

**ACTION  
FOR  
HUMANITY**

# SYRIA

**CIVILIAN PERSPECTIVES ON HUMANITARIAN  
NEEDS AND RECOVERY PRIORITIES**

**2025**



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This briefing is based on desk and field research carried out by Action For Humanity/Syria Relief in early 2025. It captures the perspectives of civilians - across multiple governorates – on sanctions, access to basic services and education, their aspirations for the future as well as recommendations directed at the transitional government and the international community when it comes to Syria’s recovery and reconstruction.

## METHODOLOGY

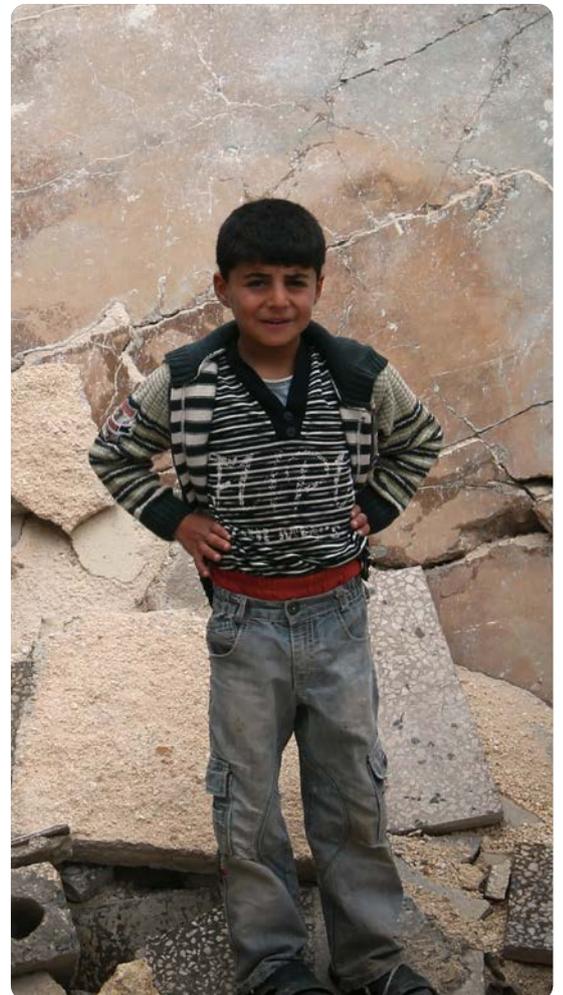
Interviews (*with 146 individuals in total*) were carried out in the following locations - Daraa, Idlib, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Tartus, Al Suweyda and Damascus. Initial plans included conducting interviews in Latakia; however, due to the prevailing security situation, these were not able to take place. Data was collected through key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with diverse male and female participants from different religious sects including youth, the elderly, displaced persons and professionals. Interviews were conducted in Arabic by Action For Humanity/Syria Relief staff. The names of all those interviewed have been hidden to protect their identities. Information provided by individuals about systemic issues has been cross checked alongside other sources including existing qualitative and quantitative research by other international organisations and agencies.

## CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Syria stands at a critical crossroads in its post-conflict recovery. A new phase has started to emerge in December 2024 since the fall of the Assad regime, cautious optimism has taken root - driven by measurable progress [1] - despite the lingering impact of more than a decade of war.

The humanitarian landscape has also begun to shift. Since December 2024, over one million Syrian refugees and previously displaced people have returned to their areas of origin. [2]. Spontaneous returns of internally displaced persons (IDPs) are also underway with hundreds of thousands displaced since late November 2024 returning to their communities. These movements reflect a growing sense of hope and confidence in Syria’s recovery. Despite these positive developments, significant challenges persist. Many returnees face destroyed homes, limited access to basic services and livelihoods, ongoing security risks and legal documentation hurdles. An estimated 16.5 million people are still in need of assistance [3] and infrastructure damage remains widespread with roads and public services in disrepair. Landmines and explosive remnants of war continue to pose lethal threats with over 600 deaths and injuries reported since December — a third of them children. [4]

*“People’s main concern has become living day by day without thinking about the future.” [5]*





# SYRIA'S ECONOMY AND THE BURDEN OF SANCTIONS

Syria's economy remains in a state of severe collapse marked by hyperinflation, widespread poverty and decimated infrastructure. Around 90% of the population can no longer afford essential goods leaving them below the poverty line and more than half are food insecure. [6] One in four Syrians are now jobless [7] with youth and women disproportionately affected and three in four people rely on humanitarian assistance and require development support across critical sectors including health, education, housing, food security and water and sanitation. [8]

The situation regarding sanctions on Syria is complex and has evolved considerably since 2011. These sanctions - imposed primarily by the United States and the European Union - were aimed at pressuring the former regime to end human rights violations and engage in a political resolution to the conflict. However, over time, these sanctions resulted in wider humanitarian impacts on civilians.

