. Some of these interviews were held face to face at the offices of the relevant NGOs in Aleppo, Damascus and Idlib, while others were conducted online.

Throughout the study, interviews were carried out with representatives, staff members and project managers from a total of 28 organisations, including UN agencies, national and international associations and foundations<sup>13</sup>. Through these interviews, humanitarian needs in different provinces, key problems, barriers to access to services, regional differences in needs, various challenges encountered, and gaps in critical sectors were identified.

The data obtained from NGOs include both quantitative dimensions, such as numbers of beneficiaries, service coverage rates and categories of needs, and qualitative dimensions, such as operational challenges, local community dynamics and security restrictions. In addition, face-to-face meetings were held with some state institutions working in the fields of education and health in Idlib and Aleppo, and the views of the competent authorities on the needs analysis were consulted.

The third methodological pillar of the project consisted of field observations and local capacity analysis. During the study, the project team had the opportunity to conduct observations in some areas of Aleppo, Idlib, Damascus, Latakia, Hama, Homs, Deir ez-Zor and Quneitra. However, it would be misleading to claim that equally detailed observations were conducted in every governorate. More extensive and detailed observations were possible in Aleppo, central Damascus and Idlib due to geographical proximity, logistical advantages, the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) hosted there, the level of destruction they had suffered, the willingness of NGOs to cooperate, and the security situation. By contrast, observations were also carried out on the western bank of Deir ez-Zor, in the northern rural and mountainous areas of Latakia and in part of the city centre, in areas of Quneitra not under the control of the Israeli Army, in northern Hama, and in the eastern rural areas of Homs, although not in as much detail as in the three governorates mentioned above. During these visits, first-hand observations were made in areas such as the level of damage in settlements, including housing<sup>14</sup>, schools, health centres and water infrastructure, local administrative and technical capacity, access to services, security risks, return trends and demographic mobility. Field observations played a critical role in comparing, verifying and further detailing the findings obtained from NGOs.

In addition to the data obtained through the three main methods outlined above—desk-based analysis, NGO consultations and institutional information gathering, and field observations—a survey was also administered to a group that may be described as “key informants” in Syria.

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<sup>13</sup> We would like to sincerely thank the NGOs and NGO representatives who agreed to be interviewed and supported the project. Since no consent mechanism was established for the use of their names within the scope of the study, the names of these NGOs have not been explicitly mentioned in the report. However, if this information is requested for use in another academic study, the author may be contacted, and support will be provided in obtaining permission from the relevant NGOs for the use of their names.

<sup>14</sup> Throughout this study, the concept of housing will refer to currently usable places of residence that consist of four walls and a roof and have not been destroyed due to war or other causes. However, it should be underlined that in many parts of Syria, people continue to live in heavily damaged buildings or building remnants; throughout this study, these will be referred to as heavily damaged buildings.

The survey was prepared by adapting the question set developed by the Association for Social Development and Aid Mobilization (SGDD/ASAM) to the situation on the ground. In order to understand the current situation in the areas of shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), health, education, livelihoods, camp life, and security/justice, 32 participants, including field workers, NGO representatives and regional experts, assessed 184 different indicators and rated the current situation in their provinces on a scale from 1 to 5. The 184-question survey was analysed through an artificial intelligence-based method, with the aim of making the results as objective as possible. In summary, open-source information, field interviews, observations and survey results were brought together, making it possible to conduct a multi-layered analysis of the changing humanitarian and socio-institutional structure in Syria. Within this framework, the study provided a comparative framework, particularly in areas such as population mobility, displacement, damage levels, access to basic services, security risks and local governance capacity. All collected data were classified under the themes of WASH, shelter, health, education and security on the basis of thematic analysis. The consistency of information obtained from NGOs, international reports and field observations was checked, and multi-source verification, or triangulation, was used. In this way, the reliability of the findings presented on Syria was strengthened.

As with all studies, this study also has certain limitations. First, it should be underlined that during the project implementation period, from 1 September to 1 December 2025, the project team was not able to access areas controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) or Sweida Governorate. After the completion of the fieldwork and the start of the report-writing phase, developments in January 2026 made it possible to conduct observations in areas that could not previously be visited, namely Raqqa, eastern Deir ez-Zor, southern Hasakah Governorate and parts of north-eastern Hasakah. However, since there was no opportunity to conduct comprehensive interviews during these observations, the economic and humanitarian situation in these areas continued to remain outside the scope of the report. Nevertheless, the security situation in these areas was partially taken into account in the report within the framework of the general assessments.

The report also has other limitations. For example, it should be noted that the team could not visit some locations that were known to have been affected by destruction, as the safety of the fieldwork could not be ensured. Since the project was carried out in a context where conflict conditions continued and access restrictions existed between regions, certain data limitations were encountered. Other factors also constituted limitations of the project, including the length of the data collection process in Syria, the size of the country, the fact that some datasets had not yet been fully developed by official institutions, and the reluctance of some institutions to share data for their own reasons. For this reason, the analysis was strengthened through multi-source verification. Conflicting information was assessed comparatively and reflected in the final findings. At the same time, it should be kept in mind that there is also a hopeful environment in which the atmosphere of trust that may emerge after the publication of the report could facilitate the collection of first-hand data.

# Security Atmosphere in Syria

There is no doubt that the security situation in Syria is better than it was on 8 December 2024. Only about one year ago, daily clashes of varying intensity were taking place between the forces of the former regime and opposition groups in an area stretching from Idlib to the northern countryside of Aleppo. The city centre of Idlib and settlements to its south were exposed to mortar or artillery fire almost every other day. The conflict dynamic was not limited to Idlib and its surrounding areas. Clashes could also occur between the SDF and what was then known as the Syrian National Army. Armed confrontations targeting towns and districts such as Tal Rifaat, Manbij, Jarabulus and Al Bab had become routine. In the large arid area east of Homs, ISIS militants were attacking Syrian regime elements. In addition, Iranian-backed militia groups spread across different parts of the country played a destabilising role rather than contributing to order. Moreover, Syria had become a centre of production and a logistical hub for synthetic drugs. Drug trafficking networks that the former government tolerated, and at times even supported covertly, had become one of the main elements of organised violence in Syria<sup>15</sup>.

In summary, one year ago, Syria was facing a major security problem shaped by clashes between the former government and opposition groups, attacks by terrorist organisations, and the activities of organised criminal networks. For this reason, travelling to Syria was considered unsafe not only for foreigners, but also for Syrians themselves.

At the end of one year, it would not be wrong to say that Syria has become a safer country compared to the previous period. Military clashes inside the country now create a threat only in very limited areas. With three major exceptions — Latakia in March 2025, Sweida in July 2025 and Aleppo in January 2026 — city centres have not been the scene of military conflict. These incidents of violence caused many deaths but did not turn into prolonged conflict.

There are no aircraft, helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicles or missile launchers bombing provinces, districts or towns across the country. Although terrorist attacks continue in some areas, the total number of terrorist incidents has decreased significantly compared to previous years. Following the developments in January 2026, the likelihood of clashes between government forces and armed groups that still maintain their presence has become limited to certain areas only.

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<sup>15</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum (EUA), *Country Guidance: Syria* (Valletta: EUA, 2025).  
European Union Agency for Asylum (EUA), *COI Report – Syria: Country Focus* (Valletta: EUA, 2025).

In addition, there has been a significant improvement in public order in the city centres of many governorates. Although security problems caused by ordinary and organised crime still exist in the rural areas of some governorates, it can be said that life is safer, especially in city centres. Roads are generally safe in most areas, except for the area between eastern Homs and Deir ez-Zor, and the rural areas of Hasakah, Raqqqa and Daraa governorates. Significant progress has been made in the re-establishment of security forces and law enforcement agencies.

Despite all this, it would not be accurate to say that security problems in Syria have completely ended. Following the events that took place in late 2025 and early 2026, it is an undeniable fact that ISIS has once again become a terrorist threat that needs to be taken seriously in Syria. In addition, security problems continue in some governorates due to factors such as drug trafficking networks and organised criminal groups, pro-former regime armed groups, and the limited capacity of law enforcement agencies across the country. Because these security problems make it difficult to assess the whole country on the same scale, the most appropriate classification for evaluating the impact of security issues on daily life would be to assess the country by geographical regions.

### **SECURITY SITUATION IN WESTERN SYRIA AND THE COASTAL REGION**

As noted in the introductory section of the study, where the scope and limitations were discussed, it was not possible to conduct a detailed study in the area east of the Euphrates River. For this reason, the security analysis concerning northern Syria will not cover the area east of the Euphrates. At the same time, it can be said that the Syrian Government-affiliated security forces' assumption of control, from mid-January 2026 onwards, over areas in Raqqqa, Hasakah and Deir ez-Zor that were previously controlled by the SDF is likely to lead to an improvement in the security situation in these areas in the short and medium term. However, ISIS attacks that took place in these governorates throughout 2025 have been observed to continue even after control of these areas changed hands. As opportunities for observation in the region were limited, and the available data are not yet sufficient for a comprehensive assessment, the term "northern Syria" in the security analysis of this study will be used to cover Idlib and Aleppo governorates. This does not mean, however, that the security situation in other governorates has been ignored. In the near future, if new observations can be conducted, the integration between the Syrian Government and the SDF is completed, and reliable data on the security situation in the region can be collected, it may become possible to carry out sound analyses of the governorates that were left outside the scope of this study. However, due to the limitations mentioned above, the security analysis of this study will cover Idlib and Aleppo. Even in this case, due to the specific conditions of Idlib and Aleppo, the security situation in these two governorates should be analysed separately.

### **SECURITY SITUATION IN IDLIB**

Compared to most parts of Syria, Idlib is by far the safest city. Although ISIS carried out terrorist attacks in some surrounding settlements east of Idlib in November and December, when the past year is considered as a whole, it can be said that the terrorist threat in Idlib has remained at a

minimal level<sup>16</sup>. However, the presence of individuals targeted by the international coalition in Idlib over the past year shows that some radical figures are still present in the governorate. It should be underlined, however, that these radical figures and the small groups they lead do not create a major problem for the overall security situation in Idlib. The general security situation in Idlib can be described as the best example across Syria. Cases of ordinary crime have declined, and the activities of organised criminal groups have largely been brought under control. Activities such as robbery, kidnapping, extrajudicial executions and ransom incidents, which are seen in some other governorates, appear to occur at a significantly lower level in Idlib.

The most important current security problem in Idlib stems from unexploded ordnance, improvised explosive devices and landmines left over from the civil war.<sup>17</sup>

The rural areas located to the south and east of the city were, until recently, areas that directly formed part of the front line. As returns to these areas have accelerated, explosive remnants from the previous period have become a major security problem. As it is not known how and in what pattern landmines and other explosives were placed in agricultural areas, and as thousands of explosive items are scattered across the region, many people have been injured or killed. Those most affected by this situation are people collecting metal to make a living and children working in the fields. This is not only a security-related problem in Syria, but also an issue that prolongs the duration and increases the cost of reconstruction activities in some areas. In particular, this is one of the most important problems delaying the reconstruction needed for people living in camps to return to their former places of residence. Along with Deir ez-Zor, Idlib is one of the areas where this problem is most severe.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN ALEPPO

Unlike Idlib, it would not be accurate to assess Aleppo within a single framework. Aleppo, one of Syria's largest governorates in terms of surface area, is also among the country's largest governorates in terms of population and economic size. However, the main factor that makes it necessary to assess the security situation in Aleppo in detail and by dividing it into different areas is that some parts of the governorate are still conflict zones.

Until one year ago, the northern countryside of Aleppo, including Afrin, Azaz, Jarabulus and Al Bab, was under the control of the Türkiye-backed Syrian National Army. Today, this area is largely safe. Different armed opposition groups that were previously present in the area have been integrated into the Syrian Army. In addition, security forces in this area are actively operating under the Syrian Ministry of Interior. There is no direct conflict in the northern districts and towns of Aleppo, and public order has also been established. However, it is not possible to say exactly the same for eastern Aleppo.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *Humanitarian Situation Reports 2025: Syria* United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Response in Southern Syria – Situation Report No. 2* (New York: OCHA, 2025). United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 15* (30 September 2025).

World Health Organization (WHO), *Public Health Situation Analysis (PHSA): Syria* (Geneva: WHO, 2025).

<sup>17</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum. Country Guidance: Syria – Comprehensive update 2025 (6th ed.). Publications Office of the European Union. (December 2025).

In Manbij district, located in north-eastern Aleppo, many terrorist attacks took place until March 2025<sup>18</sup>. However, after May 2025, the district became safer.

At the same time, Deir Hafr, located in eastern Aleppo, turned into a frontline between the Syrian Army and the SDF throughout 2025. Following the operation launched by the Syrian Army in January 2026 to remove the SDF from the areas it controlled, this town was brought under security control. Since then, this line in eastern Aleppo has generally become safer.

There is no conflict dynamic in western Aleppo. However, in the centre of Aleppo, incidents of violence occurred from time to time during 2025 around two neighbourhoods that were under SDF control, namely Ashrafiyeh and Sheikh Maqsoud. These two neighbourhoods had remained under SDF control for nearly 10 years until they came under the control of Syrian security forces as a result of operations carried out by the Syrian Government in early January 2026.<sup>19</sup> Although open sources reported that YPG militants withdrew from these neighbourhoods on 1 April 2025 in line with the agreement reached between the Syrian Government and the SDF on 10 March 2025, field observations showed that entry to and exit from these neighbourhoods continued to be controlled by the SDF until January 2026. Although this did not create a general security problem within the city, clashes occurred several times during the year between the Syrian Army and security forces on the one hand, and SDF militants on the other.<sup>20</sup> Some security personnel, SDF militants and civilians were killed or injured in these clashes. However, after the Syrian Security Forces took control of the neighbourhoods, there was a visible improvement in the security situation in both areas.<sup>21</sup>

The main security problem within Aleppo is related to public order incidents in the city. Observations and interviews conducted in Aleppo indicate that crime has increased in some neighbourhoods of the city. While these are generally ordinary crimes, a significant increase has been observed particularly in kidnappings for ransom.<sup>22</sup>

Although this situation is most likely a result of rapid population growth and deep income inequalities, it also appears to reflect the failure to ensure transitional justice. It is notable that there has been a systematic wave of violence against individuals who directly participated in the conflict on the side of the former government and who have not yet faced prosecution for past crimes. These incidents, particularly in central Aleppo, generally target people who were previously members of the security forces, the army or pro-government militia groups, but who have not yet been tried. This situation creates political and psychological pressure on a segment of the population in Aleppo city centre.

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<sup>18</sup> Anadolu Ajansı (AA), "The PKK/YPG terrorist organization is carrying out attacks on the Manbij district," 24 December 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/teror-orgutu-pkk-ypg-munbic-ilcesine-saldirilar-duzenliyor/3433144>

<sup>19</sup> Euronews Turkish, "Syrian state news agency: SDF attacked civilians in Aleppo," 22 December 2025, <https://tr.euronews.com/2025/12/22/suriye-devlet-haber-ajansi-sdg-halepte-sivillere-saldiridi>

<sup>20</sup> Bianet, "Syria: Clashes between the SDF and the army in Aleppo's Kurdish neighbourhoods" <https://bianet.org/haber/suriye-halep-in-kurt-mahallelerinde-sdg-ve-ordu-arasinda-catismalar-314812>

<sup>21</sup> (Although Ayn al-Arab/Kobani district is part of Aleppo, it had to be excluded from the security analysis since no fieldwork could yet be conducted in this locality throughout the study. However, it should be noted that, should the SDF and its affiliated structures fail to fully integrate into all institutions of the Syrian state, this district could become one of the most critical links in a potential conflict dynamic.)

<sup>22</sup> According to the interview data

The final security issue in Aleppo that needs to be carefully assessed is terrorist activity linked to ISIS. Although ISIS remained quiet in and around Aleppo for a long period, it entered a visible phase of reactivation from December 2025 onwards. ISIS attacks in Aleppo have mostly taken the form of hit-and-run attacks against security forces on roads around the city. However, on 31 December, security forces prevented at the last moment a suicide bombing attempt targeting Christians who wanted to celebrate New Year in Aleppo. Although the organisation's attacks have so far mostly targeted security forces, the possibility of an increase in attacks against minorities in Aleppo, particularly Christians, should not be overlooked in the coming period, especially with the aim of undermining the civilian population's sense of security.

