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# TASK FORCE

The Donald C. Hellmann Task Force Program



Reconstructing Syria: Resettling refugees and  
internally displaced persons

2019



# Reconstructing Syria: Resettling Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

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## Glossary

**AFI** - Air Force Intelligence  
**BCG** - Bacillus Calmette–Guérin  
**DNI** - Directorate of National Intelligence  
**DPT** - diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus  
**EU** - European Union  
**FAO** - Food and Agriculture Organization  
**FSA** - Free Syrian Army  
**GAM** - Global Acute Malnutrition  
**GDP** - Gross Domestic Product  
**GID** - General Intelligence Directorate  
**HLP** - Housing, Land, and Property  
**ICJ** - International Court of Justice  
**IDP** - Internally Displaced Person  
**ISIS** - Islamic State of Iraq and Syria  
**IRC** – International Rescue Committee  
**NATO**– North Atlantic Treaty Organization  
**NDF** - National Defense Forces  
**NGO** - Non-Governmental Organization  
**PEE** - Public Establishment for Electricity  
**PHC** - Primary Health Care  
**PKK** - Kurdistan Workers’ Party  
**PSD** - Political Security Directorate  
**PTSD** – Post-traumatic Stress Disorder  
**PYD** - (Kurdish) Democratic Union Party  
**QSF** - Quwat Dir’ al-Qalamoun  
**RG** - Republican Guard  
**SAA** - Syrian Arab Army  
**SDF** - Syrian Democratic Forces  
**UN** - United Nations  
**UNDP** - United Nations Development Program  
**UNESCO** - United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization  
**UNHCR** - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
**UNICEF** - United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund  
**UNSC** - United Nations Security Council  
**US** - United States  
**USD** - United States Dollars  
**UK** - United Kingdom  
**WB** – World Bank  
**WHO** - World Health Organization  
**YPG** - People’s Protection Units

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## **Executive Summary**

This report examines the key issues impacting the resettlement of Syrian refugees and IDPs. Many indicators point to the civil war in Syria reaching an end with Bashar al-Assad's regime still in power. As of December 2018, 11 million Syrians are displaced, 5.6 of whom have fled the country and become refugees. The other 6.2 million still reside within the country (Mercy Corps, 2018). Although the eight years of violence and war is coming to an end, many regions of Syria are unsuitable for resettlement.

Prior to 2011, various ethnic and religious groups peacefully coexisted within Syria. With the rise of Assad leading up to the civil war, these groups began fracturing and the sectarian divisions positioned groups against one another. Resettling displaced Syrians in their places of origin poses challenges because of these divisions. Alawites and Druze are now extremely vulnerable to persecution due to their minority status. The Kurds are at odds with Turkey as they continue to desire an autonomous state. The Assad regime has empowered the Alawites who were historically persecuted due to their faith. As the war is winding down, ISIS has lost substantial territory and Assad is positioned to claim victory.

As the country approaches reconstruction, the human rights violations committed by the regime and ISIS during the war must be addressed in order to provide adequate security and protection to the vulnerable populations. Women have increasingly played an essential role in the political and economic sectors. Yet as a vulnerable population, they remain threatened and exposed to human rights abuses and exploitation. Overall, reconstruction and resettlement must focus on social and sectarian differences in order to prevent any further violence or opposition. Furthermore, social institutions in Syria must be strengthened to support ongoing reconciliation.

Syria's neighbors, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, and Iraq have absorbed the displaced Syrians who fled the country. While these nations were initially quite welcoming, the mass increase of refugees put a strain on resources. Jordan demonstrated an organized response to the influx of refugees and has partnered with the UNHCR to open camps. Turkey stopped registering incoming refugees. Iraq began turning away refugees at their border and increased

deportations of vulnerable populations. These host countries are facing pressure on their economic, social, and welfare systems to compensate for an increase in need. Tensions between the local population and refugees has greatly increased along with competition for jobs. Lebanon now refuses to be recognized as a nation of asylum and refuses to sign the 1951 Convention, resulting in very few legal protections for Syrian refugees. Public sentiment of refugees in Jordan has led to increased marginalization and competition for resources. Iraq is experiencing increased violence and an inability to provide economic and social resources to the refugees, which is exacerbated by the competition between Iraqi IDPs and Syrian refugees. Iraq is in no condition to host refugees or work towards resettlement. Turkey is threatened by a potentially autonomous Kurdish state and has responded by suppressing the group. Overall, refugees in these host countries lack adequate legal protection, thus making them vulnerable to exploitation and crime.

Internal concerns in Syria are equally dire.

IDPs in Syria are an extremely vulnerable population. Most IDPs fled their homes because of economic hardship, security threats, and the desire for family reunification. They currently face devastating issues such as water scarcity, food insecurity, lack of health facility access, and property restitution. These same issues extend to the rest of the country. Syria's primary infrastructure, specifically water, agriculture, healthcare, and energy were overwhelmed by the war. In many instances, the Assad regime simply abandoned these structures and failed to alleviate issues of water and food scarcity. The country currently does not have investments into the long-term availability and accessibility to these resources, not only impacting the livelihoods of IDPs through unsafe coping mechanisms but jeopardizing the possible resettlement of Syrian refugees back into their country of origin. This severe destruction of infrastructure is coupled with the destruction of Syria's physical and human capital, thus dramatically limiting the country's economic activity and potential for future growth.

The gap analysis synthesizes the issues discussed from the report by refining the most critical issues impacting Syria and the conditions that will prevent the successful resettlement of refugees and IDPs. The gap analysis identifies ten main issues impacting the resettlement of

displaced persons; ongoing ethno-sectarianism, regional differences, governance capabilities, vulnerable populations and human rights, the destruction of infrastructure, the lack of healthcare, issues of brain-drain, and the lack of economic opportunity in Syria. By laying out these ten issues, the gap analysis then determines the minimal requirements that are necessary to successfully resettle and integrate Syrian refugees.

Based on the comprehensive gap analysis, this Task Force created a set of policy recommendations to the United Nations which frame the necessary steps to resettle refugees and IDPs. This Task Force came to five conclusions regarding the resettlement of Syrian refugees and IDPs. First, we stand behind the UN's policy of non-refoulement. We urge immediate third-country resettlement for those refugees currently in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. We support the establishment of a neutral "safe-zone" in northern Syria in addition to a small UN peacekeeping force to secure the population of Idlib. Finally, we recommend the UNDP provide economic, governance, and reconstruction support in order to rebuild and maintain critical infrastructure sectors within the country.

## Introduction

Eight years of ongoing conflict has left Syria in a disastrous state. What began as peaceful protests in 2011 turned into a violent war that consumed Syria. The regime of President Bashar al-Assad, Sunni opposition groups, Kurdish nationalists, and various militias have contributed to a conflict with no clear solution. This internal civil war resulted in proxy warfare between regional and international forces, thus dividing society and compelling conflict along sectarian, ethnic, and tribal groups. The war has produced 5.6 million Syrian refugees and 6.1 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have been forced to flee from violence and persecution (United Nations, 2017). Much of the nation's infrastructure has been either destroyed or severely compromised and the economy has greatly suffered. Syria and its population are permanently shaped by the crisis. Syria is now faced with years of reconstruction and the task of refugee resettlement to restore the nation. This Task Force seeks to analyze key sectors of Syria to create a framework which will successfully approach reconstruction and address the resettlement of displaced persons.

### *Key Questions*

This Task Force will create a report based on the question, "What are the conditions necessary to resettle Syrian refugees and IDPs within Syria?" In order to answer this question and create relevant policy recommendations, this Task Force will analyze the following:

- Who are the refugees and what is their current situation within the host countries?
- Who are the IDPs, where are they located, and what is their situation within Syria?
- What are the current conditions (infrastructure, health, and economic situations) in Syria?
- Given the current conditions in Syria, is it possible for refugees and IDPs to return home?

## *What's at Stake?*

Over half of the Syrian population is displaced, either internally or externally. With the end of the war nearing, much of the displaced population hope to return to their homes or at least the regions where they resided before the beginning of the conflict. Upon resettlement, refugees will face a slew of immediate challenges such as housing, safety, violence, and health concerns. In a more long-term sense, refugees will begin to seek out opportunities in their community to lead sustainable and enriching lives. Areas of resettlement must provide economic opportunities for refugees such as jobs and education for youth. The infrastructure in communities must also grow to meet the needs of a newly resettled population, and most importantly, hospitals, and clinics will need to be rebuilt to address urgent health concerns. The research and analysis conducted by this Task Force intends to cover the key issues refugees and IDPs will face upon resettlement and aims to provide solutions for easing reconstruction of the nation and resettlement of the population.

## *Report Organization*

This report is divided into four sections. It begins by giving a comprehensive overview of Syrian history and the events leading up to the civil war. The historical background will contextualize the state of the nation, displaced persons, human rights issues, the vulnerable populations, and governance among the key actors. This section will conclude by giving a regional overview and an explanation of the current state of governance across the regions.

Next, this Task Force will address external concerns regarding the conflict. The greatest external concern are the legal situation of refugees in host countries that are neighboring Syria. This Task Force will then analyze the refugee makeup within Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan by noting the legal challenges and social implications within these nations, and thus the challenges of resettlement.

The third section will address internal concerns of Syria. It will begin by explaining the IDP makeup within Syria followed by an in-depth examination of reconstruction issues. The three key areas of reconstruction this report will focus on are physical infrastructure, health care, and the economy.

The in-depth analysis and discussion of Syria and its refugees will form the basis for a gap analysis and then subsequent policy recommendations. The gap analysis highlights the most critical issues established throughout the report. We then propose a set of recommendations to the United Nations which will best address Syrian refugees and strategies for reconstruction. These recommendations are provided to the UN in attempts to address an internationally pressing issue, focusing on aid, development, and policy. We will propose realistic actions based on actual resources, such as funding, time, stakeholders, and foreign policy.

### *United Nations*

The conflict in Syria has proven to not only devastate the country but has left evident disruption in neighboring countries. The United Nations is a powerful global governing body involved with international crises. In an effort to create a sustainable and long-term solution in Syria, this Task Force calls on the United Nations to consider the proposed policy recommendations in order to reconstruct Syria and resettle displaced persons.

The UN has taken dramatic action in Syria since the beginning of the conflict. In August of 2011, the Human Rights Council created the Commission of Inquiry on Syria to monitor gross violations of Human Rights (Barrow, 2012). The UN Security Council has already adopted 23 resolutions related to the conflict. The UN has provided humanitarian aid to both the IDPs in Syria and the Syrian refugees in neighboring communities. Further, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHRC), an entity of the UN focusing on refugees, has investigated violations of international law and human rights.

Our policy recommendations are aimed at the UN because of their ability to enable dialogue between Member States, host negotiations, and implement sustainable solutions to world conflict. The legitimacy of this governing body gives them a large deployment of resources and information.

The UN has five key mechanisms of action, four of which are key to reconstructing Syria: delivering humanitarian aid, maintaining international peace and security, protecting human rights, and upholding international law. The UNHCR is a key entity delivering humanitarian aid to IDPs and refugees. The UN is also highly effective in maintaining international peace and

security through multiple measures including diplomacy, mediation, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. The Syrian civil war is a multi-state conflict and thus negotiations between nations and within the country will be necessary. The UN conducts numerous peace operations in order to protect and promote human rights. Many of these operations mobilize the population to claim their human rights and others to enforce long-term action. These missions are primarily led by the UNHCR. This entity has the power to investigate and report on human rights abuses and issues in other nations.

The unique position held by the UN gives them access to resources, strategies, and leverage points incomparable to other governments and organizations, thus situating them to address the issues devastating the Syrian nation and its people.

## **Part A: History and Sociopolitical Context**

*In order to understand the necessary steps of reconstruction to ensure the safe return of refugees and IDPs and long lasting state stability, knowledge of Syria's history and sociopolitical context is necessary. Prior to the civil war, various religious and ethnic groups coexisted within Syria's borders. But the Assad regime's response to opposition protests and militias has fanned the flames of division and created a society splintered along ethnic and sectarian lines. Syrian Kurds desire independence and their growing strength and autonomy has put them at odds with Turkey, their neighbor along the northern border. Both Alawite and Druze populations favor secular nationalism. Their positions as religious minorities within a Sunni-majority Syria has left them fearing persecution and loss of identity once reintegration begins. Although ISIS has lost its territory in southeastern Syria, its continuing control over 20,000 to 30,000 fighters in an area long abandoned by the Assad regime leaves a menacing possibility of resurgence. Assad's regime has the capabilities to establish security for the region, but its severe restrictions on humanitarian efforts to deliver aid threatens refugee and IDP resettlement. Security must be established at a national and local level using the current regime's resources, security apparatus, military, and Iranian and Russian assistance. Local councils within opposition territories are the primary providers of public services and distributors of humanitarian aid within Syria. However, these councils are severely hindered by challenges such as lack of funding and expertise, election manipulation, and constant threats to their security. Women's political and economic participation has become increasingly essential, as many traditional gender roles shifted due to mass male casualties in the war. Another major threat to the Syrian people and state reconstruction are human rights abuses. The major human rights violations committed in Syria are ethnic cleansing, unequal resource distribution, favoritism, human trafficking, and collective punishment. Very little has been done to dissuade these violations and prosecute the offenders. As a result, minorities, women, refugees, and children remain incredibly vulnerable as Syria moves towards reconstruction.*

## Introduction

### *Pre-War History*

#### *The Origins of Syria as a Nation*

Syria's history as a nation began when the Middle East was partitioned and divided under the Sykes-Picot agreement in order to divvy up regional power between the British and French. The French controlled Syria. Prior to French rule, ethnic and religious backgrounds were primarily left to minor rivalries which did not cause mass violence. However, in order to maintain power against a growing Arab nationalist movement, the French encouraged sectarian conflict and weakened Sunni Arab power in the region by placing prominent Alawi, Druze, Christian and Kurdish officials in powerful positions (Phillips, 2015). For the first time in Syrian history a clear class structure was created and consequently set the disenfranchised, majority Sunni population at odds with the rest of the Syrian population.

These inherent divisions within the country that had been exacerbated and politicized by the French led to a power-vacuum that could only be filled by a minority-group faction that instilled harsh rule to quell the population. The years proceeding Syria's independence was marked by instability, coups and riots as a result of hard-fought attempts to consolidate its numerous sectarian groups (Phillips, 2015). Finally in 1963, the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party took control of the government and has remained the primary force in Syrian politics now. It was at this point where Hafez al-Assad came into power - with his Baathist regime instilling control over Syria, and creating the foundation for the brutal regime Syrians currently face today.

#### *Syria Under the Assad Regimes*

Despite Hafez al-Assad's (and later his son, Bashar al-Assad) crushing measures in dealing with dissent the government invested greatly into infrastructure and formerly hostile groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood were even granted political participation. Up until the Civil War, Syrians enjoyed the development of a more educated, urbanizing country (Polk, 2013). However in combination with external economic factors and the harsh police state the country was run under, the relationship between the population and the regime became more and more strained.

## *A Civil War Begins*

The Syrian civil war did not stem from one major conflict, but instead was a building of tensions that then was finally triggered to be a larger conflict when the Arab Spring that had erupted in Tunisia in December of 2010, swept across the Middle East and arrived in Syria (Laub, 2018). In mid-March of 2011, fifteen Syrian boys were inspired to spray paint a pro-opposition phrase on their school wall in Daraa which ignited anti-government protests across Syria (Laub, 2018). Disenfranchised Syrians took to the streets to protest Assad's regime.

The protests demanded that President Assad step down and violence escalated when rebel brigades and opposition groups formed to fight the government. Following in his father's footsteps of crushing Sunni uprisings during the 1970's, Bashar al-Assad met these protests with brutality and launched a nationwide military operation in an attempt to quell this opposition (Laub, 2018). This proved however, to have severe consequences as the Syrian population retaliated with fiercer protests spreading to major cities such as Hama, Homs and even Damascus. In late April of 2011, Assad ramped up his efforts by laying siege to cities and using tanks to crush difficult resistance. The intelligence agencies of the *mukhabarat* began rounding up civilians indiscriminately and putting them into captivity where many were tortured, starved and killed - drawing widespread condemnation from the international community. Local communities and villages in the countryside began forming individual coordinating committees as they were cut off from food, water and medicine. By July of 2011, splinter groups within the resistance began to form - most notably the Free Syrian Army (FSA). However with few resources and little coordination between the many militias that make up the FSA, many of its members began to steal from civilians and align themselves with fundamentalist groups.

Compared to his father trying to avoid sectarian division, Bashar sought to exacerbate tensions by releasing Islamist militants from prisons and painting a narrative of unreasonable fundamentalist groups threatening his regime. This allowed him to force minority groups within Syria to choose between his regime, or a Sunni militarism that was perceived to have been committing atrocities against non-Sunnis. On a larger scale, it also forced larger countries with the potential to invade to be deterred by the idea of Syria being taken over by fundamentalist

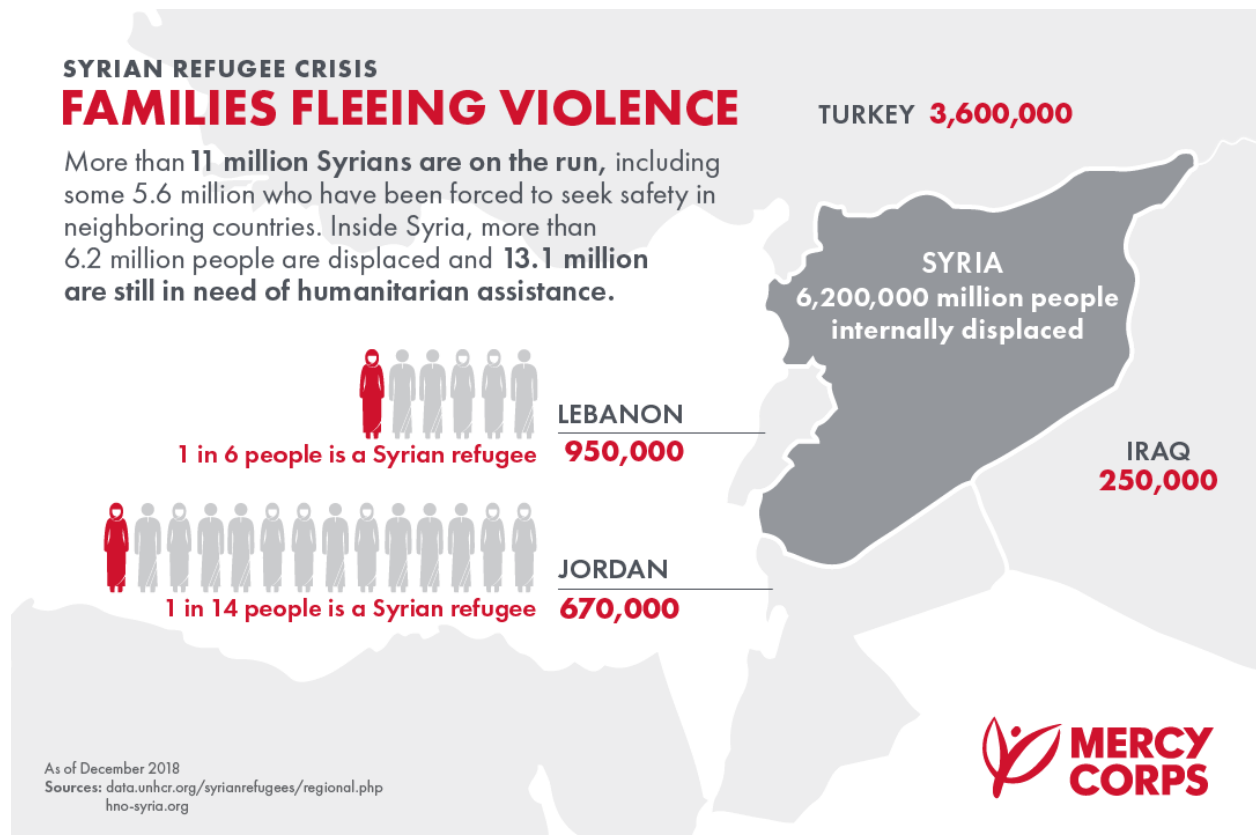
rebels. This division in the population did allow him to rally Syrians who were unreceptive to him but ended up deepening the sectarian aspect of this conflict, leading to noteworthy factions such as the Islamic State (ISIS) to gain control over portions of the region.

The conflict soon became a proxy war between many international players. Russia and Iran backed Assad and provided him with the power to gain control. The US and EU imposed sanctions on Syria including travel bans and asset freezes. Multiple Arab states condemned Syria's violent response by voting to revoke Syria's membership in the Arab League (Human Rights Watch, 2012).

All of the unrest and violence caused by the civil war forced many Syrians to flee their homes, thus creating massive refugee and IDP populations. This brought the neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq directly into the conflict.

### *Syrian Refugees and Displaced Persons*

Figure 1.1 The Syrian Refugee Crisis, Families Fleeing Violence (Mercy Corps, 2018)



Throughout the Civil War millions have been forced out of their homes to seek refuge either within Syria or in neighboring countries. Since the conflict began in 2011, there have been a reported 5.6 million refugees who fled the country, and another 6.2 million IDPs within Syria. Approximately 95 percent of all Syrian refugees who have fled the country are in just five countries surrounding Syria: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt (Amnesty International, 2014). For the purpose of this report, we will be focusing on the four countries with the highest refugee populations, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq, as seen in Figure 1.1.

As illustrated, Turkey hosts the highest number of refugees at 3.6 million since January 2012. This constitutes to 64.1 percent of all Syrian refugees. Lebanon has taken in 950,000 or 16.7 percent of all Syrian refugees. Jordan has received 670,000 refugees, making up 11.8 percent of the Syrian refugee population. Lastly, Iraq has accepted 250,000 or 4.4 percent of all Syrian refugees since the beginning of 2012. These numbers do not account for all Syrian refugees, as this figure does not include unregistered Syrians living illegally within these countries (UNHCR, 2019).

Over half of Syria's displaced population lives within the country, having been forced to abandon their homes, but remaining inside Syrian borders. Of the 6.2 million total IDPs, the majority currently reside in the governorates of Aleppo (961,000 IDPs), Idlib (984,000 IDPs), and Urban and Rural Damascus (1.95 million IDPs), having fled areas of conflict between Regime and Rebel Forces (OCHOA, 2018). The Regime's "scorched earth" policy of leveling urban centers to drive out civilians and remove cover for rebel groups has forced many IDPs into tough living situations. Many are living with host families or when better options are unavailable, they turn to last resort camps. 750,000 IDPs currently reside in last resort camps, which are informal sites often set up by the IDPs themselves. Syria's overcrowded urban centers, which host 84 percent of IDPs, and the last resort sites are facing an enormous strain regarding local infrastructure, resources, and living conditions (HNO, 2018: 18). The number of IDPs is constantly shifting due to the wide scope of the civil war as well the return of former IDPs to their communities after battles have ended. In 2018, over 800,000 IDPs returned to their homes. Unfortunately, new areas of conflict are simultaneously displacing more Syrians (Markusen, 2018: 26).

As the Syrian conflict comes to an end, Syrian refugees and IDPs are beginning to return to Syria. It will be a significant challenge to reintegrate people back into Syrian society considering all of the hardship, violence, and loss all have faced. In doing so, it is important to understand the depth of the conflict, the different players, as well as the infrastructure and political situation of today.

## **Regional Overview**

### *Regional Overview & Maps*

The situation in Syria is highly complex and changing minute by minute every day. Of the many lenses used to organize and understand the Syrian conflict, a regional analysis is critical. To even begin to understand the conflict in Syria as it moves towards reconstruction, it is first critical to develop a working knowledge of the unique regions whose incorporation and governance will be crucial in ensuring the safety of returning refugees and IDPs. Four regions that will be key to this process are the Kurdish area of control (also known as Rojava), the Alawite coastal region, the Druze lands, and the Southeast Sunni-ISIS “territory” or sphere of control (see Figure 1.2). Across and throughout these regions, Syria’s population consists of a patchwork of different identities. In order to understand Syria and the complexity of the conflict today, it is important to understand the different ethnicities and sects present within Syria (see Figure 1.3). These groups coexisted within Syria for some time but there has long been deep-rooted tension amongst these identities. Conflicts between the Sunni majority and minority groups like Alawis and Shiite that had been kept in check by Assad’s regime are now unearthed and inflamed as a result of the civil war, threatening the stability of the state. During the conflict and moving forward, each of these regions, with their distinct ethnicities and sects and social and political issues, will be critical to the successful reconstruction of the State of Syria.

Figure 1.2 Map of Political Control in Syria, 2018 (Chughtai, 2018)



Figure 1.3 Sectarian and Ethnic Distributions in Syria, 2011 (Balanche, 2018)

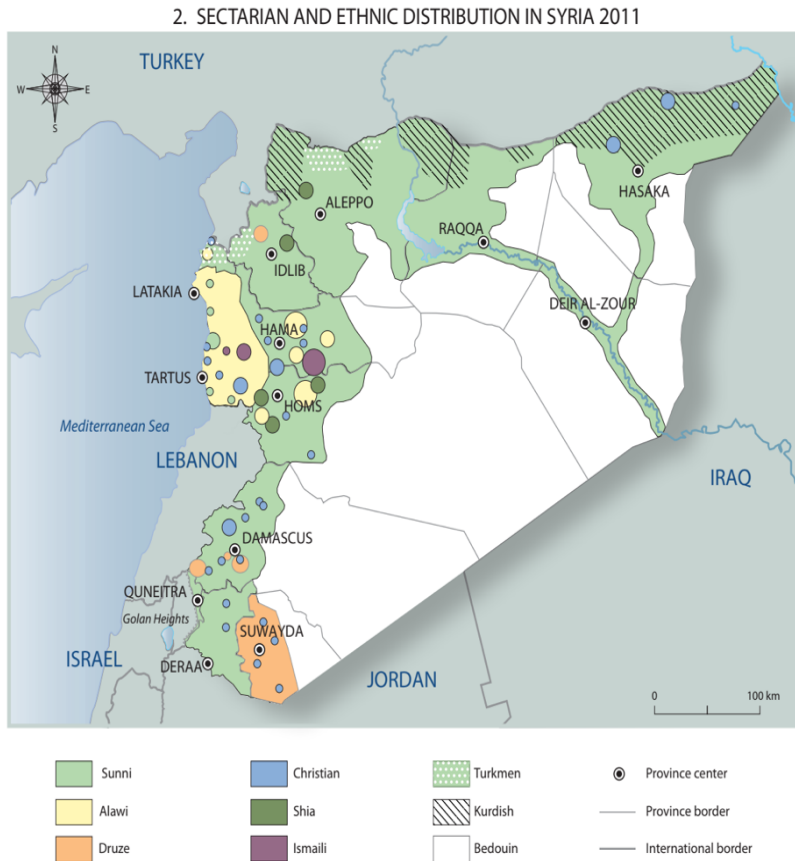
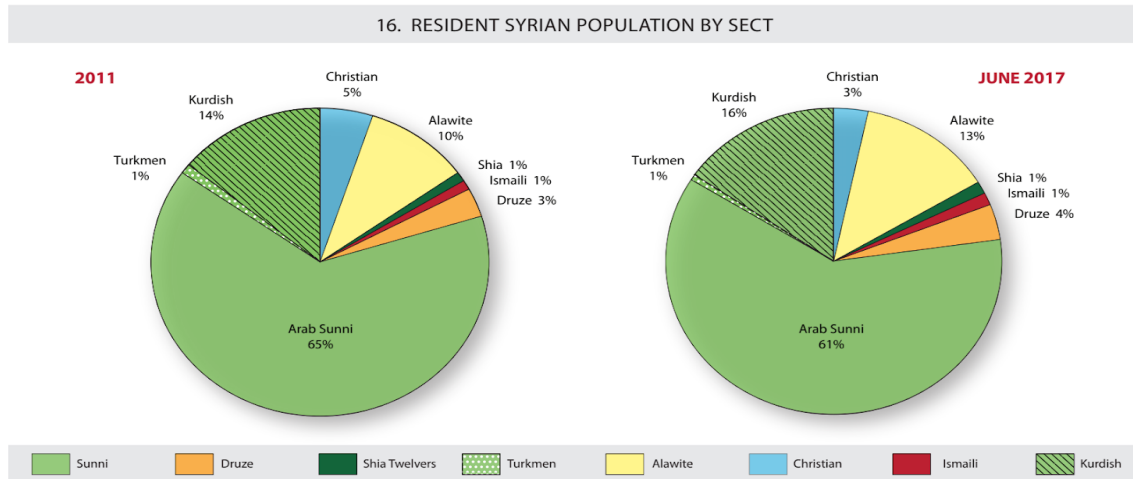


Figure 1.4 Resident Syrian Population by Sect (Balanche, 2018)



### Demographics and History

The Kurdish ethnic group has prominent populations in Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. Although the history of the Kurdish people throughout the Middle East has been long and complex, this section will focus specifically on Kurdish people living in Syria. Demographically, there are an estimated 2.5 million Kurds living in Syria, about 16 percent of the population. The primary language of the Kurds is Kurdish, more specifically the *Kirmanji* dialect, however most Kurds also speak Arabic (Minority Rights Group International, 2018c). As seen in Figure 1.3, the Kurdish people mostly occupy Northern Syria, with about a third of their population residing in the foothills of the Taurus Mountains north of Aleppo, and another third living along the Turkish border in Jazirah (Minority Rights Group International, 2018c). There are three major issues that arise when analyzing the recent history of the Kurdish region, including Arabization efforts by the Assad regimes, dependence-focused economic policies, and the rise of PYD (Democratic Union Party) and the YPG (People’s Protection Units) following the 2004 Qamishli riots (Balanche, 2018).

From 1945 to 1970, the Syrian government focused heavily on Arabizing Kurdish villages by changing their names without consent in order to “divide and reign” a more stratified and weak population. However, this policy was largely abandoned in northeast Syria due to the significant dispersal of communities and the overwhelming sense of Kurdish identity. This

history has resulted in a divided Kurdish population. One subsection is ethnically Kurdish, but no longer identify as culturally Kurdish, due to forced teaching of Arabic in schools, mixed marriages, and other Arabization policies. However other Kurds, particularly in northeast Syria, have become more ethnically isolated and homogenous, identifying as a unique Kurdish society that desires their own autonomous state (Balanche, 2018).

In response to the growing sense of Kurdish individuality, the Hafez al-Assad regime instituted economic policies, beginning in the 1970s, meant to prevent Kurdish self-sufficiency and keep them dependent and weak. Following the precedent set by his father, Bashar al-Assad has continued to rule on the principle that weak Kurds are easier to govern. As a result, the Kurdish region has been limited to raw material production, providing many of the nation's cotton, wheat, and oil resources. These policies have allowed the regime to benefit from the agriculture and resource production of the Kurdish region while preventing the Kurds from developing manufacturing or other industries that would support autonomy (Balanche, 2018).

Finally, in 2003 and 2004, the PYD and the YPG were formed during Kurdish uprisings and the pivotal Qamishli riots; the worst Syrian civil unrest in decades where a statue of Hafez al-Assad was toppled and at least 30 Kurds were killed by regime security forces (Fattah, 2005). The PYD is one of the most important Kurdish opposition parties in Syria. The YPG is a mainly-Kurdish militia that is the primary component of the SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces). The YPG and the SDF were some of the most effective military actors during the Syrian Civil War and will continue to play a critical role state security and governance as reconstruction moves forward.

### *Status During Civil War*

In 2011 at the start of the Civil War, protests and uprisings were uncommon in Kurdish areas. One major factor was the swiftness of the Assad government to reach a rapprochement with the PYD, allowing them to strengthen their ethnic ties by setting up cultural centers and their own schools in Kurdish regions. This concession allowed the Assad regime to retain the appearance of control as the Sunni majority revolted, while laying the groundwork for increased semi-independent Kurdish governance. Another major reason anti-regime protests were limited in Kurdish regions is because Kurds were weary of the "Arab" component of the opposition, having experienced state-sanctioned Arabization for decades (Minority Rights

Group International, 2018). As combat intensified, Kurdish militias, notably the YPG, took an active role in fighting Al-Qaeda related militias that had inhabited Kurdish villages and enclaves in the north. The success of the Kurdish militias was welcomed by many of the regional inhabitants, since they presented themselves as a pan-ethnic organization that defended communities, including Christians, from militant groups.

In 2014, the Kurdish role intensified as their people and villages began experiencing increasing attacks from ISIS during the height of their caliphate expansion (Minority Rights Group International, 2018). As the offensive against ISIS expanded, the SDF, backed by US troops and funding, became the primary and most effective actor in the fight against the terrorist group (Balanche, 2018). While the regime was occupied with fighting their own insurgency, the Kurds gained power through their relationship with the US and success against ISIS.

In 2016, the Kurds declared that Rojava (their claimed territory in northern Syria) was a federal region and drafted a constitution for the “Democratic Federal System of Northern Syria” that was published later the same year. However, the legitimacy of their region was not recognized by the national Syrian government or the opposition Syrian National Coalition, leading the Kurds to rethink their strategy for gaining independence (Minority Rights Group International, 2018). Turkey was openly hostile to this assertion and continues to hold this position. The main reason for Turkey’s animosity is the link between the YPG and the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party). The PKK is recognized as a terrorist group by both Turkey in the United States and has been in armed conflict with the Turkish government since the 1980s. Throughout the Syrian Civil War, most notably in August of 2016, Turkey partnered with Syrian Arabs to fight ISIS and block the Kurds from linking their two cantons (Laub, 2018).

As the Syrian Civil War appears to be coming to an end and most signs and analyses conclude that Bashar al-Assad will remain in power, the regime largely has the Kurds to thank for the near elimination of ISIS’s territorial ‘caliphate’. According to the latest reports out of the United States government and the SDF, more than 99 percent of the territory once occupied by ISIS has been returned to Syrian control (Stewart & Ali, 2019a).