Following Assad's ousting and recent political shifts, key international actors - including the US, UK and EU - have begun a phased rollback of sanctions to support Syria's political transition and reconstruction. In May 2025, the US lifted all sanctions including

those targeting the Central Bank and state-owned enterprises. [9] It also suspended secondary sanctions under the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act for six months to enable engagement with the transitional government, facilitate investment and ensure access to electricity, energy, water, sanitation, and humanitarian aid.

The EU undertook similar action lifting all economic sanctions and removing asset freezes on the Central Bank, oil sector, and telecommunications. Following recent changes to the UK's Syria sanctions regime, many of the broad economic restrictions have been eased to support reconstruction and engagement with Syria but the UK has also retained targeted sanctions on individuals and certain sensitive goods (*including military and internal-repression-related items*) and export controls, similar to the EU's continuing restrictions. [10] Additionally, backed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the World Bank has cleared Syria's arrears restoring the country's eligibility for multilateral financing. [11] The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has also returned to Damascus for its first mission in over a decade signalling a willingness to support Syria's recovery while cautioning that economic growth must accelerate significantly to reach pre-war levels.



Despite these encouraging developments, Syria's economic outlook remains fragile due to the severe hardships endured by civilians and the timeframe required for recent reforms to translate into tangible improvements on the ground. The following testimonies highlight the realities on the ground reinforcing the urgent need for recovery efforts that prioritise the wellbeing of ordinary Syrians.

***“Sanctions have led to a sharp decline in the local economy. It became difficult to obtain raw materials needed by factories and institutions, and import/export activities were heavily affected. [12] As a result, many factories and companies closed or relocated their operations abroad, leading many people to lose their jobs. Unemployment increased, and jobs became unstable and low-paid.”... [13]***

Interviewees across all locations described the sanctions as devastating to daily life painting a stark picture of the economic situation in recent years. Sanctions were repeatedly described as catastrophic [14] and indiscriminate ending every aspect of social life. The instability of the dollar exchange rate was cited as a core driver behind inflated costs for essentials particularly food, fuel and medicine. [15]

Sanctions had a serious effect on medication making it either too expensive or unavailable. [16] In Aleppo, similar sentiments were shared with one woman detailing her personal experience and how she was unable to secure medication for her relative and suffering from cancer. [17] In a focus group discussion held in Homs, a male doctor spoke of how hospital and health centres had scarcity when it came to medication to treat illness as well as medical supplies. [18] Reported shortages, according to him, were driven by the Syrian pound's depreciation, rising import costs, sanctions restricting trade and reduced domestic production linked to fuel and electricity shortages. In Tartous, interviewees spoke about the increase in prices to both food and medicines:

***“Because of import stoppages, any medicine that used to cost 5,000 SYP before sanctions would cost 2 million SYP after sanctions.” [19]***



Interviewees also highlighted the impact sanctions have had on obtaining raw materials outside of the pharmaceutical sector and needed by factories and institutions. Due to limited import and export operations, many factories and companies were forced to close consequently leading to many people losing their jobs and businesses. ***“Even when jobs were available, salaries were very low, leading to disguised unemployment.”***

[20]

In a focus group discussion held with youth in Idlib, [21] the connection between sanctions and unemployment was emphasised. According to a male programmer ***“lack of investors and foreign companies [have] increased unemployment. As a programmer, I cannot work on websites that are blocked; this affected electronic payment methods.”*** Another interviewee, aged 22, spoke about the inability to upload his electronic project on Google Play due to sanctions while another stated that technological development is restricted due to platform and external transfer limitations. The impact of restrictions on technology were also felt in Tartous: ***“Job opportunities now require internet and bank accounts, which are not available in Syrian society.”***

In interviews held across Syria, migration was a key issue that was highlighted and particularly amongst the youth. For many Syrians, the deteriorating economic and social environment was a key factor in youth considering or deciding to migrate. Interviews consistently showed that people did not want to leave Syria but that the cumulative impact of sanctions and lack of opportunities left many feeling they had no alternative.

***Many young people consider migration as the only option – FGDs in Idlib***

***The community lost its most important foundation for building the future, which is the youth, who lost hope for improved conditions inside Syria, which pushed many to migrate - KII in Aleppo***

***The sanctions have led to deterioration in various fields, making life in Syria much harder... Job opportunities have noticeably decreased, while dropout and migration rates have increased due to poverty, making the future look frightening for all Syrians, especially for us young people, because of the hardships of life and the uncertainty of the future - KII in Idlib***

***The situation in Syria since the sanctions were imposed is bad and has worsened day-by-day: rising electricity costs, increased housing rents, illogical price hikes on basic goods with minimal returns, and random migration as many youths and women have left without clear destinations - KII in Al-Suweyda***





## IN ALEPPO

Sanctions have significantly deepened humanitarian suffering, destroyed economic resilience and exacerbated social inequality. Three individuals interviewed cited the collapse of vital sectors - industry, health and education. According to one university student, *“sanctions led to the breakdown of social fabric, the emergence of an elite class and a very poor class, in addition to increased cases of family separation due to the lack of basic necessities for the family.”* [22]