**Infographic 1:** Map of Aleppo and the Current General Security Situation in Aleppo



## SECURITY SITUATION IN WESTERN SYRIA AND THE COASTAL REGION

The area referred to as Western Syria and the Coastal Region should not be assessed only according to the boundaries of the existing governorates. In this region, Latakia and Tartus governorates, as well as the settlements and rural areas located in the western parts of Hama and Homs, should be considered together. The main reason for this approach is that the area extending from the Mediterranean Sea to the mountainous region west of Hama and Homs has a relative geographical and demographic continuity.

The coastal areas of Syria are generally considered to be the main homeland of the Arab Alawites, who constituted the most important social base of the former regime. However, despite internal displacement, forced displacement and migration out of the country during the civil war, Sunni Arabs and Turkmens remain demographically dominant in the mountainous area stretching from Idlib to Latakia, along the coastal strip northwest of Latakia, at the far end of the Turkish border, and in some towns of Tartus and in Baniyas. Arab Alawites constitute the overwhelming majority of the population in central Latakia, in some districts and sub-districts including Jableh,

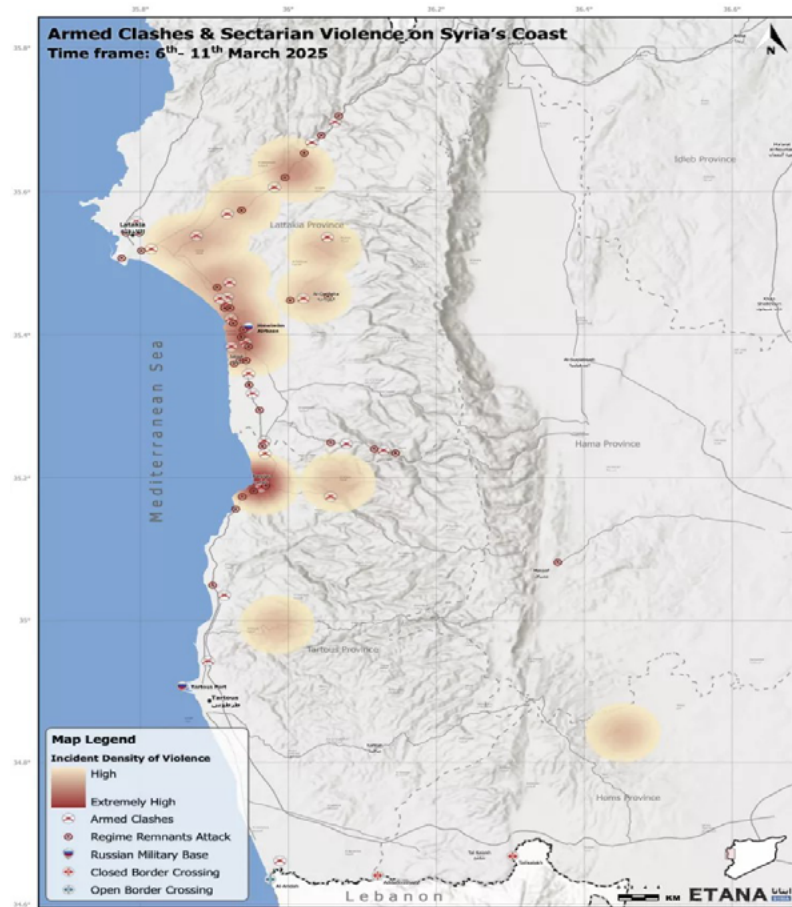
in the mountainous areas of western Hama and western Homs, and along the coastal strip and some inland areas of Tartus. The main reason for providing this detailed explanation is that Latakia and Tartus are often prioritised as the core region on which the former regime relied. This, in turn, can lead to errors in social and political analyses, especially regarding security and migration dynamics.

The area that may be referred to as the Coastal Region has been one of the places where overall security has been most problematic since the change of power in Syria. In particular, as a result of the rapid collapse of the former regime, dozens of officials and hundreds of individuals who were members of the Assad Government's security forces and who had committed many crimes during the long period of conflict fled towards this region. This led the security forces of the new government to focus on the area. Between January and March 2025, intensive arrests and pressure on the families of former regime supporters eventually led, with external provocation, to the emergence of the first uprising against the new government in Syria. During the uprising that took place between 6 and 8 March 2025, many insurgents, security personnel and civilians lost their lives. However, especially after the armed group that initiated the uprising was suppressed, the massacre of civilians by some armed groups, including members of the security forces, caused tensions in the region to continue up to the present.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Al Jazeera, "Syria clashes: What happened", 10 March 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/10/syria-clashes-what-happened>  
United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "UN Syria Commission finds March coastal violence was widespread", August 2025  
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/08/un-syria-commission-finds-march-coastal-violence-was-widespread-and>

Map 1: Areas of Conflict in the Coastal Region<sup>24</sup>



At present, although there is a heavy presence of security forces across the entire Coastal Region, attacks are being carried out, especially in rural areas, by militant groups formed by remnants of the former regime's security forces. In addition, security operations have revealed the transfer of weapons, explosives and ammunition from this region to Lebanon and from Lebanon into the region.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, it can be said that efforts are being made to prepare the ground for a new uprising in this region through external intervention. However, the security problem in this region is not limited to this issue.

In the aforementioned region, cases of kidnapping, extrajudicial execution and armed attack frequently occur, often targeting a specific ethnic, religious or sectarian group. The targeted population is the Arab Alawites, who constitute the majority in the region. Although security forces are trying to bring the region under control through operations, it is observed that some unidentified groups are carrying out a campaign of violence that directly targets civilians and

<sup>24</sup> Etana Syria. (2025, 8 Nisan). *BRIEF: Armed Clashes & Sectarian Violence on Syria's Coast*. Etana Syria. <https://etanasyria.org/brief-armed-clashes-sectarian-violence-on-syrias-coast/>

<sup>25</sup> Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), "Local Developments" <https://sana.sy/tr/locals/313996/>

aims to push the Alawite population living in the Coastal Region to leave the area.<sup>26</sup> This situation has caused many families from the region to move either to major city centres or out of the country in recent months. It should be underlined that, in particular, those who have relatives abroad have been observed to leave the country through legal or irregular means.

The region may become safer once a transitional justice mechanism begins to function in a meaningful way. However, the Coastal Region is the area most vulnerable to external provocation, provocative incidents, revenge attacks and social tensions.

**Infographic 2: Current General Security Situation in the Coastal Region**



## SECURITY SITUATION IN SOUTHERN OF SYRIA

Unlike northern and western Syria, southern Syria does not constitute a shared social, demographic, geographical or economic whole. In this area, which is geographically smaller than other regions, different security dynamics come to the fore in each of the governorates of Quneitra, Daraa and Sweida.

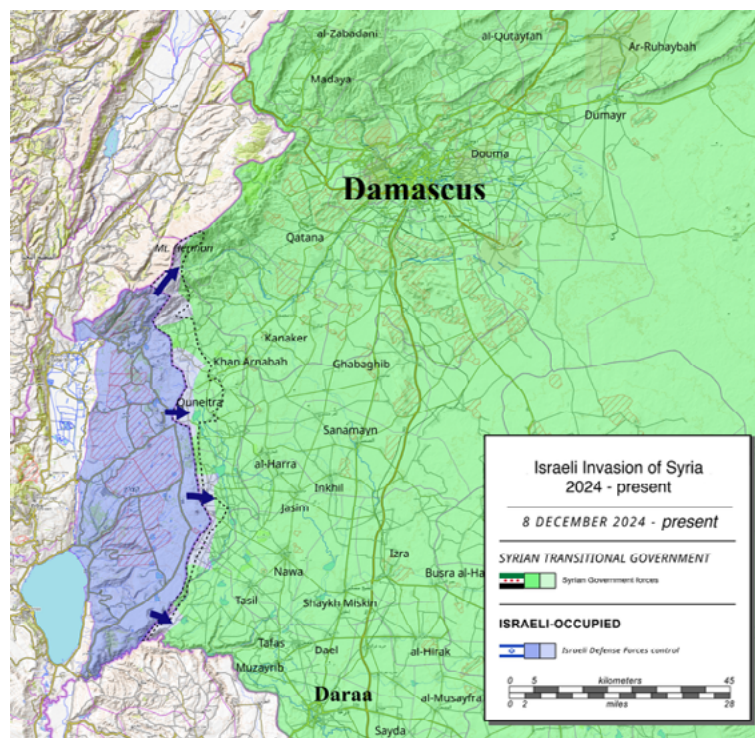
The most important security dynamic in Quneitra is Israel's occupation of Syrian territory.<sup>27</sup> From the moment the change of power took place in Syria, Israel directly targeted the Syrian

<sup>26</sup> Amnesty International, "Syria: Authorities must investigate abductions of Alawite women and girls", July 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/07/syria-authorities-must-investigate-abductions-of-alawite-women-and-girls/>  
United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Syria: UN experts alarmed by targeted abductions and disappearances of Alawites", July 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/07/syria-un-experts-alarmed-targeted-abductions-and-disappearances-alawite>

The New Arab, "Three members of one family kidnapped and killed in Syria's Latakia", 2025, <https://www.newarab.com/news/three-members-one-family-kidnapped-killed-syrias-latakia>  
<sup>27</sup> TRT World, "Israeli forces raid village in Syria's Quneitra province in latest sovereignty violation", 2025, <https://www.trtworld.com/article/55c8eae280dd>  
ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project). Mapping Territorial Control in Syria. <https://acleddata.com/series/mapping-territorial-control-syria>

army's heavy weapons, air defence systems and air power through military operations. As a result, the Syrian Army lost a large part of its military capacity and capabilities. However, Israel's military activities inside Syria did not remain limited to this. Israel occupied the western countryside of Quneitra Governorate in southern Syria along the Lebanese border and built military bases in the area. It also took control of the governorate centre and most of the nearby towns. Israel occasionally carries out targeted operations in the area and seeks to expand its sphere of influence. During these operations, deaths and injuries occur not only among Syrian security forces, but also in villages where civilians live. For this reason, part of the local population is moving to other cities where they feel safer, especially to Rural Damascus.

**Map 2: Areas Occupied by Israel<sup>28</sup>**



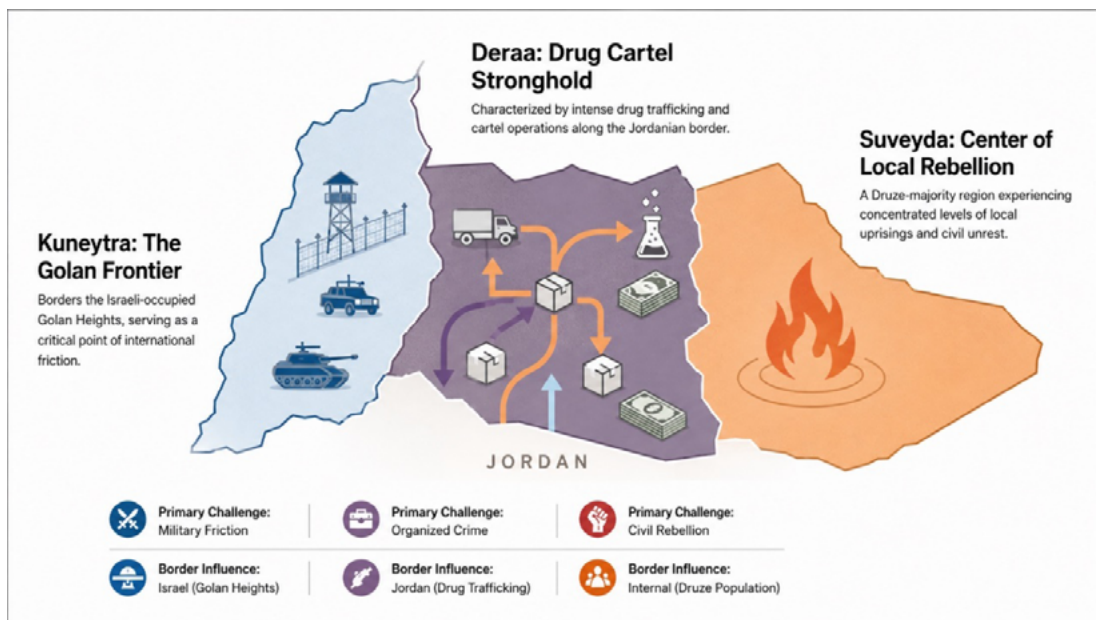
Although Israeli operations are occasionally seen to extend into Daraa Governorate, the overall security situation in this governorate is generally better. The armed opposition groups in Daraa, which had reached an agreement coordinated by the former regime and Russia from 2017 onwards, played a direct role in the overthrow of the Assad Government. Although these opposition groups kept some distance after the new government came to power, over time they largely began to integrate into the new security forces. The most important security issue in Daraa is the activity of drug trafficking networks operating intensively along the Jordanian border.<sup>29</sup> Although this issue is more a matter to be addressed within the framework of combating organised criminal groups than a military security issue, it remains the most important security problem in Daraa.

<sup>28</sup> Ecrusized. 2024 Israeli invasion of Syria [Harita]. Wikimedia Commons.  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2024\\_Israeli\\_invasion\\_of\\_Syria.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2024_Israeli_invasion_of_Syria.png)

<sup>29</sup> Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), "118 kg of Cannabis Seized in the Eastern Countryside of Daraa,"  
<https://sana.sy/tr/governorates/2264988/>

Another important security problem in the south is taking place in and around Sweida. Sweida, where Druze constitute the majority of the population, initially responded positively to the developments after the change of regime. However, within a short period of time, three tendencies emerged among the Druze: those demanding a decentralised form of administration, those loyal to the central government, and those positioned in between. Until July, tensions between the Druze and the new government, centred on Sweida, followed an uneven course. These tensions reached their peak in July 2025. When the Syrian Government took action to suppress demands for the establishment of a decentralised structure in the city similar to the Democratic Union Party (PYD), clashes broke out between Druze militants and Syrian security forces.<sup>30</sup> Security forces initially took control of a significant part of the city, but were forced to withdraw from Sweida after the Israeli army intervened. During the clashes, which lasted for several days, Sunni Arab tribes in Sweida and Daraa and some Druze armed militant groups carried out serious massacres against each other. Civilians from both sides were killed, homes and places of worship were burned, and human rights violations took place during the clashes. After these events, Sunni Arabs living in some towns affiliated with Sweida were forced to leave the governorate.<sup>31</sup> At present, a significant number of these people have become IDPs in newly established camps in Daraa. In addition, although the governor of Sweida was technically appointed by the central government, it is very difficult to say that Damascus has actual authority in Sweida. On the contrary, the newly emerging Druze leadership has been arresting other Druze leaders close to Damascus and, in some cases, causing their deaths. This situation shows that there is a growing security problem in the south of the country.<sup>32</sup>

**Infographic 3:** Current General Security Situation in Southern Syria



<sup>30</sup> Etana Syria. (2026, 24 February). BRIEF: Suwayda truce collapses following tribal mobilization. Etana Syria. <https://etanasyria.org/brief-suwayda-truce-collapses-following-tribal-mobilization/>

<sup>31</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2026, 15 January). Syria: Accountability lacking for Sweida abuses. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/01/15/syria-accountability-lacking-for-sweida-abuses>

<sup>32</sup> Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA). "Internal Security Forces Begin Deployment in Conflict Areas in Suwayda" <https://sana.sy/tr/locals/325878/>

## SECURITY SITUATION IN EASTERN AND NORTH-EASTERN SYRIA

As noted earlier, it was not possible to conduct comprehensive fieldwork in eastern and north-eastern Syria during the project implementation period. Due to developments that emerged towards the final stages of the report-writing process, observations were conducted in Raqqqa, parts of Hasakah and the eastern bank of Deir ez-Zor, which had previously been under SDF control. However, a detailed assessment of the security situation in this region will not be provided. Nevertheless, taking into account the consequences that would result from completely overlooking this region, a general assessment of the security situation will be included.