## *Current Issues*

Now that the armed conflict of Syria's civil war is beginning to wind down, many of the most pressing issues regarding reconstruction, governance, and power involve the Kurdish region of the state. One of the largest subjects to be dealt with by the Syrian regime, the Kurdish government, and other power players such as Iran and Russia, is the question of Kurdish autonomy or self-governance. The YPG is actively working to consolidate the cantons they have won in the north into a de facto autonomous territory. It is unlikely that they will be willing to give up any of the land they have gained during their fight against ISIS (Laub, 2018). Conversely however, as rebuilding begins, Assad is immediately concerned with maintaining the appearance of control over *all* of Syria, including the Kurdish regions of the north. According to many top officials in Syria and the US, all signs point to the Kurds turning to Assad to make a deal that both parties could benefit from (Cook, 2018). The Kurdish government is most interested in maintaining the independence they have gained throughout the war and seeking protection by the national government from the threat of Turkey. On the other hand Assad and his regime are immediately concerned with claiming governmental authority over all of Syria and accessing the cotton, wheat, and oil resources within Kurdish lands that will be critical during reconstruction (Cook, 2018). In February of 2019, some of these speculations were partly confirmed when Assad spoke harshly against the presence of foreign troops within Syria's borders, stating that "every inch of Syria will be liberated, and any intruder is an enemy" (Aji, 2019).

One factor which must be considered that may complicate a deal between the Kurds and the Assad regime is the issue of re-Kurdification. Re-Kurdification is almost the opposite of the Arabization that the Kurds experienced in previous decades. According to several reports, the Kurdish militias have been participating in the ethnic cleansing of Arabs, especially those who supported or were neutral to ISIS, in order to increase their demographic weight in Rojava and create a homogenous society. This process of re-Kurdification or ethnic cleansing, not unlike that carried out by the Assad regime, is likely to be a contentious topic as the Kurds negotiate for measures of autonomy.

Another even more urgent and serious problem facing the Kurdish region is Turkey. Fundamentally, Turkey views the YPG as a terrorist organization due to its association with the PKK. Turkey views the idea of a more powerful and partially independent Kurdish region in northern Syria as a threat and has made its position clear – repeatedly threatening to invade northern Syria if the issue of increasing Kurdish power is not resolved internally (Cook, 2018).

The situation only became more complicated when President Trump announced in December that ISIS was defeated and that the United States would be withdrawing its nearly 2,000 troops in the region. The US leaving will spur a regional jockeying for power between Syria, Iran, and Russia that will leave the Kurds in the middle trying to play all sides. Overall, the details of the US withdrawal and any planned Turkish actions regarding the Kurds are extremely unclear and the rhetoric is changing daily. In early January of 2019, President Erdogan announced that he will delay any invasion into northern Syria. His statements largely come in response to assurances by the US government that they will only withdraw from the region on the loose condition that their Kurdish allies will be protected (Cook, 2018). This development seems positive for Syria's stability, as any invasion by Turkey would likely lead to a protracted war in the North. The YPG now number between 30,000 and 60,000 troops and have gained significant combat experience in the last four years, meaning that any military action undertaken by Turkey would not be guaranteed a swift victory (Cook, 2018).

Another major policy issue involving Turkey and the Kurds currently is the topic of safe zones or buffer zones. In late January of 2019, President Erdogan and President Trump discussed the possibility of creating a safe zone in northern Syria along the Turkish border for the purpose of protecting returning refugees (Al Jazeera News, 2019). In a statement, Erdogan proposed a 20-mile deep safe zone along the Turkey-Syria border, in Syrian Kurdish territory, that would be controlled by Turkey. He made it clear that the safe zone would serve two purposes: creating a safe place for the return of refugees and containing the terrorist threat of the YPG (Press & Huff, 2019). Both the Assad regime and Russia, their closest ally, have come out against this proposal by Turkey. In mid-February of 2019, Putin announced at a summit on the Syrian conflict that Turkey must seek consent from Assad before it attempts to create a safe zone in northern Syria, signaling that there are tensions between Moscow and Ankara on the

Kurdish issue (Reuters News Agency, 2019). The Syrian Kurdish government has roundly rejected this proposal as well, claiming that Ankara's proposal would effectively create a Turkish colony within Syria.

In February of 2019, the United States announced that it would work with NATO allies to form a multinational force charged with maintaining a safe zone in northern Syria. Although this plan has been declared, it is far from finalized and the logistics of the safe zone, which have not been agreed upon, and will continue to shift moving forward (Diamond & Browne, 2019). With this multinational force NATO allies are hoping to fill the power vacuum that will be left in northern Syria as the war comes to an end. Initially Erdogan and President Trump discussed the safe-zone as a joint venture between Turkey and the United States. However, in his desire for Turkey to be the controlling authority in the Syrian safe-zone, Erdogan to stated that if the United States did not get on board with Turkey's intentions "we will have the right to bring about our own plans. ... no threat can deter us from our path, including a sanction list" (Associated Press, 2019). This is certainly, an ominous message for the future of Turkey-Kurd relations.

## *Alawite Coastal Region*

### *Demographics and History*

The Alawites are a sect of Shia Islam who predominantly live in Syria. Within Syria their population numbers roughly 2.1 million or about 13 percent of Syrians (Balanche, 2018). Their ancestral lands are mainly in the Nusayri Mountain range in the coastal part of northwest Syria, but they also have significant communities near Homs and Hama. Traditionally under a Sunni-dominated Syria, the Alawites faced persecution and discrimination for their faith. Many other Muslims within Syria do not view the Alawite sect of Shi'ism to be true Islam (Minority Rights Group International, 2018a).

It was not until Hafez al-Assad gained power in 1971 that the Alawites gained a privileged status within Syria because the Assad family itself were Alawites (Minority Rights Group International, 2018a). It was under the Hafez al-Assad regime that the position of Alawites within Syria rapidly changed, as Hafez surrounded himself with other members of his

faith and placed Alawites in key state security roles. Around this same time, the persecution of Alawites grew and turned more violent. Throughout the 1970s, the sect was a frequent target of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria until the Brotherhood was crushed in a 1982 massacre by the regime.

When Bashar al-Assad took power in 2000, he followed in his father's footsteps and continued to grant the Alawites special status, jobs, and privileges within Syrian society (Minority Rights Group International, 2018a). This continuing select status served to strengthen Alawite allegiance to the Assad regime, illustrated through the plastering of Hafez and Bashar's images across majority Alawite areas. The combined effect of the Alawite's history of persecution and their more elite status in society, is Alawite fear of the Sunni majority that was only flamed by the outbreak of civil war (Rosen, 2011).

#### *Civil War and Current Issues*

At the beginning of the uprisings in 2011, many anti-Alawite slogans reported in the protests were likely due to the close association of the Alawite community to the Assad regime. For many, but not all Alawites, this set the tone for the civil war. Alawites feared persecution as the protests turned violent and Sunni militias began to form across the country (Minority Rights Group International, 2018a). Throughout the war, many anti-government militant groups carried out attacks and executions on Alawite communities and villages in retaliation for attacks by the regime and its allies on Sunni areas. For example, in 2015 Jabhat al-Nusra called on its fighters to directly attack Alawite towns in revenge for Russian attacks on Sunni villages (Minority Rights Group International, 2018a). As the war raged on, many more of these religiously targeted attacks on Alawites were carried out by al-Nusra, ISIS, and other Sunni militant groups. As a result, many Alawites who were living throughout Syria fled for the majority-Alawite coastal region of Syria, away from the Sunni and tribal inlands. In these coastal lands, Alawite IDPs found relief from the violence of the war under the protection of the Assad regime.

In many Alawite areas, such as Latakia and Tartus, the civil war seemed distant. For the upper-class Alawites along the coast, beach resorts, shopping malls, and clubs continued to function despite the war raging inland. This reality highlights the importance of Alawite identity

under Assad and the different Syria that exists for those who share his religious sect. Now that the war is winding down, many Alawites worry about returning to areas shared with Sunni Muslims and those Alawites who were not fortunate enough to reach the areas of government control have attempted to distance themselves from the regime for safety. This fear of persecution based on religion, class, and support for the regime has resulted in an increasingly fragmented Syrian society facing problems of sect, ethnicity, and tribal integration as the process of reconstruction begins (Minority Rights Group International, 2018a).

## *Druze Regions*

### *Demographics and History*

The Druze are a religious group that constitute about four percent of Syria's total population, making them the third largest minority in the country behind the Kurds and the Alawites (Balanche, 2018). Their primary location within Syria is in Jabal-Druze, along the southwestern border of Syria and Jordan. However, they also have significant communities along the Golan Heights, between Aleppo and Antioch, and south of Damascus (see Figure 1.3). Although the Druze do not occupy one specific region, their pockets or cantons along the western half of Syria are significant and worth discussing as an independent region. Some label the Druze as an ethnoreligious group, however, they are ethnically Arab and Arabic speaking (Minority Rights Group International, 2018c). Religiously, they are monotheistic and have incorporated many aspects of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism into their faith. Their split from the Ismaili Shi'ism branch of Islam long ago has left them isolated from other Muslims in Syria and largely viewed as retreaters from Islam by both the Sunni and Shia sects (Halabi, 2018). This reality has led many Syrian Druze to believe that their identity and existence are at stake, like the Alawites. As a result they have adopted many strategies for religious survival. Generally, they practice principles of dissimulation, geographic isolationism, and positive neutrality to ally with powerful parties (Halabi, 2018). A large part of their geographic distribution in particularly mountainous areas can be explained by their desire to escape religious persecution or forced assimilation by a central government. Their fear of loss of

religious identity is certainly founded in the context of Assad regime policies of Arabization against the Kurds.

### *Civil War and Current Issues*

During the Syrian Civil War, the Druze have generally attempted to avoid taking sides. Instead, they worked to remain neutral, establishing military checkpoints in their areas and creating militias of Druze to protect their villages (Minority Rights Group International, 2018c). They largely rejected enlisting in Assad's army out of fear that they would be forced to travel far from their homelands or alienate the Sunni majority militias. Most of their involvement in the war consisted of Druze militias fighting al-Nusra and other militant groups in order to defend their communities and lands (Minority Rights Group International, 2018c). Both during the war and onward, the Druze have sought to establish a neutral and peaceful but militant form of governance. As a policy, they rarely attack others but are quick to defend with force when their community or identity is under threat (Halabi, 2018). Similar to the Alawites, the Druze have supported secular nationalism due to their existence as a minority religious group but continue to fear potential persecution by the Sunni majority as the war comes to an end and reconstruction begins.

### *Southeastern Sunni and ISIS Region*

#### *Civil War and Current Issues*

A large amount of information about ISIS is already known by the global community, however the most pressing issue as the civil war comes to an end is how to handle the terrorist organization's shifting role in Iraq, Syria, and the world. For much of the Syrian Civil War, the Assad regime, Russia, Iran, and Turkey largely ignored the majority Sunni southeast corner of Syria (Ignatius, 2015). However, lack of governance in southeast Syria was not a new phenomenon. During both the Hafez and Bashar regimes, this majority Sunni corner of the country was largely neglected. Prior to the takeover by ISIS, this predominantly desert territory had little federal governance and infrastructure and was mainly organized along tribal lines. This historical absence of state structures is one part of the reason why ISIS was able to expand so quickly in the region. At the onset of the war, the Assad regime was most interested

in fighting anti-regime groups such as the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and other smaller Sunni militias. The lack of attention by the Assad regime to the Southeast, coupled with Iran and Russia hosting a proxy war in the state, allowed for the quiet growth of the terrorist organization without significant military pressure. Another factor that allowed for the expansion of ISIS in southeast Syria was the absence of a unified Sunni opposition. While the FSA had attempted to organize the splintered militias, they lacked the adequate command and control capability to govern large swaths of land (Ignatius, 2015). As ISIS was actively expanding in southeast Syria throughout the early 2010s, some speculated that the Assad regime willfully chose to ignore the organization, potentially to send a signal to the West that although they didn't like his government, there was a far worse outcome for Syria if ISIS took over (Ignatius, 2015).

It wasn't until 2015 that Kurdish militias, most notably the YPG, formed with other majority-Arab militias to form the SDF. When the United States took a more active role in Syria in 2015, its main goal was no longer to oust Assad, but to fight ISIS and reduce their claimed 'caliphate' or territorial holdings (Barbaro, 2019). By partnering with the SDF and contributing resources and troops, the United States and the Kurds have managed to eliminate almost all of the territory once held by ISIS. According to reports out of the United States and the SDF, more than 99 percent of the land once occupied by ISIS has been returned to Syrian control (Barbaro, 2019). Currently all ISIS territory has been eliminated, except for one village whose fall is imminent (Loveluck, 2019). While this is an incredible development for Syria, its people, and the global community, most involved parties have indicated that the United States is misconstruing what this progress means. In late December of 2018 and January of 2019, President Trump made numerous declarations that the United States had "defeated ISIS" (Barbaro, 2019). This claim was then used by President Trump his top political advisers justify the abrupt withdrawal of United States troops and resources from Syria.

The announcement by the United States regarding the "defeat of ISIS" and the subsequent withdrawal of US troops and resources shocked the world community and has been met with heavy criticism from within and outside the United States. In response, military personnel and political advisors from numerous nations have asserted that although ISIS is on

the verge of losing all of its territory, the threat of ISIS as a terrorist organization is in no way gone (Stewart & Ali, 2019b). Recent estimates measure that the group still commands between 20,000 and 30,000 fighters in Iraq and Syria alone. US General Joseph Votel, head of the US Military's Central Command (in charge of overseeing troops in the Middle East and Afghanistan) warned on February 5 of 2018 that ISIS would pose an enduring threat after the US withdraws from Syria and that the organization still possesses the leaders, fighters, facilitators, and resources to fuel a menacing insurgency (Stewart & Ali, 2019b). The annual Worldwide Threat Assessment from the Directorate of National Intelligence (DNI) contradicted assertions made by Trump and other top administration officials, saying that ISIS still commands thousands of fighters and continues to pose a long term threat to both Syria and Iraq (Stewart & Ali, 2019a). Finally, the Pentagon's own internal watchdog released a report asserting that "absent sustained [counterterrorism] pressure, ISIS could likely resurge in Syria within six to 12 months and regain limited territory...portraying the [United States] withdrawal as a victory" (Stewart & Ali, 2019b).

In response to this backlash from the global community, the United State has since walked back its initial announcement of complete withdrawal of troops and resources from Syria. As of February 23rd, 2019 President Trump confirmed that the United States would keep about 400 troops in Syria as part of a multinational force assembled by NATO allies (Diamond & Browne, 2019). This force has two main goals: creating a buffer zone between Turkey and the Syrian Kurds and supporting Syria in the continuing fight against an ISIS insurgency.

As the reconstruction of Syria begins, it is critical for all stakeholders to understand how ISIS gained power in Syria and that the threat of ISIS has not been eliminated. One of the largest issues the Assad regime will need to address is how to govern and integrate the lands once held by ISIS back into the State of Syria. A large part of what allowed ISIS to gain territory in Syria so quickly at the start of its expansion was the lack of governmental presence in the largely Sunni tribal lands of southeastern Syria. Throughout the war the Assad regime largely abandoned the Sunnis in southeast Syria. The lack of government structures combined with the absence of a unified opposition allowed ISIS to fill the void (Ignatius, 2015). Contrary to western belief, the majority of the Sunnis living in southeastern Syria did not identify or agree with ISIS on an

ideological level. Instead, they were faced with a lack of government in their region and a new, albeit violent, organization that provided some semblance of order. Although ISIS followed a strict fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, they still created infrastructure, courts, and general governance in the region (Ignatius, 2015). The lack of state provided government in southeast Syria allowed ISIS to expand, unencumbered. This problem will be even more pressing during reconstruction, as the Assad regime is far weaker in state capacity than it was when the war began in 2011 (Stewart & Ali, 2019b). Further, the populations in the majority Sunni territories once held by ISIS will be especially difficult to govern, largely due to their incorporation with ISIS for nearly a decade and distrust in the Assad regime. These factors combined with the United States' withdrawal from the region will leave a familiar power vacuum that will need to be immediately addressed by the Assad regime in order to minimize the serious threat of an ISIS insurgency. Prior to and during the Syrian Civil war, Sunnis in southeast Syria were abandoned by their government, to avoid the resurgence of ISIS, the Assad regime cannot allow this to happen again.

### **Governance: The Assad Regime**

Syria's infrastructure and its medical, educational, political and military institutions are barely functional, with the population fractured, homeless and spread out across multiple countries. Yet the regime is still standing. In order to make policy that can take successful steps toward reconstruction and refugee resettlement, it's important to understand the nature and current capabilities of the Syrian regime under Bashar al-Assad.

#### *The Assad Regime*

##### *The Early Regime*

Much of Assad's early success in filling in the void left by the French can be attributed to Baathism. This idea itself is a socialist ideology that both Iraq and Syria commonly shares and is based on an Arab-nationalist identity that had been inflamed by the imperialism of European powers. Baathism holds the ideal to unite all Arabic-speaking people under one common history, culture and identity. Assad was even more focused on uniting Arabs under one sole,

legitimate government with shared civic values (Ahram, 2002). By uniting all Arab-speaking peoples within Syria under a cause other than religion, he eventually did reconcile his relationship with the Sunni population. Despite some resistance from Islamists within the disenfranchised Sunni population over economic issues and his Alawis background, he had the ability to draw support from religious communities throughout Syria. Assad had more leverage to ostracize any political rivals and surround himself with like-minded and influential government figures who had sway in nearly every part of Syrian society. At this point he had complete totalitarian rule over Syria.

### *An Unbreakable Alliance*

On the international level, Hafez al-Assad had tight ties with Iran as well through a number of mutually beneficial actions between the two countries. Assad provided members of the Iranian opposition, including revolutionary leader Khomeini, sanctuary as they plotted the ouster of the shah before the Iranian Revolution. Syria's help also ensured the creation of Iran's Hezbollah in Lebanon and allowed Iran to create its sphere of influence in both countries through their Shia populations. In return, Iran helped ensure the survival of Hafiz's regime through improving its religious standing and providing much needed economic and military support. In its lifetime as an opposing power against Iraqi-Israeli-U.S influence over the region, Iran maintained a tight and mutually-beneficial relationship with Syria through common cultural, regional and most importantly, religious interests. While the initial bond between the two countries was more pragmatic, Iran's rise to power in the entire region deeply involves Syria as well. In the current climate a threat to Syria could be depicted by Tehran as a threat toward Shiites everywhere in order to justify its military intervention. For Iran, losing Syria to the Civil War would involve losing a core part of its influence in the region.

In comparison, Syria has maintained a long-standing relationship with Russia. However, Russia's contributions to Syria is only prominent in the current Civil War because of the massive amount of military aid it contributes to the regime (Souleimanov, 2018). Russia does not have the deeply intertwined relationship Iran and Syria have had since the birth of both of their respective regimes.

### *Bashar al-Assad*

During the final years of Hafez al-Assad's time in power, he maintained Syria's regional power, cultivating good relationships with Russian and friendly European powers to counterbalance pressure from the US and Israel. However, when power was passed down to his son Bashar al-Assad, the entire military and political climate surrounding Syria and the rest of the international world had considerably changed. Syria was losing its influence in Lebanon and hard-line politicians were elected to the top in Israeli politics. Furthermore, the US-sponsored Global War on Terrorism and subsequent invasions into Afghanistan and Iraq threatened Assad's regime of state-sponsored terrorism. An unfriendly and confrontational U.S was now neighboring Syria as well, also halting the flow of smuggled Iraqi oil to Syria undermining the economy by billions of dollars a year. Syria needed a new direction to guide itself in, which an inexperienced Bashar al-Assad had difficulties providing. Bashar al-Assad's foreign policy behaviors were seen as "defensive and reactive" as he regurgitated the views of his father, without taking into consideration the negative impacts that he would be making in the eyes of the international world (Bar, 2006).

### *The Security Apparatus*

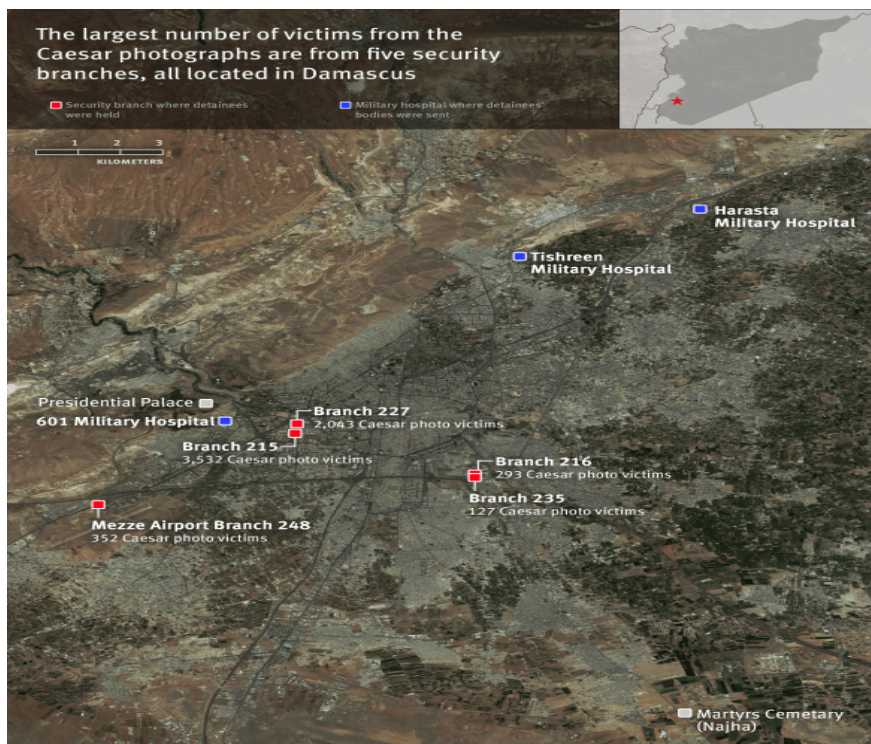
The conflict has created a massive refugee crisis that ended up displacing more than half of the twenty-two million Syrians that previously lived in the country. The spread of refugees, along with the rise of fundamentalist terrorism in the region has contributed to instability in the region and Europe as it has began to close its borders off. For refugees to have any incentive to return, the proper infrastructure must be restored, and that requires security. It is important to identify what is left of Syria and the viability of its regime being able to maintain control.

### *The Syrian Intelligence Community*

The *mukhabarat* was the force in the Syrian regime that terrorized the population in its effort to prevent any efforts that supported the "de-Baathification" of the regime. In 2006, there were fifteen different agencies which comprised the *mukhabarat* (Bar, 2006). These capabilities have been maintained during the Civil War, as a report by the Human Rights Watch in 2015 identified twenty-seven detention centers located around the country. This same

report also details the atrocities committed by these organizations through leaked photographs and documents that account for the number of civilians who died in captivity in each detention center. The Military Intelligence 215 Branch, the “Branch of Death,” is responsible for as many as over 3,000 victims in one of its Damascus centers (Human Rights Watch, 2015). The international community took note of these deaths; two former members of the General Intelligence Directorate (GID) were recently arrested in Germany on suspicion for their participation in the torture of Syrian protesters in the early stages of the conflict (The Independent, 2019). This creates a dilemma for establishing security post-conflict: the *mukhabarat* is instrumental in re-establishing control and security over Syria, but will do so via fear and a continuation of the atrocities committed during the entire war. The two members arrested in Germany also has the potential to lead to senior members of Assad’s security apparatus being held accountable for their crimes as well.

Figure 1.5 Locations and numbers of Syrian deaths in captivity under intelligence agencies (Human Rights Watch, 2015)



As for the standard military, the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) has suffered immensely because of widespread desertion among its ranks. The Republican Guard (RG), Syria's elite forces, faced the brunt of the Syrian Civil War and proved more reliable. The regime ended up splitting the entire RG into individual battalions and spreading them across the entirety of the SAA to reduce attrition. While this did make the military more unified the Republican Guard as a whole was weakened, prompting efforts for the regime to invest in training new brigades and special forces units (Waters, 2018). To expand the already depleted military force the RG sought to mobilize fighters in regions that are not currently covered by the military, such as the Qalamoun region north of Damascus. Thus, the *Quwat Dir' al-Qalamoun* (QSF) militia was formed; its fighters had been recruited from loyalist and reconciled towns that had submitted to the regime. This paved the way for militias further down the rest of the war, such as the Coastal Shield Brigade in Latakia, or the *Ittihad Jaysh al-Asha'ir* (Union of the Army of the Tribes) (Waters, 2018). This suggests two things in terms of establishing security after the conflict: the first is that the RG's main force has depleted to a point where militias are being rapidly recruited to make up for the loss in manpower. However, this also leaves the possibility of Assad's weakened military being able to sustain itself after the war and will be capable of establishing limited security in Syria by being willing to reintegrate civilian towns and its townsfolk into its military.

### *Foreign Militaries and Proxies*

Throughout the conflict Syria maintained and relied heavily upon its alliance with both Russia and Iran, both of whom were instrumental in keeping the regime intact throughout the Civil War. Iran's contributions involve military advisers and the establishment of the Syrian National Defence Forces (NDF), as well as contributing a combination of its special forces, intelligence and law enforcement agencies to help train Syrian forces. In addition to military training, Iranian contributions to Syria have been massive, including logistical support via air and contributions to Assad's chemical weapons program (Fulton, 2013).

On Russia's side, the country has continuously supported Assad's regime with weapons and ammunition - being the country's largest source of military support. It has contributed

greatly to stemming the tide of insurgent forces in Syria and reinforces Assad's military by deploying special forces and advisors on the ground. This is the sole extent at which Russia can contribute manpower to the conflict. For Russia, the drawbacks from participating in the Syrian conflict outweigh the benefits (Souleimanov, 2018). While Russia is the most powerful country in the alliance, cultural and geographic factors enable Iran to come out as the biggest winner in the conflict. In comparison with the other two powers, Iran has a very convenient position in the conflict. As a lesser power compared to Russia, it faces less political maneuvering with Western powers and benefits from Russian air power. Its location adjacent to Syria creates more tangible benefits for its participation in the conflict, with the conflict creating more opportunities to extend its influence over areas in Shiite and Alawite communities. Russia in comparison faces political backlash from the international community for its support over Assad's regime and fights a war that is unpopular back home, with no clear end vision.

What this means is that there is potential for Russia to be less committed to the conflict compared to its Iranian partner. Iran's influence - when it had already been close with Syria from the beginning - is intertwined with Syria's security and military forces. The Syrian military had been shaken and reformed by the war. With Russia having less relevance in the conflict, as well as the withdrawal of the United States from the region, there is the potential for the Iranian regime to shape its security apparatus in their image. Future policy concerning Assad's military will likely involve dealing with Iran as well.

### *Next Steps*

According to BBC, Bashar al-Assad condemned the international community for the refugee crisis. He accused foreign countries of preventing refugees from returning to Syria in order to make it easier "to impose sanctions on the Syrian people". In addition he states a desire for resettlement and called for 'millions' of refugees to return home (BBC, 2019). His actions prove otherwise: humanitarian aid organizations are heavily restricted while operating in regime territory because the regime is determined to maintain control over the flow of aid delivery. Organizations are also stifled by a 'complex', 'unstandardised' registration process that contains long bureaucratic processes and payment fees that ultimately benefit the

regime(Sosnowski, 2019). The recent release of death notices and names of deceased activists, years after they were killed by the *mukhabarat*, draws an even further gulf between al-Assad and his people (Dagher, 2018). Many Syrians had interpreted this move as less of a service and more an action meant to intimidate Syrians and warn them against future protests, or face reprisal. In short, Assad's regime welcomes the flow of refugees returning to the homeland but prioritizes complete control over its people and the remaining territory after the war.

In terms of establishing policy, Assad's regime with the combination of its intelligence agencies, military personnel, pro-regime militia and Iranian and Russian support could provide the necessary security for reconstruction and refugee resettlement efforts. However this would involve subjugating the Syrian population under a regime that heavily restricts the flow of aid to its struggling communities, and violently projects its power through fear and intimidation - whose military is heavily intertwined with Iran and its proxy forces.

However, the two arrests of Syrian intelligence officials and the release of photos of regime atrocities along with the death notices can be used to bring key regime officials into court and hold them accountable for their war crimes. Additionally, recommendations could be made to the Syrian government to loosen restrictions on aid organizations. Policy options that enable the regime to maintain and provide security for its territory and incoming refugees, can simultaneously hold the regime accountable for past atrocities. It would put pressure on the regime and possibly enable more aid groups to operate in regime territory. This is the ideal situation. The alternative would involve preventing certain groups - specifically Sunnis - from reintegrating with regime-controlled territory, out of fear for what is what is waiting for them. With the nature and reach of the Syrian regime, refugee resettlement and reconstruction cannot occur without dealing with Bashar al-Assad.

## **Governance: Local Level and Political Participation**

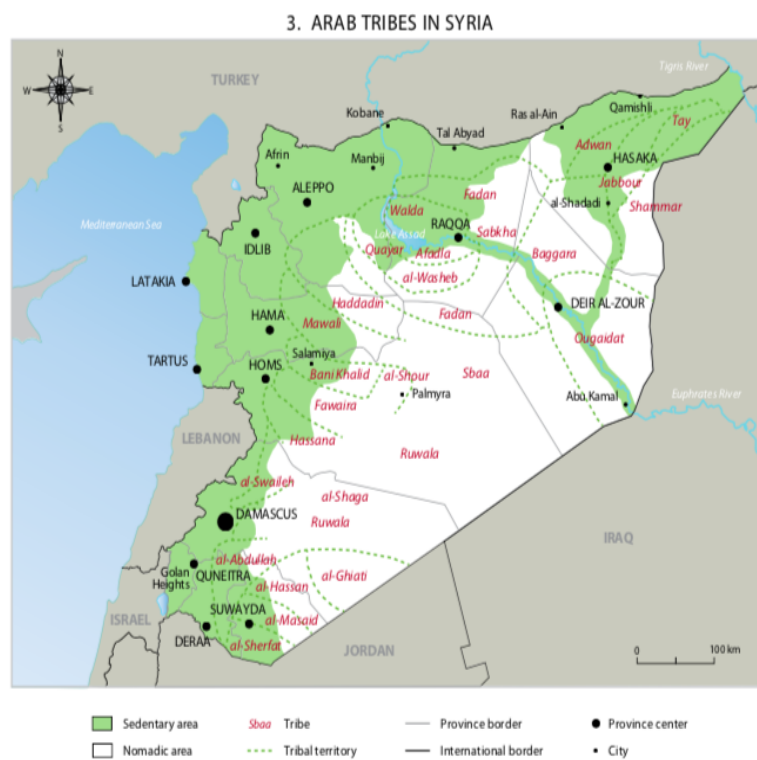
### *Introduction*

Despite the constantly changing aspects of the conflict in Syria, multiple societal and social structures exist that have been culturally maintained for decades. Understanding their progression is essential to the process of rebuilding Syrian society post-war. Social institutions,

like the local and provincial councils created after the Syrian uprising of 2011, are the backbone of remaining communities within opposition territories today. Aspects of Syrian culture such as tribalism, gender, and class all influence the functionality of these systems of governance. Therefore, it is essential to examine how they have shifted within Syrian societies since the beginning of the conflict.

### Tribalism

Figure 1.6 Arab Tribes in Syria (Balanche, 2018)



Tribalism has long been prevalent in Syria. A tribe is defined as a sociopolitical unit derived from extended families living in a defined territory, usually entire towns and city neighborhoods (Mazur, 2017) and incorporated within civilian allegiances and identities. In the past decade, the presence of tribal allegiances within Syria has gradually shifted towards allegiance to the state, meaning that tribal leaders exercise less autonomy over tribal members than they did before the Arab Spring of 2011 (Mazur, 2017).

Since the 2011 uprising, tribalism in Syria has been utilized as a tool of the Assad regime and of various religious and radical groups competing for state control. At the beginning of the uprising, the regime installed select tribal leaders in cities like Hama, that were previously represented by unsupportive leaders, gaining the allegiance of the represented tribe while maintaining control over the region (Balanche, 2018). Other political groups, such as ISIS, have infiltrated tribes as a means for gaining military support, and later orchestrating attacks on Alawite and Ismaili settlements with the use of tribal militias (Balanche, 2018). Politically, remaining tribal structures have shifted to provide civilians with governance and public services that the state government is currently failing to provide (Dukhan, 2014), and many tribal leaders make up the provincial and local councils that manage a majority of municipal institutions (Mazur, 2017). Tribal identities are critical to understanding the results of past democratic elections within local communities, where Syrian civilians place their trust, and in predicting future trends in governance within Syria.