## IN TARTOUS

Sanctions were also seen as having had a significant impact on the availability of basic necessities – such as baby formula – leading to ‘merchants monopolising essential goods.’ According to a female engineer *“I believe these sanctions have contributed to the decline of society and its sectors at all levels (food, economy, oil), especially baby formula and basic food items like sugar, which are core needs of citizens. As long as sanctions exist, we live in a cage with a ceiling on any aspiration we seek.”* [23]

# IMPACTS ON AGRICULTURE AND ENERGY

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*“The economic and agricultural sectors have deteriorated due to inability to afford irrigation costs and frequent use of sewage water, negatively affecting public health and production quality. The industrial sector declined due to the emigration of many industrialists to other countries and the failure of their projects.” [24]*

Some sectors, such as agriculture and gas, were identified as being hit hardest. Youth professionals from Idlib, including a 24-year-old agricultural engineer [25] noted that farming had become unsustainable. An interviewee in Daraa spoke of the shortage of raw materials which has led to decreased production in the nutrition sector. The food production and processing sector was specifically identified as being disproportionately affected by disrupted imports and material shortages highlighting how sanctions ripple through local industries. [26]

The impacts to the agricultural sector were also highlighted in interviews held in Tartous where engineers at the water establishment were present. Challenges with securing the right products were reported due to the majority being either counterfeit

or expensive with the right products being sold at higher prices in the black market. There were also difficulties obtaining sterilisation devices and detectors and other maintenance tools: “Before sanctions, the agricultural sector did not suffer this much and the same goes for industry and food materials where we could maintain a six-month reserve. But after sanctions, the situation changed drastically.” [27]

In Homs, interviewees spoke of the challenges facing farmers as they suffer shortages of seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and fuel to run agricultural machinery with import cost increases due to currency devaluation and agricultural infrastructure decay. [28]

When it comes to the gas sector, [29] there was mention of gas supplies being cut and traders hoarding it and selling it at a higher price. In another focus group in the same location, one interviewee also noted the shortage of items such as gas and fuel and while some materials were present, a number of camps and villages were now suffering service suspensions due to halted USAID. [30]



Syria's gas infrastructure remains fragile and in urgent need of rehabilitation. Recent energy partnerships with Qatar and Turkey mark important steps forward, [31] providing short-term capacity gains and laying the groundwork for long-term resilience. However, sustained power stability will require securing pipelines, modernising domestic plants and expanding gas imports beyond current agreements.

Fuel shortages were echoed across interviews with youth in Idlib, where young people noted not only rising demand and unaffordability, but also the lack of alternatives: ***“Fuel shortages make heating, cooking and even commuting unaffordable.”*** [32]

Community coping strategies – seen as necessary ‘due to lack of solutions and options’ [33]- included: giving up non-essentials, selling assets or savings, forgoing heating and using wood for cooking (instead of gas or electricity) and reducing meals or shifting to aid dependency. [34] In Idlib, survival strategies reported by youth included severe cutbacks on spending, return to traditional lifestyle methods(e.g., cooking with firewood, making homemade goods) and cash transfers from relatives abroad. [35]



# ACCESS TO SERVICES

Millions of children and families continue to face dire conditions amid ongoing instability and a slow recovery. According to UNICEF, an estimated 16.7 million people, including 7.5 million children, need humanitarian assistance. Almost 40% of hospitals and health facilities are partly or completely non-functional and nearly 14 million people require improved water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services. [36] One in three housing units has been destroyed and nearly half of the country's water treatment and sewage systems are out of service. Furthermore, clinics face severe resource shortages with operating rooms lacking functional ultrasound machines and anaesthesia due to payment obstacles and sanctions. [37] The UN has estimated that it would cost at least \$250 billion to rebuild Syria while experts say that could reach at least \$400 billion. [38]

According to youth interviewed in Idlib, services such as healthcare, food and water were technically

available but inaccessible due to high costs, widespread unemployment and/or overreliance on humanitarian aid underscoring a disconnect between availability and affordability (this being a recurring theme tied closely to the economic effects of sanctions). A similar situation was reported in Damascus: *“Although basic goods are available on the black market, their exorbitant prices require significant financial resources, adding economic pressure and forcing citizens to work longer hours to meet their needs.”* [39]

Regarding health services, there is a shortage of qualified staff, medical devices especially cancer detection devices, and laboratory devices are old and unreliable. Food is available but very expensive; most cannot meet basic food needs (oil, rice, etc.). Water was free but now charged. Shelter rents are high and tents still remain. [40]





# HEALTHCARE

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In focus group discussions held with men and women in Idlib, both groups highlighted serious difficulties accessing essential services such as healthcare due to rising costs, discontinued aid, infrastructure damage, and service cuts. The differences between certain areas were also highlighted *“There is a large gap in provision in newly liberated villages needing reconstruction.”* [41] In another FGD, one woman stated that *“we can’t afford hospitals due to discontinued support and the high cost of medicine.”* Another group of women interviewed also expressed concern about halted support and lack of specialists, *“there is a shortage of medical staff and cancer medications. Support stopped, posing a big risk.”* [42]