The clashes that took place between the Syrian Army and the SDF in January led to a significant narrowing of the areas controlled by the SDF in Syria. The publicly known part of the integration model agreed between the Syrian Government and the SDF on 29 January envisages a model in which, following an integration process expected to last around six months, the SDF would come under the control of the Syrian Army.<sup>33</sup> On paper, according to this plan, the integration process will not cover only the SDF, but will also include political and social dimensions. Although it is clear that the SDF lost a large part of the areas it controlled after the clashes in January, it can be expected that, as a result of the new political process to be launched, the SDF will remain the main influential actor in Ayn al-Arab/Kobani and in some parts of Hasakah Governorate. This situation should be expected to continue until a new constitution is drafted in Syria or certain administrative changes are introduced. However, the possibility that this process will be uneven and difficult should not be overlooked. During this period, the possibility of tensions centred particularly on Hasakah stands out as one of the issues that needs to be monitored in the short term.

The second important centre that needs to be addressed in eastern Syria is Deir ez-Zor Governorate. This region should be considered together with the eastern rural areas of Homs Governorate. Although it is difficult to define this area simply as eastern Syria, since it is administratively divided between Homs and Deir ez-Zor, there are many common features between the central parts of the country and the western bank of the Euphrates River. The area stretching from Palmyra town to Deir ez-Zor city was among the places most severely affected by the civil war. The level of destruction in these areas has been observed in very few other parts of the country. It is difficult to say that the desert region and the areas around Deir ez-Zor are still safe. Security control in the inner regions is relatively weak. Syrian security forces do not have sufficient personnel or technical equipment to maintain control over such a wide and flat area. In addition to ISIS activities, organised criminal groups have also been observed in the region. In fact, in rural areas close to the Iraqi border, the activities of drug traffickers create a more active and serious problem than terrorist organisations. For this reason, as in southern Syria, it can be said that combating organised crime is among the main issues that need to be prioritised in Deir ez-Zor.

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<sup>33</sup> Hamidi, I. (2026, February 2). How the US got the SDF to capitulate to Damascus. Al Majalla. <https://en.majalla.com/node/329476/documents-memoirs/how-us-got-sdf-capitulate-damascus>

After the SDF withdrew from Raqqa, eastern Deir ez-Zor and parts of Hasakah Governorate, the security situation in these areas began to show significant variation. ISIS, which had previously carried out terrorist attacks in areas under SDF control, appears to have continued its activities after these areas came under the control of the Syrian Government. At first glance, it may seem that ISIS attacks in these governorates increased in January and February (2026). However, when the frequency and distribution of attacks are compared with the previous period, it becomes clear that there is no significant difference. Nevertheless, factors such as the evacuation of camps in eastern Syria where relatives of ISIS militants had been staying, and the escape of some militants during clashes between the Syrian Army and the SDF, indicate that ISIS activities may increase in governorates such as Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa in the coming period, and that the terrorist threat may rise significantly.

**Infographic 4:** Current Security Situation in Eastern and North-Eastern Syria



**Table 1:** Overall Security Situation

Province	Main Security Risks
Idlib	Main Security Risks
Aleppo	Landmines / IEDs
Hama	Increase in crime, theft, and ISIS risk in the east and south
Rural Damascus	Israeli attacks, unsolved killings and explosions
Rakka / Deir ez-Zor / Haseke	Integration into security forces, landmines and ISIS terrorism
Latakia / Tartus	Sectarian violence and pro-former regime uprising

4

# Shelter

More than ten years of armed conflict have deeply damaged shelter infrastructure in Syria, not only physically but also in functional and social terms. Across the country, housing stock, urban infrastructure and settlement patterns have been severely damaged. In areas that experienced prolonged conflict in particular, living spaces were systematically destroyed. Data obtained from the field and interviews conducted during the study show that a large share of housing has either been completely destroyed or made unusable due to heavy damage in much of Deir ez-Zor, western Aleppo, the eastern neighbourhoods of central Aleppo, the northern countryside of Hama, the northern parts of Homs and the suburbs around Damascus. This destruction has not been limited to housing. Schools, public buildings, roads, electricity transmission lines, water and sewage infrastructure, and other basic elements of daily life have also been seriously damaged. In many settlements, the simultaneous collapse or loss of function of infrastructure has made these areas effectively uninhabitable. As a result, the shelter crisis has gone beyond a simple issue of “housing shortage” and has turned into a multidimensional problem closely linked to access to basic services, security, property rights and livelihood opportunities.

Field observations and assessments by international organisations show that more than five million people across Syria are currently in need of urgent shelter and settlement support. A significant part of this population continues to live in camps, temporary shelter centres or buildings that pose serious structural risks. For people living in areas without adequate infrastructure in particular, the shelter issue has become a major area of vulnerability affecting health, safety and livelihood conditions.<sup>34</sup>

The issue of shelter also stands out as one of the most decisive factors in the return process. Interviews conducted in the field show that a significant number of those who had to leave Syria, as well as internally displaced persons, reconsider their decision to return, or tend to give up on it, despite having an intention to return, because their homes have been completely destroyed or are not in a liveable condition. It is also frequently stated that some families who have already returned are considering migrating again because the current conditions are not sustainable. This shows that the shelter issue represents a critical threshold not only in humanitarian terms, but also in terms of social stability and durable return.

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<sup>34</sup> OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview – Syria, 2024*.

## **THE INVISIBLE DIMENSION OF THE SHELTER CRISIS HOUSING AND LAND PROPERTY ISSUES**

The main cause of the shelter crisis in Syria is the physical destruction caused by the civil war. However, displacement movements during the conflict, confiscation, the destruction of places of residence, and housing sales driven by economic hardship have added another dimension to the shelter problem. These interconnected difficulties have also become much more complex and long-lasting due to the structural breakdown in property relations. Data obtained from the field show that one of the main factors deepening the shelter problem is the property regime disrupted during the war.

Within this framework, two main problem areas stand out. The first is that, when displaced persons return, they find that their homes have in practice been occupied by others. In areas that experienced prolonged conflict in particular, it is observed that abandoned properties have been taken over by different actors, and that property relations have been reshaped on the basis of the situation on the ground. The second is that, during the former regime period, many properties were transferred to third parties through legal procedures or administrative decisions, creating serious disputes during the return process. This has made property ownership uncertain not only in practice, but also in legal terms, and has weakened trust in title deeds and registration systems.

Among the areas where these problems are observed most intensely are northern and western Homs, the Hama–Homs corridor, the northern entrances to Damascus, Rural Damascus, and some neighbourhoods of Aleppo. In these areas, physical destruction and secondary occupation are taking place at the same time. This seriously disrupts both daily life and return processes.<sup>35</sup>

The current picture clearly shows that the shelter crisis cannot be resolved through reconstruction activities alone. In order to address the problem in a lasting manner, it is necessary to establish property verification mechanisms, reorganize title deed records, and create a functioning judicial framework for resolving property-based legal disputes. Otherwise, the shelter issue will go beyond being a humanitarian crisis and turn into a structural source of instability that directly threatens social peace and return processes.

### **NORTHERN SYRIA: IDLIB, ALEPPO AND CAMPS, AND THE “DEPOPULATED” SOUTHERN BELT**

Idlib is currently one of the areas in Syria where the shelter crisis is experienced in its most intense and fragile form. According to data obtained in September from the Humanitarian Assistance Coordination (HAC) office in Idlib, there are 1,035 camps and camp-like settlements in the region, where more than one million people continue to live. However, the population in the region is highly mobile. Data obtained from the field show that many households that attempt to return to their former places of residence have had to return to camp areas within a short period of time due to inadequate infrastructure and security problems.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> NRC, *Housing, Land and Property Rights in Syria*, 2023.

<sup>36</sup> HAC, *Northwest Syria Camp Mapping Report*, 2024.

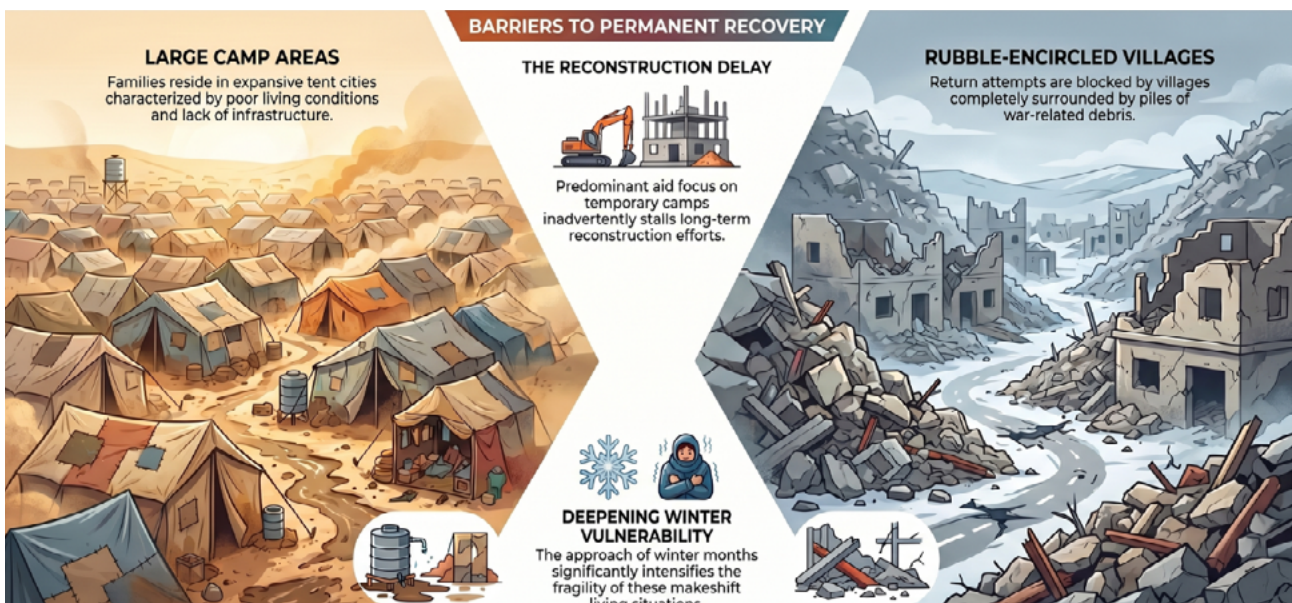
In settlements located particularly along the southern Idlib and northern Hama line, such as Saraqib, Maaret al-Numan, Abu al-Duhur and Khan Shaykhun, shelter infrastructure has almost completely disappeared. It is estimated that around 250,000 housing units in these areas have either been completely destroyed or become unusable due to heavy damage.

The large-scale collapse of infrastructure systems, the failure of sewage networks and the fact that a significant number of water pumping stations are no longer operational have made the region a high-risk area not only in terms of shelter, but also in terms of public health. In many of these settlements, which were evacuated after 2019, houses appear to have been used for military purposes and then systematically damaged, or their iron and metal parts were removed and sold. The current situation observed in the field shows that, in the absence of permanent housing, families have been forced to develop temporary and highly fragile solutions. Many households have created “hybrid” forms of shelter by stretching tent sheets over houses without roofs. However, these structures are not sustainable either in terms of safety or climatic conditions.

Debris management has become a crisis area in itself. Due to the high cost of debris removal activities and the lack of institutional capacity, many buildings that could be structurally repaired cannot be put back into use. This situation takes the shelter crisis beyond the issue of housing shortage alone and turns it into a multi-layered problem that also includes infrastructure, environmental risks and public health dimensions.

The shelter problem in Idlib is currently trapped between overcrowded camps with poor conditions on the one hand, and uninhabitable villages surrounded by piles of debris on the other. The fact that assistance is largely camp-focused turns temporary solutions into permanent ones and further delays reconstruction and sustainable settlement processes. With the approach of the winter months, this vulnerability is expected to deepen further and the humanitarian consequences of the shelter crisis are likely to become more severe.

**Infographic 5: Current Shelter Situation in Idlib**



## **ALEPPO: LIFE AMONG THE RUBBLE, HIGH RENTS AND RETURN PRESSURE**

The shelter problem in Aleppo is one of the clearest examples of the destructive impact of the Syrian civil war on the urban fabric. Today, the city is experiencing deep spatial fragmentation in both physical and socio-economic terms. While daily life can continue to some extent in certain neighbourhoods, almost completely ruined residential areas can be seen only a few streets away from neighbourhoods where life continues. This shows that the war did not create homogeneous destruction even in the centre of Aleppo; rather, it produced an uneven, fragmented and uncontrolled process of destruction.

In particular, Haydariyeh, Hulluk, Fardos and the surrounding neighbourhoods are among the areas that carry the heaviest consequences of the clashes and intense bombardment. In these areas, the roofs of many buildings have completely collapsed, the load-bearing columns of buildings have been severely damaged, or buildings have partly remained standing but have lost their habitability. Field observations show that some families have been forced to continue living right next to destroyed structures or among piles of rubble, despite serious safety risks. This picture shows that the shelter crisis in Aleppo cannot be explained simply as “homelessness” in the conventional sense. Rather, it points to a specific form of crisis in which people are trying to survive in semi-destroyed, unhealthy and unsafe structures.

Field interviews and data obtained from local sources show that, as a result of the clashes concentrated particularly along the southern Idlib–western Aleppo line during the civil war, around 800 schools and 437 mosques were either completely or largely destroyed. It is estimated that this destruction generated approximately 1.8 million cubic metres of debris. The resulting picture reflects not only physical destruction, but also the collapse of education infrastructure, the disruption of social life and the large-scale erasure of urban memory. Destruction on this scale makes the reconstruction process extremely challenging in both technical and financial terms.

Although nearly half of the Syrians living in Türkiye are originally from Aleppo, one of the main reasons why return rates remain low is this severe lack of infrastructure. The fact that basic services such as electricity, water, sewage and transport are largely non-functional makes return practically impossible. In addition, the serious housing shortage that emerged after the war has led to an extraordinary increase in rental prices. This has created serious economic pressure both for the population remaining in the city and for refugees considering return. Due to the lack of housing, it has become increasingly common for more than one family to live in a single dwelling. This situation increases privacy, health and security risks, especially for women, children and older persons, and therefore increases protection needs. On the other hand, due to the loss of property documents, the destruction of title deed records or de facto occupation, many people are legally unable to return to their own homes. The failure to resolve property disputes turns the shelter crisis from a temporary problem into a structural and lasting one.

As a result, the shelter issue in Aleppo is not limited to a lack of housing. It emerges as a multi-layered crisis in which infrastructure collapse, property uncertainty, economic hardship and security concerns are closely intertwined. Under current conditions, at least part of Aleppo appears less like a city that has entered a reconstruction process and more like an urban area struggling to survive within a “semi-destroyed living space”. By contrast, in some

neighbourhoods of the city, the impact of the war has been much more limited, and daily life can continue despite infrastructure problems. In neighbourhoods relatively less affected by the war, the better condition of buildings, the presence of small shopping centres, social spaces, cafés and other recreational venues make these areas attractive for the city's population. However, the coexistence of severe destruction in one part of the city and relatively better living conditions in another has created population pressure towards areas less affected by the war. The primary effect of this concentration is high rents. Over time, however, it can also be said that the demographic structure of the city has begun to change.

Infographic 6: Current Shelter Situation in Idlib and Aleppo



## DAMASCUS AND RURAL DAMASCUS: DESTROYED SUBURBS, HIGH COSTS AND SECONDARY OCCUPATION

In Damascus, the shelter issue has become one of the areas where the deepest and most lasting effects of the civil war can be observed. In particular, settlements around Eastern Ghouta, Jobar, Harasta and the Damascus–Homs highway were exposed to intense bombardment and ground clashes throughout the war. During this process, both the housing stock and urban infrastructure were severely damaged. In these areas, many buildings were completely destroyed, while a significant share of the remaining structures became uninhabitable.<sup>37</sup> The “redevelopment” projects implemented in these areas, in practice, have caused many neighbourhoods to disappear or have led to a loss of time before life can begin again, rather than improving residential areas. The evacuation of settlements, the reopening of some areas for redevelopment, and the de facto prevention of the return of the existing population have created a process that further deepens the shelter crisis. These practices have increased the risk of permanent displacement, particularly for low-income groups.