### *Local Governance Within Regime Territories*

With the aim of decentralizing the national government, the Assad regime enacted the establishment of local councils in 2011 through Decree 107 (Waters, 2017) and created *baladiya*, meaning municipal office, which make up 56 percent of all local councils within Syria (Waters, 2018). The structural hierarchy of the regime's local governance begins with *baladiyas*, who act under city councils, which are overseen by the regime-appointed Local Administration Ministry comprised of Assad's hand-picked governors (Khalaf, 2015). Both *baladiyas* and city councils are able to dictate allocation of funding for public service but are required to receive approval from appointed governors or ministers to ensure they act within national regulations (Waters, 2018). The regime *baladiyas* are responsible for providing public services such as infrastructure maintenance, security through a police force, functional sewage treatment, and many other services (Waters, 2018). However, the tendency for the regime to prioritize the appointment of loyal representatives over individuals with expertise in public policy (Mende, 2018) has caused social institutions to suffer. This massive failure on the part of *baladiya* council members has resulted in widespread unhappiness towards regime-established local

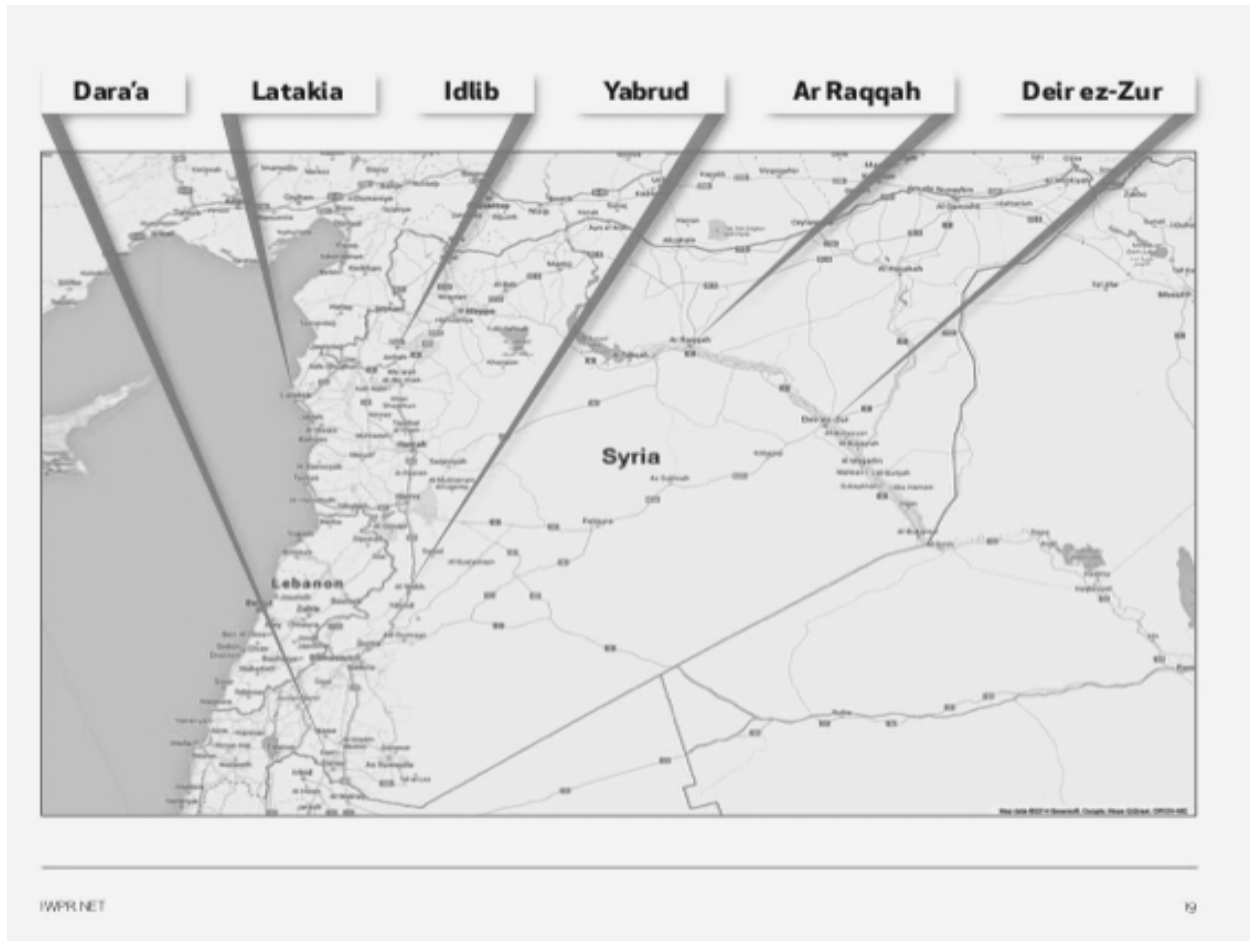
councils, an example being the recent call for a completely new council in regime-controlled Damascus (Waters, 2018).

The issue of lacking expertise within these governing bodies stems from the corruption of the election process dictated by the Assad regime. Under pretenses of corruption, the regime has repetitively disbanded local councils and later installed “temporary” leadership and interim councils until elections could be held (Waters, 2018). During 2017 alone, nine local councils in Hama, Latakia, and Tartous were disbanded and reestablished with new leaders that had strong ties to the regime (Waters, 2018). In most cases, the promised elections were not carried out and regime-appointed leadership remained in power. If elections were held, then the list of candidates to choose from was comprised of individuals that were hand-picked by the regime. Most of these councils serve as a device of Assad for rewarding the loyal elite, instead of exemplifying a democratic governing body that manages public services and develops their community (Waters, 2018).

Challenges facing the local councils within regime territories include the struggle for control between competing militias and the opposition, lack of funding, and lack of expertise (Waters, 2018). The United Nations has provided aid to many of these local councils, with the aim of developing municipal institutions that these councils are designed to govern (Waters, 2018). Local Councils within both the opposition and the regime controlled territories face a severe lack of funding, lack of expertise in managing social institutions, and an inability to maintain stable control over areas that host multiple military groups competing for power (Waters, 2018).

## *Local Governance in Opposition Territories*

Figure 1.7 Key Provincial Councils within Syria (Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 2014)



### *Local and Provincial Councils*

Local and provincial councils are currently one of the most effective distributors of humanitarian aid within Syria. It is estimated that there were about 400 local councils in both regime and opposition controlled territories following the crisis in Aleppo (Waters, 2017). There are six main provincial councils within opposition-controlled territories that are named for the cities they reside in; Dara'a, Latakia, Idlib, Yabrud, Ar Raqqa, and Deir ez-Zur. Each council was formulated by anti-regime elite, and are viewed as highly legitimate by many Syrians because of their restoration of public services and the involvement of key revolutionary activists in their leadership (Khalaf, 2015). They were established in response to the lack of political organization of anti-regime forces, designed to complement the rejection of the regime and

provide a structural alternative to civilians that have been neglected or persecuted by the Assad regime (IWPR, 2014). The establishment of these councils was technically made legal by the Assad regime through Decree 107, which gave way to the creation of local councils in order to promote government decentralization and to allow the local management of municipal institutions (Waters, 2017). However, the legality of these councils does not prevent the regime from directly targeting them through air strikes because their establishment directly undermines the legitimacy of the state (Waters, 2017).

A groundbreaking team of researchers, funded by the Institute for War & Peace Reporting, has provided some of the most thorough information on local councils that was collected from within the councils themselves. They reported that local Councils have routinely provided indispensable resources such as access to water, electricity, local policing, medical aid, transportation, and many other services that the national government fails to provide (IWPR, 2014). The study delves into three of the most effective, wide-spanning provincial councils, which each manage several smaller councils that oversee village communities: the SNC identifying Dara'a Council, and the SNC distancing Yabrud and Ar Raqqa Councils (IWPR, 2014).

### *Funding*

Opposition-led Local Councils are primarily funded by external human rights organizations, foreign governments, and the Syrian National Council, which provides them with the means to distribute aid within their local communities and prioritize issues that impact local populations the most (IWPR, 2014). Earlier in the crisis, opposition-held areas received aid from foreign donors such as France and the United States. The irregularity and unreliability of these shipments made aid distribution difficult and often resulted in depleted legitimacy of councils within their local communities (Favier, 2016). The Syrian National Council (SNC) contributes a large portion of funding, but presents issues of corruption and favoritism along tribal lines (IWPR, 2014) through prioritization of aid distribution and election manipulation.

### *Elections*

Democratic elections are held within each council's jurisdiction, and yet there is not sufficient evidence to support the notion that the elections are not skewed to favor more elite

members of the community (IWPR, 2014). However, local populations have exercised autonomy in rejecting council leadership that does not succeed in providing adequate resources to the population, and this contributes to the council's overall legitimacy. Many opposition-led communities utilize Facebook as a platform for making complaints and holding discussions about their local council's efficiency in providing public services (Mende, 2018), therefore civilians exercise some autonomy in maintaining accountability of governance. The greatest challenge to the electoral processes of these opposition-led councils is the interference of political entities like al-Nusra Front and the Muslim Brotherhood that have been accused of pushing favoritism within council leadership, and even local council election manipulation. Regardless of these challenges, the election process of these local councils is deemed as mostly representative of the communities they serve. Given that individuals of similar ethnic or tribal groups have the tendency to reside in the same communities, it's less likely for discrimination based on those identities to occur when a fellow community member is in power rather than an outside entity like members of SNC leadership (IWPR, 2014).

### *Three Local Council Case Studies*

Provincial councils are broken up into local councils, which are further organized into need-based divisions to provide a community with services like medical, military, legal, civil, and media communication outlets. Provincial councils primarily dictate the distribution of funding that is given by large contributors such as foreign governments or the SNC, to regions enduring the highest intensity of regime-inflicted humanitarian crimes. The provincial level has little to do with how the aid is distributed within communities, especially given past accusations of incorrectly distributed aid based on tribal or ethnic favoritism by the SNC. Each council prioritizes families that have suffered the loss of their primary breadwinner, regardless of ethnicity or class (IWPR, 2014).

The Yabrud council is located in the southwestern part of Syria and has jurisdiction over 28 towns and 190 villages. Its close proximity to external support within Lebanon causes it to be one of the most successful provincial councils, and its purposeful distance from the SNC causes it to appear less corrupt. Citizens interviewed by the IWPR research task force explained how

there were little to no social services in their villages prior to council establishment (IWPR, 2014).

The next council featured in the IWPR study is the Dara'a council, which is located in the southwestern region of Syria bordering Jordan, and identifies strongly with the SNC. This council deals with routine airstrikes carried out by the Assad regime, and therefore prioritizes humanitarian relief over public services when implementing foreign aid. The provincial council oversees 8 local councils, as well as a unified committee for relief. The committee was implemented in response to claims of aid not being distributed equally among local councils, a claim possibly suggested by members of the al-Nusra Front that have been in contention with members for control of public services.

In northern Syria, east of Aleppo, resides the Ar Raqqa council, representing a declining population of 250,000 civilians. This council has endured more adversity than others due to the region's political uncertainty and various groups competing for regional control, resulting in unstable governance and the presence of clashing militant groups (IWPR, 2014). The entire city was under the control of ISIS in 2014, the result of a several years struggle between multiple militant Islamist groups. ISIS's presence has made civic management difficult for the local council, since ISIS's rise to power within the region was accompanied by multiple school closures and a variety of imposed religious rules. General popular support of the provincial council has been greatly impeded by divisions within the community that have been furthered by ISIS's wavering popular support. When the council is able to provide sufficient services, they deliver relief to areas impacted by regime inflicted bombings, run medical facilities, and provide general family services. The council is personally responsible for renovating 12 schools, and working with the SNC to deliver 2,000 first aid packages to IDPs within their jurisdiction (IWPR, 2014).

### *Challenges*

Each provincial council faces similar challenges in competing with other interested parties in the region, struggling with a lack of expertise and clear hierarchical structure, and an overall lack of funding. The councils were established in response to the uprising against the

Assad regime, and therefore suffer from sporadic regime attacks primarily in the form of air raids. Assad views these councils as a threat to his legitimacy and continues to destroy the infrastructure and social institutions of these cities in order to delegitimize the council leaders as providers (Waters, 2017). A huge portion of aid allocated to each council goes to mending the immediate impacts of these air raids, making the continuation of public services unsustainable for the long term in the more impacted areas. Since the opposition regions rely heavily on individual organization and foreign government donations (IWPR, 2014), the trickle of funding is inconsistent. Issues of security that local councils frequently deal with revolve around attacks by the regime, and also ISIS, as councils provide an alternate source of stability to civilians (Starritt, 2015). Council leadership lacks proper expertise along with highly educated and skilled individuals to contribute to public services, an issue that is prevalent across Syria due to the “Brain Drain” and migration of higher educated individuals, accompanied by the fact that remaining technocrats are afraid to take positions of power after earlier regime persecution (IWPR, 2014).

There are several challenges to the legitimacy of local councils. First in the election process, due to claims of self-appointment and favoritism among the elite within their communities. Then, in the accurate claims of political infiltration within leadership by the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Nusra, along with other political groups. In order to function properly in the future, local councils will need structural stability, proper security through a functioning police force, stable funding, and a more transparent electoral system (IWPR, 2014).

### *Participation of Women in Opposition Territories*

In ISIS controlled areas, women struggle against religious restrictions and therefore are less likely to participate politically on the local level (IWPR, 2014). In other areas, women have played a key role in negotiating local ceasefires, preventing further humanitarian crises that are the result of clashing militias across ethnic and religious groups, and allowing for aid to pass safely to impacted communities. This was the case during 2011 in the Damascus suburb of Zabadani, where a group of local women convinced armed militants to carry out a 20 day cease fire (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2018). A group of women in Baniyas during 2011 were also responsible

for orchestrating a mass blockage of a main highway, resulting in the release of hundreds of illegally detained men by the regime (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2018). These two incidents are among the many examples proving that female presence in peace negotiations on the local level is essential.

### *Women's Political Participation Throughout the Conflict*

The population of Syrian men has declined since the beginning stages of the uprising due to their military participation in the regimes forces and the militias that comprise the various groups within the opposition. Due to the massive loss of male life, one in three Syrian families is now led by female breadwinners (Hilton, 2017). As of 2018, the unemployment rate increased to 55 percent due to the internal displacement of individuals, while the rate of female workforce participation continues to climb, but at a much slower pace (The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, 2017). Technological advancements and the changing role of women within familial structures combined with the increasing need for economic participants, has led to female entrepreneurship rising from 4.4 to 22.4 percent within the past seven years (The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, 2017). However, the changing role of women within Syrian families and in the national economy has been equally as critical as their role in local governance and broader peace negotiations. Not only have women been essential in negotiating local ceasefires, but they've played a notable role in delegating aid distribution, both locally and nationally (Williams, 2014). Women have also been crucial to the process of physically transporting and distributing aid to impacted communities. In areas of high military tension, women have a greater capability to pass security checkpoints without calling attention and appearing less threatening, which is why many women are responsible for the delivery of medical aid and other supplies to their communities (Williams, 2014).

Political inclusion of women in the Syrian political process was first defined in 1949, when women were given the right to vote, and again in 1990 when women held 9 percent of Syrian parliamentary seats (Marsi, 2017). There still exists an opposition to women holding political power in Syria, a sentiment that is derived from cultural norms embedded in patriarchal familial structures. The trend of granting women political freedoms while

withholding personal freedoms is common in Arab states, and the state of Syria has acted accordingly up until the 2011 uprisings (Elham, 2012). Within the sphere of international policy making, there is a lack of women's voices within UN peace talks regarding Syria. During the 2017 Geneva talks, only 15 percent of the individuals involved were women (Alrifai & Dore-Weeks, 2018). In light of the growing dependency on women to populate the workforce, their rise to becoming the breadwinners of their families, and their ability to diffuse conflicts between local militias, women's political participation has proven to be essential in the beginning stages of conflict mitigation. The official representation of women in Syrian political processes does not yet match their contribution on the local and humanitarian scales.

### *Conclusion*

Examining the internal structures of local and provincial councils within the opposition regions of Syria is important for understanding the foundation of social institutions that constitute everyday life for many civilians. It is likely that these councils will facilitate the reconstruction of the Syrian state upon conflict resolution, as they are currently the predominant distributors of aid within public services (IWPR, 2014) and enjoy legitimacy that other governing bodies do not possess within Syria today.

## **Current State of Syria: Human Rights**

### *Introduction*

The war in Syria has become one of the most brutal and unjust wars to date. A variety of factors including the intertwined ethnic, sectarian, and tribal structure, the disorder of the conflict, and the fight for power have led to mass violations of human rights. The large number of actors all vying for territory and power within Syria creates chaos in which it is easy to take advantage of human lives. This section will highlight five main human rights violations: ethnic cleansing, human trafficking, resource distribution, favoritism, and collective punishment. The analysis of these violations will demonstrate they have exacerbated the plight of Syrian refugees. Many have died from human rights abuses and many more are at risk, making this an important issue to consider.

## *Ethnic Cleansing*

Ethnic cleansing is a strategy used by many actors within the Syrian conflict. Ethnic cleansing is not only being directed at one sect, ethnic group, or tribe but instead it is being perpetrated by multiple actors targeting various sects. Assad's government is the main perpetrator and is made up mainly by those in the Alawite minority. Assad targets Sunni Arabs who began the insurgency. ISIS is also a main perpetrator who targets Syrian minorities. Additionally, the Kurds have been known to ethnically cleanse Arabs. The two main tactics used by these groups to carry out ethnic cleansing are the use of chemical weapons and disappearances.

The use of chemical weapons as a tactic of war is considered a war crime, yet the Assad government and ISIS continue to use them to secure control of different areas. Since 2013, a total of 85 chemical weapon attacks have been reported (Rodgers et al., 2019). The attacks were mainly perpetrated by the government (Rodgers et al., 2019). Assad's government attacked multiple suburbs in Damascus, Northern Hama, Khan Sheikhoun, and Aleppo. ISIS has mainly used homemade chemical weapons such as Sulphur mustard to carry out mass killings of security forces, religious minorities, and rival armed groups.

The use of chemical weapons is a power play. Chemical weapons are employed by these actors with the hopes of instilling fear in the people and to force them out of areas they wish to capture (Jenkins, 2017). The massive death toll is a consequence of this strategy because people are unable to escape. The government especially wants to depopulate regions not under their control and in order to do so they use chemical weapons to target civilians, commerce, food supplies, and health care facilities, effectively making the areas unlivable (Jenkins, 2017). Even with Russian and Iranian backing it is difficult for Assad to achieve the control he desires. Assad likely uses the extreme power of chemical weapons as an additional tool to gain ultimate control. Assad views the use of chemical weapons as a form of security to ensure that the Sunnis and Kurds are not a challenge.

Another tactic of ethnic cleansing is disappearances which are greatly used by the government. When someone is disappeared, they are forcibly taken because of their affiliation, or actions and are often tortured and trafficked. Information on the state and whereabouts of

the disappeared is not shared with the victim's family and friends. The Syrian government has been using disappearances as a way to quell peaceful protests prior to 2011. Since the start of the civil war, the numbers of disappearances have increased drastically. The Syrian Network for Human Rights estimates that between 2011 and 2017, 65,000 people have disappeared at the hands of government forces and pro-government militias (HRW, 2017). There are four main government agencies that perpetrate these crimes: The Department of Military Intelligence, the Political Security Directorate, the General Intelligence Directorate, and the Air Force Intelligence Directorate. Each government agency has branches in Damascus along with regional, city, and local branches allowing for a broad reach to target dissenters (Human Rights Watch, 2012). Temporary holding sites have been made in stadiums, schools, hospitals, and military bases before people are moved to one of the detention facilities operated by an intelligence branch. In these facilities people report ill-treatment, starvation, extreme overcrowding, and denial of necessary medical assistance. The Human Rights Watch has documented more than twenty different forms of torture in these facilities (Human Rights Watch, 2012). Disappearances not only affect the victims themselves but also can lead to the mental suffering of friends and family due to the uncertainty of the state of their loved ones.

Ethnic cleansing is widening the social divides present within Syria. It will be necessary to use caution with the strategic return of refugees to ensure the tension among sects, tribes, and ethnicities due to ethnic cleansing is not aggravated after the conflict.

### *Human Trafficking*

The chaos, violence, and lack of enforced policy present in Syria currently create an environment where human trafficking can thrive. Refugees, women, and children are among the most vulnerable to trafficking. These populations are the most vulnerable because their lives have been uprooted and their roles in society have drastically changed.

Refugees in transit and in informal settlements are at greater risk of being forced into labor or sex trafficked. When seeking illegal passage, refugees often put their lives in the hands of fraudulent agencies with the promise of relocation and a secure job when in reality they are victims of trafficking. When refugees successfully flee Syria, neighboring countries including

Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Turkey have been known to force refugees into labor or women into sex rings (Cohen, 2018).

Women are particularly vulnerable to be forced into domestic servitude, systemic rape, and sex trafficking. Most institutions target women, but ISIS particularly has sexual exploitation central to their ideology. In December of 2014, ISIS released public guidelines on how to capture, forcibly hold, and sexually abuse female slaves. ISIS has also been known to force girls to take virginity tests before selling and trading them in slave bazars (US Department of State, 2018). It is especially dangerous for women because there is a stigma attached to the victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation. Many women do not report the incident in fear of receiving additional harassment from community or family members.

During times of war children are taken advantage of in many ways. Children are orphaned, and desperate to do anything to keep themselves and any friends and family they have alive. Children are often forcibly recruited to become child soldiers. Syrian government forces, pro-regime affiliated militias, and non-state actors such as Jabhat al-Nusra, ISIS, the FSA, and Kurdish forces all force children to fight for their cause (US Department of State, 2018). In these positions the children are exposed to extreme violence. Schools are often commandeered for use by the military which makes those children more vulnerable to be trafficked and prevents those children from accessing education. Additionally, young girls are often forced into early marriages which can lead to sexual exploitation and forced labor (US Department of State, 2018).

A major issue with the dire state of trafficking in Syria is that even though the government has some limited laws, they have made no effort to use them to prosecute traffickers. The government has no anti-trafficking training for officials (US Department of State, 2018). The government has even gone as far as prosecuting trafficking victims including child soldiers for crimes they forcibly committed because they were trafficked.

In order to decrease human trafficking, it will be key to begin prosecuting perpetrators and decrease the chaos of the conflict, so victims are not left vulnerable.

## *Resource Distribution*

A major issue affecting Syrian civilians and refugees are the limited resources available and the unfair distribution of those resources. The main challenges are with water, food, and humanitarian aid. These are all essential to the quality of life of the Syrian people regardless of sect, ethnicity, or tribe and the lack of resources has been the cause of many deaths throughout the war.

The lack of access to clean water originated with the drought of 2007 in the Fertile Crescent region of the Middle East. This drought was followed by a hot and dry summer which exacerbated the problem. Many people who formerly lived in rural areas were forced to move to urban centers in hopes of gaining access to more water (Shapiro, 2019). Entering the war, water was already a scarce resource but in 2015, water began to be weaponized. The government and opposition forces began to disrupt access to water on multiple occasions. In December of 2016 the government bombed the Ain al-Fijeh spring which left 5.5 million people without access to water (Samilow, 2017). It is known that ISIS has also targeted water supplies in refugee camps for IDPs. Dams have been a major area of conflict. Kurdish forces have diverted water from the Mosul Dam. Additionally, Turkey has been accused of reducing water flow to Lake Assad, the largest body of freshwater in Syria, in order to cut off the supply to Aleppo (Vidal, 2014).

The drought of 2007 not only caused major issues with access to water but additionally drastically decreased crop yields. Over 40 percent of the jobs in Syria are connected to the agriculture industry which led to one in three people unable to afford the necessary food (Human Appeal, 2018). In 2018 seven million people in Syria were unable to obtain the basic food required to meet their needs. Food insecurity is a major issue and the threat of starvation has been used to force rebels to stand down (Human Appeal, 2018). This has come to be known as starvation war tactics.

The lack of food and water leaves the population of Syria susceptible to sickness and is a major cause of the 10.5 million people in Syria who require some form of humanitarian assistance (Syria Strategic Steering Group, 2018). The regime recognizes this need and uses it to their advantage by preventing aid from reaching their opposition. The government uses basic

goods such as food, and electricity as rewards for those who pledge their allegiance effectively increasing civilian dependency on the regime. The government has cut supplies in Duman and Aleppo. People have starved to death in refugee camps in the towns of Madaya and Daraya, as well as eastern and southern Damascus (Berti, 2016). Aid groups are having to become creative with their distribution tactics in order to actually reach those in need. The government has also targeted hospitals and medical staff. Thirty-three hospitals were functioning in Aleppo in 2010, in 2016 only ten were still operational (Berti, 2016). Aid agencies have been afraid to assist hospitals in updating their services and supplying them with more medicine because they are afraid it will make the facilities bigger targets.

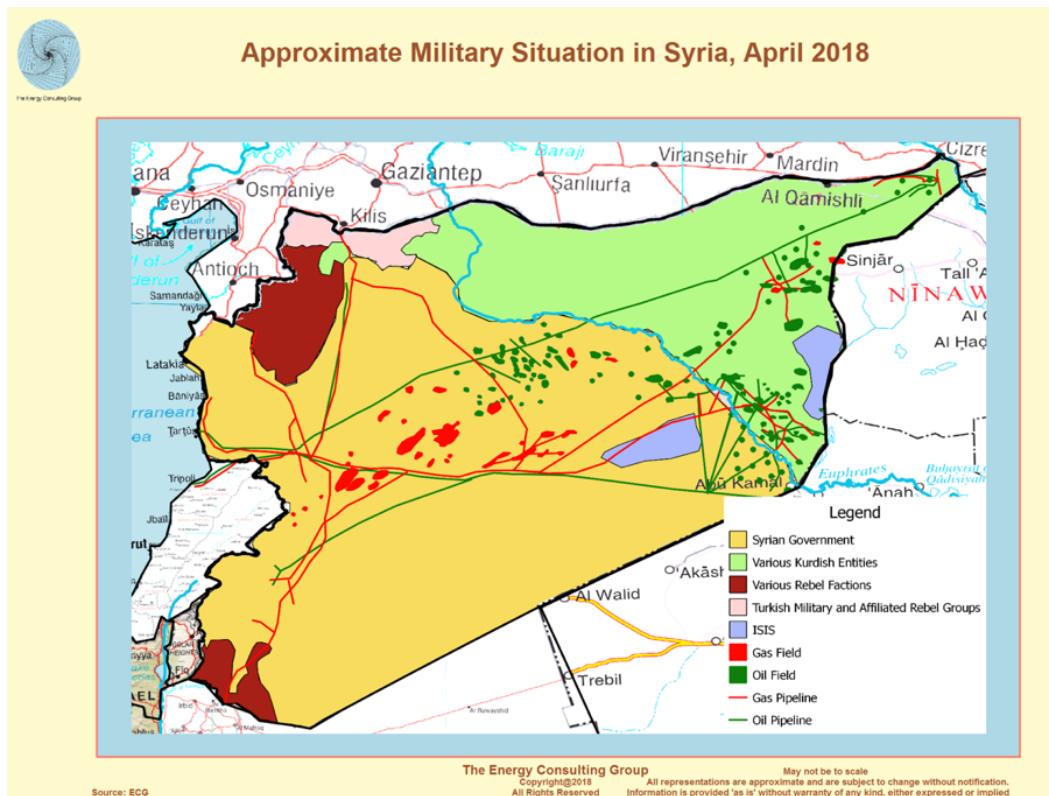
The population of Syria depends on these resources and people will go to excessive lengths to obtain them. This gives great power to those who have the ability to interfere with the distribution of these resources. These necessities such as water, food, and health care have been weaponized, and it is putting many lives at risk. It will be necessary after the war to ensure everyone, regardless of sect or ethnicity, gets the aid they need.

### *Favoritism*

Favoritism between different institutions is largely due to the resources that those groups hold, and it is used as a way to reward people for their allegiance and loyalty to different groups. Gas and oil as well as agricultural resources are all valuable to have control of especially in a time when imports and exports are largely politicized making it more difficult to get resources from other countries.

ISIS had control of natural gas fields and phosphate mines for some time but in 2017 they lost control of the mines to the Syrian army and its Russian and Iranian allies. In the east the Kurds have large control over a number of oil fields and the Conoco gas processing facility. The Kurds also control Syria's largest oil fields in northeast Hassakeh, and most of the Euphrates basin fields (Masi, 2017).

Figure 1.8 Approximate Military Situation in Syria, April 2018 (The Energy Consulting Group, 2018)



Having control of these resources comes with power. The different religious, ethnic, and tribal groups struggle to hold these resource rich areas and it is a cause of much violence. ISIS has damaged multiple facilities in Homs including the Jihir/Hayan processing plant and other production facilities in the al-Shaer field. The United States has also targeted oil infrastructure to the east of Euphrates (Masi, 2017). Because of their importance these resources have become part of strategic moves to gain power. These resources are used as bargaining chips. The distribution of these resources is often decided upon by who supports the ones in control, or it is used by smaller groups as a way to have leverage amongst more powerful forces.

By having these resources be central to the conflict and fight for power the already scarce resources have become even more limited. Before the conflict Syria produced 390,000 barrels of oil per day and now oil production capacity is down to around 100,000 barrels per day (Masi, 2017). These are resources that everyone in Syria needs in order to achieve a stable quality of life and to greatly politicize them and deprive people of these resources based on

their identity and allegiance is unjust. These resources should not be seen as a reward but as a right.

### *Collective Punishment*

Collective punishment is a tactic that has been used in the Syrian conflict where civilians, certain sects, and regions have been targeted at mass. In 2016 Russian forces used aerial attacks to target whole neighborhoods, homes, and hospitals in eastern Aleppo (Amnesty International, 2017). Opposition groups have injured and killed hundreds of civilians by indiscriminately shelling Kefraya and Foua (Amnesty International, 2017). The government has used bulldozers to tear down houses in shops in Damascus. Christian Syrians are often the ones targeted through these mass raids, kidnappings and killings (Eghdamian,, 2015). The objective of collective punishment is to destroy everything and leave civilians with nothing and no one to stay behind for. In Ghouta people have tried to escape the attacks by hiding in basements but Russian Allies have started using “bunker busters” to destroy these underground shelters. Kids have developed breathing and other health issues from living in these confined spaces (Mrie, 2018). This broad brutality reminds some of the brutality inflicted in the 1980s by Assad’s father Hafez al-Assad who conducted mass killings and caused massive destruction in the city of Hama (Oweis, 2012). Civilians are being targeted purely for the purpose of winning territory and weakening certain groups. This tactic is a type of war crime and is a violation of international humanitarian law.

### *Conclusion*

Human rights issues within Syria are among some of the worst the world has ever seen. There is a mass disregard of international humanitarian law when these tactics are used to gain power and weaken opposition. The ethnic, sectarian, and tribal diversity within Syria is suffering due to these targeted violations. It is important to consider how to reconcile these human rights violations during reconstruction. People will want answers about where their family members have gone, and will want to honor those who have been lost. Perpetrators will need to be prosecuted and trust will have to be rebuilt in order for progress to be made in other

areas such as governance and redevelopment. Human rights transcend ethnic, tribal, and sectarian differences so, during the phases of conflict resolution it is necessary for equality to be restored amongst these identities.

## **Conclusion**

Social and sectarian issues are critical to understand when considering reconstruction of Syria after the war. Refugees and IDPs want to return home and live in safety once again. The differences, hardship, and wrongdoings between the different groups will not be forgotten after the conflict. In order to achieve successful reconstruction, strategic planning is necessary. Where the different sects, tribes, and ethnic groups originate, how they are organized within society and how they interact with each other going forward with a deep-rooted history of conflict will all be important factors for the functioning of Syrian society. It must be strategized where refugees and IDPs will return to: will it be where they were located pre-conflict or somewhere new? What will be the role of leadership and governance in society when there is distrust amongst the many different groups that have been vying for power over the past eight years of conflict? How can society support individuals and regain trust after their human rights have been violated? Not only do the varying religions, ethnicities, and sects have to be considered but it is also necessary to consider how society will function differently considering the new roles assumed by different gender, ages, and class.

Social institutions are the backbone to nations and although they have been a reason why the Syrian war is so complex, they also will be an important source of strength post-conflict. Identities are what people rely on during times of conflict but also in times of reconciliation.

## **Part B: External Concerns**

*This section investigates the legal status and situation of Syrian refugees in the neighboring host countries of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. We find that while the specific policies on refugees may differ in each country, refugees across all four countries are lacking adequate legal protection. This lack of legal protection makes refugees more vulnerable to exploitation and crime. Additionally, the vast majority of refugees are living below the poverty line in each country. Governments of the host countries are growing weary of hosting Syrian refugees, and there is an increasingly high risk of refoulement back to Syria the longer the refugees stay. There are even some reports that countries have already begun sending back Syrian refugees. There is a credible threat to the safety of refugees who return to Syria, making the refugee situation in neighboring countries an urgent problem that needs addressing. We have found that rather return home to Syria, refugees should be resettled to wealthier third host countries, where they can be absorbed without causing enormous strain on the infrastructure and economy.*

### **Introduction**

Beginning with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's violent response to peaceful Arab Spring uprisings in 2011, there have been approximately 5.6 million Syrian refugees fleeing abroad for safety. The vast majority (96.9 percent) have fled to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2019). Prior to the onset of Syrians fleeing, the region was already attempting to cope with hosting the densest population of refugees in the world due to the Israel-Palestine conflict. As a result of internal and external political conflicts as well as the Palestinian and Syrian refugee crises, the Middle East is struggling to maintain a streamlined response to the mass influx of refugees migrating in and out of the region. At the downturn of the Syrian civil war and ISIS control, most of Syria continues to sustain a hostile environment for Syrian nationals, therefore it is unclear whether failing refugee responses will force Syrian refugees to voluntarily repatriate (Di Stefano, 2018: 1). Each host country has provided separate responses to the refugee crisis, thus the region lacks a centralized approach

to providing housing, medical care, education and jobs to refugees. This section is divided into a thorough analysis of each high-intake Syrian refugee host country: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Each subsection will include the demographic makeup of its refugees, Syria's political relationship to each host country and each nation's response to the refugee crisis.

## **Turkey**

### *Demographics and Overview*

According to the UNHCR, 64 percent of registered Syrian refugees outside of Syria are living in Turkey as of December 31, 2018. With over 3.6 million Syrian refugees currently seeking asylum in Turkey, the Turkish economy has unequivocally been hit by its inability to provide for the mass influx of individuals seeking housing and employment (UNHCR, 2019). Turkey has experienced an extreme imposition of responsibilities regarding its refugees per capita. Due to Turkey's inundation of refugees since 2012, the Turkish government has created its own means of dealing with the mass inflow of migrants, including temporarily ceasing to register Syrian asylum-seekers at its border and in Istanbul (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Through refusing to legally register more refugees as well as disincentivizing work permits, Turkey has politicized the Syrian refugee crisis.

### *Political Relationship between Syria and Turkey*

Prior to the Arab Spring uprising, the internal relations between Turkey and Syria were rather calm. Both countries advertised the other's tourism industry while also offering university exchange courses within their education systems (Zahra, 2017: 28). Further, Syria and Turkey signed a Free Trade Agreement that came into effect in 2007, signifying the mild relations between the two countries which lasted until trade relations ended in 2011 (Daoudy, 2016). Tensions began to rise between the neighboring countries following President Assad's response to Syria's peaceful uprisings in 2011. Due to Assad's lethal attacks on his opposition in August 2011, Turkey chose to side with rebel groups and exercise military power to force Assad from power. Currently, as Assad refuses to resign, Turkish-Syrian relations remain tense. The Turkish government has continuously argued that Assad's use of military force and chemical weapons has been a contributing factor to the rise of ISIS in Syria and has pushed for a regime change in

order to completely eradicate ISIS in the region in addition to curbing the refugee crisis (Stein, 2014). Although the Syrian civil war is experiencing a downturn, the violence Assad has inflicted on the Syrian population has created an incentive for Syrians in Turkey to resist repatriating and continue to rely on humanitarian aid as refugees. While Syria has regained control of almost all land lost to ISIS as well as a slight increase in some Syrian refugees repatriating, the country is not yet fit to welcome the millions of nationals it has lost since 2011 (UNHCR, 2018b). The political relationship Turkey maintains with Syria is a tumultuous one including a history of militarization and conflict among political parties and ethnic groups. Nonetheless, Turkey will play an essential role in reconstructing Syria after the civil war.