In Homs, during a focus group discussion with women, similar reflections were shared, *“The health situation is very bad in both private and public hospitals. Prices are very high, many medicines are unavailable due to sanctions, such as cancer and chronic disease medicines, which led to many deaths in recent years.”* It was noted by one woman *“Some chronic disease patients I know were supposed to take two pills daily but due to poverty and lack of medicine, they only take half a pill daily.”* [43]





# FOOD, WATER, ELECTRICITY AND SHELTER

In Homs, food was reported to be available at times but the quality poor and affordability a major issue due to high prices and citizens' low purchasing power because of their restricted incomes.

In Aleppo, those interviewed informed Action For Humanity/Syria Relief that certain basic services are currently rare with water accessible only once a week and in small amounts. In Homs city, water was either completely not available or very weak due to repairs being needed for water pipes. Some rural areas were said to from severe water shortages. [44] A few interviewees in a focus group discussion also spoke about the lack of clean water increasing the risk of outbreak. [45]

Electricity in certain areas was available in limited supply, lasting no more than two hours every 24

hours. This was attributed to poor access to basic services and a lack of sufficient family income. [46] Chronic blackouts and decaying infrastructure were reported especially in Hama and Tartous where water engineers stressed the impact of sanctions on equipment availability.

As for shelter, *“most displaced people live in camps and cannot return to their areas due to destruction and inability to afford returning costs.”* In interviews with Hama and Damascus residents, housing was reported as unaffordable, particularly for those internally displaced with many living in overcrowded or unsafe dwellings. In a focus group discussion in Homs, one woman, recently widowed, stated *“rent has increased significantly. My house is destroyed and next month I have no income to pay rent. I will buy a tent and stay on top of my destroyed house.”*



While only anecdotal, a few interviewees suggested that sanctions have had a significant impact on both mental health and family relationships. One interviewee noted **“there is a feeling of depression and psychological helplessness; depression rates reached 70% in the city due to the country’s situation.”** Another highlighted the strain on marriages stating **“sanctions affected marital relationships; men can no longer support families, leading to depression and increased divorce rates.”**

**“The sanctions were meant to target the previous regime, but the only ones harmed are the people.”** [47]

Syrians often expressed frustration that the international community was unaware or indifferent to the unintended consequences of sanctions. Multiple respondents emphasised that sanctions failed to impact the Assad regime. According to one humanitarian worker **“Sanctions do not significantly affect dictatorial regimes; their greatest impact is on the people.”** [48] This statement reflected a common sentiment found in almost all the Syrian testimonies collected. that sanctions, while designed to pressure the former regime, are primarily felt by civilians and are deepening suffering across all demographics. According to one woman in Al Suweyda **“We live in extreme misery—essential life needs are almost completely absent.”**

Across all demographics, there was a consensus that sanctions have intensified inequality, widened class divisions and left civilians without institutional or economic safety nets. The long-term projection shared by the majority of Syrians interviewed for this research was very bleak with the impact of sanctions expected to result in a generation deprived of knowledge, opportunity and cohesion.

**“Sanctions should be lifted so Syrians can restore their normal lives with dignity, contributing to the country’s revival and progressing toward recovery and reconstruction.”** [49]



# IMPACTS ON EDUCATION

*“The poor financial situation forces many children to beg or work to support their families.” [50]*

*“Education is no longer affordable or accessible. Children are forced into labour, and essential materials are both costly and scarce, compounding the dropout rate.” [51]*

*“Only a small number managed to complete secondary or university education.”*

*“Education has regressed; we lack modern tools and curricula, and students suffer mentally from the situation.”*

The education sector has been crippled by conflict, poverty, and sanctions leading to mass dropout, [52] infrastructural decay and a lost generation of students. Interviewees across different governorates described children being forced to leave school to support their families and how the conflict itself made higher education virtually impossible, halting academic advancement and professional training. [53] One man from Hama shared his personal experience, saying *“I was deprived of education because my father lost his job and couldn’t support the household or provide for our needs. So, I dropped out of school and started working to help my family and father secure a livelihood.”* High dropout and child labour rates were cited the most in Hama, Homs and Damascus.



In Syria, more than 7,000 schools have been destroyed [54] and according to UNICEF, over 2.4 million children are out of school, with another 1 million at imminent risk of dropping out.

The collapse of the education system has far-reaching consequences. UNICEF warns that children excluded from schooling are increasingly vulnerable to child labour, early marriage, exploitation and recruitment by armed groups. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that nearly 138 million children are engaged in child labour worldwide. [55]

Sanctions have directly undermined Syria's education sector, restricting access to essential tools and materials in both formal and informal learning environments. Import bans have made books, computers, laboratory equipment, and other educational resources scarce eroding the quality and continuity of education. ***“Sanctions prevented the import of modern educational equipment and even the printing of books,”*** [56] noted one woman in Aleppo. This was echoed in Idlib where one interviewee highlighted that the education sector was affected due to the shortage of books, basic materials and resource rooms leading to many teachers to seek alternative job opportunities due to the lack of incentives, worsening an already critical shortage of qualified staff. [57] These constraints were seen as contributing to dropout rates and forcing families to adopt negative coping mechanisms.