<sup>37</sup> A News. (2025, 19 November). *War-shattered Jobar turns into a ghost town*. A News. <https://www.anews.com.tr/gallery/world/war-shattered-jobar-turns-into-a-ghost-town/5>

In Damascus city centre, the serious contraction in housing supply is striking. Following the changes in Syria, citizens living in different parts of the country have come to the capital in the hope of finding work and returning to their homes. This has turned an already problematic housing supply situation into an even more serious problem. As the existing housing stock has not been able to absorb the population increase caused by migration, rental prices have risen rapidly. Rising costs have made access to housing practically impossible for displaced families or families planning to return.<sup>38</sup> For large segments of the population whose income levels have declined, finding housing in the city centre has become almost impossible.

In Rural Damascus, another key factor deepening the shelter crisis has been the phenomenon of secondary occupation. Many families who were forced to leave their homes during the conflict found, upon return, that their houses were being used by others. In some cases, this took the form of de facto occupation by armed groups, and in others by civilians arriving from other areas. The loss of title deeds, the destruction of official documents and damage to archive systems have made it extremely difficult to prove property claims legally.<sup>39</sup>

The emerging picture clearly shows that the shelter issue in and around Damascus cannot be explained only by physical destruction. Housing shortages, rising rental prices, property disputes and legal uncertainties have become intertwined, turning shelter into a multidimensional crisis. In this context, the shelter problem in Damascus should be assessed not only as an economic issue, but also as a structural crisis area with legal, social and administrative dimensions.

**Infographic 7: Current Shelter Situation in Damascus and Rural Damascus**

The housing issue is a complex, structural crisis with legal, social, and economic layers, not just physical destruction.



<sup>38</sup> Enab Baladi. (2025, 16 February). *House rents in Syria: Inflation without intervention*. Enab Baladi.

<https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2025/02/house-rents-in-syria-inflation-without-intervention/>

<sup>39</sup> Daraj Media. (2026, 17 February). Residential property claims in Syria: A growing challenge for returnees. Daraj Media.

<https://daraj.media/en/residential-property-claims-in-syria-a-growing-challenge-for-returnees>

## DEIR EZ-ZOR, HAMA AND HOMS

Deir ez-Zor is one of the cities in Syria where the war caused the most severe destruction. In particular, the part of the city located west of the Euphrates River was almost completely devastated due to the prolonged siege and clashes on the ground, and a significant share of residential areas became unusable.<sup>40</sup> In addition to the extensive damage to the housing stock, water networks, electricity lines and basic infrastructure elements have also become non-functional. Landmines and unexploded ordnance widely laid in the area after the clashes continue to pose a lasting security threat to civilian life.<sup>41</sup>

Under these conditions, the shelter issue in Deir ez-Zor has gone beyond a “housing need” in the conventional sense. The main problem in the city is not whether a structure exists, but whether that structure is liveable. Limited access to water, the large-scale collapse of electricity infrastructure and continuing security risks make it practically impossible for people to return to their homes. For this reason, the shelter problem in Deir ez-Zor emerges as a multidimensional crisis directly linked to security, infrastructure and environmental conditions.

A similar picture can also be observed in northern Hama<sup>42</sup> and in settlements located in northern Homs, such as Talbiseh, Rastan and Bab Amr. These areas witnessed intense clashes throughout the war, and a large share of housing was either completely destroyed or heavily damaged. The slow restoration of infrastructure services in these locations seriously worsens living conditions and limits returns. Property disputes seen in other areas are also observed in these regions. In this respect, northern Hama and the areas around Homs largely resemble the property-related problems observed in the suburbs of Damascus.

In Deir ez-Zor, northern Hama and the areas around Homs, the shelter crisis differs from other regions in that it is largely caused by the large-scale physical destruction resulting from the war. However, in these areas, the shelter problem is also compounded by a lack of security, infrastructure collapse and the threat of landmines. Under current conditions, it is clear that housing construction alone will not be sufficient to ensure sustainable return. A holistic approach is required, including comprehensive infrastructure rehabilitation, an effective mine-clearance process, legal mechanisms to resolve property issues, and measures to establish security.

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<sup>40</sup> Abdurrahman, O. (2025, December 6). *Displaced Syrians in Deir ez-Zor struggle amid ongoing insecurity*. North Press Agency. <https://npasyria.com/en/132902/>

<sup>41</sup> Doctors Without Borders. (2025, June 6). Landmines: The hidden danger injuring people returning home in Syria. Médecins Sans Frontières / Doctors Without Borders. <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/latest/landmines-hidden-danger-injuring-people-returning-home-syria>

<sup>42</sup> Porter, L., & Fallaha, A. (2025, December 16). They've forgotten us: The Syrians unable to return home inside their own country. The National. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/mena/2025/12/16/theyve-forgotten-us-the-syrians-unable-to-return-home-inside-their-own-country/>

**Infographic 8: Current Shelter Situation in Deir ez-Zor, Hama and Homs**



As a result, the shelter crisis in Syria is too deep and multi-layered to be explained only by a lack of housing. In addition to physical destruction, property disputes, the collapse of infrastructure, economic hardship and legal uncertainty come together to form one of the main obstacles to return processes. Under current conditions, it is not possible to speak of safe, dignified and sustainable return unless the shelter problem is resolved. In this framework, reducing the reconstruction process only to the repair of physical structures would be a narrow approach that overlooks the root causes of the crisis. For a lasting solution, the shelter issue must be addressed together with the protection of property rights, the resolution of legal uncertainties, the restoration of infrastructure services and the strengthening of local government capacity. Otherwise, reconstruction activities may provide short-term improvements, but in the long term they risk creating new areas of vulnerability.

5

# WASH

Prolonged conflict in Syria has severely damaged not only shelter infrastructure, but also WASH systems. In many areas of the country directly affected by conflict-related destruction, water supply is limited to only a few hours per day, while in some settlements regular water provision is completely interrupted.

Prolonged drought, the overuse of water resources and the collapse of energy infrastructure are among the main factors seriously limiting access to clean water. Although tap water may be drinkable or usable for cooking in some city centres, strong measures are needed across the country to make water safe for drinking. In particular, the shutdown of water pumping stations and widespread power cuts have caused the existing water infrastructure to lose much of its functionality. Access to water has become extremely fragile in many parts of the country. In north-western Syria, especially in Idlib, drinking water is largely dependent on supplies transported by water trucks. This undermines the continuity of access to water. Household access to water is irregular, and the quality of the water supplied often cannot be monitored. This creates serious health risks, especially for children, older persons and individuals with chronic illnesses. While the risk of waterborne diseases increases, the inability to maintain hygiene conditions creates an additional public health concern. In addition, the high cost of water trucking places further economic pressure on households that already have limited sources of income.<sup>43</sup>

As a result, the current situation in the WASH sector shows that the humanitarian crisis in Syria is not limited only to shelter or food shortages, but also has dimensions that directly affect basic living conditions.<sup>44</sup> Without safe and sustainable access to water, it does not appear possible either to protect public health or to ensure that return processes move forward in a healthy manner.

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<sup>43</sup> ReliefWeb. (n.d.). WASH sector requires US\$14 million for critical life-saving services: Most vulnerable Syrians prioritized in informal settlements and collective shelters. <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/wash-sector-requires-us14-million-critical-life-saving-services-most-vulnerable-syrians-prioritized-informal-settlements-and-collective-shelters>

<sup>44</sup> UNICEF Syria. (2025). *Syria humanitarian response snapshot WASH, January–December 2025* (UNICEF Syria Humanitarian Response Snapshot). United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). <https://www.unicef.org/syria/media/22656/file/Syria-humanitarian-response-snapshot-WASH-Jan-Dec-2025.pdf>

## **NORTH-WESTERN SYRIA: THE WASH CRISIS IN THE CASE OF IDLIB**

In Idlib, the collapse of WASH infrastructure is not merely a technical infrastructure problem. Findings from the field show that water and sanitation systems in the region have largely become non-functional as a result of bombardment by the former regime and Russia. Damage to a significant number of water pumping stations, contamination of groundwater resources, the large-scale failure of sewage networks, and the shutdown of treatment facilities can be listed among the most important problems. As a direct result of this structural collapse, millions of people have been forced to continue their daily lives dependent on water delivered by trucks. However, both the high cost of trucked water and the inability to carry out regular quality control create serious risks for households. The lack of continuous access to water places heavy economic pressure, especially on low-income families. A significant share of limited resources that should be allocated to basic needs is directed only towards securing water.

In addition, the uncontrolled and unsafe use of water also has serious consequences for public health. Interviews conducted in the field indicated a clear increase in cases of diarrhoea, skin diseases and some infections. This situation poses life-threatening risks, especially for children, older persons and individuals with weakened immune systems. This clearly shows that access to water in Idlib is not only an infrastructure issue. On the contrary, the crisis in the WASH sector is directly linked to health, nutrition, household economy and community safety. For this reason, the reconstruction of WASH infrastructure should be addressed not only as a technical improvement process, but also as a key priority for ensuring stability in the region.

## **ALEPPO: INFRASTRUCTURE COLLAPSE, HYGIENE CRISIS AND HEALTH RISKS**

In Aleppo, particularly in the western parts of the governorate and the eastern neighbourhoods of the city centre, water and sewage infrastructure has largely lost its functionality as a result of the direct and indirect effects of the war. It should be underlined that infrastructure still continues to function in neighbourhoods of the city that were not affected by the conflict. In addition, infrastructure problems have been minimised in the districts and towns in the northern and north-western countryside of Aleppo that were previously held by opposition groups. In places such as Afrin, Azaz, Jarabulus, Al Bab and Çobanbey/Al Rai, water and sewage problems appear to have been largely resolved, at least when compared with other areas. However, in parts of the governorate that were directly affected by conflict and have not yet been repaired, water pipelines remain buried under rubble. For this reason, even in buildings that were not destroyed in such areas, there is no access to network water. This has made life in rural areas and destroyed neighbourhoods largely dependent on water delivered by trucks. However, the inability to carry out regular quality control of water provided through this method has created serious public health risks. In particular, the collapse of wastewater management systems and the failure of sewage infrastructure are causing a serious hygiene problem in urban areas.

Outside busy areas in the city centre, greywater pools can be seen spreading into open spaces. This increases environmental pollution and creates serious health threats for vulnerable groups, especially children and older persons. These conditions create a highly favourable environment for the spread of waterborne diseases.

Another critical problem observed in Aleppo is that households forced to live in destroyed or heavily damaged buildings cannot access basic hygiene facilities. Homes do have basic areas such as toilets and bathrooms. However, it is extremely difficult to say that there are sanitation units functioning in an integrated manner. For this reason, it has not been observed that waste management can be carried out in a healthy way. Lack of hygiene is one of the issues that causes the strongest public concern. In summary, WASH-related problems in Aleppo include access to water, the deterioration of sanitation and hygiene conditions, increased health risks, a decline in quality of life, and the direct disruption of return processes.

#### **DAMASCUS AND RURAL DAMASCUS: INTERMITTENT WATER SUPPLY, OLD NETWORKS AND INADEQUATE INFRASTRUCTURE**

WASH-related problems in and around Damascus largely stem from ageing infrastructure and the pressure created by unplanned urbanisation. In particular, the fact that network water can be supplied for only a few hours a day in the suburbs of Damascus, and that some neighbourhoods may go for days without water, has led to complaints about access to water. Although Damascus city centre has not experienced destruction, the old water networks remain insufficient. In addition, the failure to implement new infrastructure investments has turned water provision in the city's newly developing areas and outskirts into an irregular and costly process. Some rural areas around the city have been affected by conflict, while others suffer from inadequate infrastructure due to the large number of settlements that have expanded later. For this reason, dependence on wells and water trucking is higher in these areas. This is a factor that makes shelter conditions more difficult, especially for the returning population.

#### **WASH SITUATION IN CAMPS: THE MOST FRAGILE AREA**

The most fragile areas in terms of WASH are camps and temporary settlements. Field observations carried out in these areas show that toilet and shower units are inadequate and that ground conditions have begun to deteriorate. It can be said that in some camps built before 2024, important steps had been taken with the support of civil society organisations in relation to access to clean water, control of wastewater, drainage of contaminated water and disinfection. During field interviews, it was observed that both public officials and civil society organisations were highly informed and aware of issues related to clean water provision and waste management. However, due to the decrease, and in some cases the suspension, of financial support, it has become difficult to maintain WASH services in camps. In many existing camps, despite occasional inspections, resources remain very limited in relation to the scale of needs. This leads to gaps in the drainage of contaminated water, periodic pest control and, in particular, the provision of drinking water. Since the drinking water problem has not been resolved through permanent methods, civil society organisations are often seen supporting camps by supplying drinking water from outside. Although this support through water trucks and bottled water is not cost-effective, it has been observed that such solutions are used because the measures required for permanent solutions are highly costly.

Although these problems have been partially brought under control in camps that receive relatively regular humanitarian assistance, the situation is deteriorating in places where support has been cut. No large-scale outbreak has yet occurred in the camps. However, during field observations, it was reported that disease rates have increased. If solutions cannot be found

to the shortcomings in the WASH sector, it can be said that structural risks directly threatening public health may emerge.

Problems in the WASH sector also have a direct impact on shelter, education and livelihoods. In particular, children's school attendance and women's daily life practices are seriously restricted by hygiene conditions. This reminds that the WASH crisis is an issue that directly affects social life and community resilience.

Infographic 9: Current WASH Situation



As a result, WASH-related problems in Syria are no longer temporary disruptions that can be addressed only within the framework of humanitarian assistance. The current situation clearly shows that the reconstruction of water and sanitation services has become one of the preconditions for the country's overall recovery process. Unless lasting improvement is achieved in these areas, it does not appear possible for shelter, health or return processes to move forward in a sustainable manner.

6

# Health

As of 2025, the health system in Syria has faced serious challenges. According to OCHA data, around 15.9 million people are in need of urgent health services, while more than one third of hospitals across the country are completely non-functional. Health facilities that continue to operate have become unable to sustain even basic health services due to severe staff shortages, power cuts, irregular water supply and chronic funding gaps.<sup>45</sup>

Reports published by WHO and UNICEF show that access to health services has declined dramatically, particularly in rural areas.<sup>46</sup> In particular, in areas where returns are taking place rapidly and in places affected by physical destruction, maternal and child health, follow-up for chronic diseases and emergency response capacity have been seriously weakened. In many regions, major difficulties are being faced in the delivery of preventive health services.

This fragile situation has not emerged only as a direct result of the conflict. It has deepened further due to the long-term collapse of infrastructure, the departure of health personnel from the country, and the absence of sustainable financing mechanisms.<sup>47</sup>

Field observations show that in some governorates, hospitals, health centres and primary health care units, which form the backbone of the health system, remain largely non-functional. Due to prolonged power cuts, medical equipment cannot be operated; the lack of fuel limits the use of generators; and irregular water supply disrupts sterilisation processes. This creates serious life-threatening risks, especially for surgical interventions, delivery services and cases requiring intensive care. At the same time, physical problems in health infrastructure also disrupt the functioning of the system.

In previous years, many health facilities became unusable as a result of bombardments. The facilities that remain standing are trying to operate despite severe staff shortages. The departure of a large share of specialist doctors from the country, the decline in the number of nurses and midwives below critical levels, and insufficient laboratory capacity make it difficult to ensure the continuity of health services.<sup>48</sup>

This situation has greatly weakened not only the health system's capacity to provide services, but also its ability to respond to crises. Although the growing role of international and local civil society

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<sup>45</sup> OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview – Syria*, 2025.

<sup>46</sup> UNICEF, *Situation Report – Syria*, 2025. WHO, *Health Sector Bulletin*, 2025.