Turkey's struggling economy and hostility towards Syrian Kurds play an extensive role in its inclination to discontinue registering Syrian refugees and inhibits the open-door policy it once held at the height of the refugee crisis. Although Turkey's initial method to control refugee flows was highly acclaimed, Kurdish refugees have been met with extreme opposition, forcing many Syrian Kurds to flee east to Iraq. Amongst addressing the current refugee crisis, Turkey has been preoccupied with the impending threat of a growing Kurdish autonomy. Through Syria's political unrest, its Kurdish population has gained much power. Now, Turkey is struggling to continue to suppress a growing Kurdish population that may threaten to rise up against the Turkish state (Kaválek and Mareš, 2018: 112). Turkey, frightened of a heterogeneous population, has previously attempted to undermine Kurdish culture by refusing Kurdish languages to be taught in schools and repressing Kurdish political struggles. Therefore, an increase in Kurds entering the country has left Turkey tense and apprehensive. Consequently, Turkey has largely suppressed a potentially autonomous Kurdish region, similar to that in Syria (Derince, 2013: 145). Turkey's current political and economic instability has exacerbated the historical aversion between the Turks and Kurds. It is worth noting that multiple failed peace negotiations between Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) have accelerated Turkey's antipathy towards Syrian refugees (Kaválek and Mareš, 2018: 112). The political situation concerning Kurds has intensified throughout the Syrian refugee crisis and with a potential pullout of US military power in the region, Kurds may be left with even less protection than before.

## *Turkish Refugee Policy and Legal Status Today*

Regardless of its anxiety of accepting Kurdish refugees, Turkey gained an admirable global reputation with its educational and medical services provided within refugee camps. Due to the mass influx of Syrian refugees entering Turkey in 2012, Turkey's initial response was short-term and included housing almost all refugees in camps until that method became feasibly impossible. As refugee camps became overcrowded, refugees were forced to forego living in camps and reside in urban settlements instead. While the initial approach to housing was a temporary fix by the Turkish government, refugee camps continue to be reported as much safer and efficient than urban settlements. For example, refugee camps tend to include better health care and easy access to education compared to informal urban settlements (Icuduygu, 2015: 8). Turkey has maintained a notable reputation for its response to the Syrian refugee crisis, however, it is not going nearly far enough to extend its resources and humanitarian aid to refugees living in informal urban settings.

While the Syrians living in refugee camps receive an exceptional level of assistance from the Turkish government and the UNHCR, approximately 94 percent of the 3.6 million displaced Syrian refugees in Turkey do not reside in a formal refugee camp. Outside of refugee camps, Syrians are not obligated to receive education services and often face language barriers and socio-economic obstacles. Roughly 350,000 Syrian refugee children in Turkey remain out of school, which expedites their abysmal working and living conditions and also reinforces the language barrier between refugees and their Turkish neighbors (Di Stefano, 2018: 13). The nation's first response was particularly generous in its assistance to its geographic neighbor, however, Turkey's infrastructure and welfare system have become overwhelmed with refugees. Turkey's struggling social order has compelled it to resist registering all incoming refugees, widening the gap between those living in formal camps and those residing in informal settlements. (Di Stefano, 2018: 12).

Registered Syrians are entitled to governmental and foreign aid, however, Turkey has been slow and increasingly reluctant to register more refugees. Since late 2016, in order to curb the migration into Turkey from Syria, nine provinces located on the Syrian border, as well as Istanbul, have suspended asylum-seeker registration facilities. Ironically, Turkey is a signatory of

the 1951 Refugee Convention in addition to adopting a unique system of temporary protection status specific for Syrian refugees. Regardless of Turkey's humanitarian policies, though, Human Rights Watch has discovered that many unregistered Syrian refugees in Turkey have been subject to deportation for failing to possess temporary protection permits (Human Rights Watch, 2018). The core principle of the 1951 Refugee Convention is to define and resist the practice of non-refoulement of refugees. The concept of non-refoulement protects any individual from being deported back to a nation in which they are subject to a real risk of persecution, torture, or threat to their life (UNHCR, 1977). As Turkey is a signatory of this convention, the process of deporting Syrian nationals for failing to retain a temporary protection permit would constitute refoulement. While failing to legally register incoming Syrian asylum-seekers, Turkey is effectively denying legal protection to Syrians fleeing violence. Turkey has yet to receive any international retribution for this illegal use of force. (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Further, under Turkey's legal framework specifically established to protect Syrian nationals, Temporary Protection Regulation, the concept of non-refoulement explicitly applies (Turkey National Legislature, 2014). The irony of Turkey being a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention *and* enacting its own policies towards non-refoulement while also creating loopholes to deport asylum-seekers is a testament to the gravity of the refugee crisis within the nation (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

While Turkey has registered more refugees than any other country in the world, the process of preventing a clear path to formal refugee registration has caused major difficulties in agency monitoring and aid distribution. Due to the closure of asylum-seeker registration facilities, the number of Syrian expats cannot be accurately calculated. Because Turkey does not allow for independent monitoring of unregistered Syrian refugees and their movement in or out of Turkey, statistics are unknown. The lack of reporting unregistered asylum-seekers complicates the amount of aid Turkey may receive from the UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies. This policy has allowed for Syrian refugees to be further exploited and neglected. For example, a growing population of Syrian refugees are now effectively being denied the right to necessary services such as education and medical care, assistance registered refugees are inclined to receive. The manner of living "illegally" or without proper documentation is one that the 1951 Refugee

Convention has attempted to avoid. However, during a crisis of this volume, Turkey is in dire need of assistance in accurately registering all incoming asylum-seekers (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

On the contrary, formal registration does not stabilize the living standard for many refugees. Urban refugees face many challenges when not receiving direct aid from a formal refugee camp, one major obstacle being access to work permits. Many Syrian refugees work as small-business owners or agricultural farmworkers in Turkey, however, these careers offer little job protection without proper work permits. Because of the small number of refugees in Turkey returning to Syria (50,422 individuals from 2016 to 2018), authorization to work in the formal labor market would benefit refugees who have no plans on repatriating, as well as support the Turkish economy through income taxes (UNHCR, 2018b). While the number of work permits granted to Syrian refugees in Turkey is rising, the percentage of work permits to registered refugees is extremely low. As of March 31, 2018, only 40,895 Syrians in Turkey (or 1.15 percent of all Syrians in Turkey) possessed work permits. While this figure does not include Syrian business owners or Syrians working in the seasonal agriculture sector of Turkey, work permits provide employment security and protection to the holder.

One obstacle that may be hindering access to work authorization is that Turkish work permits must be initiated by the employer along with a fee of approximately 42.93 USD paid by the Syrian national. This process is a deterrent for employers to hire Syrian refugees instead of Turkish nationals and is only available to *registered* Syrian refugees, effectively denying unregistered Syrians entry into the formal labor sector (Revel, 2018). While this policy is intended to support Turkish nationals and the Turkish labor market, it is also stimulating the informal work sector, increasing child labor and augmenting dangerous working conditions with no legal protections.

Furthermore, work permits may also provide the Turkish government with increased income taxes from a larger workforce. Easier access to formal work authorization may also augment working conditions for urban refugees, many of whom participate in the informal sector (Oğuz and Binatlı, 2017). Also, due to recent US tariffs on Turkey, the Turkish lira has experienced an extreme decline in exchange rate to the US dollar. Currency deflation has been one major cause of hostility towards refugees because refugees are often used as scapegoats for the

economic downturn. The economic situation further deteriorates by permitting obstacles to access official work permits. The percentage of Syrians who have received formal authorization to work in Turkey is dismal and without a streamlined process to encourage refugee employment, Turkey's economy may continue to decline.

If Turkey has faced challenges accurately registering all incoming Syrians, it has certainly failed to find a pathway to third country resettlement for many applicable refugees. In general, Syrian refugees residing in any host country have met problems being resettled by either their host country or the UNHCR. Almost the same number of Syrian refugees have voluntarily returned to Syria from Turkey in 2018 (22,410 individuals) than were resettled to a safe third country (28,046 individuals). While the severity of the situation of living as a Syrian refugee in Turkey has not improved since 2011, it is questionable as to why resettlement submissions to the UNHCR peaked at 76,943 submissions in 2016 and has dropped to only 28,046 submissions in 2018. The UNHCR states that this decline is due to limited resettlement places, however, the population of Syrian refugees has increased from 4.8 million in 2016 to 5.6 million at the end of 2018, proving the need for third country resettlement (UNHCR, 2018b). The UNHCR is failing at assisting Turkey with resettling its population of Syrian refugees and thus exacerbating the growing pains felt by the country.

The sheer numbers of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey has caused elevated tensions for Turkey and the refugees living there. The growing distrust between the two populations pose a threat to the natural social order as well as Turkey's economy. As there are over 3.6 million Syrian refugees who may not be voluntarily repatriating any time soon, a policy recommendation must include how to mediate these two cultures, especially among the Kurdish population in Turkey. While Turkey bears the heaviest burden of the Syrian refugee population, it is important to govern the Syrian refugee crisis at a more global level in order to relieve Turkey of some of its economic pressure.

## Lebanon

### *Demographics and Overview*

Lebanon is a country that has enjoyed relative peace in the past two decades, despite its extreme sectarian diversity. Lebanon is home to large Christian and Muslim populations, with varying sub sects within those, such as Sunni and Shia Muslims, and Maronite and Greek Orthodox Christians. As of December 31, 2018, the most recent point for which there is data, Lebanon has 948,849 registered Syrian refugees living within the country, the vast majority of which are Sunni Muslims. This number is down from a peak-high in September 2014 of nearly 1.2 million refugees (UNHCR, 2018c). The number of Syrian refugees living in the country is of course greater, with many living unregistered and marginalized in the country due to increased pressure by the Lebanese government on UNHCR to both limit registration and even deregister certain individuals (Janmyr, 2018). In total, Lebanon is home to approximately 1.8 million refugees, including nearly 500,000 Palestinian refugees and their descendents, in a country with a polity of only four million (Hägerdal, 2018). Additionally, approximately half of all Syrian refugees in Lebanon are minors (Di Stefano, 2018).

Therefore, nearly *one third* of the total population of Lebanon are refugees, putting an enormous strain on the country economically, socially, and politically, and decreasing its capacity to provide adequate care for these vulnerable populations. As a result, more than three quarters of the Syrian refugees living in Lebanon are living below the poverty line (UNHCR, 2017). Social tensions within the large Shia and Christian populations are rising with the influx of mostly Sunni Syrian refugees, as there is an increased perception of competition for resources and jobs, putting the peace Lebanon has enjoyed over the years, despite sectarian differences, in a precarious position. Some also fear that Lebanon is hosting rebel fighters within refugee communities, which complicates matters since Lebanon's Shia movement, Hezbollah, actively contributes to Assad's war efforts in Syria (Hägerdal, 2018). To better understand how we arrived at this current situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, we must examine Lebanon's fraught history with refugees and its historical relationship with Syria.

Overall, the Lebanese government has grown tired of hosting so many refugees. Some argue the Lebanese government has imposed policies that are hostile to Syrian refugees as a

conscious political choice. By reducing the incentives to stay in Lebanon, refugees will avoid permanently resettling in the area, and instead encourage refugees to look to other host countries or return home to Syria (Hägerdal, 2018). Some reports claim Lebanon has already begun sending home refugees, including 10,000 in 2017, following a security operation (Di Stefano, 2018).

### *Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon*

Lebanon has a complex relationship with refugees. The Syrian refugees crisis is the second influx of refugees that Lebanon has taken in. The first influx was shortly after the creation of Israel and the following first Arab-Israeli War in 1948, when the country took in over 100,000 Palestinians fleeing persecution (Suleiman, 2006). The second Arab-Israeli conflict of 1967 further contributed to the growing number of Palestinian refugees. Today, there are approximately 463,000 registered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (Di Stefano, 2018). Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are recognized as second-class status individuals and are among the most destitute and marginalized group of Palestinian refugees of any Arab host country (Suleiman, 2006). Palestinians in Lebanon are generally stateless and denied many basic rights (Di Stefano, 2018).

Because of the influx of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon in 1948, the Lebanese government is not a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention nor its 1967 Protocol. This was a way to avoid shouldering the legal responsibility for the refugee population (Hägerdal, 2018). Lebanon today continues to refuse to be considered a country of asylum, despite hosting the largest number of refugees in the world today relative to its population and geographical size.

### *Political Relationship between Syria and Lebanon*

The relationship between Syria and Lebanon gives insight into how Lebanon has addressed the Syrian refugee crisis. The neighboring countries enjoyed a positive relationship and were close allies between 1990 and 2005. The relationship quickly began to tarnish with the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559 on September 4, 2004, which called on Syrian and other foreign militias to remove themselves from Lebanon's interior in an

effort to reclaim the country's sovereignty. The following year, on February 14, 2005, the assassination of ex-Lebanese Prime Minister and members of the Lebanese anti-Syria coalition called March 14, evaporated what little relationship was left. These events were followed with a swift withdrawal of Syrian forces from the country in April 2005 (Assi, 2018).

The 2011 Syrian refugee crisis complicated matters further. Members of the Lebanese government were split on the civil war, with some political blocks supporting the Assad regime and others opposing it. The government took a decidedly neutral stance on the conflict and severed relationships with Damascus in an effort to ease rising political tension within its own government (Janmyr, 2018; Assi, 2018). Still, more recently in 2016, the two governments came together when the Lebanese government sent an ambassador to Syria to help the Syrian army combat ISIS troops in Syria and Iraq (Assi, 2018). Overall, there is an effort by Lebanon to mitigate the Syrian war's effect within its own government and diverse population and thereby work with Damascus, despite protest from some critics in and outside of the country.

### *Lebanese Refugee Policy and Legal Status Today*

Lebanon's insistence on being a non-asylum country and its refusal to ratify the 1951 Convention and the 1967 protocol have had profound effects on the legal status of Syrian refugees today. As a result, there are very limited legal protections in Lebanon for refugees and asylum seekers, and no particular governing body tasked with dealing with these populations. Part of the government's effort to remain neutral in regards to the Syrian war led the Lebanese government to push the responsibilities of status determination, registration, education, healthcare, and administering aid to refugees over to the UNHCR. The UNHCR has had a continued presence in the country which was somewhat formalized in the 2003 memorandum of understanding (MoU), in what is known as the Gentlemen's Agreement. However, the MoU is critiqued by scholars for having an anti-refugee sentiment. The MoU discusses refugees exclusively as security-threats and has codified into writing Lebanon's stance as a non-asylum country. Specifically, the MoU makes no protection for refugees against refoulement, a key protection of the 1951 convention (Janmyr, 2018).

Registration with the UNHCR gives Syrian refugees limited legal status in Syria. The certification is valid for two years and gives refugees some international protection and

humanitarian assistance. However, UNHCR registration does not grant formal status, meaning legal stay, that is recognized by the Lebanese government, and does not exempt individuals from being penalized for “irregular entry or a lack of residency in Lebanon” (Janmyr 2018: 406). The moment when UNHCR registered over a million Syrians in 2014, the Lebanese government began to take back the reins. They began a more restrictive refugee policy with the explicit intention of decreasing the amount of Syrians in the country (Hägerdal, 2018). In 2015, the government ceased new registration altogether (Janmyr, 2018). The new policy included introducing a new restrictive residency policy which laid out two ways to obtain legal residency. The first is through sponsorship by a Lebanese citizen or secondly, with a UNHCR certification. In this way, the UNHCR registration of refugees has been afforded some legal recognition by the Lebanese government (Janmyr 2018). However, if you wish to stay registered with UNHCR, you must sign a pledge to not work (in order to protect Lebanese employment), or in the sponsorship route, pay a fee of 200 USD to receive a valid residency permit, which most cannot afford. Most Syrian families prioritize the male head of house for visa renewal, leaving the rest of the family to live with an illegal status (Aranki and Kalis, 2014). These new restrictive policies were designed in a way to virtually guarantee refugees could not meet these conditions, and thereby reduce the number of Syrians in the country (Hägerdal, 2018).

Unsurprisingly, these restrictive policies have led to a sharp increase in the number of unregistered Syrian refugees living in the country. In 2015 alone, the number of illegal residents rose from nine percent to 61 percent (Hägerdal, 2018). They are either forced to cross into the country illegally, or are unable to renew their residency permits. The lack of a legal residency status makes life increasingly difficult for Syrian refugees. They are unable to access legal employment or social services (Hägerdal, 2018). Many cite that without formal legal status, freedom of movement is severely limited. Many fear of leaving their immediate environments because they could be arbitrarily arrested, detained, or sent back to Syria. Limited movement also impairs their ability to access health care services. Without residence permits, refugees also cannot open bank accounts or government documents which limits their ability to obtain marriage licenses or register new births (Hägerdal, 2018; Oranki and Kalis, 2014). The lack of official status also means refugees cannot seek recourse in the justice system, a right guaranteed

to refugees in the 1951 Convention (Hägerdal, 2018). As a result, refugees have adopted other mechanisms to circumvent these difficult restrictions, including paying high fees to receive their documentation from Syria, buying fake documents, or using others people's legal documents (Oranki and Kalis, 2014). Daily life as a Syrian refugee in Lebanon has grown increasingly difficult and can be perceived as a signal that they are overstaying their welcome. A solution is needed to both better improve the quality of life for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and reduce the likelihood of pre-emptive refoulement by the Lebanese government.

## **Jordan**

### *Demographics and Overview*

Of Syria's surrounding countries, Jordan has taken in the third highest number of refugees. Jordan is a primarily Sunni Muslim country with a small Christian minority, but is considered internationally to be an oasis of stability within the turbulent region. The Hashemite Monarchy, the ruling family of Jordan, largely escaped the violence and turbulence that arose from the Arab Springs in 2011 (Francis, 2015). Jordan is considered to be welcoming to refugee populations, having taken in refugees from Iraq, Palestine, and now Syria, and using them to leverage greater international aid. There are more than two million long-term Palestinian refugees registered in Jordan, the vast majority of whom have been afforded full citizenship (UNRWA, 2018). As of March 2018, there were 65,822 Iraqi refugees registered by the UNHCR (Di Stefano, 2018). As of December 31, 2018, the UNHCR has registered 671,551 Syrian refugees living in the country. This number has remained consistent over the last three years due to increasing pressure by the Jordanian people to halt the number of Syrians entering the country (UNHCR, 2018d; Francis, 2015). This means there are approximately 2.8 million refugees living in the country, out of a total population of 9.5 million people, making up almost one third of the total population (Di Stefano, 2018).

Jordan has exhibited a more organized response to the refugee influx. The country has opened multiple camps for refugees which are run in collaboration between Jordanian authorities and the UNHCR. Zaatari is the largest camp and as of December 2018, is home to 78,527 Syrian refugees and has an average of 80 births per week (Omondi and Hashem, 2018). The Azraq and the Emirati Jordanian camps are two other notable camps in the country. Of the

over 670,000 refugees, only 126,009 live within refugee camps, thus a majority of Syrian refugees do not live in camps, but live in host-communities (UNHCR, 2018d). Prior to the arrival of Syrian refugees, these communities were among the poorest and most vulnerable in all of Jordan. Now, 76 percent of Syrian refugees are concentrated in the poor northern regions of Amman, Irbid, and Mafraq (Francis, 2015).

In the first few years of the Syrian refugee crisis, public sentiment towards the refugees quickly began to sour. Initially, the refugees served as a good reminder to the Jordanian people of the cost of political revolution, quelling the people's desires for large-scale political change post-Arab Spring, and taking the focus away from the failures of the Jordanian government. However, Syrian refugees in Jordan today are causing more mobilization within marginalized populations (Francis, 2015). Refugees are increasingly blamed for exacerbating pre-existing issues such as the lack of natural resources and infrastructure, access to strained social services such as education and healthcare, as well as competition over jobs (Francis, 2018). Host communities are growing weary, and as a result, there is increasing pressure on the Jordanian government by its people to limit competition posed by Syrian refugees. According to a report by the International Labour Organization, 85 percent of workers in Jordan believe Syrians should not be allowed to enter the country freely, and 65 percent believe all Syrian refugees should live within labor camps (Stave and Hillesund, 2015).

### *Political Relationship between Syria and Jordan*

In order to better assess the current situation, we must also consider the historical relationship between Syria and Jordan. Like most Arab nations, Syria and Jordan have had a chequered history. One of the worst times for Syrian and Jordanian relations was in 1970, when Syrians supported the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in attacks against Jordan in what's known as "Black September." The PLO even tried to assassinate the then ruler of Jordan, King Hussein (Al-Weshah, 2014). As a result, Syria had broken off diplomatic relations with the country in 1971 and the border closed. Relations between the two countries resumed shortly after in the Yom Kippur War, when Jordan contributed to Syria's military effort against the state of Israel. Tensions rose again in the 1980s when Syria accused Jordan of harboring escaped

members of the Muslim Brotherhood from Syria. Both forces sent troops to the border. Tensions remained high in 1981, when Jordan accused Syria of the kidnapping of a Jordanian officer in Beirut, and charged Hafez-al Assad's brother, Raffit al-Assad, with a plot that aimed to assassinate Jordan's prime minister (Al-Weshah, 2014). Relations then improved in the First Gulf War. In the 2000s, both Syria and Jordan were under new leadership, and efforts to foster a better relationship between the two countries were underway, which brings us to the 2011 Syrian refugee crisis.

The Jordan government's primary concern in the Syrian civil war is the potential spillover effects and increased turbulence within its own borders. Jordan made an effort to remain neutral to the Assad regime and remain diplomatic. Jordan did not evict Syria's ambassador in the country, unlike other Arab nations. This is perhaps because Syria serves as Jordan's "gate of import from Europe," as well as provide a crucial water source for the landlocked country (Al-Washeh, 2014: 197).

### *Jordanian Refugee Policy and Legal Status Today*

While Jordan is not a signatory to the 1951 Geneva convention nor its 1967 protocol, non-refoulement is guaranteed in Article 21.1 of Jordanian Constitution. Despite not being a signatory, they are relatively progressive when it comes to refugees, and tend to uphold international standards when it comes to their treatment of refugees. Jordan's law number 24 of 1973 allows for irregular entry into the country without fear of prosecution, as long as they present themselves to a police station within 48 hours of entry. The Minister of the Interior then has the authority to determine if a person who has entered illegally is eligible for refugee system on a case-by-case basis (Di Stefano, 2018). However, in the Syrian crisis, refugees were granted automatic refugee status prima facie, meaning they were recognized as refugees until proven otherwise. Amidst the crisis, the UNHCR in Jordan is tasked with further investigation.

Similarly to Lebanon, the UNHCR also lacks legal prowess. In 1998, Jordan signed an MoU with the UNHCR regarding refugee and asylum seekers. The memorandum adopts the Geneva Convention's definition of a refugee and asylum seeker and allows for the UNHCR to make a status determination within seven days. Refugees can register with the UNHCR at two centers: one in Amman and the second in Irbid, located near the Syrian border (Di Stefano, 2018). The

MoU outlines a relationship of cooperation between the Jordanian government and the UNHCR, however it does not amount to a legal obligation by any means. Absent from the MoU were explicit rights to housing, employment, public education, freedom of movement, and public relief assistance given to refugees in countries that have ratified the 1951 convention (Frances, 2015). The absence of the UN's legal framework has jeopardized Syrian refugee's access to livelihood in Jordan, making life increasingly difficult and leaving them legally vulnerable to exploitation.

Increasing pressure to reduce refugee flow has led to more restrictive policies when it comes to Syrian refugees. While Jordan opened their borders to Syrian refugees when the 2011 crisis broke out, they severely limited entry of Syrian refugees into the country beginning in 2013, and at times even closed the border, citing security concerns (Di Stefano, 2018; Frances, 2015). In 2014, the number of registered refugees by the UNHCR decreased from 15,000 between July and September, to only 2,900 new arrivals (Francis, 2015). Today, there are few new entries into Jordan as a response to tightened restrictions upon entry.

In addition to closing borders, human rights groups have reported an increase in the number of refugee deportations, amounting to a violation of the non-refoulement agreement. Reports note the deportation of registered refugees such as women, children, medical workers, and injured persons. There are also an increasing number of individuals being turned away at Jordan's border. In October 2014, somewhere between 45 and 80 percent of Syrians who reached Jordan's border were turned away before they were able to register with the UNHCR. This was most likely due to lack valid documents or continued travel between Jordan and Syria, but can be imposed arbitrarily (Frances, 2015).

There are no automatic social or economic rights for refugees in Jordan. Refugees can apply for residency, though residence permits are granted for one year, and only a small number are given out. Initially when the crisis broke out, access to healthcare was free to Syrians who possessed a residency card. However, in 2014, the Jordanian government repealed free medical services to Syrian refugees, citing an overburdened healthcare budget (Frances, 2015). Refugees are to pay the same price for health care as uninsured Jordanians, pushing more to seek healthcare services within camps (Di Stefano, 2018). Jordan does allow Syrian children access to

education, however, with over half of the refugee population being below the age of eighteen, there is a huge burden on Jordan's education sector (Frances, 2015).

Access to employment opportunities is also limited, granted only to those who have residency cards, and only in specific sectors to protect Jordanian employment. Non-Jordanian citizens are not allowed to work in "medical, engineering, administrative, accounting, and clerical professions, telephone and warehouse employment, sales, education, hairdressing, decorating, fuel sales, electrical and mechanical occupations, guards, drivers and construction workers" (Di Stefano, 2018: 9). Additionally, legal work permits for refugees are subject to quotas for foreign workers, which includes the high number of pre-existing labor migrants already working in Jordan. As a result of the lack of legal permits for workers, refugees are turning towards the informal sector, developing black markets, and adopting criminal behaviors to cope with the lack of livelihood (Frances, 2015). Not surprisingly, an estimated 81 percent of Syrian refugees in Jordan live below the poverty line (Di Stefano, 2018).

Within camps, refugees are provided with food, water, and free electricity. Some camps have established work programs (Di Stefano, 2018). Still, less than 20 percent of refugees live in these camps (Di Stefano, 2018). Freedom of movement has been severely restricted since 2014, with the Jordanian government forcibly returning refugees in urban areas back to camps (Frances, 2015). As a result of these policies, refugees are increasingly unlikely to renew their status, leading to an even further decrease in access to services and increased risk of exploitation and deportation (Francis, 2015). The restrictive policies reflect Jordan's anxieties over the responding to refugee needs, while appeasing a public whose patience is wearing thin, leaving refugees caught in the middle.

## **Iraq**

### *Demographics and Overview*

Although Iraq receives a relatively minimal amount of Syrian refugees at 4.4 percent of the entire reported Syrian refugee population, its significance in the refugee crisis is critical (UNHCR, 2019). Due to the internal conflicts within Iraqi borders, the inflow of refugees has expedited Iraq's economic and social struggles. Unlike other refugee host countries, Iraq has grappled with a tremendous amount of internally displaced persons since ISIS took control of

Mosul in 2014 (Migration Policy Center, 2015). Increased violence in Iraq has produced an inhospitable environment for refugees. Even when most inflowing individuals are of Kurdish ethnicity, a large minority ethnic group in Iraq, the nation does not possess the economic or social means to properly manage and provide for its refugee and IDP populations. In fact, outside of Syria, Iraqi Kurdistan holds the second most displaced persons with 2.25 million refugees and IDPs. Further, one out of every four people living in Iraq's Kurdish region is either a refugee or IDP. Iraq's current internal conflict have forced Iraqi IDPs and Syrian refugees to compete for scarce resources. This competition has ultimately heightened tensions between Iraqi nationals and Syrian refugees. While Iraq has been cooperative with the UNHCR in providing aid for Syrian refugees, the country is rife with struggle, making any relief to individuals especially necessary yet challenging (The Kurdish Project, 2015).

### *Political Relationship between Syria and Iraq*

The 1991 Gulf War was a turning point in the relationship between Syria and Iraq. Syria's decision to support the American-led coalition against Iraq was crucial to the success of the coalition and has paved the way for violent relations between the neighboring countries. The two countries have failed to overcome the political presence of two rival wings of the Ba'ath party among their governments. Syria and Iraq are historically the only two nations in which the Ba'ath party has achieved success, as well as the two nations that have tended to espouse the most similar Arab ideals. Furthermore, both nations have suffered political conflict among their national government and an increasingly autonomous Kurdish region. But despite the parallels that bind Syria and Iraq together, Syria strongly opposed Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August of 1990. Hafez al-Assad's anti-Iraq rhetoric and decision to side with the US eventually became extremely profitable, leaving Syria to become the powerful Arab nation in the region. The Gulf War and Syrian-Iraqi relations are crucial in understanding Iraq's refugee response to the Syrian Civil War (Drysdale, 1992).

The civil war in Syria has reinforced Iraq's weaknesses in infrastructure and security. What began as an Iraqi uprising against President Bashar al-Assad has developed into extreme, localized conflicts between Iraq and Syria. The Syrian Civil War has fortified the ethnic

discrimination within both Syria and its neighboring states. Similar to Syria's rise of sectarian militias, Iraq has seen a surge in radicalized militant groups that have caused mass destruction to public order and created a hostile living situation for almost all Iraqi populations. Following the Arab Spring protests in 2011, ISIS joined the opposition against President Bashar al-Assad and began seizing control of northern Iraq and eastern Syria. The mass killings of Syrian and Iraqi civilians have led to proxy wars and eventual military involvement by the US, Russia, and Iran. BBC reports that the UN has no clear means of tracking civilian deaths due to the inaccessibility of war zones and unreliable reports from government entities. Although 2018 witnessed the near overthrow of ISIS, the destruction of the militant group remains (BBC, 2018). Powerful and militarized ethnic sects as well as international actors, such as the US, Russia, and Iran, have exploited the insecurity of this region, resulting in a growth in nationalism and the growing power of Iraqi Kurds. The rising autonomy of the Kurdish region of northern Syria and Iraq has only posed more uncertainty for these two countries vying to regain control of their state. Syria's political relationship with Iraq has amplified the conflict between and within these two nations.

### *Iraqi Refugee Policy and Legal Status Today*

Due to Iraq's close geographic proximity to Syria's northern Kurdish region, the majority of Syrian refugees fleeing to Iraq are Kurdish. From an ethno-sectarian standpoint, Syrian Kurds receive a more gracious welcome into Iraq from Iraqi nationals compared to other refugee-hosting countries due to the large Kurdish minority in the region. However, Iraq has proven to be incapable of serving Syrian refugees partially due to its economic hardships.

To curb the crisis, the UNHCR has provided the northwestern area of Iraq with humanitarian support and financial assistance. While this support is greatly needed, it is far too limited and falls inferior to the assistance received by refugees in other host countries. The increased security costs of the anti-ISIS campaign in Iraq as well as an increasing decline in oil prices has left Iraq struggling to maintain an economic order since 2015. Millions of Iraqi IDPs are in desperate need of international humanitarian assistance, therefore neglecting the amount of aid refugees may receive. At the time of writing, Iraq's economic situation is far too dire to effectively protect Syrian refugees (Natali, 2017).

Not only is Iraq financially incapable of caring for an influx of Syrian refugees, refugee camps are in dismal condition to be hosting any individual in need. Iraq's water scarcity has restricted access to safe drinking water, citing a public health concern for all individuals located in and around Iraq's northern Kurdish region. Furthermore, due to the inadequate infrastructure, camps have lacked a secure method of safely disposing of wastewater. The current practice of water disposal in refugee camps is through unmanaged underground septic tanks. However, many individuals depend on underground water for drinking. Personal hygiene of individuals residing in Iraqi camps poses a major challenge to providing a safe living standard for refugees. Without the physical infrastructure to care for refugees, Iraq cannot be relied on to protect and provide safety for Syrians (Ahmed, 2016).

Further, Iraq is not a formal signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention. However, it does continue to cooperate with the UNHCR to the best of its abilities. Though Iraq, with the help of international aid organizations, has been able to house approximately 100,000 Syrian refugees in formal refugee camps, over 150,000 Syrian refugees are residing in informal urban areas (UNHCR, 2018a). Not only do refugees who lack access to a formal refugee settlement not gain access to education or health care, resources become increasingly sparse to those who may be the most vulnerable. Iraq possesses a fairly liberal policy of free health care, however, the health care system has been overwhelmed and continues to function poorly since the influx of refugees in 2013 (Abu Sa'Da and Serafini, 2013). The unpredictable distribution of medical aid has led refugees and Iraqi nationals to compete for scarce resources, leading to increased friction between the two populations. There has been no formal reporting of Iraq actively deporting Syrian refugees, however, overall assistance to refugees is falling short of an adequate response to the refugee crisis.

What began as an uprising against President Bashar al-Assad has morphed into an extremely localized and sectarian conflict in Iraq. The political unrest of Iraq has created an inhospitable environment for both Iraqi nationals and Syrian refugees. The physical incapability of housing and securing incoming migrants is a defining factor in Iraq's refugee crisis. Iraq is not qualified to host Syrian refugees during the crisis and must receive more foreign assistance in resettling refugees to a safe third country. There are currently 2.1 million displaced Iraqis

throughout the country and 260,000 Iraqi refugees elsewhere, proving Iraq has internal issues it must attend to before it may be responsible for providing security for Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2018a).

The Kurdistan region of Iraq is overburdened by displaced Iraqis so much so that nearby refugee populations are not receiving adequate care. Iraq's cooperation with UNHCR efforts will aid it in its efforts to first resolve its internal struggles, however, a stronger refugee policy is needed to further ensure safety of Syrian refugees in the region. Iraq's economic structure and wartime conflicts first need to be addressed before refugees can be served sufficiently. While Kurds face ethnic resistance when fleeing elsewhere, they are not being properly served as refugees in Iraq, therefore a proper resolution must be found for refugees fleeing Syria.

### **Conclusion**

Each neighboring country has its own relationship with Syria and its own varied response to the refugee crisis. However, it is clear in each that there is a lack of humanitarian assistance and overall organization needed to alleviate hardships of Syrian refugees in each country. Additionally, it is also becoming increasingly clear that host countries are running out of patience. A solution is needed that both adequately cares for the safety and wellbeing of refugees, and eases growing political tensions within Syria's neighboring host countries. Some countries have already begun sending refugees back to war-torn Syria, making the need for a solution extremely urgent.