In Tartous, during a focus group discussion, a teacher shared her personal experience: ***“A teacher does not have the tools and methods capable of delivering the idea to the student, and also we do not have a curriculum that matches the requirements of the era nor rely on technology in education. In our schools we barely find chairs or blackboards. Sanctions affected and prevented the provision of necessary educational tools such as projectors. Secondly, the student is in a pitiful***

***psychological state, collapsing daily because of the surrounding conditions. For a student to receive information, they must be psychologically prepared... Overall, this allows us to say that education in Syria has been greatly delayed compared even to neighbouring countries with much lower economic capabilities than ours. We notice this when comparing the children of our friends who migrated with the Syrian student. It is not because of us as individuals, but because we do not have these advanced tools used in education, nor do we have the mentality that can lead us to advanced stages in education.”***

***“Access to schools has changed. Casualties occur due to mines, especially among children.”*** [58]

Other barriers to education reported by interviewees included destroyed schools and unsafe access routes (especially near unexploded ordnance – UXOs), overcrowding of schools, [59] the lack of psychological support for trauma affected students [60] and inability to cover transportation costs. [61] When it comes to transportation, there were several reports that this forced students to attend nearby schools despite their poor quality. According to an interviewee in Damascus, teachers are averaging no more than \$20 per month which is insufficient to cover transportation costs let alone other living related costs.

It is important to note that some students have managed to continue their education despite facing significant obstacles including studying in inadequately equipped tents, navigating difficult security conditions and the cost of learning materials. While formal and informal education programs are being offered to support children, these initiatives remain limited in scope and require additional funding to effectively meet the growing needs.

# LANDMINES AND UXOs

Syria remains heavily contaminated with landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXOs) - these remnants of war pose a serious, daily threat to civilians, particularly in high-risk areas such as Aleppo, Idlib, Hama and rural Damascus. According to Humanity and Inclusion, over 1 million explosive munitions have been used since the onset of the conflict with a failure rate of 10–30%, leaving between 100,000 and 300,000 unexploded devices scattered across the country. [62]

The widespread presence of UXOs not only results in direct casualties but also obstructs humanitarian access, prevents agricultural activities and access to schools as well as impedes the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The threat is especially acute for children - many injured or killed while playing near contaminated areas.

***“Displacement is the only way for families to protect their children from danger,”*** [63]

In urban areas like Damascus, interviewees expressed deep concern about sending children to school due to the presence of UXOs near educational facilities and along transit routes. ***“This***

***fear hinders the education process and increases families’ suffering, as many areas remain unsafe, forcing them to make difficult decisions to protect their children’s safety.”***

Despite limited resources, communities have taken initiative to protect themselves. Youth in several focus groups highlighted the growing culture of caution and collective vigilance. ***“Due to the abundance of ordnance in the community, there has been an increase in awareness and community reporting”.*** Another noted ***“We exercise caution around suspicious objects and report them.”*** Syrian Civil Defense (aka. The White Helmets), and other local actors, were mentioned as playing a critical role in conducting awareness sessions, teaching residents - especially children - how to recognise and avoid explosive remnants.

However, it was highlighted that community-based awareness is no substitute for professional demining. The lack of technical capacity and specialised equipment means many contaminated areas remain untouched. Families often abandon land and homes where UXOs have been spotted, particularly following injuries, fatalities or near-misses.





# PERSPECTIVES FROM YOUTH

This research included focus group discussions in each of the eight governorates with young people aged 18 to 24, representing a diverse range of backgrounds including agricultural engineers, media workers, digital marketers, university students as well as those who are unemployed. Across all interviews, young people expressed a strong sense of civic responsibility and motivation to contribute to the study. Many emphasised that young people are essential to Syria's recovery and long-term stability. As one participant noted during a focus group, youth play *“a large role in building and protecting the country and are responsible for its security and stability.”*

In focus group discussions held across Syria, young people reported severe unemployment, technology and internet restrictions as well as barriers to accessing global platforms or remote jobs as their key concerns. *“Sanctions affect our ability to access online platforms and job opportunities.”* [64] A 22 year old digital marketing graduate stated *“we're blocked from participating in the digital economy,”* reflecting a broader sentiment among youth facing limited access to digital tools, and platforms ties. Many in the focus group discussions expressed that if conditions remain unchanged, migration would be their only viable future. *“We want to stay, but we need support, training, and opportunities.”*

In 2024, the Syria Response Coordinators Team reported an average unemployment rate of 88.74% in northwestern Syria. The report identified unemployment as one of the region's most urgent challenges, citing its wide-reaching consequences—including rising youth migration, escalating crime rates and deepening poverty. [65]