<sup>47</sup> UNICEF, *Situation Report – Syria*, 2025. WHO, *Health Sector Bulletin*, 2025.

<sup>48</sup> WHO, *Health Sector Bulletin*, 2025.

UNDP, *Socio-Economic Impact Assessment*, 2025.

organisations has partially filled service gaps in the short term, this structure is far from offering a sustainable long-term solution. Under current conditions, the health system in Syria appears to be a structure kept functioning through temporary support, but one that requires reform.

### **IDLIB: DECLINE IN CAPACITY**

Idlib is one of the regions where the health system has recently suffered a serious blow. Field interviews show that at least 31 hospitals and health facilities operating in the region closed between December 2024 and September 2025 due to lack of funding. This situation shows that one of the most important dimensions of the problems in the health system is financial insufficiency. Until 8 December 2024, international civil society organisations had focused their health service support on northern Syria. After the change of government in Syria, this support was extended across the country, which led to a decline in the share allocated to health services in Idlib.

In the rural areas of Idlib that remained under the control of the former administration, a significant share of health centres and hospitals have either been completely destroyed or have lost their functionality after remaining inactive for a long time. Under current conditions, the region is mainly able to provide only primary health care services, while cases requiring advanced treatment need to be referred to major hospitals in the city centre. Although the number of ambulances is better compared to other regions, the shortage of health personnel is notable. The number of specialist doctors is in fact higher than in many other regions. However, the fact that the number of people living in camps is almost equal to the population of Idlib city itself makes the number of doctors insufficient. For this reason, disruptions occur in surgical interventions and follow-up for chronic diseases. The shortage of nurses and midwives directly affects delivery services, emergency care and routine health checks, making it difficult for the health system to perform its basic functions.<sup>49</sup> The current situation suggests that the health system in Idlib is moving from a temporary capacity problem towards a problem of institutional sustainability. This limits the population's access to health services and creates risks, especially for vulnerable groups.

In order to prevent the problem from worsening and to ensure that the health system functions more effectively, it would be useful to strengthen not only physical infrastructure, but also financing mechanisms, human resources, and the referral and case management system at the same time.

### **ALEPPO: HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE COLLAPSING UNDER EXTREME PRESSURE**

Aleppo is one of the cities where health infrastructure was most severely damaged during the war. Interviews with officials from the Provincial Health Directorate show that health facilities have almost completely disappeared, particularly in the neighbourhoods of Haydariyeh, Hanano and Fardos. The absence of units capable of providing primary health care in these areas has made it extremely difficult for the population to access basic health services. In particular, in the western and southern rural areas, many people have to travel several kilometres to receive health care. A large share of the health facilities that have remained operational are working with serious

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<sup>49</sup> Health Cluster Turkey Hub, *Idlib Health Sector Update*, 2025.

infrastructure shortages. Interruptions in water and electricity supply directly affect the continuity of health services. Home care, follow-up for chronic diseases and emergency interventions often cannot be provided. Under these conditions, health facilities can provide only limited services, while comprehensive treatment and follow-up processes are largely disrupted.

In addition, overcrowding in hospitals significantly reduces the quality of services. Due to insufficient staff numbers and shortages of medical equipment, the time allocated to each patient has decreased considerably, which has negatively affected the effectiveness of diagnosis and treatment processes.

It is clear that the health system in Aleppo suffers from physical damage. In addition, the relatively rapid population increase in the city is causing existing infrastructure to become insufficient. The shortage of human resources and the narrowing of service capacity are also placing further pressure on Aleppo's health system. Under current conditions, in order to provide sustainable health services in the city, it is necessary not only to rebuild facilities, but also to ensure staffing, repair infrastructure and restructure the service chain in a holistic manner.

#### **DAMASCUS AND RURAL DAMASCUS: INFRASTRUCTURE COLLAPSE AND SERVICE DISRUPTIONS**

Health infrastructure inside Damascus appears to have largely remained standing. However, there are serious problems in terms of functionality. The situation is different in rural areas. In Rural Damascus and the city's suburbs, health facilities have been heavily damaged, and a significant share of existing structures can no longer be used effectively. Due to the inability to secure the fuel needed for generators, health centres remain closed for long periods during the day, directly disrupting the continuity of services.

Power and water cuts make sterilisation processes difficult. This has significantly increased the risk of infection, especially in operating rooms and maternity wards. The inability to ensure hygiene conditions has also made it difficult for health personnel to provide services safely. Many health workers have become unable to intervene effectively because even minimum conditions cannot be met.

Within this framework, it is clear that the health system in Damascus and its rural areas needs greater support, particularly as a result of increasing needs linked to population growth. Under current conditions, ensuring the continuity of health services should be a priority.

#### **DEIR EZ-ZOR: SECURITY, TRANSPORT AND STAFFING CRISIS**

Deir ez-Zor can be described as the area most in need of support in terms of health services across the country. The limited number of ambulances, long distances, poor road conditions and security problems lead to serious disruptions in emergency health services. The need for electricity in health facilities and insufficient fuel supply reduce the capacity of health centres. This situation may create serious life-threatening risks, particularly in emergency cases.

Although there is a shortage of specialist doctors in the region, this problem appears to be manageable as returns increase. However, existing health facilities are already struggling with cases that require advanced diagnosis and treatment. This has significantly narrowed the scope of health

services. For chronic patients and severe cases, the health system has become slow and difficult to access. Another key factor worsening health problems in Deir ez-Zor has been the shutdown of the Alouk Water Station. Although this has affected other areas more directly, it has also had a direct impact on access to clean water for many people in Deir ez-Zor. In this context, the risk of the spread of diarrhoea, cholera and various skin diseases has increased in the region.<sup>50</sup>

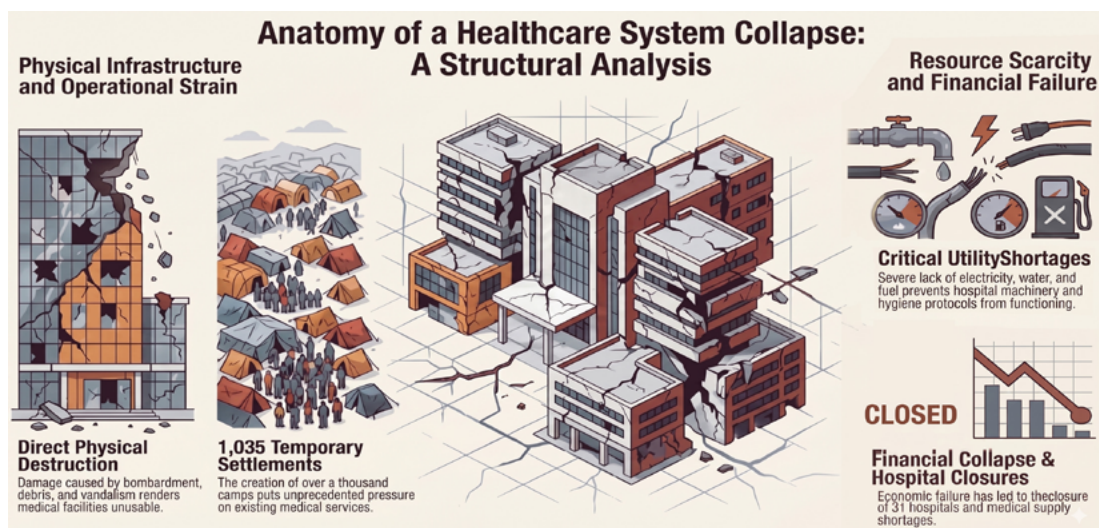
In summary, the health system in Deir ez-Zor is facing problems not only because of limited capacity, but also due to mutually reinforcing factors such as insecurity, infrastructure gaps, water-related challenges and shortages of human resources. Under current conditions, providing sustainable health services in the region appears possible only through a holistic recovery process that extends beyond medical support and includes security and infrastructure improvements.

### HEALTH IN CAMPS: THE MOST VISIBLE FACE OF THE CRISIS

Temporary camps spread across the country are the places where the health system in Syria functions with the greatest difficulty. In these facilities, the health crisis stems not only from medical shortcomings, but also from shelter conditions, inadequate WASH infrastructure and nutrition problems. The high density of the population living in camps, together with unregistered population movements, increases the pressure on existing health services.

Field observations show that health units in camp areas are making significant efforts to overcome problems related to both their number and capacity. In many locations, existing health points struggle to respond to growing needs. The lack of continuity in the supply of medicines and medical consumables disrupts service delivery. In addition, irregularities are observed in vaccination activities. Health monitoring systems cannot be operated effectively enough. The limited availability of maternal and child health services also leads to disruptions in antenatal and postnatal care. Poor hygiene conditions, problems in access to clean water and overcrowded living spaces may create conditions that are favourable for the spread of diseases.

Infographic 10: Current Health Situation in Syria



<sup>50</sup> WHO, *Northeast Syria Health Update*, 2025.

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# Education

Syria has a fully centralised 12-year system of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education. The first nine years of the 12-year education system are compulsory. Education in the country is free of charge. However, there are private schools operating in different governorates. Private schools are also required to follow the curriculum used in public schools. Although education is provided in mixed classes for girls and boys up to Grade 7, classes are separated from Grade 7 onwards, except in exceptional cases or in some private schools. The curriculum determined by the Ministry of Education is in Arabic. With recent regulations, preparations have begun to introduce Kurdish language courses in areas where Kurds constitute the majority. In addition, religious minorities have their own schools. Syria was one of the leading countries in education in the Arab world until the 2000s. However, the problems accumulated over 14 years of conflict now place a heavy burden on educational institutions and the teaching process.

Although an almost nationwide mobilisation for education has been launched since mid-2025, the effects of the deepening economic crisis, migration and the long-term consequences of the conflict continue to be strongly felt. According to UNICEF data, more than 2.5 million children in the country have remained completely outside the education system, while around 7.2 million children and teachers have come to need urgent education support. This picture shows that the problem is not limited only to access to school, but that the education system has suffered a major structural blow.<sup>51</sup>

Reports published by EUAA and UNICEF show that more than half of educational institutions across Syria are not fully functional. Schools that remain standing are struggling with serious funding shortages, infrastructure gaps and a lack of teachers. In many parts of the country, physically damaged school buildings, inadequate heating and poor sanitation conditions make it difficult to maintain the learning environment, both in pedagogical and health terms. Overcrowded classrooms, shortages of educational materials and inadequate classroom conditions, poor hygiene, and security concerns directly affect children's school attendance rates. It is observed that school dropout rates have increased significantly, especially among children of families returning from conflict-affected areas. This situation brings not only the current loss of education, but also the long-term risk of a "lost generation."<sup>52</sup>

Due to economic hardship, economic support for families who have to send their children to work instead of school, or scholarship opportunities for successful students, remain extremely

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<sup>51</sup> UNICEF, *Humanitarian Situation Report – Syria*, 2025.

<sup>52</sup> EUAA, *Country Focus: Syria*, 2025.

limited. It should be underlined that education-related problems are not limited to healthy children. Although there is strong goodwill and willingness regarding the needs of children with special needs and special education programmes, field observations show that there is a serious capacity gap in both areas. Finally, it can be said that significant progress still needs to be made in lifelong learning and adult education programmes.

The emerging picture shows that education in Syria is no longer only a social service area, but has become a strategic issue that directly affects the country's capacity for reconstruction. If education infrastructure is not restored, teacher capacity is not strengthened, and children's safe access to education is not ensured, it appears inevitable that existing crises will deepen across generations.

### **IDLIB AND WESTERN ALEPPO: THE CHALLENGES OF THE TRANSITION PROCESS**

Southern Idlib and Western Aleppo are among the areas where education infrastructure has been most severely damaged. Field observations suggest that the destruction of education facilities in these two areas was not random, but was carried out systematically by the former regime. The main factor behind this observation is that school buildings were directly and heavily targeted. In some settlements, although certain buildings remain standing, schools have without exception been severely damaged. Through this destruction, the former regime either aimed to force local residents to move to areas under its own control, or sought to depopulate these areas by making schools unusable and thereby pushing families to leave. According to assessments, around 800 schools have either been completely destroyed or made unusable due to heavy damage. This situation has led not only to the loss of buildings, but also to a broader loss within the education system. The scale of the destruction has become even more visible through the more than 1.8 million cubic metres of debris identified in the region. These piles of debris not only create a physical obstacle, but also seriously delay the reconstruction and planning of education spaces.

The inability to carry out debris removal work quickly enough prevents many schools from reopening. This makes it difficult to restructure education services in a sustainable manner. In Aleppo city centre, the situation has become even more striking. In some neighbourhoods, it has been found that only one school remains standing, while all surrounding education buildings have either been completely destroyed or have not been repaired for a long time. This shows that even within the city, access to education has become highly unequal and fragmented. The fact that students have to travel between villages in order to receive education results in children without access to transport being pushed out of the education system. This picture shows that education services are disrupted not only because of the lack of buildings, but also because the spatial integrity of education has been broken. The irregular, disconnected and insufficient distribution of schools reduces the effectiveness of student and teacher allocation and classroom planning. This disconnection between the basic components of education management has greatly weakened the system's capacity to reproduce itself.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> UNICEF, *Education Under Attack – Syria*, 2025.

In these areas, building new school facilities alone will not be sufficient to restore education. A long-term reconstruction process is needed, including the completion of debris removal works, the rebuilding of infrastructure, the creation of safe access routes, and the holistic re-planning of education services.

### **SOUTHERN GOVERNORATES: DARAA AND SWEIDA**

Particularly in the southern governorates, it has been found that more than 150 schools have either been heavily damaged or are being used as shelters by internally displaced persons. This situation, which emerged after the clashes between the Syrian Government and Druze armed groups, shows that education infrastructure has in practice been redirected to non-educational functions, and that it is not possible to return these structures to educational use in the short term. The transformation of schools into shelter spaces has not only led to the loss of classrooms, but has also seriously damaged the physical, institutional and social integrity of the education system.

School buildings used for shelter have rapidly deteriorated because they have hosted populations far beyond their capacity. Classrooms, toilets and common areas have largely lost their function. During this process, hygiene conditions have seriously worsened, access to clean water has become limited, and waste management has become a major problem. As a result, schools have ceased to be safe spaces where educational activities can take place and have turned into places that threaten human health.<sup>54</sup>

### **TEACHER CAPACITY AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

The challenges facing Syria's education system are not limited to physical infrastructure. Nearly 14 years of conflict have also created a range of problems related to both the number and qualifications of teachers. Syria does not have a shortage of teachers in numerical terms. On the contrary, in some areas, the number of teachers is higher than the actual need. However, low and irregular salaries directly undermine the sustainability of the education system. In areas that were previously under the control of the former regime, teacher salaries had been extremely low. As a result, the salary increases introduced in 2025 improved the income of teachers in governorates such as Latakia, Damascus and Homs. However, the income of teachers working in areas previously controlled by opposition groups did not increase. In fact, as many foundations and associations relocated their operations to other areas, many teachers had to accept salaries lower than before. This situation led teachers, particularly in north-western Syria, to go on strike or leave their posts. The loss of income security forced many teachers to take on additional jobs or pushed them away from the education system altogether. This process has caused a serious decline in teacher quality and the continuity of education. In rural areas in particular, it has resulted in irregular classes and, in some schools, the de facto suspension of education.

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<sup>54</sup> UNICEF, *Education Under Attack – Syria*, 2025.

Increased teacher turnover weakens the relationship between students and teachers. As of the 2025 academic year, economic difficulties in Syria led to budget shortages. These budget constraints, in turn, limited access to educational materials. Although this situation has improved over time, children from families returning to the country have begun to face adaptation difficulties, as they encounter a curriculum different from the one they followed in the countries where they had been living. This weakens standardisation in education.

As a result, teachers' economic difficulties, shortages of educational materials and inconsistencies in curricula together lead to a decline in the quality of education. It is observed that, although the education system in Syria continues to exist in quantitative terms, it has suffered a qualitative decline.