## **PART C: Situation within Syria**

*Eight years of civil war has transformed Syria's internal landscape, leaving in its wake a host of challenges related to infrastructure, healthcare, and the war economy. IDPs are forced to flee their homes due to indiscriminate attacks, resulting in overcrowding and the further exasperation of issues already present in Syria. A combination of severe drought and war-inflicted damages to infrastructure have deteriorated the functionality of Syria's water and agricultural systems. In addition, damage from the conflict has been felt in Syria's housing, energy, and transportation sectors. Large percentages of the population have been left without shelter, adequate electricity, and safe options for travel. Syria's health care system has been systematically targeted, causing disruptions to necessary and preventative medical treatment. These high levels of physical and human capital destruction, along with the demographic shifts, have long-term repercussions on the Syrian economy. Most significantly, the disintegration of economic organization and institutions stunt Syria's economic activity and fuel its informal economy. Informal economic activity within Syria is a vital part of the war economy where individuals and armed groups are exposed to financial, economic and social risks through participation within the black market.*

### **Introduction**

The Syrian Civil War has fundamentally changed the country's internal structures and institutions. The damage to these systems has fueled massive demographic shifts both within and outside the country. Aside from the previously discussed external refugees, over 6.1 million civilians have been displaced within Syria (OCHA, 2018). These IDPs are particularly vulnerable to poor living conditions and human rights violations. Damage to Syria's physical infrastructure has made it difficult to keep up with demands for water, agriculture, housing, energy and transportation. Intentional attacks against the health care system have severely limited access to health services. An unstable formal economy and the spread of informal trade networks have left Syria with limited economic opportunities.

This section is divided into five subsections that discuss the current situation within Syria. The first section introduces IDPs and where they have been displaced, while the second

and third sections examine the current conditions of physical infrastructure such as water, agriculture, housing, energy, and transportation. The fourth section compares the pre-crisis health care situation to the current one. And finally, the fifth and six sections explore the conflict's effect on Syria's formal and informal economy.

## **IDPs**

### *Introduction*

Since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, over half of the country's population has been displaced from their homes. While many Syrians fled across Syria's borders to surrounding countries, 6.1 million remain internally displaced within Syria. Numerous human rights violations against these populations have been reported, including the use of barrel bombs and chemical weapons that have killed thousands. According to the 2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview, there are 13.1 million people in need in Syria, approximately half of which are IDPs (OCHOA, 2018). Given the limited access humanitarian organizations and the Syrian government have under the current fragmented conditions of the country, 6.1 million IDPs is the most accurate data available. Nevertheless, other regions almost certainly hold more IDPs that have not yet been recorded. The main issues Syria's IDP population is facing include water scarcity and pollution, food insecurity, limited access to health facilities, documentation, and property restitution.

### *Regional Analysis*

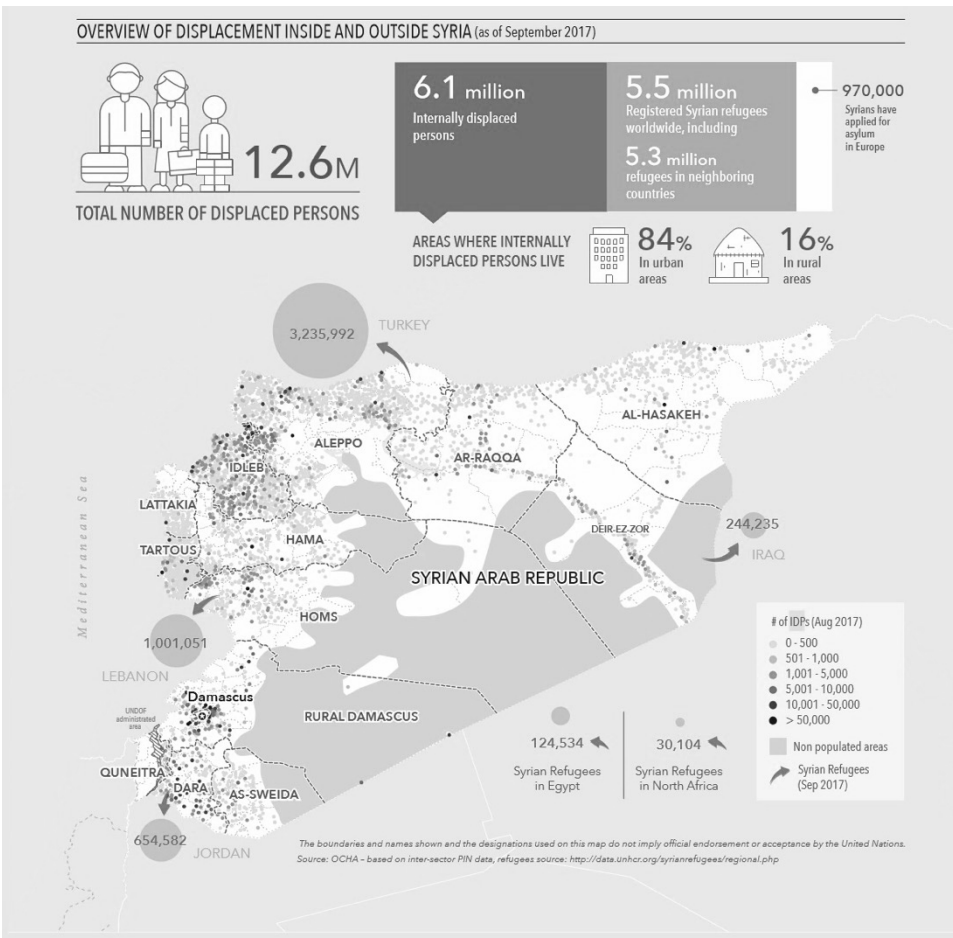
The regions currently struggling with the highest concentrations of IDPs are Aleppo, rural Damascus, and Idlib. The region surrounding Damascus possesses the largest number of long-term IDPs with a population of 1.3 million in rural Damascus and 648,000 within the city limits. Idlib comes in second with 984,000 long-term IDPs, followed closely by Aleppo with 962,000 IDPs. These three governorates combined host slightly over half of all the IDPs in Syria, with the remaining half being distributed in smaller concentrations throughout other governorates such as Latakia, Homs, and Raqqa (HNO, 2018: 13).

The primary reasons for IDPs being concentrated in northwest Syria, around Idlib and Aleppo, are twofold. First, this region has the largest rebel strongholds in the country. Second, the region's proximity to the Turkish border and Mediterranean Sea provides multiple options for IDPs who are considering leaving the country. Moreover, the high concentration of IDPs in the southwest of Syria in urban and rural Damascus is a direct result of the regime's campaign against rebels in Eastern Ghouta by pulverizing cities with shelling, bombing, and chemical attacks, the government drives out civilians and denies rebels any cover. The UN attempted to address this indiscriminate violence in 2017 with the establishment of four de-escalation zones, which were meant to provide safe humanitarian corridors for IDPs in conflict areas. However, by the summer of 2018, three out of four of these zones fell as the regime considered them rebel-harboring areas, and thus launched offensives to remove the perceived threats. (Markusen, 2018: 2).

In many cases, IDPs remain displaced within the borders of their governorate of origin. However, when power shifts in an area, many IDPs residing in that area fear accusations of aiding the opposition, forcing them to flee to other governorates. This can be seen in regions such as eastern Ghouta, Homs, Der'a, and Quneitra where, as a result of conflict from March to July 2018, IDPs and rebels were bussed to Idlib in order to flee regime forces (Markusen, 2018: 3).

In 2017, the governorate experiencing the largest number of departing IDPs was Raqqa (478,000 IDPs), as recent offensives to remove ISIS have driven civilians towards Aleppo. Aleppo also experienced a large exodus of 461,000 IDPs in 2017, due to a regime victory over the city prompting IDPs who wished to remain in rebel controlled territory to flee east to Raqqa or west to Idlib (HNO, 2018: 13). The crossing paths of Syrians fleeing conflict demonstrates the unpredictable conditions that IDPs must constantly adapt to in order to avoid warzones and find safety, however temporary it may be.

Figure 2.1 Overview of Displacement (UNOCHA, 2017: 11)



### *Palestinian IDPs*

Another group of IDPs in Syria are some 438,000 registered Palestinian refugees (UNRWA, 2018). This demographic originally fled to Syria after Israeli occupation of their lands first in 1948 and then again in 1967 after further Israeli expansion through the Golan Heights. Of these Palestinian refugees, two-thirds have been internally displaced due to the current conflict and 95 percent are dependent upon humanitarian aid in some form (Syria Crisis Regional Overview, 2018: 8).

### *Reasons for Displacement*

The primary reasons IDPs cited for fleeing their homes were economic hardship, security threats, and the desire for family reunification. Many Syrians were displaced even prior to the

conflict due to the ongoing drought since 2001 which depleted the main sources of income of many communities. In many cases, IDPs have been displaced multiple times. Constantly shifting conflicts can rapidly push away displaced populations until they find an area that is relatively free of violence. About 84 percent of Syrian IDPs are being hosted in urban areas, which also tend to be the target of most military attacks. Changes in access to food and water, as well as shelter, can also prompt forced migration. As a Jordanian Foreign Ministry official stated, “Jordan is typically the fourth stop for Syrians; most of the refugees arriving have been previously displaced at least three times inside Syria” (Consequences of Chaos, 2016: 77). The 1,575,429 IDP movements recorded from January to November 2018 alone exemplify the constant demographic shifts among the Syrian population (OCHOA, 2018).

### *Security for Women and Children*

Women and children make up 79 percent of the 750,000 IDPs in last resort settlements, and their protection is an urgent matter of concern (HNO, 2018: 43). Many families lack male relatives to provide protection and mobility. Families without men are met with the need for security given the increased rates of domestic and sexual violence during conflict as well as the risks of being pushed into child marriages or prostitution. The Commission has also regularly received allegations against extremist and terrorist group members imposing brutalities on men accused of homosexuality (HRC, 2018: 15). Multiple factions have consistently reported sexual and gender-based violence at checkpoints throughout the conflict. Women reported being detained and raped before being released. “During interrogations, many women and girls are subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence to force confessions of their alleged support to the opposition or to extract information as to the whereabouts of their male relatives” (HRC, 2018: 10).

With many displaced women traveling without male companions, there are serious security concerns in Syrian Defense Force camps, where thousands of people are forced to reside closely together. In order to leave these camps, female IDPs are asked to pay SDF authorities and locate a *kafil* or guarantor to allow them to continue their journey into other regions. The lack of male relatives and finances prevent many women and children from ever

leaving. In turn, this subjects them to further abuse. Rapes often result in pregnancies that endanger the life of the mother and sometimes result in suicide or honor killings. The lack of protection and nonexistent support to deal with the resulting trauma presents dangerous conditions for these women. Adolescent girls are overwhelmingly perceived to be most at risk of sexual violence and early marriage, including sexual exploitation through successive temporary marriages. Widows, divorcees, and spouses of detainees were also found to be at high levels of risk (PNO, 2017: 36).

### *Documentation*

Documentation is a massive obstacle facing many IDPs in Syria. New events, such as births, marriages, divorces and deaths are not officially recorded in government records. This leaves displaced persons without the documents necessary to legitimize these incidents. Even in cases where these essential records are obtained, they are often not digitally stored. The loss of the original physical papers can completely erase any proof of legal existence.

In Syria, the primary civil record takes the form of a family booklet, a document that records all members of a family. This document can only be obtained by providing a copy of the marriage certificate, ID cards, a military service booklet, and two photos. Individuals create a separate booklet with their spouse after marriage. This booklet is vital, as it is the basis for obtaining all other civil documents. Approximately 40 percent of the IDPs surveyed by the UNHCR stated that their family booklet is no longer in their possession. In northwest Syria, almost half of IDP children ages five and under were not included in their family booklet (Syrians in Displacement, 2018: 59). This lack of documentation holds significant consequences, as it can often become a barrier to moving through checkpoints, as well as obtaining desperately needed humanitarian aid.

### *Property Restitution*

Another leading area of concern is the restitution of lost property. By definition of their status, IDPs have been forced to leave their residences involuntarily. Unfortunately, returning to and reestablishing ownership of their land presents a number of issues. Primarily, the fact

that half of the land in Syria was not formally registered before the conflict began presents the greatest challenge to potential property restitution (Syrians in Displacement, 2018: 66). As previously mentioned, a considerable amount of any formal documentation has been lost in process of displacement, including property documentation. Restoration of property is difficult, because much of the land and property has been damaged due to the years of conflict throughout the affected regions. Women in particular face challenges in this process. Even if documentation for ownership of property is held, it is usually in a male family member's name.

### *Return*

Over 800,000 IDPs (approximately 13 percent of Syria's total IDP population) returned to their areas of origin in 2017, primarily due to the reduction in hostilities as well as regular access to basic services such as shelter, clean water, and food (Markusen, 2018: 26). It is important to realize that IDPs returning to their homes do not face an easy journey. Not only do they face the aforementioned barriers of documentation and damage sustained by the land, but they are also confronted with the changing political authority in different regions. The danger of prosecution due to accusations against IDPs for supporting the opposition is particularly high. Moreover, authority figures leveraging their positions in re-emerging communities to place themselves into positions of power and dictate future growth also present a threat to returning IDPs. The bulk of returns have been to areas that are still hosting a large number of IDPs, thus further stressing already strained infrastructure (Markusen, 2018: 26). Even after the decline of violence in one region, there are still many regions lacking sufficient and operable infrastructure to return to pre-conflict status. The process of rebuilding what has been lost is unavoidably long and arduous for Syria's IDPs.

### *Conclusion*

The central areas of concern for Syrian IDPs are security for vulnerable populations, documentation, and property restitution. The Assad regime has refused to acknowledge Syrian IDPs and further threatened their security with bombardments and sieges of heavily populated areas. This has caused high casualty rates and dire conditions inside conflict zones. Given these

circumstances, it is vital for an outside organization to step in and provide the necessary aid to IDPs which is not provided by the government. Additionally, large portions of Syria's population still face immediate needs pertaining to physical infrastructure, healthcare, and economic stability.

## **Physical Infrastructure**

### *Introduction*

Water, agriculture, housing, energy, and transportation are critical aspects of Syria's infrastructure which significantly influence the remaining population. Leading up to the conflict, Syria's water and agricultural sectors struggled to meet the needs of the people. Droughts have caused the mass migration of individuals to urban areas, many of which have experienced severe housing sector damage. Regarding energy and transportation, Syria had the means to distribute electricity to its citizens, produced and exported its own oil, and had an extensive transportation network prior to the conflict. Since the start of the war in 2011, there have been countless examples highlighting the amount of damage that has occurred to Syria's infrastructure. This information is critical in identifying Syria's immediate needs and what needs to be done to rebuild Syria in a way that is sustainable and productive.

### *Water: Pre-Crisis*

Prior to the conflict, Syria had already demonstrated signs of developing major water scarcity issues. A large amount of Syria's water is supplied from groundwater sources. Some cities such as Aleppo and Raqqa receive their water from surface water sources such as the Assad Lake and Euphrates River. With Syria's estimated total renewable water resources averaging the amount of 16 km<sup>3</sup>/year, Syria is technically not a water scarce country compared to its neighboring Middle Eastern countries (FAO, 2008). However, due to a combination of poor water management over time, continuous drought, climate change, inefficient irrigation systems, aggressive groundwater pumping practices, and rising production costs, Syria's water sustainability has weakened since the start of the war. Although water shortages did not directly cause the war, it is evident that they have played a big factor in encouraging dissidence

within the country and continued resentment towards Assad's regime's failure to adequately address water related issues. Further, the probability of continued climate stressors on the region make it difficult to ascertain water levels similar to those prior to the drought. Therefore, revisions to the water management procedures and additional investments in water infrastructures need to be made in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of Syria's water supply. However, in order to reintegrate Syrian refugees and IDPs after the civil war, solutions should focus on ensuring immediate availability and access to water resources.

### *Water: Current Crisis*

#### *Water Infrastructure Damage*

Two-thirds of the Syrian population lack access to safe drinking water. Syria's water supply and sanitation infrastructures have experienced extensive damages as a result of the ongoing conflict. Estimates illustrate that at least two-thirds of Syria's water treatment plants, half of its pumping stations, a third of its water towers, a quarter of its sewage treatment plants, and a sixth of its wells have all experienced partial or complete damage since 2011 (World Bank Group, 2017: 29). Along with infrastructural damage, damage caused by repeated bombings account for water contamination. The inability to introduce water treatment chemicals into household-level aid contributes to further degradation in water quality (OCHA, 2014: 95).

#### *Accessibility/Availability Issues*

Because pumping and water distribution systems rely on electricity to function, pipelines to communities are entirely reliant on the status of Syria's fuel and electricity sector. In fact, Aleppo, Dar'a, and Deir-ez-Zor's lack of electricity to operate systems and lack of fuel for generators were the main water availability issues (OCHA, 2014: 99). Power outages inhibit pumping stations from distributing water to civilians, which results in the affected populations devising alternative access methods. As a result of inconsistent water supplies and distribution costs, water prices have escalated dramatically, making access to water unaffordable for many. These constraints are more heavily felt in areas such as Al-Hassakeh, Dar'a Hama, Idleb, Quineitra, and Rural Damascus.

## *Sanitation & Waste Disposal*

The disruption in waste removal services and damage to water distribution pipelines has caused a sharp decline in the quality of water supplies. Conflict-related disruptions to sewage disposal systems have resulted in the public openly disposing of sewage in places such as Hama, Raqqa, Al-Hasakeh, Aleppo, and Quenteitra (OCHA, 2014: 103). Surface water resources are contaminated as a result of sewage spillover caused by power outages. In addition to skin diseases, perhaps the most alarming concern for these developments, is the exposure to waterborne diseases. Cholera and polio are among the threats of disease that circulate overcrowded camps and besieged areas through contaminated water (Rohwerder, 2017: 4). Additionally, garbage accumulation in public spaces is a high concern in all governorates. The lack of and damaged equipment, as well as the scarcity of fuel, are the main components to the disruption of garbage disposal infrastructure (OCHA, 2014: 104).

## *Responses to Water-Related Issues*

### *Water Access/Use*

Facing the likelihood of ongoing water insecurity, many Syrians have developed various coping mechanisms to adapt to the harsh conditions of a war-torn Syria. Adaptive solutions are primarily aimed at restoring water access in areas experiencing prolonged disruptions to water accessibility. For instance, many new wells were developed by the water authority to maintain pipeline supply in places such as Aleppo and Hama. Additionally, hundreds of water trucks were deployed across the cities to maintain water distribution to various holding tanks (World Bank Group, 2017: 30). However, due to the high costs of water truck services, many civilians revert to continued unmonitored well development. Many Syrians are forced to acquire water in ways that will potentially have significant impacts on depleting groundwater tables and long-term water sustainability. Other drastic methods for gaining access to water is to collect rainwater, using degraded irrigation water, and reducing daily water consumption (OCHA, 2014: 9). Families often revert to these methods because many spend around one-quarter of their income on water (Rohwerder, 2017: 2). These practices are not sustainable nor healthy, but are necessary given the current water conditions.

## *Hygiene*

In order to address water scarcity concerns, Syrians have also responded by neglecting hygiene-related practices. This is the most dangerous response, as doing so leads Syrians to be susceptible to a number of health issues. Individuals who neglect hygiene practices are at higher risk of spreading communicable diseases; especially in condensed shelter areas like IDP camps. Nevertheless, Syrians continue to abandon hygiene practices due to the high cost of water and hygiene products (OCHA, 2014: 9). Similar to the problem of water, basic products, such as shampoos and soap are available yet very expensive. The local production of these materials has been disrupted by the war. Furthermore, the raw materials and chemicals used for their production are subject to international sanctions, which limit their accessibility. (OCHA, 2014: 9). Besides facing accessibility constraints, women are particularly vulnerable to hygiene-related health concerns due to availability restrictions. Assessments show that feminine hygiene products are rarely available in markets, which places further stresses on Syrian females. Reducing hygiene product availability and accessibility constraints will ensure that Syrians resume hygiene-related practices. Addressing hygiene concerns will alleviate stresses on the healthcare sector and will allow policymakers to focus on other vital concerns, such as food scarcity.

## *Agriculture: Pre-Crisis*

Throughout history, agriculture has remained one of Syria's most vital industries. The agricultural sector plays a significant role in Syria's economic development, employment opportunities, and food security. Ensuring the efficiency of farming systems and other agricultural infrastructures is thus vital in sustaining regional stability and securing the livelihoods of Syrian citizens. Although only ten percent of Syria's agricultural land is irrigated, irrigation accounts for 87 percent of the water withdrawn from conventional resources. This suggests that the availability of water for local use is highly contingent on the efficiency of agricultural irrigation use (Tull, 2017).

Prior to the conflict, outdated irrigation systems and the lack of modern information gathering tools led to the depletion of groundwater tables and soil degradation, which has attributed greatly to Syria's current food and water scarcity problems in its civil war. Since 90 percent of Syria's agricultural land is highly dependent on seasonal rainfall patterns, these areas are especially prone to climate epidemics. The impact of persistent droughts and climate change patterns, coupled with the destruction of the agriculture sector by the civil war, has caused much of the rural populations to seek refuge in urban centers and surrounding countries. The accumulation of these IDPs in increasingly congested cities has raised a multitude of concerns, including adding alarming stresses on food availability and accessibility. Over 10.5 million Syrian residents and IDPs have reported the need for food assistance since the start of the conflict in 2011 (HNO, 2018). Until effective intervention initiatives can be implemented to address Syria's immediate food scarcity problems and Syria's long-term goals for reconstructing Syria's agricultural sector, it is highly unlikely that IDPs and refugees will return to their original regions before the war.

#### *Climate, Drought and Rain-fed Systems versus Irrigated Farming Systems*

Syria's Mediterranean climate experiences hot and dry summers and wet winters that average 300-500 mm/year of rain in coastal areas and 25-127 mm/year of rain in inland areas (Weatheronline, 2019). Rain-fed agriculture is practiced mainly in the coastal areas that receive heavier rain, while irrigated farming systems are primarily used where the pumping and flooding of surface water is available (Hassan, 2014: 3). Both farming systems rely on the government's ability to respond to issues of water scarcity and its ability to issue water management policies that protect the agriculture sector. However, since 2006, Syria has faced multiple severe droughts which ultimately contributed to the civil unrest that led to the conflict in 2011. Between 2006 and 2011, Syria's government virtually abandoned the agricultural sector and did very little to alleviate the water scarcity issues that negatively impacted agriculture in rural areas (Akhmedkhodjaeva, 2015: 6). As a result, Syria's agricultural sector is now faced with unprecedented challenges and a severe lack of sustainable infrastructure.

## *Agriculture: Current Crisis*

### *Crops & Agriculture Inputs*

Since the beginning of the conflict, the destruction of Syria's crop production has equated to 7.2 billion USD (FAO United Nations, 2017: 6). The sector's productivity has suffered greatly due to the high cost and absence of agriculture inputs. Prior to the conflict, the agriculture sector received most of its economic support from centralized subsidies. Following years of conflict, the sector's support from the government has either significantly decreased or ceased to exist entirely (FAO United Nations, 2017: 13). As a result, farmers now lack primary agricultural inputs including seeds, fertilizer, and pesticides. In the absence of fertilizers, farmers have developed coping mechanisms such as the use of harmful pesticides which has caused soil degradation.

Syria's primary agricultural products include cotton, olives, wheat, barley, lentils, chickpeas, sugar, beets, beef, mutton, eggs, poultry, and milk (Nations Encyclopedia, 2019). Bread and wheat are perhaps Syria's most important products because they are the staple of many diets, however, as of 2018, wheat production has been reduced by 50 percent (Butter, 2018: 15).

Throughout the conflict, bread and wheat supplies have been targeted as a means to starve out supporters of opposition groups. This has contributed to the escalation of bread prices in markets, further exacerbating issues in production due to the lack of wheat (Tull, 2017: 2). ISIS controlled cereal production in the areas along the Euphrates for most of the conflict, thus causing Syria to rely on imports to meet the cereal demands of the population (Butter, 2018: 15). Other significant crops such as olives and cotton have also realized a 50 percent reduction in production due to both inconsistent rainfalls and the civil war (Butter, 2018: 15) In general, farmers have avoided growing vegetables because of water requirements for production and the risks associated with selling in unstable market conditions (Tull, 2017: 8).

### *Agricultural Infrastructure*

Syria's agriculture infrastructure and assets have accumulated 3.2 billion USD in total damages since the conflict began. Assets may include "tractors, trucks, agricultural machinery, while infrastructure includes cooperatives and government buildings, commercial farms,

veterinary clinics, and animal sheds, greenhouses, storage, and processing facilities, as well as irrigation canals and wells” (FAO United Nations, 2017: 14). Both the accessibility and the availability of agricultural infrastructures have been constrained due to damages incurred by the conflict. Many farmers have abandoned infrastructures as a result of excessive damages, as well as the persistence of conflict within regions, giving farmers very little opportunity for rebuilding or reviving previously existing structures. The use of agricultural assets are constrained by the lack of and the high costs of fuels needed for operation. In addition to damages, the rising costs of irrigation use have also limited farmers’ abilities to carry out agricultural production.

### *Livestock*

Livestock rearing is one of Syria’s most vital agricultural subsectors. It is estimated that livestock rearing contributes as much as 40 percent to Syria’s total agriculture production and makes up at least 20 percent of Syria’s rural employment (FAO United Nations 2017). Since the start of the conflict, the livestock sector has suffered 5.5 billion USD in damages (FAO United Nations 2017, 11). Consequently, household livestock rearing has dramatically been reduced across all regions. The absence of livestock is primarily attributed to the sale of animals to address individual economic needs and the spread of diseases. The sale of livestock by household suggests that livestock is being used as hard currency to make up for the absence of consistent incomes. Those who continue to rear their remaining livestock, face challenges such as the absence of feed due to damaged lands and the absence of veterinarian services that have been closed or damaged as a result of the war (Tull 2017, 6). All of these factors have greatly contributed to the degradation of Syria’s agricultural sector. In addition to crops, the livestock sector has been essential in providing nutrition for all populations; especially the poor, rural women and children. Thus, the revival of the livestock sector will play a major role in ensuring that Syria’s food security meets the needs of returning refugees and IDPs.

### *Food Security*

Overall, Syria’s food security issues are mainly attributed to fluctuating prices for food, variability in access, disruptions to market access via trade routes, and damage to infrastructure (OCHA, 2014: 53). The food insecurity in Syria is a problem of accessibility rather than

availability. The prices of food have increased drastically as a result of the damages incurred by Syria's agricultural system. This inflation coupled with scarce income opportunities make food accessibility a matter of affordability. The war-damaged economy has ultimately constrained Syrians' access to food sources.

Further, the lack of consistent income to purchase essential food necessities is evident across all regions, especially in those that have higher IDP populations. IDPs are the most vulnerable to food scarcity. To combat the rising cost of food products, these groups have turned to various coping mechanisms, such as selling valuable assets, participating in illegal jobs, and utilizing child labor in order to afford food (OCHA, 2014: 56).

Market variability is also a cause for concern in various regions. Disruptions in trade routes caused by the conflict have caused unreliable delivery of supplies, driving prices even further upward. Fuel for cooking, infant formula, and milk products are reported to be the most commonly missing in Syrian markets. This suggests that children and infants are particularly susceptible to malnutrition and other hunger-related problems (OCHA, 2014: 56).

### *Housing: Pre-Crisis*

Syria is considered a highly urbanized country. Prior to the conflict, approximately 56 percent of the population lived in urban areas, most of which were strategically placed around agricultural regions (such as the Euphrates River Basin), or along trade routes. As the Syrian Civil War has progressed, the number of Syrians residing in urban areas has dramatically increased, as IDPs and refugees have fled to regions with more stability and security. In terms of housing, the 2010 Syrian census data states that there were 4,128,941 conventional dwelling units across Syria's 14 governorates. In the eight most crisis-affected governorates (Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Dayr az Zawr, Raqqa, Dar'a, Idlib, and Rif Dimashq), the residential housing stock added up to 2,881,392 housing units in 2010 (World Bank, 2017a: 21). Since then, Syria's housing sector has been decimated, leaving millions of people without access to suitable shelter.

## Housing: Current Crisis

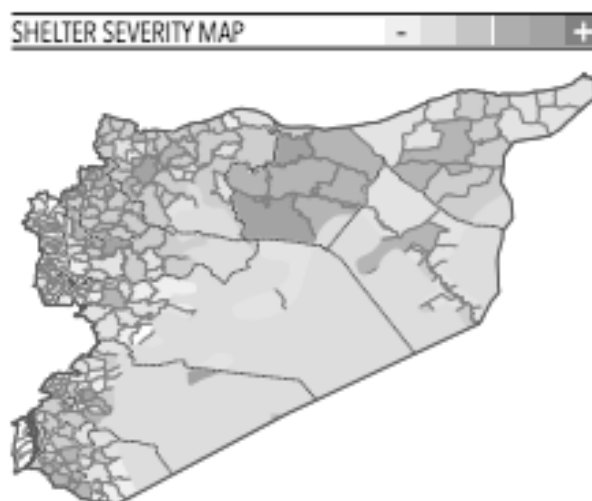
The war has significantly damaged critical housing infrastructure across the country. As of 2018, there are currently 4.2 million people in need of shelter (UNHCR, 2018: 37). Millions of people have been displaced due to damage or complete destruction of their homes. Many of these displaced persons experience uninhabitable living situations, along with contested land and property rights. It is challenging to accurately estimate the amount of destroyed housing stock in rural areas due to the lack of reliable reporting. However, in highly populated cities such as Aleppo and Homs, it is clear that IDPs have faced the greatest impact of the housing destruction.

Regime and rebel forces have strategically targeted populated urban areas to inflict the most amount of damage. As a result, some Syrians have decided to reverse course and seek shelter in rural areas with less violence and war activity (Al-Khalidi, 2012). In a study of ten major cities (see Figure 3.3) an estimated 316,649 housing units have been affected by the conflict with 78,339 residential units having been completely destroyed and another 238,311 facing some form of structural damage (World Bank, 2017a: 22).

Figure 2.2 Shelter Severity Map  
(UNHCR, 2018: 37)

City	Units in 2010	Damaged units in 2017		Damaged units in 2017 (% of 2010 value)	
		Partial damage	Destroyed	Partial damage	Destroyed
Aleppo	662,323	154,465	49,830	23.3	7.5
Raqqqa	55,746	7,214	2,418	12.9	4.3
Dar'a	30,532	3,678	922	12.0	3.0
Douma	18,786	3,476	884	18.5	4.7
Dayr az-Zawr	48,430	15,107	4,849	31.2	10.0
Homs	216,191	37,350	12,526	17.3	5.8
Hama	101,902	2,531	3,020	2.5	3.0
Idlib	46,014	1,164	2,916	25.3	6.3
Tadmur	3,178	1,042	272	32.8	8.6
Kobani	20,801	2,226	814	10.7	3.9
Total	1,181,813	238,311	78,339	19.8	6.5

Figure 2.3 Housing Damage in Cities  
(World Bank, 2017a: 21)



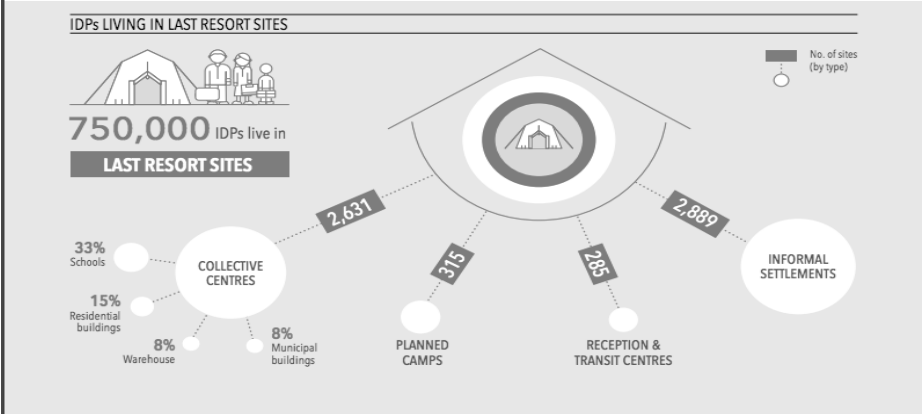
Following the destruction of their homes, a majority of Syrians chose to flee in fear of continued violence and destruction. In 2018 alone, approximately 1.5 million people were newly displaced in areas such as eastern Ghouta, rural Homs, and eastern Deir-ez-Zor (World Health Organization, 2018:6). Those who decided to stay in contested areas endured rapidly deteriorating conditions. An estimated 35 percent of the current urban population are now considered IDPs, and are faced with the challenge of finding shelter.

*Last Resort Sites*

As of 2017, there are an estimated 6.1 million IDPs living in Syria, with 750,000 of them living in last resort sites, formal settlements, transit centers, and collective centers (schools, residential buildings, and warehouses). These shelters are often the difference between life and death, however, they are only a temporary solution for those looking for safety.

There are an estimated 2,900 informal settlements (tents and shelters), 2,631 collective centers (schools, residential buildings), 315 planned camps controlled by humanitarian organizations, and 285 reception and transit centers for short term placements (see figure 3.4). These last resort sites are often the only option for newly displaced persons and in 2017, 20 percent of the 6.1 million people who fled their homes were forced to seek refuge in a temporary housing camp. Conditions inside these camps are dire and residents are faced with electricity and heating issues, along with water and sanitation discussed earlier (UNOCHA, 2017: 15).

Figure 2.4 Last Resort Sites (UNOCHA, 2017: 15)



## *Host Communities*

Displaced Syrians are turning to host communities and families for shelter as well. Some 12 million people in Syria live in areas where more than 30 percent of the population are IDPs. As a result, an estimated 400,000 families are stepping up and serving as hosts for those without shelter (UNOCHA, 2017: 15). This is not a new phenomenon, but the increase in IDPs can negatively impact host families. Host families and their associated urban areas greatly lack the resources to accommodate such an influx of people. Basic services often become limited, which can create tensions between IDPs and the people providing for them. One of the greatest areas of concern is schools, where overcrowding has caused a decline in the quality of education and the amount of opportunities available for young people.