*“We want to contribute with ideas that benefit Syria and help it rise.”*

Despite facing deep challenges, Syrian youth across all the governorates expressed a strong, unified commitment to shaping their country’s future. Interviewees aged 18 to 24 consistently expressed a desire to share experiences, propose solutions and actively contribute to peacebuilding and national reconstruction. Their long-term vision centred on job creation, vocational training and national unity. Youth in Homs, Damascus, and Al-Suweyda in particular emphasised the need for support in launching small businesses and acquiring practical skills. In Homs and Hama, many called for greater political participation and roles in governance. While young people see themselves as key drivers of Syria’s recovery, they did note a lack of meaningful platforms and opportunities to lead. As one interviewee from Al-Suweyda said *“believing in youth ideas is the support we need most.”*

*“We want our voice heard during this critical stage in Syria’s history.” [66]*



## **DIFFERENCES OBSERVED IN INTERVIEWS**

There were some notable differences in responses in interviews conducted according to gender, age and profession. Male participants tended to emphasise broader structural issues such as economic collapse, inflation and the deterioration of infrastructure and public services. In contrast, female participants - particularly counsellors and social workers - focused more on the domestic and social consequences of the crisis. They highlighted the burden of rising prices on daily life, the loss of male breadwinners, and the strain of caring for families without sufficient support. Women also gave specific accounts of growing vulnerabilities: children leaving school to help secure food, lack of income-generating opportunities for women and concerns over long-term prospects.

Although rising prices and shortages—particularly of fuel, medicines, and food staples—were raised across all interviews, farmers and workers stressed the direct impact on livelihoods while students and professionals highlighted the impact of inflation on household needs. Doctors and counsellors pointed heavily to the effects of sanctions on healthcare while young people emphasised broader economic hardships and the growing scarcity of basic goods.

Age also shaped responses, though less starkly. Young people interviewed were more likely to focus on youth empowerment, education and entrepreneurship, while other age groups focused more on concerns around healthcare and economic stability. Across all groups, there was shared anxiety over the psychological toll of prolonged crisis - rising levels of despair, crime and social deviance, particularly among youth with few viable pathways forward.

# VULNERABLE GROUPS

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Interviewees consistently identified women, children, the elderly and internally displaced persons as the most vulnerable populations, echoing broader assessments that link vulnerability to limited mobility, dependency and a lack of stable income or institutional support. Women, often heading households due to the loss of male relatives, face disempowerment, early or forced marriage and exploitation in low-wage labour markets. [67] Children are particularly at risk (as highlighted in the education section) with many dropping out of school to help support their families amid deepening poverty.

Elderly people were reported as frequently being cut off from healthcare and social services, especially in remote areas. [68] Displaced families were also noted as a highly vulnerable group due to their struggle with high housing costs and lack of information about host communities. As one interview stated *“displaced families face shortages in shelter, food, and clean water, with risks of exploitation.”* Those interviewed also pointed to the absence of organisations dedicated to supporting women and children, limiting their access to resources and protection.



# MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Mental health emerged as a critical yet under-addressed issue, particularly for displaced individuals and those affected by prolonged conflict. Female professionals and younger participants, especially counsellors, highlighted the absence of psychological and social support structures. **“Psychological and social support is largely ignored, leading to mental health crises.”** A counsellor from Homs added that “there is a need for mental health programs to support crisis-affected individuals.”

In Tartous, Homs, and Damascus, participants pointed to rising levels of despair, drug use, and crime—particularly among unemployed young men—as symptoms of systemic neglect. An engineer in Tartous observed **“Sanctions caused psychological damage... youth are turning to crime and drugs.”** Without targeted mental health interventions, these underlying stresses risk undermining Syria’s social cohesion and long-term recovery.



# ASPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

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When it came to the aspirations for the future, there was a commonly shared view from all those interviewed. [69] Peace, safety and reconstruction, stronger education systems, mine clearance support for those displaced (and returning) were considered the biggest priorities. There was emphasis put on the role of youth (particularly by youth themselves) that they would be the ones to revive Syria. [70] A number of interviewees, the majority notably women, also called for a dedicated focus on empowering women through greater support for their political participation and inclusion in decision making processes. Syrians across the different

governorates agreed that mutual understanding was necessary across all societal groups and for Syria to recover and that Syria needed to be politically and economically stable with strong, transparent institutions serving citizens. All those interviewed expressed hope in witnessing reconstruction and the restoration of infrastructure.

Where men focused on investments, national strategy and technological advancement, women stressed social equity, inclusion and empowerment, especially in education, healthcare and livelihoods support. [71]

## ROLE OF THE TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Interviewees unanimously highlighted the pivotal role of the transitional government in steering Syria toward stability and recovery. Their responsibilities were seen as restoring order and rebuilding fractured institutions, fostering inclusive political systems and driving economic rehabilitation through job creation and the improvement of basic services. Those interviewed spoke of both addressing immediate needs while laying the groundwork for long-term resilience and stability. Promoting national reconciliation and transitional justice were also underscored as a critical component of the transitional government's mandate.