### **RETURN, MOBILITY AND INTEGRATION CHALLENGES**

Interviews conducted at the Idlib Provincial Directorate of Education played a very important role in identifying a problem that extends beyond the borders of the governorate. This problem concerns the difficulties faced in integrating the children of families returning to their country into the education system. In Idlib, there are thousands of young students, most of whom are children of families returning from Türkiye.

These children received education in different curricula in the countries from which they returned. There are differences between the education they received in those countries and the education system in Syria. It has also been observed that children returning from different countries differ among themselves in terms of educational level. The main issue observed in the field is not the children's academic level, but their adaptation to educational institutions and their new environment.

Children who have been out of education for a long time, or who have attended school in different education systems, face difficulties in adapting to school again. This directly affects the sustainability of the education process. The lack of alignment between education policies across governorates and the absence of a central coordination mechanism further deepen this problem. The absence of a common implementation framework among provincial education units leads to differences in registration, level assessment and referral processes. This makes it more difficult to integrate children into the education system. During field observations in Idlib, it was found that a significant number of children returning especially from Türkiye did not have sufficient proficiency in Arabic. It was also observed that some of these children did not culturally identify themselves with a Syrian identity, which made the process of school adaptation more complex. Within this framework, although remedial education has been provided to around 175,000 children under the "My Root" programme, these programmes appear to be implemented largely by civil society organisations and with limited budgets.

The continued limited level of integration into the formal education system represents an important risk for the continuity of education. Language differences, issues of identity and belonging, and curriculum mismatches are among the main barriers preventing children from being permanently included in education. While this situation may lead to individual learning loss in the short term, in the long term it may also create negative consequences for social cohesion and social integration.

## **SPATIAL PLANNING AND ACCESS PROBLEM**

As planning efforts are being carried out for resettlement and population return in Syria, education infrastructure has been addressed as one of the priority areas. In this context, the approach developed has been built on the principle of “school first”. The aim is to open one school in each settlement first, and then to open a second school as the population increases. In addition, in order to ensure children’s regular access to education, it has been envisaged that the distance between schools should ideally not exceed three kilometres. This approach aims to prevent inequalities in access to education, particularly in rural areas.

However, field observations show that there are difficulties in implementing this planning. Due to the severe physical destruction caused by the conflict, irregular population movements and infrastructure gaps, the distance between schools has exceeded the planned limits in many areas. As distances to schools have increased, school transport has become unavoidable. However, sufficient transport infrastructure has not been established on the ground to meet this need. Due to the lack of school buses and the absence of a regular transport network, children from low-income families face the risk of exclusion from education. During the winter months, adverse weather conditions, damaged roads and infrastructure gaps further deepen this problem.

Another key factor weakening the education system is the socio-economic problems faced by teachers. The inadequacy of salaries for public school teachers and the insecure working conditions in schools supported by civil society organisations force many teachers to turn to other forms of work in order to earn a living. This affects not only the number of qualified teachers, but also the quality of education. On the other hand, returns to Syria from abroad have further increased the existing challenges. As a result of intense returns to certain areas in particular, some schools have had to accommodate more students than their actual capacity.

Finally, there is another very important issue that needs to be addressed. Educational opportunities for children and individuals with special needs are highly limited. Although efforts are being made to provide this education in public schools under difficult conditions, education for children with special needs is largely delivered through civil society organisations. It can be said that the number of teachers capable of providing special education is close to a sufficient level. However, the number of schools or institutions where this education can be delivered is far from adequate. As the number of educational institutions increases in line with needs, the number of qualified teachers and educational materials will also need to increase. The Syrian Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and the Ministry of Education have a high level of awareness on this issue. However, it would not be wrong to say that this is one of the areas where cooperation between the state and civil society is most needed.

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# Economy

For many years, the Syrian economy has been exposed to the destructive effects of sanctions and civil war, and has not yet entered a full recovery process. Across the country, production capacity has contracted significantly, income levels have declined, and people's ability to meet their basic needs has not improved. Economic activity has moved away from the dynamics of sustainable growth and has turned into a fragile structure focused on maintaining daily life.

Observations conducted across the country clearly reveal the main problems of the economy. While income increases for large segments of the population have remained extremely limited, essential expenses such as rent, electricity, water and food have risen rapidly across the country, particularly in Damascus. This has disrupted the balance between income and expenditure and has made the cost of living unaffordable for broad segments of the population.

One of the areas where economic pressure is felt most strongly is the agricultural sector. Drought, the destruction of irrigation infrastructure and mined areas on agricultural land have seriously limited production. As a result, agricultural recovery has not been achieved, and Syria has had to meet even its most basic food needs through imports. A large share of small-scale businesses has not been able to resume operations. However, the situation in large-scale industry is even more serious. Since Syria did not have a strong industrial base before the war, it is currently unable to make a significant breakthrough in this area.

High production costs and the lack of capital are making the country increasingly dependent on imports. Since people's sources of income are limited and purchasing power has not improved, demand for cheaper goods is increasing. This situation prevents local producers, who lack access to affordable energy, raw materials and the technological progress needed to increase productivity, from competing with imported products. Raising customs barriers to compensate for this creates a conflict of interest between industrialists and traders. More importantly, however, prices do not fall, and this leads to growing economic dissatisfaction among the population.

Field observations show that people largely sustain their livelihoods through two main means: borrowing, and dependence on relatives abroad and humanitarian assistance. Many families meet their basic needs by going into debt. At the same time, for people living in camps and low-income neighbourhoods, humanitarian assistance has become the main source of livelihood. This situation is leading to the entrenchment of an economic order dependent on external support, rather than a production-based economic model in Syria.

This emerging picture has also had a direct impact on the return process. A significant number of returning families are considering migrating again or going back to the places they came from because they cannot find livelihood opportunities. Across Syria, a large share of the population lives below the poverty line.

## **AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK**

As of 2025, the agricultural sector has entered a serious period of contraction due to worsening drought conditions. In particular, the clear decline in rainfall in recent years has directly affected agricultural production. Many agricultural areas have become non-functional because irrigation infrastructure has not been maintained for a long time. Non-operational irrigation canals, disabled pumping systems and energy shortages have seriously limited production capacity. The issue of secondary occupation, which is frequently seen in housing property, is relatively less common in agricultural land. When such problems arise, they are also easier to resolve compared to disputes over housing property. For this reason, it would be more accurate to say that problems related to agricultural land mostly stem not from legal issues, but from other direct effects of the conflict. For example, in many areas, particularly Aleppo, Hama, Idlib and Deir ez-Zor, landmines and unexploded ordnance in agricultural fields have become one of the biggest obstacles to production.

The fact that agricultural activity has not reached the desired level increases production costs for farmers and limits livelihood opportunities in rural areas. Despite the growing population resulting from returns, insufficient agricultural production is causing a serious contraction in food supply. In addition, the decline in assistance from international aid organisations has further increased the need to purchase food in markets. This has led to higher prices for basic food items, while access to food has become increasingly difficult for low-income households.

## **TRADE**

Although Syria has historically been a strong trading country, it has remained outside the main trade routes due to the prolonged civil war and sanctions. Roads and bridges in some parts of the country have been severely damaged. The banking system has also become largely non-functional as a result of sanctions. Despite this, commercial activity has not declined, as imports remain cheaper than local production. The recent easing of sanctions on Syria, important steps taken towards the rehabilitation of the banking system, and the stronger functioning of customs administration can be considered positive developments for the Syrian economy. In addition, due to geopolitical competition in the Middle East and initiatives aimed at including Syria in alternative trade routes extending from Asia to Europe, the possibility of Syria becoming a trade hub has begun to emerge. If this process is managed well, trade may become one of the main channels for significant economic progress in Syria in the coming period.

## **INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION**

The prolonged conflict environment in Syria has had a highly negative impact on the production sector. The organised industrial zone initiatives launched in the 2000s were severely affected by the war. As a result, industrial production came close to a standstill in many areas. Several factors have kept industrial production limited. Syria is not among the countries rich in raw materials, and healthy access to the country's hydrocarbon and natural gas reserves only became possible in early 2026, after the clashes between the Syrian Government and the SDF. However, the Syrian Government's recent decisions to increase investment incentives and support initiatives related to organised industrial zones may pave the way for industrial production to become one of Syria's main economic activities in the coming period.

## **SITUATION OF SMALL BUSINESSES**

The prolonged period of conflict affected small-scale businesses as much as large industrial enterprises. Even during the conflict period, Syria did not face serious problems in the entry of raw materials used for production. Today, Syria still does not face a major problem in terms of access to raw materials. However, factors such as the collapse of the electricity infrastructure needed to provide energy for production, the severe difficulty of accessing capital due to the negative security environment, and the breakdown of credit mechanisms have prevented small businesses from continuing their activities. In addition, the relocation of thousands of small business owners abroad, especially from Aleppo, has also negatively affected the networks and relations among small businesses. For this reason, serious support is needed to revive small businesses in Syria.

Based on this rationale, it is observed that some civil society organisations provide support to individuals who wish to establish small businesses. These forms of support are generally accessed by male entrepreneurs, who, within the framework of Syria's traditional social values, assume responsibility as heads of households and return to the country as pioneers. Nevertheless, it is also known that in some areas there are a limited number of support projects for women entrepreneurs, with the aim of supporting women's employment and broadening the economic base. However, Syria's need for economic development requires the participation of the widest possible social groups in the labour force, and therefore women need to be included in economic life as strongly as possible. In the survey conducted for this study, one of the areas that received the lowest scores from participants, and was therefore seen as one of the most inadequate areas, was women's participation in the labour force. This supports the findings from field observations. In this regard, the need to develop projects supporting women's cooperatives is an important issue frequently raised in the field.

The growing consensus on the need to support small businesses has paved the way for civil society organisations to provide small-scale support for such projects. However, although the limited support provided by civil society organisations, generally in the range of EUR/USD 2,000–5,000, may create temporary relief, it does not ensure the establishment of sustainable businesses. Within this framework, hundreds of small workshops, bakeries, repair shops and neighbourhood stores established in many cities, particularly Aleppo, Idlib and Hama, with the help of such incentives have had to close down or transfer ownership in the face of rising costs. Businesses established under residential buildings or in temporary premises are unable to survive for long periods, especially because they cannot cover fuel supply and generator costs. This shows that small business support provided without training, equipment supports and market development guidance quickly begins to lose its effectiveness.

## **EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR FORCE**

The significant weakening of industrial production, the contraction in the agricultural sector and the low productivity of small businesses have directly and negatively affected the labour market. Unemployment is extremely widespread. Under current conditions, the most important institutions able to provide economic security are the army and security forces. For this reason, a significant share of the young population in particular has turned to military or police service as a means of livelihood.

The insufficiency of adults' salaries or income causes children in many households to have to work. This clearly shows the extent of economic pressure. Field interviews conducted in Aleppo found that a daily worker who is able to find temporary work earns an average of 10,000–25,000 Syrian pounds. This amount is far from sufficient even to cover transport and daily food expenses. Of course, this situation does not apply equally to every sector or to workers with different skill levels. It is observed that skilled workers in some sectors are able to earn enough income to maintain their livelihoods. In general, however, it is understood that a significant share of wage workers cannot generate enough income on their own to meet the needs of the entire family.

The current picture shows that, as one of the consequences of the prolonged war, the Syrian economy is operating within a structurally collapsed market system. The damage to production infrastructure, the looting of industrial facilities, and the insufficient efficiency of roads and power plants mean that the process of reviving economic activity will take time. This situation has directly affected not only industry, but all areas of production, from agriculture to small-scale businesses.

A large share of the expenditures of returning families goes to essential costs such as fuel, electricity and water. In interviews, it was reported that households have to allocate around half of their income to basic living costs. Although the working-age population is returning to Syria, the limited availability of employment opportunities is putting pressure on the labour market. Difficulties in sustaining small businesses and the problems mentioned above in agricultural areas are negative factors standing in the way of a broader production-based increase in welfare.

# Field Surveys and Analysis Conducted in Syria

This section has been prepared to analyse the findings of the survey conducted within the timeframe, scope and methodology outlined in the introduction of the study. The study aimed to assess the current situation on the ground not from a single-dimensional perspective, but within a multi-layered and holistic framework. In this regard, the survey focused on key areas of daily life, including shelter, health, education, water and sanitation (WASH), security, law, camp conditions and cultural infrastructure.

The data collected were analysed in a way that makes it possible to address structural problems on the ground not only at the level of humanitarian needs, but also in relation to institutional capacity, governance, social vulnerability and sustainability. The main logic of this form of analysis is to move beyond assessing the situation in Syria merely as a picture of problems or crisis. Since the aim is to consider the core economic and social realities encountered in Syria, regardless of the conditions, as part of a multidimensional reconstruction process, the data produced by the survey have been analysed from a broader perspective.

## **METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLING**

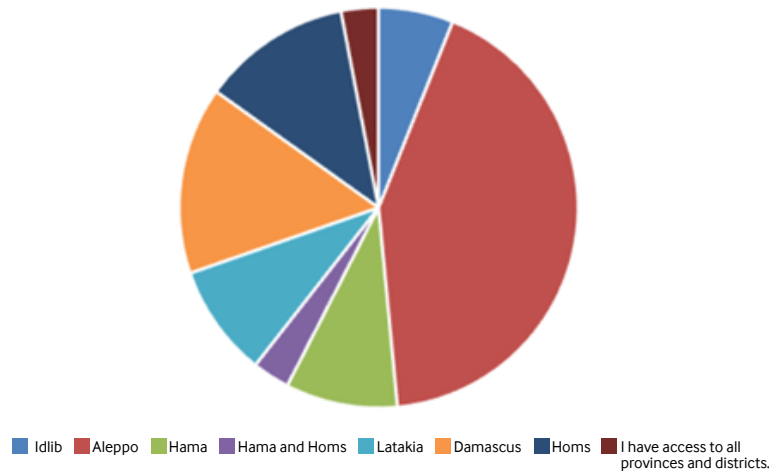
The research was conducted through a structured survey prepared on Google Forms. A total of 32 participants were included in the study. The participants were selected from experts and field workers who were actively working in the Syrian field or had direct access to the field. The survey questions were largely prepared on the basis of a Likert scale rated between 1 and 5. Within this scale, a score of “1” indicates very inadequate / very poor, while a score of “5” indicates very good / adequate.

The geographical distribution of participants is as follows: Idlib (2), Aleppo (14), Hama (3), Hama and Homs (1), Homs (4), Latakia (3), Damascus (5), and participants with access to “all governorates and districts” (1). This distribution shows that the research mainly focuses on Aleppo and its surrounding areas. At the same time, the data obtained from different regions also make it possible to conduct comparative assessments concerning the country as a whole.

The data obtained make it possible to analyse the current situation on the ground through quantitative indicators, while also gaining qualitative depth through observations based on the participants’ field experience. In this respect, the research provides an opportunity to address

humanitarian, social and structural problems in Syria not only statistically, but also within a holistic framework grounded in field realities.

**Figure 1:** Geographical Distribution of Participants

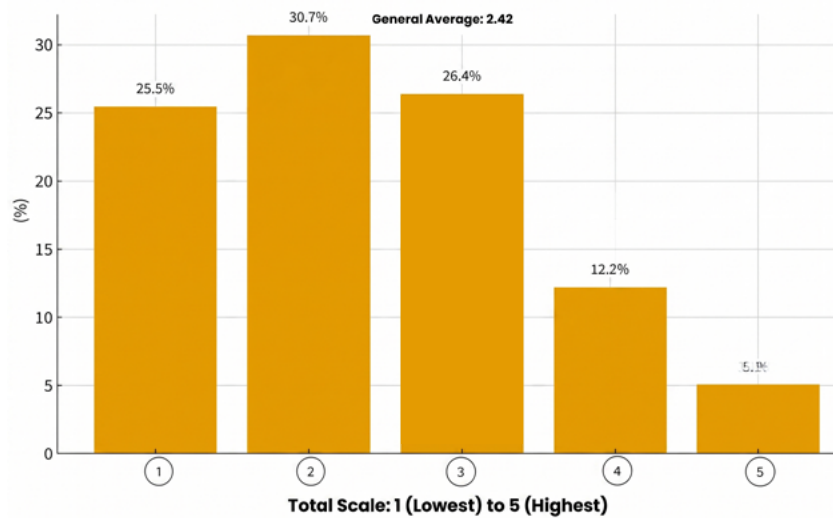


The overall assessment of the survey findings clearly shows that none of the examined areas has reached a “good” or “very good” level. In all thematic areas, the average scores remain below 3 out of 5. This indicates that the assessed areas are perceived by participants as “below moderate level” or “close to inadequate”. This picture shows that humanitarian, structural and institutional problems on the ground continue at a high level, and that current interventions remain insufficient to meet existing needs. The findings indicate that the current situation in Syria has moved beyond a temporary problem area and has become a form of structural vulnerability.