Housing, land, and property (HLP) disputes are also very common. Across Syria, 57 percent of surveyed communities reported having HLP issues at least sometimes, with 81 percent of communities stating that ownership was one of their greatest concerns. (UNOCHA 2017: 15) Along with ownership, rental and hosting accommodations were reported as being some of the leading causes of problems when accommodating IDPs. Not only are these issues frustrating for host communities, they also have the potential to stunt the growth of areas that have experienced violence and destruction themselves, making it nearly impossible to recover and build for the future.

## *Energy Overview*

Another aspect of physical infrastructure that has taken a major hit over the course of the conflict is Syria's energy sector. The two most important players in the energy field are electricity and oil production. Regarding electricity, "almost 13 million people, roughly 70 percent of people in Syria, lack sustained access to electricity [with] electricity production, transmission and distribution heavily affected by ongoing hostilities, leaving much of Syria's electricity infrastructure non-operational" (UNOCHA, 2017: 47). Efforts to fix electrical grids and other facilities have been hampered due to a lack of parts, trained technicians, sanctions, and lack of access to certain areas that are under siege. Oil production in Syria has also taken a major hit. A mixture of sanctions imposed by the US, EU, and the league of the Arab States at the beginning of 2011 and the proceeding conflict have caused Syria's oil sector, which

accounted for 20 percent of total gross domestic product and 25 percent of total government revenue prior to the conflict, to crash significantly (Abboud, 2012). Ever since, oil production in Syria has decreased every year and shows little sign of recovery.

### *Electricity: Pre-Crisis*

Prior to the conflict, Syria's electricity sector was far from stable. Throughout the mid-2000s, there was an increasing demand for electricity that the country could not sustain. Many areas experienced frequent outages, a decreasing profitability in the electrical sector, and not enough private investments to keep up with the demand. In 2010, the Syrian government attempted to make policy changes in order to attract private investors, but the onset of the civil war quickly diminished these expectations. Before the conflict, the Public Establishment for Electricity (PEE) was in charge of distributing power throughout Syria, but the institution quickly collapsed when the fighting began (World Bank, 2018: 178). A mixture of technical and nontechnical factors resulted in an electrical infrastructure that was extremely unreliable. In 2010, an estimated 15.9 percent of total electrical loss in Syria stemmed from technical issues, while 9.9 percent was caused by non technical issues such as theft, errors in meter readings, and errors in billing. (World Bank, 2017a: 31). These numbers highlight the severe lack of funding and accountability present in the energy sector prior to the conflict.

### *Electricity: Current Crisis*

Electrical power assets have been subject to damage, but the overall functionality of the transmission grid has remained relatively intact. At first glance the numbers can be confusing, but separating the physical status of power assets and the functional status helps paint a better picture of the amount of power available. In other words, several power assets in Syria are able to function, but for a multitude of reasons have failed to produce the amount of electricity required to power the country. Secondary infrastructure (power lines and substations) are at least partially functional, but overall, service quality is below standard and certain areas have been cut off completely during the fighting. Three hydroelectric dams and five of the 13 major power plants remain fully operational, while two other power plants remain partially functioning. The Aleppo Thermal Power Station (1,065 megawatts capacity), the Zeyzoun Power

Plant (544 megawatts capacity), and the Al-Teem Power Station (100 megawatts capacity), are examples of power assets that have been completely destroyed (World Bank, 2017a: 31).

Figure 2.5 Physical + Operational Status of Electrical Grid and Power Assets by % in Seven Syrian Cities (World Bank, 2017a)

City	Physical status			Operational status		
	No damage	Partial damage	Destroyed	Functioning	Partial function	No function
Aleppo	89.39	3.81	6.80	0.33	99.00	0.66
Idlib	94.29	1.43	4.29	92.86	2.86	4.29
Hama	99.24	0.51	0.25	0.25	99.75	0.00
Kobani	66.67	33.33	0.00	66.67	0.00	33.33
Tadmur	30.00	70.00	0.00	10.00	90.00	0.00
Douma	88.24	5.88	5.88	23.53	64.71	11.76
Raqqa	94.59	0.00	2.70	13.51	86.49	0.00

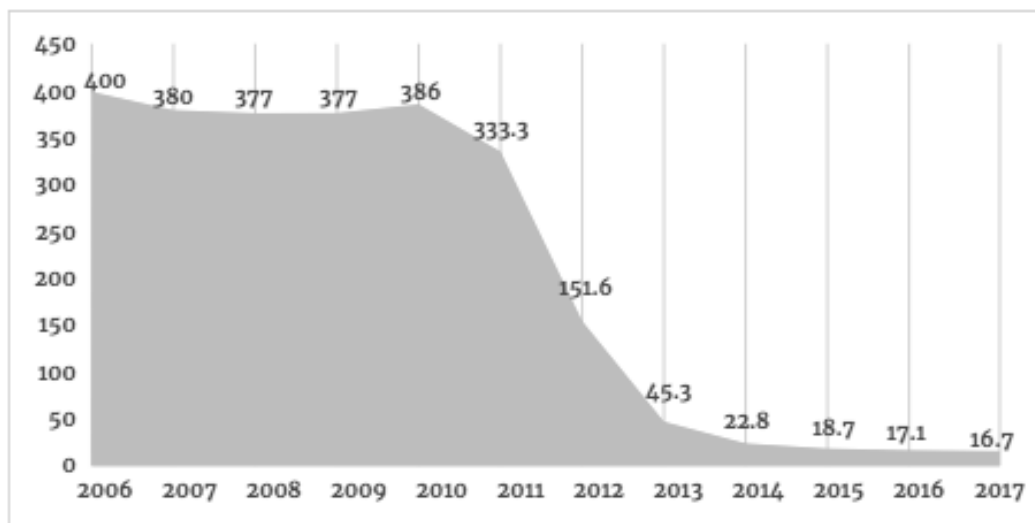
As shown in Figure 3.5, large percentages of electrical assets in Syria have little to no damage but are still not performing to their full capabilities. There are a number of factors that impact the lack of functional power assets in Syria. Some of these factors include a serious shortage of skilled workers, fuel, and a lack of necessary spare parts. To give some perspective, the “Euphrates Dam in Raqqa, while physically undamaged, is experiencing impaired power production as only a few hundred qualified staff remain out of the roughly 2,500 necessary to keep the dam operating” and “villages outside of Menbij are currently only receiving two hours of power from the Tishrin Dam daily, as the lack of machinery and equipment necessary to repair the dam equipment result in low water levels that can only power the dam inefficiently” (World Bank, 2018:179). Along with shortages, the lack of institutions available to govern the distribution of electricity and harsh oil restrictions have made it nearly impossible for repairs or progress to be made.

*Oil Production: Pre and Current Crisis*

Beginning in 2011, the production of oil in Syria rapidly decreased. There has been a shortage of refined products and oil exports are virtually non-existent. Not only has Syria’s GDP

plunged by 63 percent between 2011 and 2016, but the oil GDP has declined by 93 percent during this time period. Syria averaged 400,000 barrels a day from 2008 to 2010. As of May 2015 oil production was less than 250,000 b/d. At the height of production in 2002, the all-time peak stood at 677,000 b/d, and fell to only 15,000 (see figure 3.6) as of February 2018 (World Bank, 2018: 85). A combination of sanctions and damage to the oil and natural gas pipelines made it nearly impossible to locate, produce, or transport oil throughout the country. As a result of the degradation of the oil sector, a serious strain has been put on Syria's economy

Figure 2.6 Oil Production in Barrels a Day (in thousands) (World Bank, 2018: 86)



### *Oil Refining: Pre and Current Crisis*

Prior to the conflict, Syria's oil refining capabilities were well below average. The country only has two state-owned refineries located in Homs and Baniyas that are managed by the Syrian Petroleum Company. The combined capacity of these locations is roughly 240,000 b/d as of 2015, which would supply roughly one-third of pre-conflict Syria's demands. Due to damage caused by the conflict, production from these facilities has been cut in half compared to their pre-war capabilities. Outside sources, such as Iran, have provided some crude oil, but this does not meet Syria's minimum needs (World Bank, 2017a: 56). Recently, help has been provided by the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran to try and rehabilitate and increase Syria's oil production after the war (World Bank, 2018: 85).

Non-state groups have also found ways to extract and process their own oil. In areas outside of government control, there have been reports of ISIS producing, refining, and selling as much as 50,000 barrels of crude oil per day. Although these reports are from late 2014, underground production and selling of oil has only increased with the continued crash of Syria's oil market (World Bank, 2017a: 57).

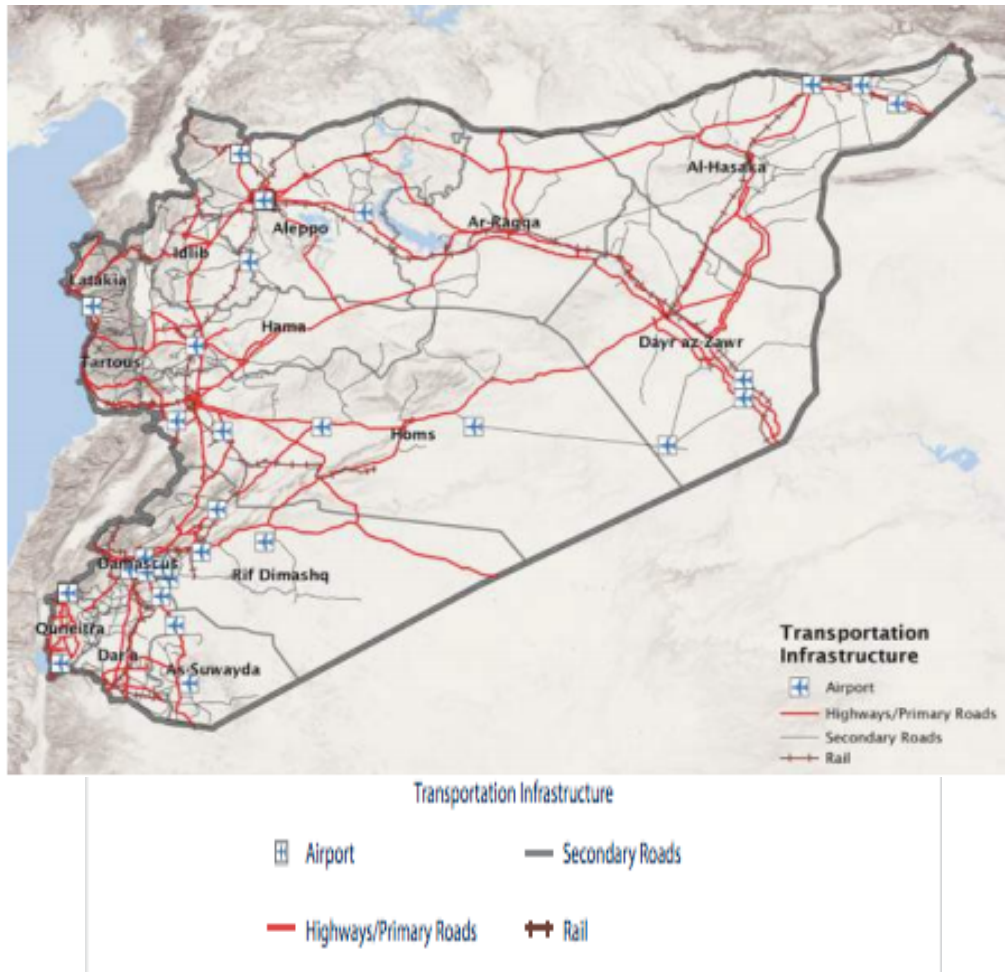
### *Transportation Overview*

Transportation is an important aspect of the current conflict because it directly impacts the amount of supplies available to people in Syria. A damaged transportation infrastructure can cause a myriad of problems that seep into other sectors and prevent real progress from being made. The railway usage statistics before and during the war give insight into the amount of damage incurred by the war. According to the World Bank Group (2018) report on *The Mobility of Displaced Syrians*, "Syrian railways carried about 3.5 million people per year with more than 8.5 million ton of freight in 2010... and only very limited operations have been resumed, with 3,294 passengers on the Hijaz Railway, and 600 thousand tons of goods carried in 2017" (80).

### *Pre-Crisis: Transportation*

Syria possessed a fairly healthy transportation infrastructure prior to the start of the war. Roadway networks continued to expand to meet the demands of a growing economy, population, and number of cars. In the ten years prior to 2011, the road network grew by ten percent and 70 percent of the network was asphalted. The total number of registered vehicles in Syria also increased from 1.2 million to 2.1 million between 2006 and 2011 (World Bank, 2018: 182). A large majority of Syria's highways and primary road systems are located in the west (see figure 3.7), and there were several secondary road networks in good condition as well. Inside cities, public buses were considered the most popular form of transportation (World Bank, 2017b: 20).

Figure 2.7 Syria Transportation Network (World Bank, 2018)



### *Current Crisis: Transportation*

The conflict in Syria has impacted several aspects of the country’s transportation infrastructure. It is estimated that 3,000 km of roadways have been damaged in 13 urban areas, making it extremely challenging for people to travel to work, school, or seek medical attention. Airports, railways, and ports have also been damaged. Syria has a total of 26 airports with paved runways, three of which are international. As of 2017, the only airport that is currently conducting international flights is located in Damascus. In regards to railways, The Syrian railway system (2,423 km in total length) has halted operations due to the conflict (World Bank, 2017a: 36). Out of all of these transportation sectors, roadways have seen the most amount of damage.

The large majority of road damage has been caused by explosions. Bombs have blown craters in the pavement and debris from fallen buildings have made several areas inaccessible. The impact of damaged roads and bridges in Syria has affected the governorates differently (see figure 3.8). According to recent reports, there are currently eight governorates with damaged roads (Aleppo, Dar'a, Rural Damascus, Homs, Al-Hasakeh, Idleb, Raqqa, and Deir-ez-Zor). According the World Bank Group (2018), 43 percent of the damage is within the Aleppo governorate and 27 percent is in the governorate of Homs (183). Nearly all the damage in these two regions has happened inside city limits. Some cities have experienced damage to almost all of their roads, while others have experienced none at all. Reconstruction projects are currently underway to repair and remove debris from roads in areas where violence has subsided.

Figure 2.8 Damaged Roads in Syria (World Bank, 2018: 185)

Governorate	City	Roads Damaged Per City (m)	Bridges Damaged (m)	Roads Damaged Per Governorate (m)	Percentage of the total Damage
Aleppo	Afrin	5,640		1,431,878	44%
	Aleppo	1,352,576	7,027		
	Menbij	53,302			
	Kobani	20,360			
Dar'a	Dar'a	132,259		132,259	4%
Rural Damascus	Douma	95,617		95,617	3%
Homs	Homs	750,301		909,230	28%
	Tadmur	80,458			
	Al-Qusayr	78,471			
Al-Hasakeh	Qamishli	55,425		55,425	2%
Idleb	Idleb	119,375		119,375	4%
Ar-Raqqa	Ar-Raqqa	310,006	7,027	310,006	10%
Deir-ez-Zor	Deir-ez-Zor	172,414		172,414	5%

### Conclusion

It is clear that Syria's physical infrastructure has a long road to recovery. Even prior to the conflict, certain sectors were struggling to meet the basic needs of the people. Decimated by years of drought and ongoing war, Syria's water and agricultural systems have incurred

substantial damages. The aftermath of this destruction has left millions of Syrian refugees and IDPs vulnerable to food and water insecurity. Damages to water and sanitation infrastructures have led to the degradation of water supplies and have increased Syria's vulnerability to waterborne diseases and a variety of water scarcity issues. Damages to the agricultural sector have resulted in the rise in production costs of food supplies and in many cases, forced individuals to abandon farms altogether and relocate to urban centers. IDPs, women, and children are exceptionally at risk to the food, water, and hygiene insecurities caused by the constraints of supply. In order for the reintegration of Syria's refugees and IDPs to be achievable following the conclusion of the war, policies and solutions must alleviate the immediate accessibility issues to food and water supplies.

In addition to water and agriculture infrastructure issues, three immediate areas of concern are housing, energy, and transportation. Housing units must be restored to their original condition or be completely rebuilt. The energy sector needs a management overhaul to oversee the production and distribution of power. Major and secondary roadways affected by the conflict need fixing and crews to remove debris. This process will not happen overnight, but gradual progress could see a rise in Syrians returning to where they belong; inside the safety of their homes, with continued access to electricity and a transportation infrastructure that allows them to live their daily lives. However, until the issues of infrastructure are resolved, the current living conditions within Syria subject returning refugees and IDPs to a plethora of health-related concerns.

## **Healthcare**

### *Introduction*

Syria's healthcare system is another crucial indication of the country's current condition. The destruction of Syria's foundational infrastructure has significantly weakened its healthcare system. Pre-crisis Syria was considered a country passing through a significantly advanced epidemiological transition characterized by a decline in mortality rates and rates of communicable diseases. However, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2013) has recorded that overall life expectancy has dropped from an average of 75.7 years of

age to 63.8 years of age during the conflict (WHO, n.d.). As of 2018, there are 11.3 million Syrians in need of healthcare. Breaking it down, 5.5 million are male, 5.8 million are female, 6.5 million are children, 6.1 are adults, and half of one million are elderly aged 59 and older. Governorates where IDPs are most in need of health care include Aleppo, Damascus, Idlib, rural Damascus, Al-Hasakeh, Dara'a, Hama, Homs, and Lattakia (UNOCHA, 2017). Medical facilities and medical personnel which once provided effective medical coverage have been ravaged and bombed. As a result, medical staff have fled the country leaving Syria with a lack of trained personnel (WHO, 2017). The collapse of Syria's health care infrastructure has reduced the workforce and availability of essential medicines and limited support for chronic diseases, reproductive health, nutrition, and mental health services (UNOCHA, 2013). This section will discuss numerous health care issues including hospitals, medical personnel, public health, and mental health.

## *Hospitals*

### *Hospitals: Pre-Crisis*

Before the crisis in 2011, the Syrian Ministry of Health managed the public health system. Syria's health care system focused on primary health care (PHC) and delivered it through three levels; village, district, and provincial. At the village level were rural health centers and units. At the district level, there were larger health centers which included training facilities and specialized physicians. Each district health center had at least one physician, one nurse, one public health technician, obstetricians, pharmacy technicians, laboratory technicians, midwives, and health visitors. And the provincial level comprised of urban health centers staffed with specialized physicians and dentists along with family planning services, control and prevention of communicable diseases, and health education. Large general and specialized hospitals were also present at the provincial level. A network of ambulance, blood bank, and drug distribution services were managed at the national level. Due to Syria's well-structured health care system, 99 percent of the population had access to health care services in 2004. In rural areas, over 95 percent had access to PHC services and a total of 1534 PHC centers were reported in 2005 (WHO, 2006). Prior to the crisis, Syria's pharmaceutical industry produced 90 percent of

required medicines (UNOCHA, 2013) and grew from 11 manufacturers in 1970 to 54 in 2005 making it less dependent on importing medication (WHO, 2006).

### *Hospitals: Current Crisis*

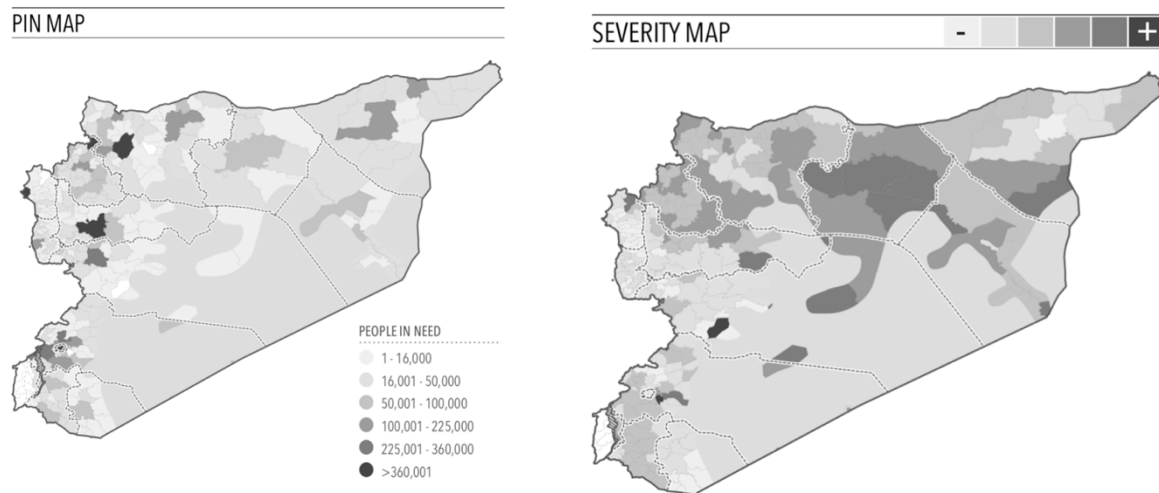
Intentional attacks against hospitals have caused frequent electricity outages, shrinking fuel supplies, broken equipment, and extreme shortages of medical personnel and supplies. As a result, many hospitals are working at minimum capacity (WHO, 2017). Of the 111 public hospitals assessed in 2017, 50 percent of those hospitals were described to be fully functioning, 22 percent were partially functioning, and 28 percent were not functioning. In addition to hospitals, public health centers have also been targeted. Of the 1,802 public health centers assessed, 46 percent were reported to be fully functioning, 22 percent were partially functioning, and 31 percent were not functioning (UNOCHA, 2017).

The number of hospitals attacked every year is increasing. Between 2016 and 2017, there was a 25 percent increase in attacks on health facilities. During the end of 2017, there were 123 verified attacks against health care facilities and ambulances (WHO, 2017). WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (2018) reported that in the first six months of 2018 there were 126 attacks on health care infrastructure. Syria accounted for 70 percent of all attacks on health care facilities worldwide. Most of these attacks were in rural Damascus, Idlib, and Dara'a governorates as they were the focus of intense hostilities at the beginning of 2018. Attacks on health care are frequently used as a military tactic to push Syrians out of their homes. This was seen when the attacks in early 2018 caused a quarter of a million Syrians to leave. Healthcare facilities were forced to mitigate the dangers of such attacks by working underground and by candlelight. Due to the interruption of the healthcare system, Syria lacks essential medications such as insulin, anesthetics, serums, and intravenous fluids (UNOCHA, 2013). The Department for International Development (2018) found that with deteriorating hospital conditions, about half of Syrian patients reported they would not go to the hospital even if their life depended on it.

While access to health care is limited, access is even more restricted in UN-declared besieged areas. There are 2.98 million Syrians living in hard-to-reach areas, including 419,000 living in UN-declared besieged areas (see figure below). Hard-to-reach areas are defined by an

area that is not regularly accessible to humanitarian aid because of denial of access, active conflict, or multiple security checkpoints. These areas are surrounded by armed actors for the purpose of preventing humanitarian aid access or the exit of Syrians in need of medical attention. Health centers and public hospitals located in Al-Haskeh, Raqqa, Deir-ez Zor, rural Damascus, Dara’a, Homs, and Hama, are located in these hard-to-reach areas. Increasing instances of fighting in Dier-ez Zor and Raqqa governorates has amplified trauma cases. Yet in Raqqa, health facilities are unable to cope with the increase as 99 percent of all public health facilities are closed or partially functioning (UNOCHA, 2017). Increasing disruptions to roads, attacks on health infrastructure, and denial of humanitarian access has caused patients to resort to medical alternatives. Some self-medicate with low-quality black-market supplies or use homemade expedients. Others risk traveling across conflict lines for essential treatment. Those who suffer from chronic diseases, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, and the elderly no longer have regular and specialized care that they were dependent on pre-conflict (DFID, 2018).

Figure 2.9 Locations of IDPs that are in need of health care and to what extent (UNOCHA, 2017: 56).



## *Medical Personnel*

### *Medical Personnel: Pre-Crisis*

Prior to the crisis, Syria's health sector was determined by WHO to have many strengths including having enough health workers to cover all governorates in Syria. The country was experiencing a noticeable increase in doctors, dentists, pharmacists, nurses, and midwives. The most notable change was in the number of doctors; however, this created an imbalance between the number of other health workers. Between 2002 to 2004, the number of physicians increased by 14 percent. This expanded the private health sector but did not address the needs of the public health sector. In 2004, the public health sector had 96 physicians, 32 dentists, 30 pharmacists, 137 nurses and midwives, and 32 paramedical staff per 100,000 Syrians. Additionally, the Syrian Ministry of Health had on average ten health workers in each district health center (WHO, 2006).

### *Medical personnel: Current Crisis*

Attacks against health workers have been systematic and deliberate (DFID, 2018). According to UNOCHA, Syria is the most dangerous country in the world to be a healthcare worker (UNOCHA, 2017). Health care workers have been targets of violent attacks in order to disrupt medical treatments of Syrians. More than one in ten health workers report they have received personal threats and over a third of health workers have no formal training (DFID, 2018). During the first half of 2017, 107 attacks on health workers and facilities were reported in addition to the 155 reported during 2016 (UNOCHA, 2017). In 2018, 97 health workers were killed while 165 were injured. These attacks were in Rural Damascus, Idlib, and Dara'a governorate which is where a quarter of a million Syrians fled to in June 2018 (WHO EMRO, 2018). The Syrian American Medical Society Foundation (2018) reported that in Dara'a more than 1,000 physicians were present in southern Syria before 2011, but only 150 remain.

The 2017 Sphere Minimum Standards in Health Action determined the number of health facilities and personnel needed to meet essential health needs. At least one team comprising a doctor, a nurse, a midwife, and an anesthetist must be on duty 24 hours a day seven days a week per 500,000 Syrians (SAMS, 2018). This standard is not enough to keep up with growing health care demands. Health care workers are essential in Syria as violence and destruction

against health infrastructure causes major disruptions of services, limits those who need access to essential life-saving medical assistance, and affects the availability of staff to provide health services (UNOCHA, 2018). Surgeons operate by candlelight (WHO EMRO, 2018), with one in six surgeons working over 80 hours a week (DFID, 2018). Health workers are working underground in hospital basements as their places of work have been bombed (WHO EMRO, 2018).

## *Public Health*

### *Public Health: Pre-Crisis*

In 2011, life expectancy at birth was an average of 75.7 years of age (UNOCHA, 2013). The top causes of death included cardiovascular disease, tumors, accidents, and issues with one's respiratory system (WHO, 2006). In 2010, the infant mortality rate was 17.9 per 1,000 live births with 9.2 percent of children born classified with a low birth weight (SAMS, 2018). Syria was regarded as one of the largest agricultural producers in the Middle East (Human Appeal, 2018) with only five percent of the population undernourished (UNOCHA, 2013). In terms of immunizations, before 2011 vaccination coverage was high. 100 percent of Syrians were vaccinated for BCG (the vaccine for tuberculosis), 100 percent of infants were fully immunized for measles in 2004, and 98 percent for polio and DPT (WHO, 2006). The prevalence of tuberculosis was 23 cases per 100,000 Syrians and there were no laboratory-confirmed cases of measles in 2010 (WHO, 2013). In addition, access and availability of reproductive health services were not much of a concern. In 2002, 87 percent of pregnant women and about 97 percent of deliveries were attended by trained personnel (WHO, 2006).

### *Public Health: Current Crisis*

The destruction of agriculture has greatly contributed to malnourishment. IDPs in UN-declared besieged areas have the highest detected levels of acute malnutrition and moderate levels of chronic malnutrition (UNOCHA, 2018). The governorates of Aleppo, Idlib, and Rural Damascus have the highest levels of need (UNOCHA, 2017). As a consequence of the crisis, malnutrition within infants and children has risen dramatically. 4.6 million children under five years old and pregnant women are at a higher risk of malnutrition. This makes children in Syria 11 times more likely to die compared to well-nourished children. Pregnant women in besieged

areas are at a higher risk as well. There were reports in East Ghouta of pregnant women complaining of cramps and pain which were thought to be signs of labor when they were in fact symptoms of poor nutrition (SAMS, 2018).

In addition to increasing rates of malnutrition, immunization rates are falling as a result of the conflict. With increasingly weak health care facilities, immunization rates have been majorly impacted, amplifying the risk of outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases. WHO estimates that vaccination coverage has fallen to the 60 to 70 percent range compared to the pre-crisis range of over 90 percent for polio, DPT, and measles (UNOCHA, 2017). In other terms, Syria's national vaccination rate has dropped to 45 percent (WHO, 2013). Destruction of infrastructure and low immunization coverage has attributed to 39 documented cases of vaccine-derived poliovirus type-2 (cVDPV2) (WHO, 2017), with a total of 74 cases reported mainly in Deir-ez Zor and Raqqa governorates (UNOCHA, 2018), and 8,000 cases of children contracting measles. In 2013, 139 cases of measles had been laboratory confirmed with 75 percent of the cases reported as not being vaccinated (WHO, 2013). As of 2017, measles were reported in all 14 governorates of Syria (WHO, 2017).

As a consequence of inadequate immunization rates, specific communicable diseases like Cutaneous Leishmaniasis are a growing health concern. 32,888 cases were reported in 2017 compared to 31,105 in 2016. Caused by the bite of certain sandflies, Leishmaniasis causes disfiguring ulcers on exposed skin such as the face, arms, and legs (WHO, 2017). It is endemic to mainly Aleppo (WHO, 2013), but deteriorating water and sanitation conditions found in IDP camps have created a model environment for this disease to spread to the Tartous governorate (UNOCHA, 2017) since specific sand flies are attracted to crowded areas (WHO, 2017).

Besides communicable diseases, there are also major noncommunicable diseases that are being exacerbated by the conflict. In the period between 2011 and 2013, WHO estimated that over 400,000 Syrians have been wounded, many ending up with chronic conditions (UNOCHA, 2013). 30 percent of trauma cases lead to disabilities requiring long-term rehabilitative care (WHO, 2017). Specialized care and medications are hard to receive remotely and is even more difficult for those with chronic diseases who need to cross military lines in

order to receive required treatment (DFID, 2018). Many may die unless they obtain basic medicines (WHO, 2017).

Today, noncommunicable diseases such as cardiac diseases, respiratory diseases, cancer, and diabetes account for 46 percent of deaths in Syria. This number accounts for more deaths than those that are a direct result of war-related injuries. Noncommunicable diseases that are easily mitigated in normal circumstances are now life-threatening without treatment. Patients with noncommunicable diseases do not show immediate signs of distress that justify prompt medical intervention (WHO EMRO, 2017).

A specific non-communicable chronic disease of concern is diabetes. The number of diabetic Syrians has tripled since 1980. More than one in ten Syrians have diabetes. Before the conflict, Syria had 200 specialized diabetes clinics. Over 60 percent of insulin-dependent Syrians are now at risk because of limited supplies and a lack of specialized diabetes clinics. Pre-crisis, insulin was free of charge through the National Diabetes Program, but today shortages are common as Syria's only insulin producing facility has stopped production. With frequent shortages of insulin, patients resort to using other types of insulin or buy it from the private and informal sector. The situation is dire because without insulin diabetic patients are at risk of having raised blood sugar which can seriously damage nerves and blood vessels (WHO, 2016).

Another important overlooked health concern is the numerous injured Syrians living with disabilities. Persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected by the conflict (UNOCHA, 2018). WHO and Handicap International (n.d.) estimate three million Syrians live with injuries and disabilities. With an estimated 30,000 injured every month, 1.5 million have been injured while an additional 1.5 million are living with permanent disabilities, including 86,000 Syrians whose injuries have led to amputation. Of the 30 percent of trauma linked to permanent disability, 15 percent undergo amputation, ten percent have peripheral nerve damage, and five percent suffer spinal injury (UNOCHA, 2016). These injuries have been exacerbated by ill-equipped and non-functioning hospitals. There are only two remaining physical rehabilitation centers, located in Damascus and Homs, that provide artificial limbs (WHO & HI, n.d.). Syrians with disabilities lack the adequate care they require as they have specific needs from multiple sectors that have been hindered by the conflict (UNOCHA, 2017).

In terms of women's health and prenatal/postnatal care, reproductive health services are also impacted as the destruction of health care facilities continues to be used as a military tactic. 2.9 million Syrian women have not received essential sexual and reproductive health care (UNOCHA, 2018). Transportation to prenatal care is also difficult and has caused women in Idlib and Dara'a to go to pharmacies and receive incorrect or dangerous medications that could impact their own health as well as their unborn child.

In addition, there is an overall lack of OBGYNs, causing midwives to fill the gap. Even with midwives and other doctors taking over the role of an OBGYN, a severe gender gap still exists. Female OBGYNs and midwives remain scarce, making it difficult for Syrian women, due to religious beliefs and cultural traditions, to seek out female OBGYNs. Reproductive health services have been systematically targeted by Russian and Syrian government forces. In 2017 alone, 12 facilities were forced to close. This impact can be seen in Damascus through Al Salam Hospital's capacity to conduct consultations. Before the crisis, Al Salam Hospital conducted 100-500 consultations daily and delivered 500 babies a month. Now the hospital provides less than half of the consultations than it did pre-crisis. A lack of equipment and supplies has caused another problem in providing adequate prenatal/postnatal care. The labor inducing drug, oxytocin, and incubators are also limited. The medical knowledge of the remaining medical workers and patients are lagging, causing both to be ill-equipped to recognize warning signs indicating complications during labor (SAMS, 2018).

## *Mental Health*

### *Mental Health: Pre-Crisis*

As a whole, the Middle East attaches stigma towards mental health disorders. International Medical Corps (2017) explains that the stigma is expressed through use of terms like "crazy" and "mad" as a way to describe a person with mental disorders or in psychosocial distress. This stigma in Syria is reflected in the lack of availability and accessibility of mental health care pre-crisis. Mental health comprised only two percent of the total health budget in Syria (WHO, 2011). Before the crisis, 21 million Syrians were treated by only 70 psychiatrists and in just two public psychiatric hospitals located outside of Damascus and the other in Aleppo

(WHO EMRO, n.d.). As of 2011, WHO reported that the majority of health care doctors and nurses had no official in-service training in mental health for five years (WHO, 2011). The lack of adequate mental health services can be attributed to Middle Eastern culture's belief of Jinn, or evil spirits. Mental health disturbances are rationalized as a punishment from Jinn rather than a true medical disorder (IMC, 2017).