The international community was described as a vital and supportive partner with many interviewees emphasising that it should not be a leading/controlling force positioning the international community as an enabler rather than a director of Syria's future. Participants called for the international community to focus on supporting the delivery of humanitarian aid and assisting with reconstruction, infrastructure development and essential services by providing financial and technical support.

To improve humanitarian delivery, those interviewed called for stronger engagement with community mechanisms. There was consensus that agencies needed to 'hold multiple meetings with local elders and dignitaries' and 'form community committees made up of residents who are in direct contact with the population.' These committees would ensure aid delivery aligns with local realities and builds trust.



# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Across Syria's diverse regions, civilians consistently highlighted the collapse of basic services—particularly healthcare, electricity, water, food, and shelter—as a critical source of hardship. Interviews in Hama, Homs, Tartous, Damascus, and Al-Suwayda revealed similar patterns of systemic failure stemming from the last 14 years of conflict, marked by medicine shortages, limited to no power supply and inadequate shelter. These challenges were often exacerbated by inflation and currency depreciation forcing communities to rely on black markets or reduce consumption or resort to negative coping mechanisms. In rural areas, the situation was even more acute.

Overall – across all governorates - interviewees painted a picture of communities struggling with economic hardship intensified by sanctions. There was also a consensus that vulnerable groups - especially women, children, displaced persons, and the elderly - faced disproportionate difficulties.

Despite shared struggles, some location-specific nuances emerged. In Tartous and Al-Suwayda, the

erosion of the middle class and social cohesion was a dominant concern while in Damascus and Hama, interviewees stressed the severe pressure on IDPs and female-headed households. Youth across all regions voiced frustration over unemployment and exclusion but expressed a strong desire to lead reconstruction and social change. Women, especially in Hama and Damascus, emphasised the need for protection, income generation and inclusion in decision-making processes.

Across Syria, people consistently express a clear desire for peace, justice, inclusive governance, and urgent economic revival. Achieving these goals will require coordinated action focused on rebuilding critical infrastructure, restoring essential services, empowering young people, and advancing national reconciliation. Both international and transitional authorities must partner closely with Syrian communities to lay the foundations for a stable, democratic, and prosperous future—one rooted in human rights, dignity, and local ownership.





# FOR HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

*“Ensure humanitarian aid respects the dignity of Syrians”*



Prioritise restoration of basic services, including:

- + Healthcare (medical supplies, hospital funding, mobile clinics)
- + Water and electricity
- + Scale up food assistance with specific attention given to targeting internally displaced persons and female-headed households
- + Provide psychosocial and legal support for those vulnerable to exploitation
- + Expand targeted support to vulnerable groups: women, children, the elderly, and IDPs
- + Invest in mental health and psychosocial services, especially for youth and displaced communities

*“First steps to restore education include rebuilding destroyed schools and rehabilitating damaged buildings... It is also important to train teachers on modern teaching methods and keep up with educational developments.”*



Rebuild education systems:

- + Repair damaged schools
- + Incentivise and train teachers



Improve aid responsiveness through:

- + Expanded needs assessments
- + Community feedback mechanisms
- + Regular consultation with local elders and dignity-holders



# FOR SYRIA'S TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT

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*“The transitional authority must focus on rebuilding government institutions to ensure effective, transparent basic services, transitional justice, national reconciliation, accountability for violations, and strengthening national unity.”*



## Create economic opportunities:

- + Launch cash-for-work initiatives and support small businesses
- + Invest in job creation, vocational training, agriculture, industry, and national production
- + Improve governance and accountability
- + Implement transparent, inclusive planning processes
- + Fight corruption, monopolies, and nepotism
- + Pursue democratic transformation and transitional justice



## Rehabilitate critical infrastructure:

- + Water, health, electricity, sanitation, roads, schools, hospitals
- + Prioritise underserved rural areas
- + **Enhance public services:** Ensure robust medical supply chains and mobile clinics and reinvigorate education, mental health, and social services



## Promote inclusion and cohesion:

- + Incorporate youth and women in decision-making roles
- + Ensure equitable participation and representation across all groups
- + Ensure equitable distribution across all population groups
- + Protect rights of women, girls, minorities, and vulnerable populations
- + Empower youth and women as agents of peace and reconstruction



## Develop sustainable recovery plans:

- + Mobilise international technical and financial assistance
- + Foster local labour and community participation



## Strengthen peacebuilding:

- + Build partnerships that elevate youth and civil society leadership
- + Promote inclusive peace processes across ethnic, religious, and political lines

# FOR INTERNATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

*“The international community’s role should be as a supportive partner - not a controlling one – which backs an inclusive, sustainable political process and provides financial and technical support for Syria’s reconstruction.”*

- + Prioritise high-return areas for multisector investment - Align funding with return patterns to stabilise WASH, health, education, and markets.
- + Support coordinated, multi-year early recovery packages - Move beyond fragmented projects toward integrated, multi-sector programming.
- + Adopt integrated programming - Link WASH with health, education with protection, and reconstruction with livelihoods to maximise impact.