When the distribution of survey results is examined, it is seen that participants’ perceptions are largely concentrated at negative or borderline levels. While 25.5 per cent of participants rated their assessments at the level of “1”, 30.7 per cent selected the option “2”. The fact that these two groups together reach 56.2 per cent shows that conditions on the ground are clearly perceived as inadequate by more than half of the participants. The option “3”, which represents a moderate level, was selected by 26.4 per cent of participants. This group is considered to largely reflect a “neither good nor bad” perception. By contrast, the total share of the relatively positive options “4” and “5” is only 17.3 per cent. In particular, the fact that the option “5”, which indicates the highest level of satisfaction, remains at a very low rate of 5.1 per cent shows that areas that can be assessed positively on the ground are extremely limited.

This distribution shows that, across all areas covered by the survey, the overall perception is concentrated around “inadequacy”. It also indicates that current humanitarian, social and structural conditions have not yet moved into a phase of improvement; rather, fragility continues. The findings clearly show that the situation on the ground is structural rather than temporary, and that comprehensive interventions are needed.

**Figure 2: Overall Assessment Rates**



The table below shows the average scores for the main areas assessed within the scope of the survey. When the data are examined, it is seen that all areas remain below 3 out of 5. This indicates that conditions on the ground are generally perceived as fragile and inadequate.

The lowest average scores were recorded in health (~2.1) and shelter (~2.2), showing that these two sectors are the most critical areas on the ground and require the most urgent intervention. Disruptions in access to health services, inadequate infrastructure and staff shortages, as well as destruction, property issues and poor living conditions in the shelter sector, stand out as the main reasons behind these low scores. Although WASH — water and sanitation — (~2.5) and cultural spaces (~2.5) received slightly higher scores, these areas also remain within the “fragile” category. Access to water, inadequate sanitation infrastructure and deteriorating hygiene conditions continue to create risks that are directly linked to health.

The low score for cultural spaces shows that social life has not been revitalised and that social cohesion remains weak. Although education (~2.6) and camp conditions (~2.7) are among the areas assessed relatively more positively, even these scores do not indicate a sustainable and healthy structure. The partial provision of basic services in camps has led this area to receive a higher score compared to others. However, it has also become clear that camp life is not sustainable in the long term. The highest average scores are seen in security (~2.8) and access to law and justice (~2.9). Nevertheless, the fact that even these areas do not reach a “moderate” level shows the fragility of the security perception and the limited functionality of legal mechanisms. Structural problems in access to justice, property disputes and legal uncertainties in particular continue to constitute major obstacles to social stability.

When the overall picture is assessed, it is clear that no area has reached a level that can be considered positive or adequate. A fragile situation continues across all sectors. This indicates that current conditions in Syria point not to a temporary crisis, but to a multidimensional and lasting set of structural problems. For this reason, the prioritisation of intervention areas should be addressed not only from a humanitarian assistance perspective, but also within the framework of long-term reconstruction and institutional capacity-building.

**Table 2: Average Scores by Theme**

Area	Average Score
Health	~2,1
Shelter	~2,2
WASH (Water – Sanitation)	~2,5
Education	~2,6
Camp Areas	~2,7
Security	~2,8
Law / Access to Justice	~2,9

### LOWEST AVERAGE SCORES

When the survey results are examined, the indicators falling within the 1.6–2.0 range appear to reflect the deepest and most structural problem areas on the ground. The topics within this range point not only to service inadequacy, but also to a lack of institutional capacity and a serious weakening of sustainability. Health insurance and legislation are among the areas with the lowest averages. This shows that access to health services on the ground is seriously limited not only by physical constraints, but also by the absence of a legal and administrative framework. The fact that the health system largely operates through temporary solutions and humanitarian assistance prevents the development of an institutional structure.

Similarly, shelter conditions for persons with disabilities and older persons stand out as one of the most fragile areas. The existing shelter infrastructure is not suitable for the needs of these groups, creating serious gaps in both physical access and care services. This shows that social protection mechanisms remain non-functional on the ground. Bed capacity and operating room facilities are also among the lowest-scoring areas. This finding shows that the health system has collapsed not only in terms of primary health care, but also in terms of advanced treatment capacity. The system's ability to respond is extremely limited, especially in cases requiring emergency intervention, surgical operations and inpatient treatment.

Sewage and drainage services stand out as one of the areas where infrastructure inadequacy is most visible. The low scores in this area indicate not only a technical gap, but also a structural risk that directly threatens public health. Inadequate sewage infrastructure increases the risk of epidemics and seriously reduces quality of life. In the field of education, the number of teachers and adult education opportunities are among the weakest areas. The shortage of teachers, low salaries and the absence of mechanisms to ensure the continuity of education create serious gaps, particularly in adult education and professional development.

Finally, new employment opportunities and women's employment stand out as among the areas with the lowest averages. This shows that economic recovery is not inclusive and that women's participation in the labour force remains extremely limited. This low level of women's employment weakens household income and also increases social vulnerability. Overall, these indicators show that problems on the ground are concentrated in the areas of infrastructure, legislation, employment and social policy. For this reason, these areas should be among the priority targets of long-term and holistic policy interventions, beyond short-term assistance.

### **HIGHEST AVERAGE SCORES**

The overall assessment shows that even the areas perceived as relatively better under field conditions have not reached an adequate level. The highest average scores are concentrated in the 3–3.6 range, which indicates that the humanitarian situation has improved only to a limited extent. In the WASH sector in particular, the presence of responsible units creates a more positive perception compared to other areas. However, this does not mean that services are effective or sustainable. Similarly, the existence of institutional structures, a sense of security or the availability of basic services is not sufficient to meet needs on the ground. Due to capacity gaps, limited resources and implementation problems, these areas also remain fragile. In this picture, the highest-scoring areas point not to structural improvement, but only to a relatively less negative situation. They show that service delivery in many areas across Syria still remains below critical thresholds.

### **SECURITY AND JUSTICE**

Security perception appears relatively more positive compared with other sectors. The study shows that the public order situation is generally perceived as being at a "moderate level". However, the presence of landmines and unexploded ordnance remains a serious risk factor in many areas. The widespread view that mine clearance activities are insufficient has become one of the main factors limiting returns to rural areas. This shows that security is directly linked not only to the presence of law enforcement forces, but also to making the physical environment safe.

The legal sector is perceived relatively more positively compared with other sectors. However, this area also has serious limitations in terms of functionality. Most participants stated that access to legal mechanisms is difficult, that structures providing legal support are insufficient in both number and capacity, and that justice processes move slowly. Uncertainties continue especially in relation to property rights, return processes and applications concerning rights claims. This shows that, although there has been some progress in the functionality of the legal system, it has not yet become sufficiently institutionalised to meet needs on the ground.

Overall, the survey results show that a certain level of functioning can be observed in the areas of security and law. However, current conditions make it necessary to strengthen security and justice mechanisms, particularly in relation to return processes. Otherwise, inadequate security and legal safeguards will continue to be major obstacles to lasting stability at both individual and social levels.

## **SHELTER**

Assessments related to shelter point to one of the areas where fragility on the ground is most clearly felt. The majority of participants emphasised that there are no adequate and liveable housing options for the returning population. It was stated that a significant part of the existing housing stock is either heavily damaged or far from meeting basic living conditions. In particular, it was noted that most buildings damaged during the war have not been repaired, while some are effectively unusable because they are unsafe.

The shelter problem is not limited only to the insufficient number of housing units. It was emphasised that suitable shelter conditions for persons with disabilities, older persons and other vulnerable groups have almost not been created, and that accessible and safe housing solutions for the needs of these groups remain extremely limited. This situation further deepens the shelter crisis in the context of social protection and the right to live in dignity.

Participant assessments show that the shelter problem varies by region, but that the situation is much more severe in Aleppo and Hama in particular. In these governorates, both the scale of physical destruction and the extremely slow progress of reconstruction and repair processes have made shelter conditions even more fragile. As a result, shelter stands out not only as an infrastructure gap, but also as one of the main obstacles directly affecting the sustainability of return, increasing social vulnerability and undermining long-term stability.

## **WASH**

The WASH sector showed a lower-middle level of performance in the overall assessment. The findings indicate that continuity in access to clean water cannot be ensured and that infrastructure remains largely inadequate. In many areas, water supply is irregular; interruptions occur frequently, and households do not have continuous access to reliable drinking water. The dysfunction of sewage and drainage systems increases environmental risks and leads to serious health problems, especially during rainy periods. Significant gaps were also identified in waste management and pest control. The absence of regular waste collection systems leads to the accumulation of waste in open areas and increases the risk of infestation. This situation facilitates the spread of water- and environment-related diseases, particularly diarrhoea and skin diseases.

The current picture shows that problems in the WASH sector are not limited to technical infrastructure gaps, but have become a structural issue that directly threatens public health. These shortcomings are felt more clearly, especially in camp areas and rural regions, making living conditions unsustainable.

## **HEALTH**

The health sector stands out as the area with the lowest average score among all themes. Participant assessments show that access to health services is extremely limited and that existing capacity remains far from meeting needs. There is a widespread view that the number of institutions providing health services is insufficient, and that existing facilities face serious shortages in both personnel and equipment. In particular, difficulties in accessing medicines and medical equipment directly affect the continuity of health services.

The fact that most responses to the question “Is the number of institutions providing health services sufficient?” are concentrated at the levels of 1 or 2 shows that health infrastructure on the ground is extremely fragile. This picture points not only to the low quality of services, but also to the fact that the sustainability of the health system is seriously at risk.

## **EDUCATION**

The education sector stands out in the survey results as one of the areas where structural fragility is most clearly felt. Participants’ assessments particularly underline the shortage of teachers and the low level of teacher salaries. In addition, the fact that a significant number of school buildings are damaged, together with inadequate physical infrastructure, directly and negatively affects the quality of learning environments. Regional differences also emerge as a clear problem area. While access to education is relatively possible in some areas, children’s access to school is seriously limited, especially in rural areas and return locations.

## **ECONOMY**

Findings on the economy show that people are facing serious livelihood difficulties. Limited new employment opportunities and the very low level of women’s participation in the labour force are among the main obstacles to economic recovery. Markets and wholesale market areas appear to continue functioning in some regions. However, the weakness of agricultural production infrastructure, problems in access to irrigation and energy, and the inability to diversify household-level livelihood sources further deepen economic fragility. The current picture suggests that households remain largely dependent on irregular income sources and external support, and that a sustainable economic structure has not yet emerged in Syria.

## **CONDITIONS OF CAMP AREAS**

In the surveys, participants state that security problems in camps do not constitute a major issue. The most prominent problem areas in camps are infrastructure inadequacies and overcrowding. In particular, limited shelter capacity creates inequalities in access to water and sanitation services. This increases differences in living conditions between camps. Irregularities in service delivery make it difficult to access basic needs in some camps. The limited possibility of moving to living areas outside camps causes temporary solutions to become permanent and pushes families into a structure dependent on humanitarian assistance. This situation creates a significant risk for sustainable settlement and social cohesion.

## Assessments by Governorate

### OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF RESPONSES GIVEN IN IDLIB AND ALEPPO GOVERNORATES

When the survey data for Aleppo Governorate are assessed overall, it is seen that the humanitarian situation in the city remains fragile across many areas. Shelter and health stand out as the sectors with the lowest average scores. Participants identify the lack of adequate housing, the damaged condition of existing structures, and disruptions in access to health services as the most basic problems. The WASH sector presents a relatively better picture. However, access to water and the continuity of infrastructure services are still not stable. Perceptions in the education sector are more positive. Nevertheless, the results show that problems related to school infrastructure, teacher shortages and access to education continue. The areas of law and security received relatively higher scores compared with other sectors. However, the average in these areas does not indicate that the system is functioning fully and effectively; rather, it shows that they are perceived as relatively less problematic than other sectors. The overall picture shows that Aleppo urgently needs structural improvements, particularly in the areas of health and shelter.

**Table 3:** Sector Scores for Aleppo Governorate

Area	Score
Shelter	≈ 2,2
Health	≈ 2,0
WASH	≈ 2,4
Education	≈ 2,5
Law / Security	≈ 2,6–2,7

\*In Aleppo, health and shelter are perceived as weaker than the other sectors.

### OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF RESPONSES GIVEN IN HAMA AND HOMS GOVERNORATES

When the responses concerning Hama and Homs governorates are assessed together, it is seen that shelter conditions in these two cities are even more fragile than in Aleppo. The low averages in the shelter sector are associated with the inadequacy of the housing stock, the damaged condition of a large share of existing structures, and the lack of suitable living spaces for the returning population. A similar fragility is also observed in the WASH sector. The lack of continuous access to water, inadequate sewage infrastructure and deteriorating hygiene conditions are among the main problems that directly affect daily life. It can be said that these findings are driven particularly by the situation in northern Hama.

Although the health sector was assessed relatively more positively than other sectors, the current scores show that health services are also perceived as inadequate and irregular. Serious disruptions continue, particularly in access to health facilities, staff shortages and service continuity. By contrast, the perception of security in Hama and Homs is assessed more positively compared with other areas. While this can be linked to the decline in direct conflict risk and a relative sense of stability, it also shows that improvements in security do not compensate for shortcomings in basic services. The overall picture shows that, in these two governorates, structural problems in shelter and basic services continue to prevent living conditions from improving as expected, despite the relative improvement in security.

**Table 4:** Sector Scores for Hama and Homs Governorate

Area	Score
Shelter	≈ 1,7
WASH	≈ 2,0
Health	≈ 2,2
Security	≈ 3,2

\* While shelter conditions in Hama and Homs appear even more fragile than in Aleppo, the perception of security is relatively better.

## OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF RESPONSES GIVEN IN DAMASCUS GOVERNORATE

When the responses concerning Damascus Governorate are assessed overall, a relatively more balanced picture emerges compared with other regions. Scores in the areas of WASH, education, law and security are concentrated at a moderate level, with a perception that these sectors are more functional, particularly in central areas. Participants stated that legal mechanisms and security structures in Damascus operate more regularly compared with other parts of the country, and that public order is relatively better maintained. However, this relatively positive perception does not mean that services are sufficient. Although there is a certain degree of institutional continuity in education and WASH, the inclusiveness and sustainability of services remain limited. While life in Damascus is more predictable in terms of security, it still shows a fragile structure in terms of access to basic services.

## GOVERNORATE-BASED GENERAL ANALYSIS

Governorate-based assessments show that regional differences are quite clear. Latakia and Homs, located among the coastal and central governorates, have higher average scores compared with other regions, indicating relatively better conditions. In these governorates, access to basic services, the perception of security and institutional functioning appear more stable compared with other regions.

By contrast, Hama, Damascus and Idlib present a moderate picture. In these areas, access to services is partially possible, but infrastructure gaps and institutional capacity problems continue. Aleppo stands out by far as the governorate assessed most negatively. Problems related to shelter, health, economic opportunities and access to basic services pull down the city's overall average. It is also observed that participants with greater field experience provided more negative assessments. This shows that actors who know the field closely are able to observe the existing problems more clearly, and that partial improvements on the surface are not sufficient to cover structural problems. The overall picture shows that regional inequalities have deepened and that much more comprehensive interventions are needed, especially in governorates such as Aleppo that have experienced extensive destruction.