### *Mental Health: Current Crisis*

Children are at the highest risk of suffering from mental health problems. PTSD is the most common illness followed by depression (Rogers-Sirin, 2015). 48 percent of adults in Syria have witnessed children losing their ability to speak or the development of speech impediments. 71 percent report that their children are experiencing more frequent bedwetting and involuntary urination which are common symptoms of PTSD. Syrian children are experiencing visible and invisible wounds that have the potential to forever damage a generation (Save the Children, 2017).

In Rural Damascus, Homs, Tartous, Quneitra, Suweida, and Aleppo during the first years of the conflict, trained specialists were lacking proper education and training to treat acute psychosocial needs (UNOCHA, 2013). The expansive areas of Eastern Ghouta and Dara'a are home to 1.4 million people who have access to only two professional psychiatrists. Only 20 percent of Syria's functioning health facilities provide basic mental health services (Save the Children, 2017). Other governorates reported mental health workers leaving the area because of increased attacks on health facilities and workers (UNOCHA, 2013).

Due to prolonged exposure to violence, one in five Syrians are at risk of developing moderate mental health issues such as depression or anxiety disorders. One in 30 are at risk of developing severe or acute mental health problems such as disabling anxiety, psychosis, and severe depression (UNOCHA, 2018). Syria does not have enough mental health facilities or staff to support the mental health needs of IDPs. One of the two public psychiatric hospitals available pre-crisis is now at capacity while the other has closed its doors (WHO EMRO, n.d.). The shortage of mental health workers is further heightened by the lack of required medication (DFID, 2013). The pharmaceutical industry has been hindered and black-market options are too expensive. Phenobarbiturates used to treat epilepsy and bipolar disorder cost 30 times more to

make in Syria compared to pre-crisis. Due to increased demand, hospitals are also being used as psychiatric facilities such as Ibn Rushd hospital, a former substance-abuse treatment center. While Ibn Rushd hospital is located near the capital hospitals located in hard to reach zones are without mental health services (WHO EMRO, n.d.).

## *Conclusion*

Intentional attacks against hospitals and health workers have worked as a military tactic to push Syrians out of their homes. While the degree of healthcare needs varies by governorate, the key takeaway is that when one aspect of Syria's health care system is affected, so is the rest. Attacks on hospitals force health workers to work in non-traditional environments. Shortage of adequate numbers of medical personnel is causing decreased immunization rates. Lack of medical facilities and health workers is amplifying the severity of preexisting and new communicable and noncommunicable diseases, hindering women's access to reproductive services, and decreasing Syrians already limited access to mental health services. Overall, the breaking down of Syria's health care system is another symptom of the country's disintegrating physical and institutional infrastructure resulting from the conflict. Not only does this systemic failure threaten the health and well-being of Syria's current population, but it also has serious impacts on the country's long-term development. These and other economic consequences will be discussed in the following section.

## **Economy and Development**

### *Formal Economy*

#### *Introduction*

An economic analysis of the damages caused by the Syrian conflict on the various levels discussed throughout this report provides further measurable insights into the current state of affairs. Since the conflict is also partially rooted in economic grounds, it is essential to consider the economic dynamics as an integral element of generating effective reconstruction plans. Given the desperate situation of Syrians caught in this conflict, economic incentives play a

central role in rebuilding policies. The following section will discuss the economic consequences of the Syrian conflict along the dimensions of physical capital, human capital and economic organization and institutions. It is important to keep in mind that the available data for current economic statistics is both very limited and varying across different platforms and outlets. The World Bank’s measure of Syria’s “Statistical Capacity Score”, which assesses the quality of a country’s statistical system, has dropped significantly since the beginning of the war. The data presented in the following section is largely based on estimates and simulation calculations conducted by the World Bank.

Figure 3.1 Syria’s Statistical Capacity Score (World Bank, 2018)



**Formal Economy: Pre-Crisis**

Prior to the civil war, the Syrian economy was growing steadily, with an average GDP growth rate of 4.3 percent annually between 2000 and 2010 (United Nations Development Programme, 2018: 34). Syria’s economy was comparable to other middle-income regional economies in many socio-economic indicators in terms of poverty rate and income inequality. However, there was also an increase in economic hardship for many segments of Syrian society,

particularly in rural areas of the north and east (Butter, 2015: 4). The country showed typical signs of unequal economic development, particularly in the imbalanced growth of wealth without the redistribution of wealth contributing to a wider wealth disparity (Butter, 2015: 4). Further, Syrians reported high levels of perceived corruption and low trust in public institutions (World Bank, 2017: 11).

Indeed, the Assad regime has a reputation of authoritarianism and corruption. The ruling elite was known to skim money from private enterprises by attaching themselves to wealthy investors. The government retained direct control over the economy by keeping businessmen as regime insiders and using the police state to block competitors. As a result, the country's means of production stayed within the control of the ruling family, elites, and their cronies (Lund, 2018). Moreover, Syria's economy was deeply fragmented, with economic activity concentrated in certain hubs, most notable in the manufacturing city of Aleppo. Although Syria's eastern provinces are rich in natural and agricultural resources, the region has been continuously neglected by the central government in Damascus. As a result, resentment among locals of different ethnic and religious groups grew, which ultimately contributed to the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011 (Lund, 2018).

## *Formal Economy: Current-Crisis*

### *Physical Capital*

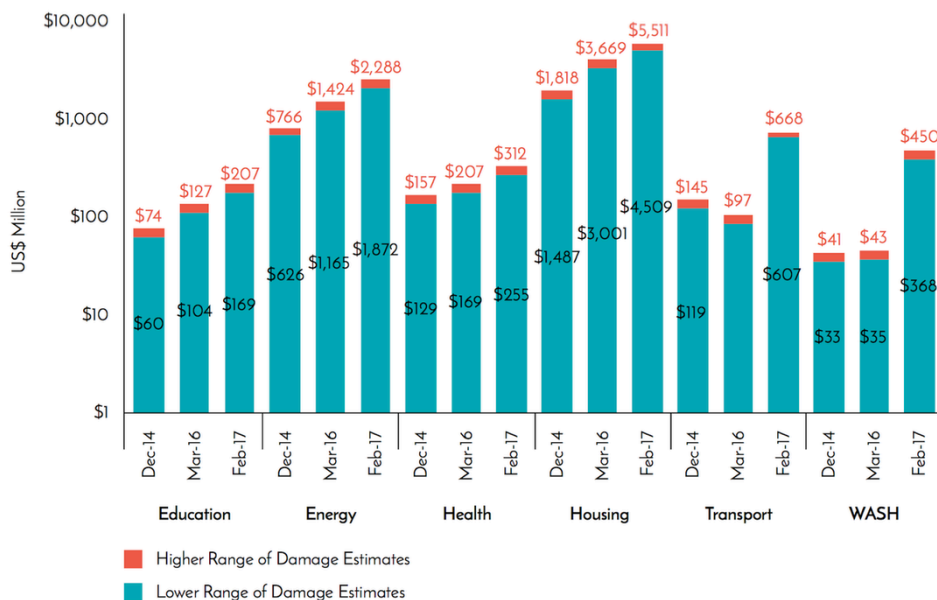
This widespread antagonism against Assad's regime ultimately culminated in the conflict that continues to ravage Syria until today. Since the onset of the civil war in 2011, the visible damage to Syria's economy has become most obvious with the high levels of destruction to the country's physical capital and infrastructure. The collective damage to economically significant physical capital, such as infrastructure, machinery, and buildings, has increasingly stunted Syria's economic capacity (Figure 4.2). Major cities and industrial zones, such as Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Raqqa have been destroyed. These affected areas have seen their fundamental structures, including houses, buildings, roads, bridges, schools, and hospitals diminish since the onset of the civil war (World Bank, 2019: 64). With the disruption of water, power, and sanitation infrastructure, entire urban systems have been reduced to dysfunctional

living spaces. (World Bank, 2017: 88). The war’s devastating effects on Syria’s physical capital has significant ramifications for its economic growth, fiscal and export revenues and ultimately, its foreign reserves.

The energy sector is the most notable industry that has seen substantial destruction since 2011. (World Bank, 2017: 93). The physical damage to the energy infrastructure, including oil and gas pipelines, has hindered the exploration, development, production, and transport of energy resources. The energy industry is also threatened by government opposition groups taking control over its resources and processing facilities (United Nations Development Programme, 2017: 41). Thus, the conflict has stunted Syria’s potential oil output significantly on a physical level. On top of the physical damage, the economy is further inhibited by a declining energy sector due to political alliances created by the war. Most significantly, US and EU sanctions have hindered Syria’s energy sector from operating properly.

The agricultural sector has observed similarly substantial economic losses. Damage to irrigation systems, along with shortage of necessary farming inputs and labor, have decreased the agriculture GDP by 41 percent between 2011 and 2015 (World Bank, 2017: 96). Not only has this agricultural decline impacted Syria’s GDP, but it has also caused massive changes in the movement and concentration of labor, thus further fragmenting the economy.

Figure 3.2 Sector-Level Damage Range Estimates, on Log Scale (World Bank, 2017: 35)



Although the destruction of Syria's physical capital is extensive, it represents only a limited share of the conflict's aggregate economic impact. Indeed, simulations conducted by the World Bank show that Syria's capital destruction by itself would have a relatively limited effect on the national economy (World Bank, 2017: 96). The other impacts of the war on the economy, including casualties, demographic movements, and lower returns to investment, further exacerbate the damage to physical capital. As a result, the effective damages due to capital destruction are more pronounced and sustained.

### *Human Capital*

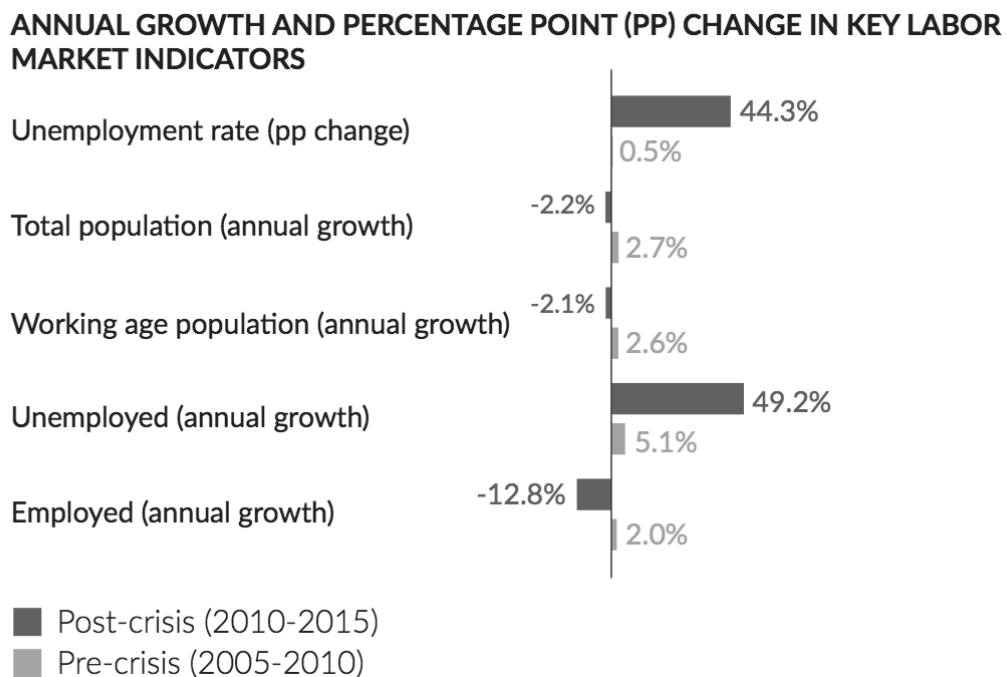
Evaluating the effects of the Syrian Civil War on human capital is another integral component in this damage assessment of the conflict. Death, injury, and displacement have significantly eroded Syrian human capital stock. Casualties directly related to the conflict are estimated to have reached about half a million since 2011 (The Heritage Foundation, 2019). (World Bank, 2017: 98).

In addition, the economic impacts caused by the war's casualties is "much more persistent than other channels", indicating that the death toll is significantly impacting Syria's economic performance on different levels (World Bank, 2017: 98). Primarily, the high number of casualties directly impacts the Syrian economy by reducing its productive labor force. Moreover, casualties and fear of insecurity are also a main driver for the large-scale demographic displacement of Syrians (Phil de Imus, Pierre, Gaëlle, & Rother, Björn, 2017). This forcible displacement also has noticeable economic effects, as the movement of IDPs to safer, primarily government-controlled areas has caused geographic shifts in the country's economic activity. Farmers represent a significant share of IDPs moving from rural to urban areas due to insecurity and lack of employment. As a result, this has created labor shortages in rural areas and labor surpluses around safer urban centers (World Bank, 2017: 102). The labor surpluses in government-held cities along the west coast, particularly in Tartous and Latakia, have caused a fall in wages in these areas. Although this demographic mobility has generated new production hubs, it also reduces economic activity, as displaced people usually "don't immediately integrate into their destination labor markets" (World Bank, 2017: 99).

Aside from IDPs, one quarter of displaced persons, many of whom are highly-skilled, are refugees outside of Syria, which presents an even costlier hit to its economy. Conflict-related insecurity and unemployment are an important consideration in the conflict, since they are stronger drivers of massive migration compared to causes such as capital destruction.

The conflict has significantly impacted the workforce and subsequent employment in Syria. The country’s overall economic deterioration is accompanied by drastic reductions in employment levels. About 538,000 jobs were destroyed on average per year between 2010 and 2015, adding 482,000 people to the unemployment pool annually (Butter, 2015: 11). Most significantly, Syria’s unemployment rate increased from 8.6 percent in 2010 to an estimated 52.9 percent in 2015 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019). The strong economic contraction and resulting lack of jobs has spread idleness and informality amongst the country’s labor force, as more than three-fourths of Syrians are of working age (77 percent, or nine million people) are not involved in any economic value generation (World Bank, 2017: 99). While 2.9 million Syrians are unemployed, 6.1 million individuals are merely inactive (World Bank, 2017: 99).

Figure 3.3 Annual Growth and Percentage Point (PP) Change in Key Labor Market Indicators (World Bank, 2016)



This widespread idleness amongst the working-age population will have long-term repercussions, as human capital and its skills continue to depreciate. The ongoing shortage of important skills is further exacerbated by the exodus of Syrians to foreign economies. In the short-term, the lack of job opportunities will increasingly push people (particularly youths) to join the military or armed opposition forces to survive (Butter, 2015: 27). Moreover, countless individuals are working informal jobs, particularly those generated by the country's war economy, as an alternative way to earn income.

The limited access to education is another primary concern for Syria's human capital skills in the long-term. While there are 4.8 million Syrian children of school age, 2.2 million of them do not attend school inside Syria, and more than half a million refugee children do not attend school outside Syria (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2013: 3). The breakdown of education has been most pronounced in areas strongly affected by violence. In cities with intense fighting, such as Idlib, Aleppo and Raqqa, less than half of all children are enrolled in school, and attendance reaches below 30 percent (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2013: 3). Not only does this violate their right to quality education, but it also has significant long-term economic consequences. With an entire generation missing fundamental education, the population's human capital skills, which are essential for continued economic growth, are severely underdeveloped. This decreases current and potential economic development in Syria, which is a key to eventual economic reconstruction.

The extensive spread of poverty inflicted by the war also significantly reduces Syria's human capital. The prevalence of unemployment, violence, along with the government reducing its subsidies on energy and essential food goods has caused a drastic spread in poverty throughout the country (World Bank, 2017: 89). The World Bank's estimates show that six in ten Syrians live in extreme poverty today (World Bank, 2017: 89). The substantial increase in poverty rates is demonstrated further by the high levels of aid distribution amongst Syrians. Foreign aid to Syria increased at an annual rate of 131 percent between 2011 and 2016, with funds reaching over - 2.5 million USD in 2016 (Gobat & Kostial, 2016: 16). Most of this aid is provided by the US, followed by Germany, the European Commission, the UK, Turkey, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Similarly to most other economic consequences of the conflict, poverty and

the resulting need for aid are also unevenly distributed across the country, with the highest levels concentrated in besieged areas.

### *Economic Organization and Institutions*

Beyond physical and human capital destruction, the most significant economic impact of the war is the disruption to the country's economic organization and institutions. This economic disorganization denotes "all factors that lead to reduced productivity or idleness in factors of production" (World Bank, 2017: 104). This includes the losses in human networks, internet connectivity, and any other intangible capital contributing to the economy (World Bank, 2017: 104).

Overall, Syria is experiencing limited participation in economic activity due to security concerns. The instability caused by the war has diminished the country's economic governance structures, especially in the areas where institutional quality was already poor before the conflict began. This has resulted in reduced connectivity, higher transportations costs, disruptions in supply chains and networks, along with increased corruption of actors fighting for political and economic power (World Bank, 2017: 105). Hence, producing economic value has become increasingly difficult in Syria's active conflict environment.

The lacking social trust generated by the high-risk environment of the war economy is further exacerbated by missing legal institutions. This causes Syria's government to become more susceptible to rent-seeking and cronyism (Lund, 2018). Moreover, fundamental economic institutions, such as banks, ministries of finance, tax authorities, and commercial courts are highly dysfunctional in government-controlled areas, and essentially absent in remote or opposition-controlled areas (Phil de Imus et al., 2017). Overall, this economic instability reduces both domestic and foreign incentives to pursue productive activities.

In the long-term, the country's stability and development are severely stunted as confidence and social cohesion progressively decrease. It is the damage to economic organizations and institutions which constitute the bulk of the conflict-driven economic losses. The World Bank estimates that "disruptions to economic organization were about 20 times costlier than capital destruction in the first 6 years of the Syrian Conflict" (World Bank, 2017:

112). Rather than the destruction of productive factors (physical and human capital), it is the low utilization of these factors (through economic organization) which restrains the country's economic activity.

### *GDP, Finance, and Banking*

The decrease of economic production factors and institutions described above have had substantial macroeconomic effects, which are evident in Syria's growth rate and GDP. Compared to Syria's pre-conflict 2010 GDP of 60 billion USD, its GDP fell to only 15 billion USD in 2016, indicating a 63 percent decrease (World Bank, 2017: 88). The damages to physical capital, decline in overall productivity, and available labor has drastically reduced incentives to invest in the Syrian economy, hence decreasing the country's GDP (Figure 4.4). This extreme contraction of nearly 65 percent has essentially cancelled out Syria's economic achievements during the decade preceding the conflict (Butter, 2015: 27). Both public and private investments fell significantly due to the high risk, weak administrative capacity, and disrupted infrastructure (Figure 4.5). This has manifested in a 31 percent drop in public investments in 2015, as the government lacked revenue and shifted its priorities towards the military and public wages (World Bank, 2016: 110). With public revenues falling to negative three percent of the country's GDP, along with its high military spending, Syria's fiscal deficit increased from two percent to nine percent between 2010 and 2015 (Figure 4.6) (World Bank, 2016: 110). Due to Syria's poor business environment, private investments' share in the country's GDP declined from 12 percent to 4 percent in 2015 (World Bank, 2017: 110).

Figure 3.4 Syria GDP Annual Growth Rate (Trading Economics, 2016)

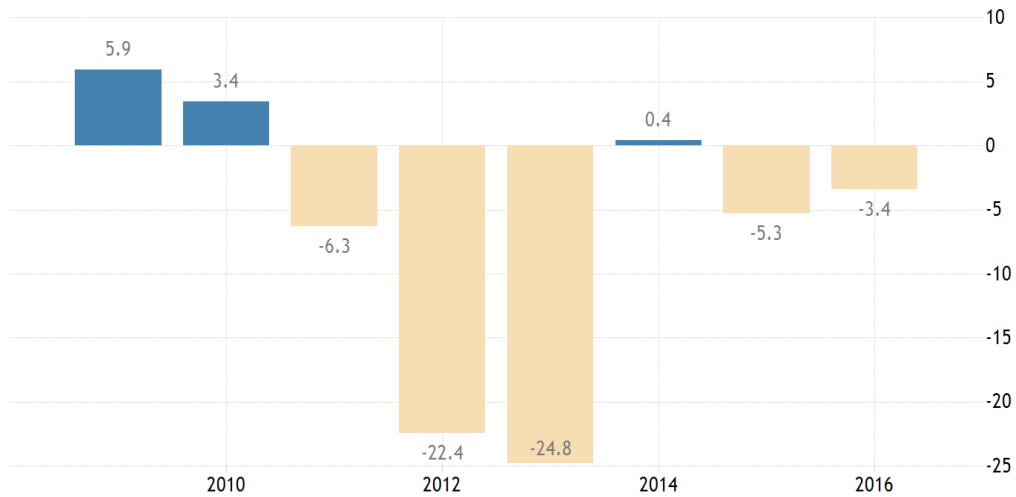


Figure 3.5 Private and Public Investment (World Bank, 2016: 101)

**PRIVATE AND PUBLIC INVESTMENT**

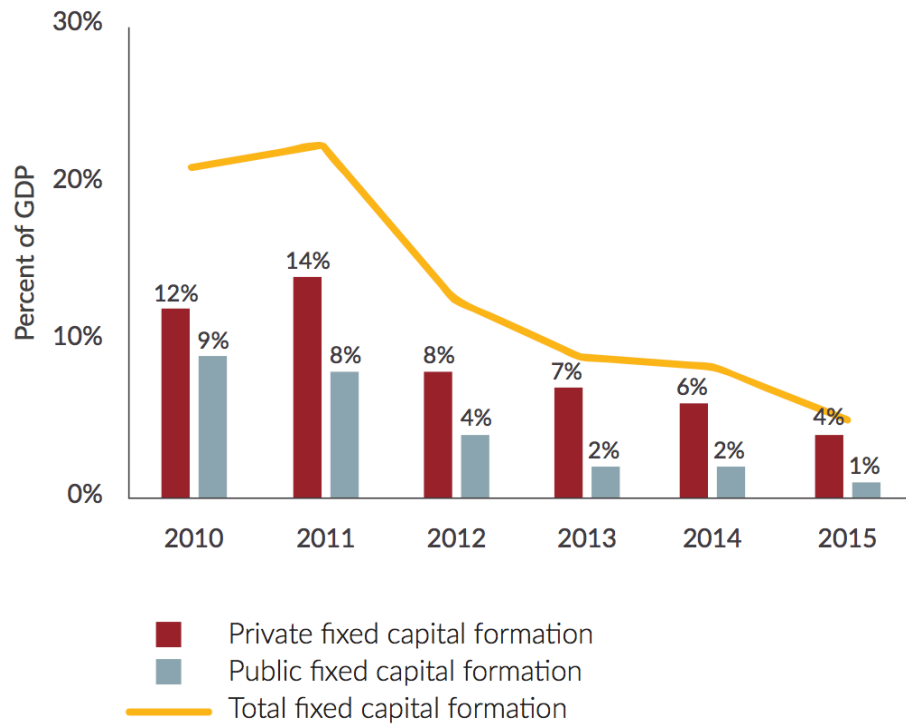
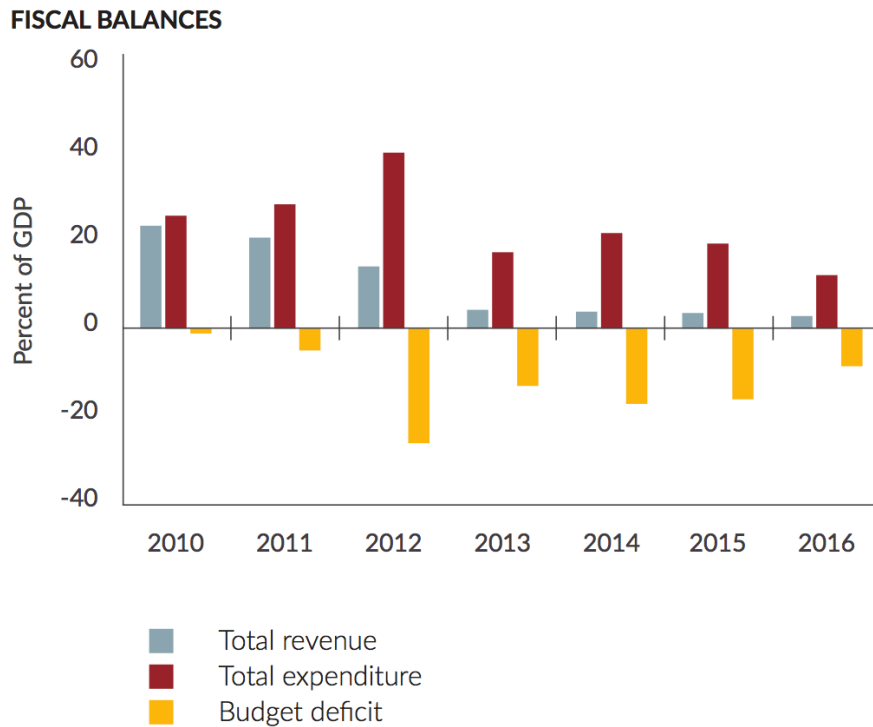


Figure 3.6 Fiscal Balances of Syrian Government (World Bank, 2016: 101)



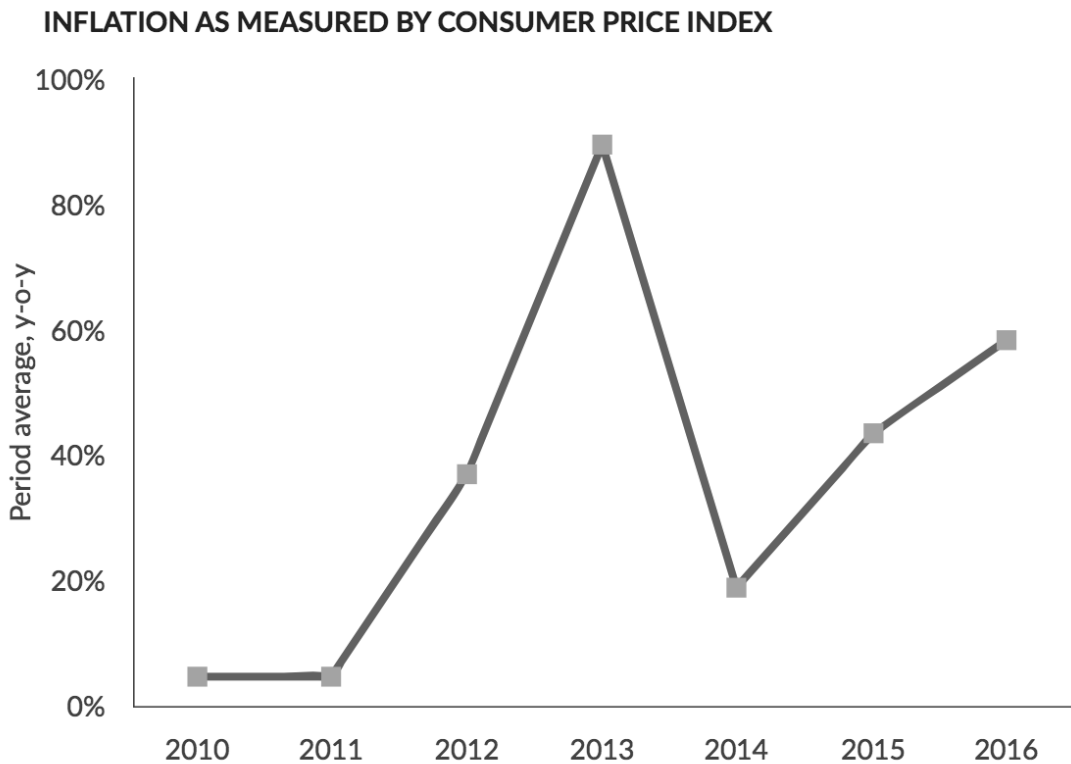
The political and economic instability has also significantly reduced international trade, particularly the country's export economy. Total exports fell from 7.9 billion USD to a mere 631 million USD in 2015, indicating a 92 percent drop in only four years (Germany Trade & Invest, 2018). Similarly, imports also drastically decreased by 73 percent in the same time period (Germany Trade & Invest, 2018).

This dramatic decline in both exports and imports is caused by multiple factors. First, tradable sectors, such as oil, are more vulnerable to changes in national income than sectors without trade. A second factor are the sanctions placed on Syrian exports by foreign governments opposing Assad which are also blocking the country's economic activity. Moreover, some export industries have shifted away from formal exports to production for domestic consumption or even illegal trade (Phil de Imus et al., 2017). Due to the disruption of international trade, Syria's current account deficit was about 28 percent of its GDP in 2016, compared to only .7 percent in 2010 (World Bank, 2017: 89). In attempt to finance its growing external deficit, the Syrian government has used its Central Bank reserves, resulting in a sharp decline in its foreign reserves from 21 billion USD in 2010 to 1 billion USD in 2015 (World Bank,

2017: 89).

With the depressed export revenues and nearly depleted international reserves, the nominal exchange rate for the Syrian Pound has depreciated by 459 percent (The Heritage Foundation, 2019). At the same time, the country has experienced high inflation (Figure 4.7), with consumer prices rising by about 600 percent between 2010 and 2016 (World Bank, 2019: 18). However, the actual inflation rate fluctuates substantially across the country, which shows the deep fragmentation of the country's economy. Price increases are more severe in areas with more intense conflict and high insecurity, and less volatile in government-controlled areas. While fuel prices increased tenfold from 2011 to 2015, prices for essential food goods increased by 2.3-fold (World Bank, 2017: 93). This high inflation rate, along with increasing cost for rent and utilities decreases Syrian citizens' purchasing power significantly.

Figure 3.7 Inflation as Measured by Consumer Price Index (World Bank, 2016: 102)



The financial sector is also experiencing disruption due to the country's shrinking economy, tightening international sanctions, and lacking public and private investments. While many bank branches have been physically damaged, many of them are still operational, particularly in government-controlled areas (World Bank, 2017: 116). Private sector banking and payments systems remain functioning in these areas. In contrast, banks in conflict areas have largely shut down, with only limited access to functioning basic banking services. As a result, informal banking services have emerged in these territories (World Bank, 2017: 116). With limited banking systems and a restricted business environment, banks are challenged with maintaining financial flows and seeking lending opportunities. Overall, the business environment in Syria carries a high risk, thus diminishing any incentive for financial endeavors in the war-torn country.

### *Conclusion*

The enormous levels of destruction caused by the Syrian Civil War are evident superficially in the forms of physical and human capital damage, but also in the perpetuating cycle of economic costs. The destruction of Syria's physical capital has led to even greater losses in the country's human capital. In turn, this decrease in economic production factors has had substantial impacts on the quality of economic organization and institutions. Human capital and economic institutional losses in particular will have long-term economic repercussions for the country. Although the damage to physical and human capital present the Syrian economy with significant challenges, it is the lack of economic organization which inhibits the country's economic activity. However, another implication of the weakened formal economy, both along the lines of capital destruction and institutional dissolution, is a booming informal economy. The expansion of such extralegal economic value production will be discussed in the next section.

## *Informal Economy*

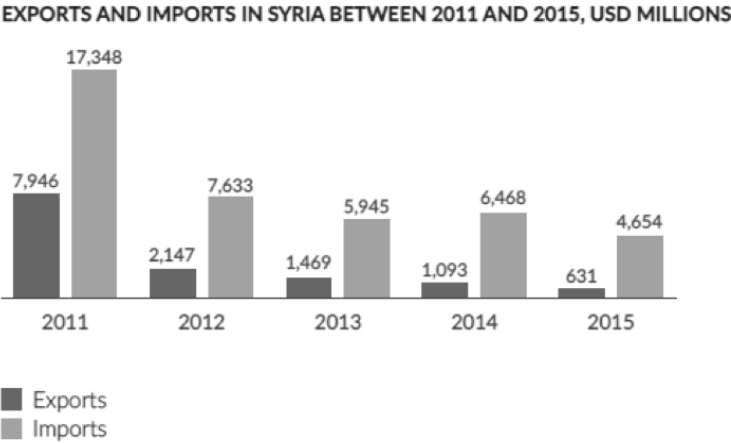
### *Introduction*

A crucial part of the current war economy within Syria is the informal economy, which plays a prominent role in most regions. The informal economy consists of ‘business by other means’ and as a ‘privatized form of self-enrichment’ where individuals, especially armed, non-state groups, are able to financially benefit through criminal activities, such as the black market. (Bojicic-Dzelilovic, 2018: 54). The informal economy exposes individuals to financial, economic, and social risks. However, due to regional sieges and a lack of regulation of the formal economy, Syria is experiencing an economic crisis which is pushing individuals towards the informal economy. Armed groups throughout Syria and the Syrian regime are both prominent actors within the informal economy. Through supply chains and smuggling passes, armed groups largely benefit from the criminal activities and forceful use of the black market while the majority of the Syrian population is experiencing an extreme amount of poverty. Looting, bribery, kidnapping, and illegal trade force Syrians to flee or participate in the corrupt economies with little to no regulation. This section will focus on how regional economies, armed groups, the black market, and funding is currently fueling the war economy.

The informal economy is not new to Syria. Smuggling passes have continued through generations, and the issues brought on by the black market, such as human trafficking and illegal trade of goods and services, have been reoccurring issues within Syria. However, once the Syrian war began in 2011, Syria’s economy became more reliant on “the proliferation of lucrative criminal activities, through looting, bribery, extortion, kidnapping, human trafficking, the illegal trade in oil, weapons, drugs and antiquities” to function (Bojicic-Dzelilovic, 2018: 52). The financial burden put on the Syrian people continuously increased, which eventually led to 82 percent of Syrians living in poverty and 2.96 million people (58 percent of the population) unemployed in the early years of the conflict (Al-Mahmoud, 2015). This continued until the “majority of Syrians, whether under the control of the government or the opposition, plunged into the informal economy, and 80 percent of the remaining population in Syria needed help by April 2015” (Al-Mahmoud, 2015). In 2017, 60 percent of Syrians lived in poverty (World Bank,

2017: 89). These financial burdens are including but are not limited to agricultural losses, displacement of households, and the price increase for basic goods by 300 percent (Al-Mahmoud, 2015). Regions within Syria have become more and more dependent on imports, as well as aid brought in by other countries. However, imports were decreased while the amount of regionally manufactured goods decreased, which led to a severe decline in exports. The total exports in Syria declined 92 percent to 631 million USD in just four years, while imports declined 73 percent from 17,348 million USD in 2011 to 4,654 million USD in 2015 (World Bank, 2017: 61). The extreme decline in imports and exports forced Syrians to become reliant on smuggled goods through supply chains and smuggling routes. Foreign aid was funneled in, but due to the corruption within different regions and the siege by armed groups and the regime, funds were rarely spent and distributed as intended.