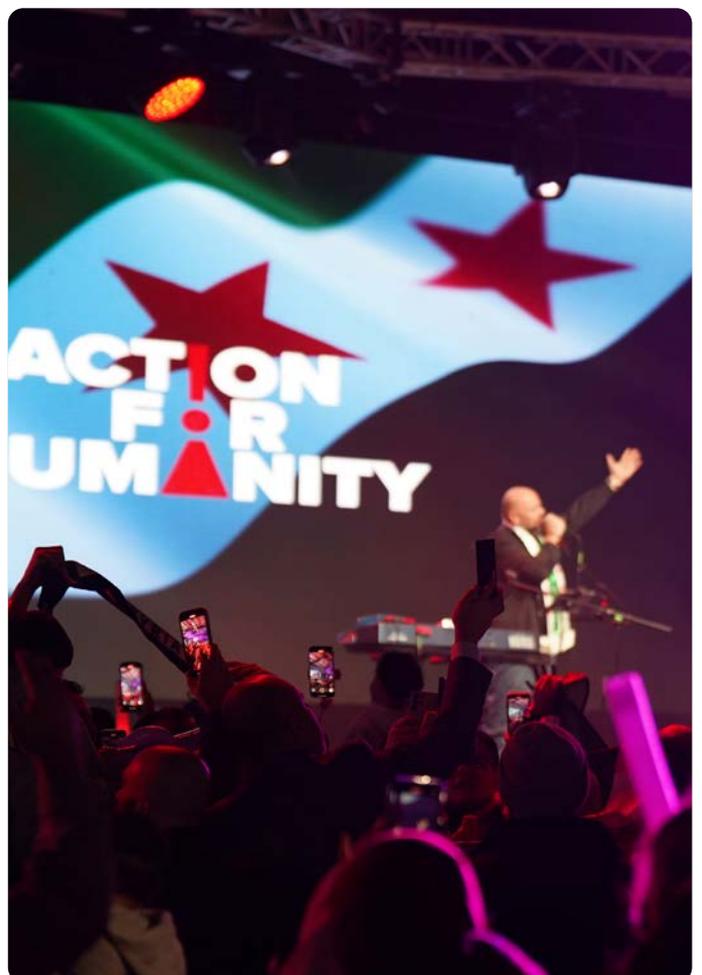
## Support local-led recovery:

- + Fund education (school reconstruction, teacher training, inclusive programs)
- + Invest in livelihoods, healthcare, water/energy, and social infrastructure
- + Launch youth-focused entrepreneurship, skills, and leadership initiatives
- + Embed localisation and civic empowerment as strategic pillars by amplifying youth-led initiatives and supporting Syrian NGOs



## Ensure coordinated and responsive support:

- + Align donor efforts with local priorities
- + Scale up explosive ordnance risk education and clearance efforts
- + Improve community-level safety and security with humanitarian protection
- + Promote an integrated triple nexus approach by strengthening the coordination between humanitarian aid, development initiatives, and peacebuilding efforts through phased, context-sensitive programming.





# REFERENCES

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- 10 [Supporting a secure and prosperous future for Syria: guidance for businesses and NGOs - GOV.UK](#)
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- 14 A catastrophic situation due to price increases, the high cost of living, and traders exploiting the people.” Key informant interview in Daraa, February 2025
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- 16 Focus group discussion (women only) in Idlib, early 2025  
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- 18 Focus group discussion with eight young men aged between 19 and 25, early 2025
- 19 Focus group discussion in Tartous, early 2025
- 20 Key informant interview in Damascus, February 2025
- 21 Focus group discussion with youth aged between 18 and 24, early 2025
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- 24 Key informant interview in Idlib, February 2025
- 25 Key informant interview in Idlib, February 2025
- 26 Key informant interview in Daraa, February 2025
- 27 Focus group discussion in Tartous, early 2025
- 28 Focus group discussion with youth in Homs, early 2025
- 29 Where energy production has dropped by 80 percent due to extensive damage to power plants and transmission line
- 30 Focus group discussion in Idlib, early 2025. In 2025, Syria has faced a deepening humanitarian crisis exacerbated by significant reductions in international aid. Only 14% of the UN’s humanitarian appeal for Syria has been funded and this shortfall has led to suspension or reduction of services, disruption of aid delivery and staffing cuts of up to 40% across humanitarian organisations. Globally, 2025 has seen a wave of foreign aid reductions as donor countries reallocate budgets toward domestic and defence priorities.
- 31 [Turkey and Qatar Are Buying Into Syria. The US Should Be Wary of Their Motives](#)
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# ACTION FOR HUMANITY

Action For Humanity, 6 Carolina Way Salford, Manchester, M50 2ZY  
+44 (0) 161 860 0163 | [info@actionforhumanity.org](mailto:info@actionforhumanity.org)

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