**Table 5:** Governorate-Based Overall Score

Governorate	Overall Score
Latakia	2.8
Homs	2.75
Hama / Damascus / Idlib	2.5–2.6
Aleppo	2.2

## OVERALL SURVEY FINDINGS

When the survey findings are considered holistically, it becomes clear that the humanitarian situation across Syria still remains highly fragile. Health, WASH and shelter stand out as the most problematic areas, due to both infrastructure gaps and interruptions in access to services. The low scores recorded in these areas point not only to physical inadequacies, but also to limited institutional capacity, funding gaps and weak coordination. Disruptions in access to health services, when combined with inadequate clean water and sanitation infrastructure, create a situation that directly threatens public health.




Education and the economy were assessed at a relatively moderate level. However, the deterioration of education infrastructure, teacher shortages and access problems carry the risk of creating long-term losses, especially for children and young people. Similarly, responses concerning the economy show that limited livelihood opportunities, unemployment, the weakness of agriculture and small-scale production, and increasing dependence on assistance constitute obstacles to lasting recovery.

Security and justice were assessed more positively compared with other areas. However, responses in these areas also show that this positive situation is not felt equally across the country.

The overall picture shows that vulnerable groups — particularly women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities — have not yet benefited positively from recent developments. The current service structure is not able to respond adequately to the needs of these groups. It should be underlined that this situation may become a structural problem that threatens social cohesion and long-term stability.

As a result, the survey findings show that recovery in Syria remains extremely fragile, and that existing improvements are limited and unevenly distributed. For lasting improvement, sectoral interventions should not be planned in isolation from one another. Instead, they need to be designed through a holistic approach that addresses shelter, health, WASH, education, the economy and law together. Otherwise, existing vulnerabilities will deepen, and return processes in particular will remain far from sustainable.

**Table 6:** Overall Survey Findings

	<b>Health, WASH and shelter are the most critical areas.</b>
	<b>Education and the economy are at a moderate level, but are not sustainable.</b>
	<b>Security / justice is relatively better, but equal access remains problematic.</b>
	<b>Vulnerable groups are in the worst situation across all sectors.</b>

# Key Strategic Conclusions and Policy Recommendations for Actors

The findings obtained within the scope of this study show that the current situation in Syria must be assessed not only from a humanitarian perspective, but also through structural, administrative and socio-economic dimensions. Field observations and survey results reveal mutually reinforcing problems in almost every area, from security to shelter, from health to education, and from the economy to governance. For this reason, policy recommendations should not be based on short-term and fragmented interventions focused on individual sectors. Instead, they should be addressed within a holistic, long-term and sustainable framework.

The survey results show that health, WASH and shelter have fallen below critical thresholds. They also indicate that, although education and the economy appear relatively better, their structural sustainability remains questionable. The findings suggest that security and justice mechanisms have shown partial improvement in some regions, but that this improvement has not been reflected equally across the country. For this reason, it can be argued that the steps taken in 2025 have mostly provided short-term relief, while questions remain about their ability to generate long-term stability.

In this context, policy recommendations will be built around supporting a transformation process that does not completely exclude humanitarian assistance, but reduces aid dependency and places production, employment and local capacity at the centre. In Syria, security, economic development, social cohesion and institutional capacity-building should be pursued simultaneously. Otherwise, progress in any one area will not be able to create a lasting impact due to fragility in other areas.

Within this framework, the strategic conclusions and policy recommendations presented below are based on field findings and aim to provide a roadmap that is applicable in the short, medium and long term, sustainable, and aligned with realities on the ground.

## **10.1. Preventing the Increase of Security Risks and Supporting the Political Process in an Inclusive Manner**

As of 2025, the picture emerging in Syria clearly shows that the country lacks the institutional, social and economic capacity to bear a new phase of conflict. In particular, unresolved areas of tension between the Syrian Government and the SDF, debates on federalism between the Druze and the Syrian Government, armed threats that may arise from former regime elements in the Coastal Region and could grow with external support, and the activities of the ISIS terrorist

organisation may create new conflict dynamics in the medium term. A possible new phase of conflict could have destructive effects on social cohesion, political legitimacy and economic recovery. In an environment where security is not institutionalised, it does not appear possible for political consensus to deepen or for economic recovery to become lasting. On the contrary, increasing security risks could deepen the fractures within society that emerged during the war. This situation could strengthen tendencies towards radicalisation and cause limited resources to be redirected towards conflict dynamics.

However, the continuation of security problems in the country and the periodic recurrence of armed clashes between different groups may once again pull the perspective of regional states and the international community towards a security-centred framework on Syria. As a result, support for development, reconstruction and the strengthening of institutional capacity may remain in the background.

For this reason, the main elements of the approach to be followed in the security field should include strengthening inclusive political dialogue mechanisms, creating a balance among different actors that does not generate conflict, and restructuring the political process in a way that includes all segments of society, rather than relying on temporary solutions based on military methods. Otherwise, temporary improvements in security may begin to produce new risks again within a short period, before turning into lasting stability.

## **10.2. Improving Living Conditions: The Humanitarian Assistance –Development Dilemma**

As of 2025, it is observed that the need for humanitarian assistance in Syria has not decreased; on the contrary, it has increased due to structural problems. However, field observations and surveys clearly show that a support model based only on humanitarian assistance is not sustainable. Although the long-standing aid-oriented approach has made survival possible in the short term, it has turned into a structure that increases social dependency because production capacity has not been rebuilt. Current conditions particularly limit the participation of the working-age population in economic life and make unemployment chronic.

The main problem in the way other countries address social and economic issues in Syria is that they have not been able to establish a balanced and flexible model between urgent humanitarian needs and development-oriented interventions. It is not possible to completely cut assistance and support to the Syrian people in the short term. However, maintaining a system based only on aid also prevents social recovery in the long term. For this reason, it has become necessary to implement a feasible, gradual and multidimensional transition model.

In this framework, the approach to be followed should be shaped around three main stages:

- a. In the short term, the uninterrupted continuation of humanitarian assistance for food, shelter, health and basic needs;
- b. In the medium term, the establishment of equipment, training and small-scale support mechanisms that enable individuals to re-enter productive processes;
- c. In the long term, support for strengthening local economic capacity, particularly in industry and agriculture, and the development of a self-sufficient economic structure in Syria.

This approach aims, in the medium term, to replace the aid distribution-based model with a production-oriented ecosystem. In other words, it is necessary not only to “give fish”, but to create an environment in which fish can be caught and how, to make access to means of production possible, and to establish a sustainable structure through which the value produced can reach the market. Only in this way can dependency on humanitarian assistance be reduced and the long-term resilience of society strengthened.

### 10.3. Prioritizing Economic Recovery

In order to establish lasting stability in Syria, economic recovery should become a central policy area. Unless medium- and large-scale development programmes that support production and employment are implemented, current economic problems are likely to continue deepening. If economic recovery cannot be achieved, the problems experienced during this period may become permanent. In this framework, an environment may emerge in which poverty becomes not temporary but continuous and cyclical, the social support burden on the state gradually increases, public resources become insufficient to meet growing needs, and dependence on international assistance continues. In parallel, the likelihood of increasing social unrest, weakening social cohesion and rising security risks becomes stronger. If economic revival cannot be achieved, there is a strong possibility that return processes will slow down, or even that new migration movements out of the country will be triggered.

For this reason, economic recovery should be addressed not only as a goal aimed at improving humanitarian welfare, but also as a fundamental priority for security, social stability and the sustainability of the political order. Increasing production capacity, expanding employment opportunities, implementing education and economic programmes that improve productivity, and restoring the production sectors with which the Syrian people are familiar stand out as essential elements for ensuring long-term stability.

### 10.4. Strengthening State Capacity

After more than a decade of conflict, a new social generation has emerged in Syria. Compared with previous periods, this generation appears more open to taking public responsibility, more willing to contribute to the rebuilding of the state, and more inclined to cooperate with international actors. However, current practices on the ground show that this potential remains largely limited to civil society projects and has not been sufficiently integrated into state structures. In particular, short-term, project-based and non-continuous interventions fall short of supporting the development of lasting institutional capacity. This leads to the fragmented use of human resources and prevents accumulated experience from turning into institutional memory. Current conditions, however, show the need for long-term and holistic programmes that directly aim to strengthen state capacity instead of temporary solutions.

In this framework, the priority areas can be outlined as follows:

- a. Strengthening the institutional capacity of public institutions;
- b. Improving the professional competencies of public personnel and establishing continuous training mechanisms;
- c. Establishing structural mechanisms that ensure accountability, transparency and institutional continuity.

The main objective is to build a state structure that is not continuously dependent on external assistance, but is able to generate its own resources, has improved capacity to deliver services, and can respond to social expectations. Steps taken in this direction will contribute not only to strengthening public administration, but also to rebuilding social trust.

## 10.5. Linking Returns to a Sustainable Strategy

The ability of return processes to produce lasting results depends not on spontaneous movements, but on a planned, gradual and long-term strategy. Field observations clearly show that improvements in security conditions alone are not sufficient to make returns sustainable. The permanence of returns requires the simultaneous strengthening of economic, social and institutional factors.

In this framework, the main components of a sustainable return policy have taken shape as follows:

- a. Emergency humanitarian assistance mechanisms should not be completely abandoned, but these forms of assistance should be restructured in a way that does not create permanent dependency;
- b. A shift should be made from aid-based approaches to production-oriented support models in the economic field;
- c. Support mechanisms should be established to strengthen production in agriculture and industry in a planned manner;
- d. Employment policies should be developed for people who have returned, or are planning to return, to their country, taking into account planned local needs and social cohesion;
- e. The infrastructure, urban planning and basic service capacity of cities should be strengthened gradually;
- f. Capacity should be increased simultaneously in the areas of education, health and shelter.

Field observations support the finding that the points listed above are being implemented in a fragmented and disconnected manner. The Syrian Government and local authorities are trying to implement these measures with support from international funds and contributions from civil society organisations. However, unfortunately, these efforts are not being carried out in a holistic and planned way. Since the steps taken have not been turned into a holistic and planned practice, returns appear to be slowing down, and some returnees have started to move within the country. This picture suggests that, if the situation continues in this way, this population may begin to seek reverse migration. It is clear that improvement in the economic field will take time to reach the expected level. However, disappointment caused by the slow fulfilment of expectations is creating problems beyond economic losses. These problems weaken social cohesion, which is already facing difficulties for other reasons, and create additional pressure on public resources. For this reason, it is critically important that return policies be addressed through a multidimensional development perspective that aims at long-term stability rather than temporary solutions.

## 10.6. Reframing Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance Activities with a Focus on Scale and Impact

Reconstruction and humanitarian assistance activities in Syria have long been carried out mainly through small-scale, short-term and fragmented projects. This approach is preferred because it produces quick results and is relatively low-cost. However, given the scale of existing needs, it remains far from creating structural transformation. Field observations and reports reflected in open sources show that many small projects are being implemented. Yet, despite their high number and wide spread across the country, it can be said that the impact of these projects remains limited and does not generate lasting improvement.

It is observed that the total budget of small-scale projects implemented across the country reaches millions of US dollars. However, when these resources are used in a fragmented manner, the results do not translate into improvement at the intended scale. This shows that the issue of scale has become a fundamental structural problem in assistance and reconstruction activities. For this reason, it is recommended that the reconstruction approach be carried out through well-planned, geographically focused and multi-sectoral large-scale programmes instead of fragmented projects. Strategic projects that aim to restore a specific area in a holistic manner should be designed to cover infrastructure, shelter, employment, education and basic services at the same time. Such an approach will both ensure more effective use of resources and increase the capacity to produce visible and lasting results on the ground. In summary, the main priority in the reconstruction process should be to move towards well-planned, results-oriented and large-scale projects that can create impact at the regional level, rather than many small and scattered interventions.

## 10.7. Ensuring That Social Cohesion Processes Are Not Overlooked

The current situation in Syria makes it necessary to address the issue of social cohesion again and in greater depth. Until recently, discussions focused on the integration of Syrians into Türkiye and European Union countries. At the current stage, however, the focus has shifted to within Syria itself. With the increase in returns, the issue of social cohesion has gained a new dimension.

Field observations show that integration challenges no longer arise only along the axis of migrants and host communities, but directly within the internal dynamics of Syrian society itself. In this framework, three main lines of tension stand out in particular:

- Social and economic cohesion challenges between returnees and those who remained in the country,
- Adaptation problems experienced by returning family members within their own family structures,
- Social and political tensions between those who accept the new political structure and those who do not.

These differences point to a multi-layered cohesion crisis extending from the individual level to the societal level. It is observed that differences have emerged between the population that stayed outside the country for a long time and those who remained in Syria in terms of lifestyle,

expectations, perceptions of security and political attitudes. For now, this situation is causing tensions in daily life. However, if social cohesion cannot be ensured, it may transform over the long term and turn into social polarisation in some places.

In geographical areas where ethnic, religious and sectarian tensions are high, projects and initiatives aimed at contributing to social cohesion appear to create sensitivities. Hasty steps that directly address social cohesion projects carry the risk of further deepening existing fragility.

For this reason, the basic approach to the social cohesion process should be based on a gradual, inclusive framework that also takes into account other communities beyond the target group that may be sensitive to the issue. It is clear that society needs time to adapt to the new conditions, and that this process should be supported through social support mechanisms, local reconciliation processes and inclusive policies. However, attention should be paid to the risk captured by a common Turkish expression: “causing harm while trying to do good.” Efforts to ensure social cohesion by creating special social groups built around minorities, former dominant social strata perceived to be under pressure, or expectations that fall outside Syria’s traditional social structure may worsen existing cohesion problems.

For this reason, social cohesion should be addressed as a complementary element of security and development policies and managed through a long-term perspective of social stability. However, while this process is being carried out, the perspectives of democracy, the rule of law and human rights must not be neglected. In light of all these policy recommendations, the points presented above can be summarised below in a form classified according to implementing actors.

# Policy Recommendations Classified by Implementing Actors

## Recommendations for the Syrian Government

### STRENGTHENING STATE CAPACITY

- Increasing the institutional capacity of public institutions
- Restructuring law enforcement forces
- Developing mechanisms for transparency, accountability and continuity of services

### ECONOMIC AND INFRASTRUCTURE RECOVERY

- Implementing national policies that support agricultural and industrial production
- Prioritising investments in basic infrastructure, including water, energy and transport
- Developing national resettlement and reconstruction plans to address the shelter crisis

## Recommendations for the International Community and Donor Countries

### HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DEVELOPMENT BALANCE

- Ensuring the uninterrupted continuation of emergency humanitarian assistance
- Transforming assistance mechanisms into production- and employment-oriented development programmes within the shortest possible time

### RECONSTRUCTION SUPPORT

- Supporting large-scale regional and multi-sectoral reconstruction programmes instead of fragmented projects
- Providing long-term financing for shelter, health, education and WASH infrastructure

### SECURITY AND STABILITY SUPPORT

- Providing technical and institutional support in the fight against ISIS and organised crime
- Providing training and equipment support to strengthen law enforcement capacity
- Providing rapid and large-scale support for mine and unexploded ordnance clearance processes

## **RETURN PROCESSES**

- Implementing integrated return strategies based on shelter, employment and access to services
- Establishing local integration mechanisms for the returning population

## **Recommendations for International and Local Civil Society Organisations**

### **CONTRIBUTION TO STRENGTHENING THE ECONOMY**

- Supporting small-scale production and local initiatives as much as possible within holistic and systematic plans
- Supporting production-oriented economic initiatives that include women's employment as part of a strategy to broaden the economic base

### **SERVICE DELIVERY AND CAPACITY SUPPORT**

- Supporting the Syrian Government in addressing basic service gaps in health, education and WASH
- Implementing local capacity development and training programmes

### **SOCIAL COHESION**

- Developing cohesion projects between returnees and local communities
- Implementing sensitivity-based and inclusive social programmes
- Strengthening local dialogue mechanisms that reduce social tensions

### **DATA AND MONITORING**

- Contributing to field data collection and multi-source verification processes
- Regularly updating vulnerability analyses

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