Figure 3.8 Exports and Imports in Syria Between 2011 and 2015 (World Bank, 2017: 62)



Source: World Bank staff estimates.

*Regional Differences*

One common misconception is that Syria has one overarching economy and the issues are the same throughout all regions. Each region, whether the Kurdish region, Druze, Alawite coastal region, or areas taken over by ISIS and the regime are experiencing different parts of the war economy. Each region is currently in a different economic state due to the ‘territorial fragmentation’ which has divided areas which are under control of the regime: ISIS, Kurdish,

and by a collection of armed groups (Abboud, 2017: 93). Due to the instability of the conflict and constant fluctuation of control by armed groups, these territories are regularly changing.

The Kurdish region has dealt with most of the destruction from ISIS. As a result, their infrastructure and economy have suffered greatly. As the regional control of ISIS has dwindled, the Kurds have focused on the reconstruction of their economy and governance as they are attempting to become more economically independent. Due to the neutral position of the Druze, they have taken on more of a defensive role in the conflict and their economy. This region has put an emphasis on creating military checkpoints to ensure proper security. Therefore, the Druze are focusing more on security and ensuring that their region is protected, instead of stabilizing their economy.

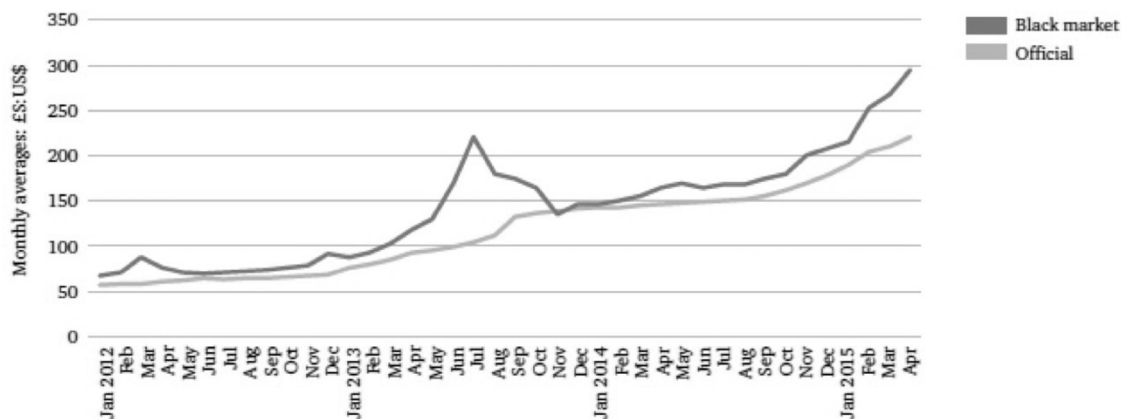
Within the Alawite coastal region, the two major cities, Latakia and Baniyas show how the conflict has impacted this region greatly by unveiling tensions (Khaddour, 2016: 9). Within Latakia, the economy revolves around trade with Alawites. However, due to the conflict, the geographic for economic exchange has shifted. This has led to the need to rely on “direct connections to regime figures—unmediated by public bureaucracy or state-owned enterprises—to access public goods” (Khaddour, 2016: 10). Although Latakia must rely on the regime to get access to goods, they have secured business and trade through the conflict. This is benefiting the regime greatly as they have increased their ability to become the decision-makers within the public and private sectors (Khaddour, 2016: 10). Baniyas, on the other hand, was traditionally economically dependent on trade of agriculture products. However, with growing sectarian tensions, markets eventually closed due to decreased sales (Khaddour, 2016: 10). The tensions between Sunnis and Alawites within this area has led to an economic crisis as markets close and sales diminish.

Despite other cities severely suffering from the conflict, Damascus has benefited from the current war economy and continues to function as a regular city, strongly participating within the formal and informal economy. Although the majority of the population within Syria is experiencing high levels of poverty, there are still regions and individuals benefiting from the war economy, mostly from the black market.

## Black Market

Syria's war economy is currently structured around the black market which includes human trafficking, child labor, supply chains, smuggling passes, and the illegal trade of oil. The black market, although not new to Syria, plays a major role in fueling the current war economy. This had led to increased corruption in the economy, which has benefited few and has become disastrous to many. The exchange rate is one of the few economic indicators that has been available within Syria since 2011 (Butter, 2015: 23). Within the black market, there has been a large amount of trading within Syria and countries surrounding it, such as Lebanon (Butter, 2015: 23). The exchange rate of the black market has gradually increased as the conflict has escalated. Figure 4.9 shows how from January 2012 to April 2015, the black market exchange rate with the USD grew from around 70 Syrian Pounds to 300 Syrian Pounds with fluctuations, in just three years (Butter, 2015: 24). Even though the official exchange rate within Syria was lower than the exchange rate for the black market, resources have been limited since the conflict began, so individuals are unable to receive goods using the official exchange rate. This forces Syrians and armed groups to participate in the black market, where they may have to pay extreme prices for necessities.

Figure 3.9 Black Market Exchange Rate, January 2012-April 2015 (Butter, 2015: 24)



Sources: Central Bank of Syria; Al-Watan newspaper, Damascus; syria-news web news agency.

### *Trafficking and Child Labor*

Since the conflict began in 2011, the use of individuals in the black market has increased substantially. The black market is most prevalent in the forms of human trafficking, kidnapping, forced labor, and child labor. Human trafficking, especially, has increased and played more of a prominent role within the black market and overall informal economy. Due to the violence and economic crisis with little to no regulation from the government throughout Syria, men, women, and children are being trafficked into Syria and forced into labor or sexual exploitation (U.S. Department of State, 2017).

Child labor has been a growing issue within the black market in Syria. The Child Labor Laws in Syria outlaw the ability for children to work before they turn 15. Due to the lack of regulation on this law, children are being forced to work in dreadful environments before the legal age. Syrian children are being forced to participate in the war economy through the recruitment and kidnapping by armed groups. This has resulted in many children becoming the breadwinners of their family. In 2017, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) estimated that thousands of Syrian children were involved in the informal economy (Al-Mur'y, 2016: 2). Combat is a common place for children throughout Syria. Pro-regime militias, armed groups, Free Syrian Army (FSA) and their affiliated groups, Kurdish forces, and ISIS are continuously recruiting boys and girls as "soldiers, human shields, suicide bombers, and executioners" (U.S. Department of State, 2017). As the economy continues to worsen, families are becoming more reliant on their children to work and provide for the family which has created terrible working conditions for children within Syria.

### *Supply Chains*

Supply chains connect different regions and countries surrounding Syria and are fueling the war economy by allowing armed groups and the regime to control trade, checkpoints, and border crossings. Although supply chains are a prominent factor within most countries, the supply chains within Syria have been taken over and controlled by armed groups and the regime. The import dependent economy has caused supply chains to become an essential factor for armed groups, the regime, and individuals within Syria. This is due to the lack of

resources and goods Syria has to offer their citizens and the corruption around the manufacturing and distribution of goods. The regime has attempted to influence the war by taking control of trade routes and different supply chains, which will give them a strategic advantage over armed groups while ensuring that the opposition groups are not acquiring goods.

However, checkpoints between cities allow armed groups to control civilian areas “under the pretext of security provision” (Abboud, 2017: 101). These checkpoints benefit armed groups in multiple ways, such as providing a revenue source through taxation and fees and providing areas the ability to recruit new members to support their cause.

In Aleppo, “the proliferation of checkpoints and their high-density structure enhance the interactions between combatants and civilians” (Abboud, 2017: 101). In 2014, there were 1,463 checkpoints, 35 percent of which were under the control of the regime (Abboud, 2017: 101). Border crossings are now occupied by armed groups who have created supply routes to collect goods and revenue. An example of a border crossing is Killis corridor or the Castello Road Supply Route (Abboud, 2017: 100). This crossing is the main source for the accumulation of humanitarian aid for the region, and civilian commodities, and is one of the most effective ways that rebel groups are acquiring supplies (Abboud, 2017: 100). Aleppo is also experiencing an impact from border crossing checkpoints and supply chains. These routes allow for armed groups to control taxation as well as smuggling, kidnapping, and the illegal trade of goods and services.

Supply chains are a major issue within Syria because it allows s armed groups to take control of the prices and fees of imported goods and services. . Armed groups and the regime use these channels to fuel the conflict and increase their effectiveness as fighters by procuring goods from outside of Syria, collecting taxes at border crossings and checkpoints (Abboud, 2017: 105). In the beginning, these supply routes were a way for civilians to gain access to goods and services not provided within specific regions of Syria due to the conflict. Over time, it has turned into a way to fuel the violence and allowed the regime and armed groups to benefit from these goods and aid being sent into Syria or even from citizens traveling across regional borders.

## *Smuggling Passes*

Smuggling passes were created in order to circulate goods and people. It is also used as a strategic advantage for armed groups who have control of the underground passes. These passes give armed groups an alternate route in order to avoid supply chains, checkpoints, and border crossings. In the case of Ghouta, there are only two entryways into the city and both were under control of either government forces or various insurgent groups. Underground tunnels were created to allow individuals and armed groups to bypass the insurgent and government forces. Not only did the tunnels serve as a way to bypass checkpoints, it also turned into a trade organization and supplemented exchange of licit and illicit goods (Bojicic-Dzelilovic, 2018: 56). These passes are very important when used correctly because they allow civilians access to goods and services which may not be available through supply chains. However, the trade systems are being used to the advantage of armed groups and provide a substantial amount of revenue for groups under control of the passes. This has led to “extreme food insecurity due to the limited supply and high prices of goods and the heightened vulnerability of the local population to the extraction strategies of the armed groups” (Bojicic-Dzelilovic, 2018: 57).

## *Oil Economy*

The once very prominent oil economy within Syria has turned into a major facet of the black market. Prior to the conflict, oil exports were a major part of Syria’s GDP. However, once the protests began, sanctions were placed on the exportation of oil from Syria, which decreased the overall sales and eventually led to the emergence of oil as a weapon. Since then, armed groups have become active participants in the oil economy and have seized areas with access to oil and gas and used the oil as profit for their cause. Oil fields were once under the control of Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham, which were set up through a stewardship of the Shari’a courts (Butter, 2015: 17). By 2013, ISIS and other armed groups began gaining control over oil fields which played a major role in the conflict between armed groups (Butter, 2015: 17). According to the World Bank and as shown in Figure 4.10, “in areas outside government

control, non-state groups have continued to extract and process oil and gas. Estimates from November 2014 suggest that ISIS was producing, refining, and selling as much as 50,000 barrels of crude oil per day. Another estimate from October 2015 puts the number at between 34,000 and 40,000 barrels a day” (World Bank, 2017). Due to high exchange rates, armed groups were able to sell the oil at outrageous prices in order to fund their terrorist activities.

Figure 3.10 Regional Control of Oil Fields in Syria (World Bank, 2017: 57)

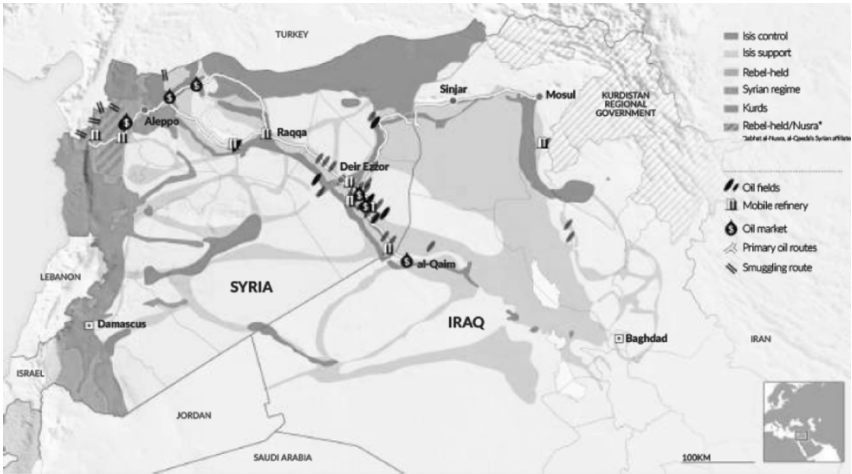


Figure 3.11 Sample of ISIS Crude Oil Production (World Bank, 2017: 58)

**Table B2.2.1: Sample of ISIS Crude Oil Production**

Oilfield	Est. production (barrels per day)	Price (\$/barrel)
al-Tanak	11,000-12,000	\$40
al-Omar	6,000-9,000	\$45
al-Tabqa	1,500-1,800	\$20
al-Kharata	1,000	\$30
al-Shoula	650-800	\$30
Deiro	600-1,000	\$30
al-Taim	400-600	\$40
al-Rashid	200-300	\$25

*Source: Erika Solomon, Robin Kwong and Steven Bernard, at Financial Times, February 29, 2016.*

## *Funding*

Through outside actors, private donors, middlemen, and multiple revenue streams, funding of the informal economy is extremely hard to track but has a major impact on the conflict and economy within Syria (Keatinge, 2014: 54). Without the revenue streams which contribute to funding, armed groups would not have the ability to control and seize most areas, especially not supply chains. Funding is one of the most important weapons for any armed group and continues to contribute to the success of the occupation around Syria. The groups which are well-funded “can generally act independently, progressing their own or their donors’ ideology and developing patronage networks, particularly across the Middle East” (Keatinge, 2014: 54).

First and foremost, it is important to define the different types of funds for armed groups present within Syria. According to Al-Mahmoud in *The War Economy in the Syrian Conflict*, there are three sources of funding which these armed groups are relying on:

1. Armed groups who can self-finance themselves by occupying and managing different regional economies. In these regional economies they impose taxes and trade public resources, such as oil, gas, and crops (Al-Mahmoud, 2015).

2. Armed groups with external funding consisting of secret transactions from international actors and institutions, as well as “undeclared” public and international funding (Al-Mahmoud, 2015).

3. Armed groups using the humanitarian aid and international assistance intended for cities and regions for their own use (Al-Mahmoud, 2015).

Due to the various forms of accumulating revenue, armed groups are pushing towards economic corruption and the informal economy. The lack of regulation on humanitarian aid and international assistance has created an opportunity for armed groups and the regime to intercept distribution and use it for themselves. Even armed groups who can self-finance are contributing to economic corruption as they are frequently creating outrageous taxes and trading public resources which leave civilians who are already lacking necessities, with less resources, goods, and services.

Outside actors, such as private donors from other countries, play a major role in the conflict and economy within Syria by pushing individuals and armed groups to give in to their agendas. “The key sources of rebel financing and support include state sponsorship from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, the West, and Israel, strongly supported by private donors from across the Middle East” (Keatinge, 2014: 55). The revenue funneled into Syria brings in overly priced goods and services, weapons for armed groups, supplies, and fighters. (Keatinge, 2014:53). The influence of private donors has increased as support has turned from basic humanitarian aid, to actions attempting to change the course of the conflict by outside actors. Private donors frequently aim to fund armed groups which tend to lean more towards an extremist side in order to influence the conflict (Keatinge, 2014: 53).

It is important to consider the constant competition of armed groups with the regime and the funding they are receiving from Russia, Iran, and other private donors. “Finance is an existential determinant of success as it creates the ‘enabling’ environment that allows states to arm themselves and opposition groups to mount a credible, threatening, planned and organized strategy” (Keatinge, 2014: 54). Armed groups are forced to find financial funding through outside actors or regional activities such as, supply chains, checkpoints, border crossings, smuggling passes, and human trafficking. If these groups are not able to find the funding to match the Assad regime, they have no chance of prevailing in the fight. The Assad regime is currently receiving “supplies of fighters, weapons, spare parts, and finance from Russia and Iran” (Keatinge, 2014: 53). Russia claims that they “lack leverage” over Assad and they do not have an alliance with Syria. However, Russia is continuously sending supplies to Syria to ensure the victory of the Assad regime (Allison, 2013: 799). Donors contributing to the conflict are not always attempting to influence the war. There are regional donors that are attempting to alienate the conflict by funneling in humanitarian aid and work. However, due to the lack of regulation and current corruption from the war economies, the aid is rarely distributed properly.

Corruption has played a prominent role within Syria’s war economy. The most common forms of corruption in Syria are the misuse of humanitarian aid, funding based on different agendas, bribery, smuggling, and the overall abuse of power. These avenues of corruption have

fueled the war economy during the conflict and have pushed unbearable financial expenses onto Syrians, which has caused very high levels of poverty. Corruption within Syria directly correlates with the lack of political institutions and the lack of government regulation, which has greatly weakened economic growth as well as destabilized the economy within Syria.

### *Conclusion*

The current war economy within Syria is being fueled by the informal economy. The lack of resources, public goods, and services have pushed individuals towards the informal economy, specifically the black market. Regions have become import dependent and are experiencing the repercussions from the continuous violence for the past eight years. Human trafficking, child labor, supply chains, smuggling passes, and the illegal trade of oil have fueled the black market as funding continues for the Assad regime and armed groups. These groups are able to continue to accumulate revenue through outside actors, regional checkpoints, and international humanitarian aid and assistance.

As the conflict continues, one of the biggest challenges will be figuring out a way to incentivize people to transfer from the informal economy towards the formal economy. The biggest factor will be ensuring there is an established government to regulate economic activity and find ways to diminish and over time, attempt to eliminate, the illegal economic activity within Syria. The formal economy needs to have short and long term goals as Syria attempts to stabilize the economy. The most important issues will be ensuring individuals have proper training and access to goods within the public sector. For now, Syria's economy is too reliant on the informal economy and as long as this is the case, they will not be able to fully stabilize their economy.

## **Gap Analysis**

As outlined in the preceding sections of this report, the Syrian conflict has resulted in an enormous number of displaced persons seeking shelter either in different parts of the country or outside of Syria entirely. Whether for fear of safety or an inability to provide for their families, Syrians have left their homes in droves searching for a better life. This mass exodus has strained the capacities of host-communities and has left a significant portion of the displaced population without access to desperately-needed aid. Host-countries such as Turkey have begun deregistering refugees and the threat of refoulement is becoming an ever-increasing reality.

Given the aforementioned, it is the intent of this section to outline the difficulties faced by IDPs and refugees and to identify those aspects of the crisis which must first be addressed in order for Syria's displaced population to return to their homes. Thus, the section begins with a description of the refugee and IDP situation, and is followed by ten main concerns currently faced by the Syrian population: Ethno-Sectarian Divisions, Regional Differences, Governance Capabilities, Security and Protection, Vulnerable Populations and Human Rights, Destruction of Physical Infrastructure, Lack of Healthcare, "Brain-Drain" and Lack of Economic Opportunity.

### *Refugee and IDP Situation*

Syrian refugees and IDPs face severe difficulties once they are forced to leave their homes. Camps are overcrowded and lack sufficient resources to support the enormous number of displaced persons seeking aid. Those lucky enough to make it into the camps face dire circumstances as a lack of safe drinking water and poor sanitary conditions lead to disease and healthcare is insufficient to meet demand. Those not admitted to the camps seek shelter in informal urban settlements, which lack healthcare altogether. This leads to competition over scarce resources with the host-community, stirring animosity against the displaced population. Further issues include a cessation of registration and a lack of documentation, both of which affect a displaced person's ability to receive aid as well as their ability to find employment. As the need to support their families continues, the displaced persons are increasingly drawn to

the informal economies where a lack of legal protections exposes them to such things as child labor and human trafficking. Finally, dependent upon the host country's laws, unregistered refugees might also be subject to refoulement. Those living in the host-country "illegally" are then forced to limit their mobility due to fears of arbitrary arrest and refoulement, further impeding their ability to access aid services. Overall the situation of refugees and IDPs is dire, leading to a pressing need for resettlement. However, the following issues must first be addressed in order for the displaced Syrian population to return to their homes.

### *Ongoing Ethno-Sectarianism*

One of the toughest issues within Syria is the prevalence of ethno-sectarian divides which permeate virtually all aspects of daily life. From sectarian-based violence to favoritism in aid distribution, access to nearly all life-sustaining resources (food, water, shelter) are dependent on one's ethnicity or religion.

Sectarian-based violence has become a main feature of the Syrian conflict. While the Assad regime has been accused of ethnic cleansing through Arabization policies, so too have the Kurds due to their re-Kurdification efforts. Sunni-majority areas are regularly targeted by the regime's barrel bombs, and the Alawite and Druze populations fear reprisal attacks should Assad ever fall from power. Though ISIS no longer occupies any physical territory, their ideology remains and poses a potential threat to anyone who does not adhere to their particular interpretation of Islam. Regardless of which religion, sect, or ethnicity a person belongs to, life in Syria is dangerous due to ongoing sectarian-based violence.

Favoritism is another huge issue facing the Syrian population. Despite the large number of aid agencies active across the country, those most in need may struggle to gain access to the services provided due to their religious beliefs or ethnicity. For example, the regime might encircle an area which is known to be predominantly Sunni and prevent aid from reaching those inside in an effort to weaken the opposition. Alternately, they might simply reserve the much-needed aid for regime-supporters, thereby using access to life-sustaining resources as a tactic of war. The ways in which ethno-sectarianism plays into the daily lives of Syrians are innumerable. Therefore, any policy regarding the future of the region which aims to repatriate Syrian refugees and IDPs must address the issue of ethno-sectarianism.

## *Regional Differences*

Due to the aforementioned ethno-sectarian divides, the country is essentially split into four main territories: the Alawite coastal region, the Kurdish region, the Druze region and the Sunni opposition territory. In comparison to the rest of the country, the Alawite coastal region is a relatively stable and wealthy area under regime control, while the Sunni opposition-controlled region is marred by fighting with damaged infrastructure and food and water shortages. These stark regional differences not only highlight ethno-sectarian driven inequalities, but further entrench them by increasing tensions between the regions. It is therefore of utmost importance that any policy regarding the future of Syria and the return of its refugees and IDPs address this issue.

## *Governance Capabilities*

Along with Regional differences come varied governance capabilities. The Alawite coastal region, for example, is run under the tight control of President Bashar al-Assad's various intelligence apparatuses, whereas the rest of the country makes use of local and regional councils to provide for law and order. Though these councils enjoy a fair amount of recognition from their communities, they are often targeted by the regime as they directly undermine the President's power. Policies on the future placement of refugees and IDPs cannot ignore the impact of varied governance capabilities across the country.

## *Security and Protection*

The country's varied governance capabilities become particularly salient when discussing the protection and security of its citizens. While the regime may run a stable government, its people lack basic protections from discrimination and targeting by the regime, such as the many documented cases of disappearances and Arabization efforts. Furthermore, portions of the population are still subjected to indiscriminate barrel bombings, undermining any reconstruction efforts by local councils. Resettlement of refugees or IDPs cannot begin until these threats have been mitigated.

### *Vulnerable Populations and Human Rights*

The issues of vulnerable populations and human rights go hand-in-hand with security and protection. A lack of effective governance nurtures an environment in which human rights violations flourish. Human trafficking, to which refugee women and children are particularly vulnerable, thrives in an environment which has no mechanism to deter or hold accountable those who take part in it. As a result, women are forced into domestic servitude or trafficked for sex, and children face child marriage, labor or are forced to become soldiers in various militias. Furthermore, crimes such as ethnic cleansing, unfair resource distribution, and collective punishment must be addressed in order to make Syria safe for refugees and IDPs to return to.

### *Destruction of Infrastructure*

Damage to physical infrastructure is one of the more obvious obstacles to the resettlement of refugees and IDPs. Camps, settlements and last resort sites provide only a limited amount of life-sustaining services/resources and are therefore only temporary solutions. More permanent housing must be established as a significant amount thereof was either completely destroyed or sustained structural damage during the fighting. In order to rebuild these and other damaged infrastructure, serviceable roads will be needed as well. Of course, hospitals and clinics are needed to treat the ill and injured, schools must be rebuilt to educate youth and energy is required to power it all.

In addition to physical infrastructure, a less visible but equally damaged aspect of the country is its organizational infrastructure. This refers to the way in which the various institutions structure personnel activities in order to accomplish their organizational goals. For example, a town's organizational infrastructure might include a mayor/council and public services such as education, utilities, and emergency services such as police and fire. Such structures must be reestablished in order to regain function once the physical infrastructure has been rebuilt. Both physical and organizational infrastructure must be in place if Syria's population is expected to return, and both must be addressed in any policy aiming to do so.

## *Lack of Healthcare*

Syria's lacking healthcare system stands out as an especially poignant issue for returning Syrians. The country as a whole lacks adequate facilities, staff and supplies to properly treat a population in need. Among the many services which are either unavailable or extremely limited are chronic disease treatment, reproductive healthcare, geriatric medicine, preventative healthcare, mental healthcare and emergency/trauma care. As a large portion of the population has not been immunized in past years, there is also an increase in communicable diseases and an extremely limited quantity of drugs with which to treat them.

As explained in the previous section, part of the issue is damaged infrastructure, to include facilities such as hospitals or clinics and pharmaceutical production facilities. In addition, there is an extremely limited amount of supplies along with intermittent electricity which further complicate treatment. Finally, Syria's medical staff has been severely depleted due to intentional targeting and "brain-drain" (discussed below).

In all, the healthcare system in Syria is unable to provide adequate care to the population currently living within its borders and a return of any number of refugees will further strain this already overburdened system. It is for this reason that any policy considering the return of Syrian refugees or IDPs must address the availability of healthcare.

### *"Brain-Drain"*

The term "brain-drain" here refers to the emigration of Syrian individuals who possess the expertise and education necessary to rebuild the country's decimated infrastructure. These individuals are more likely to be accepted by host countries as their chances for supporting themselves in a new environment are higher than those without education or expertise in their field. This means they are often the first to leave and the last to return.

Doctors and other medical personnel are a classic example. These individuals are more likely to be granted asylum in a foreign country and are thus quicker to leave their war-torn homes. Once they become established in their new homes, there is less incentive to return to the country from which they fled. The result is a lack of trained personnel to maintain or re-establish essential services.

Of course, trained medical personnel are only a portion of the human capital lost to more stable countries. Other essential personnel include lawyers, engineers and educators. In addition to a lack of qualified personnel to repair all the damaged physical infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals, homes and roads, there exists a vacuum where previously organizational infrastructure existed. Local and regional councils for example, struggle to maintain a hierarchical structure leading to inefficiencies in aid distribution among other things. These councils require experienced members to properly lead their communities.

“Brain-drain” affects not only current efforts to maintain and rebuild communities, but also the future of the country itself. A lack of educators at every level affects the population’s opportunities for advancement leading to a self-perpetuating cycle of skills deficits. Without proper education, future generations will struggle with the same lack of a skilled workforce.

Given the serious implication of “brain-drain” and the widespread effect thereof, it is reasonable to expect any regional policy, which seeks to return the Syrian population to their original residences, to address this issue.

### *Lack of Economic Opportunity*

In addition to the aforementioned issues, returning Syrians also face a lack of economic opportunity, impacting various aspects of life within the country. Extensive damage to physical infrastructure has led to rampant unemployment at a time when inflation is skyrocketing, trapping the majority of the population in abject poverty.

Predictably, the lack of legitimate means of supporting their families has driven many to participate in the informal economy. This system, however, is rife with issues from corruption to human trafficking. Child labor is on the rise as adults are unable to find work and child marriages are becoming more and more prevalent.

Alternately, those desperate enough may decide to join one of the many armed groups whose illicit activities bring in a significant amount of revenue. The danger here is having to align oneself with a particular group and thereby becoming a target of the aforementioned sectarian violence.

Either way, Syria’s refugees and IDPs are faced with the choice between perpetual dependence on humanitarian aid, and becoming involved in potentially dangerous and illegal

activities, neither of which are reasonable solutions to the current predicament. As such, any policy addressing the return of Syrians to their original communities must deal with the lack of economic opportunity.

## **Policy Recommendations**

Regarding the resettlement of Syrian refugees and IDPs, this Task Force has come to the following conclusions:

1. We stand behind the UN's policy of non-refoulement.
  - All refugees should return to Syria of their own volition.
2. We urge immediate third-country resettlement for those refugees currently in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.
  - We ask the UN to urge Gulf countries to assist in the resettlement of refugees
3. We support the establishment of a neutral "safe-zone" in northern Syria in addition to a small UN peacekeeping force to secure the population of Idlib.
4. We encourage the UNHRC to continue investigating human rights violations in Syria and to hold accountable those who perpetrate such crimes.
5. We recommend the UNDP provide economic, governance and reconstruction support in order to rebuild and maintain critical infrastructure sectors within the country.

Given these conclusions, this task force recommends the following policies which are organized first into refugee concerns and IDP considerations then into issues which must be addressed in order for refugees and IDPs to return home safely.

### ***Refugee Concerns***

This Task Force *strongly* recommends third-country resettlement of at least two-thirds of the refugees currently in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq within the next one to five years and urges the assistance of Gulf countries in achieving this goal. In addition, this Task Force makes the following country-specific recommendations:

#### ***I. Lebanon***

The Task Force recommends that:

- The UNHCR increase humanitarian aid to poor host-communities to alleviate the most desperate poverty\*\*\*\*

- The UNDP increase development funds in order to alleviate the strains of Lebanon's overburdened infrastructure.
- The UN pressure Lebanon to ratify the 1951 UN Refugee Convention in an effort to prevent refoulement.
- The UNHCR resume registration of all refugees and halt all deregistration activities.

## *II. Jordan*

The Task Force recommends that:

- The UNHCR increase humanitarian aid to refugees in order to alleviate the most destitute forms of poverty such as lack of food and clean drinking water.\*\*\*
- The UNICEF provide refugees increased educational opportunities in order to reduce the strain on the Jordanian school system.
- The UNDP increase aid to host communities in order to relieve tensions between refugees and their host communities.
- The UN pressure Jordan to adopt the 1951 UN Refugee Convention in order to secure refugee rights to housing, employment, education, freedom of movement and public relief assistance.
- The UN pressure the Jordanian government to abide by its non-refoulement agreement especially as it concerns vulnerable populations such as women, children and injured/disabled persons.
- The WHO increase healthcare services to refugees residing outside of camps.
- The UN Economic and Social Council pressure the Jordanian government to increase the number of work-permits issued to refugees in order to reduce participation in the informal economy.

## *III. Iraq*

The Task Force recommends that:

- The UNHCR increase distribution of humanitarian aid such as food and safe drinking water, particularly in Kurdish territory which has seen the greatest influx of SYrian refugees.

- The UNHCR increase education and social services to those living outside of formal refugee camps.

- The WHO increase aid to the Iraqi medical sector in order to relieve stress on the overburdened system.

#### *IV. Turkey*

The Task Force recommends that:

- the UNHCR distribute more humanitarian aid to refugees not currently residing in camps in order to ease the burden on Turkish nationals and relieve economic stress on the country \*\*\*

- The UNHCR pressure Turkey to reopen all refugee registration facilities
- The UNESCO fund educational programs aimed at cultural assimilation in order to better integrate Syrian refugees into Turkish society.

- The UN's International Labor Organization (ILO) furnish work permits to registered refugees in order to integrate them into the Turkish job market.

#### ***IDP Considerations***

The Task Force recommends that:

- The UNHCR increase distribution of humanitarian aid such as food, water, shelter and sanitation aid beyond refugee camps to include informal settlements and last-resort shelters.

- The WHO increase training and supply of healthcare individuals and facilities.
- The UN pressure the Syrian regime to allow aid workers safe passage across the country including access to besieged areas.

- The UNICEF increase outreach to include education of children in camps as well as in informal settlements and last-resort shelters.

- The UNHCR increase assistance for documentation retrieval
- The UNSC establish neutral zones for humanitarian aid with sufficient international backing to deter regime attacks, especially in opposition territories such as Idlib

#### *Ongoing Ethno-Sectarianism*

The Task Force recommends that:

- The UN pressure the Syrian regime to expand government participation in all regions to include all religions, sects and ethnicities in order to restore their faith in Syria's state capacity and prevent a possible ISIS resurgence.\*\*\*

- The UN Security Council aid in negotiating a peace agreement between Turkey and the Kurds.

- The UNHCR monitor sectarian tensions in order to prevent the eruption of violence.

- The UN pressure the Syrian government to legislate protections for religious freedoms.

- The Syrian government implement socio-educational projects to build cohesion between various sects and ethnicities.

### *Regional Differences*

The Task Force recommends that:

- The UNHCR expand services in underserved regions in order to help balance the quality of life from region to region.

- The UNHRC monitor rebel-held territories for human rights violations and hold accountable those who perpetrate these crime.

- The UN continue pressuring the Regime to allow humanitarian aid into all areas across the country, including besieged areas.

### *Governance Capabilities*

The Task Force recommends that:

- UNDP support local and provincial councils so they may stay in place during and post reconstruction to ensure public safety and provide other public services\*\*\*\*

- The UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) support increased women's participation in governmental affairs due to their superior capabilities in negotiating local ceasefires and distributing aid across security checkpoints. \*\*\*

- The UN Democracy Fund (UNDF) and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) assist in the establishment of fair and transparent elections at all levels of governance

- The UNDP establish /re-establish training programs for management of social institutions

### *Security and Protection*

The Task Force recommends that:

- The UNSC establish a peacekeeping force to ensure the safety and security of all civilians regardless of religious or political affiliation.
  - Such a peacekeeping force aid in maintaining the safety of aid workers and medical personnel operating across all regions, especially in UN-declared besieged areas.
  - Such a peacekeeping force provide security to protect key energy, transportation and water infrastructure, as well as the the local and provincial councils that run them.
  - The UNDP aid in the reestablishment of local police forces and courts in order to hold accountable perpetrators of violent crimes including those of a sexual nature.

### *Vulnerable Populations and Human Rights*

The Task Force recommends that:

- The ICJ prosecute perpetrators of human rights violations.
- The UNHCR expand education of refugees on the dangers of human trafficking.
- The UNHCR provide increased aid to vulnerable populations to stave off malnutrition and starvation, and to prevent issues of child labor and/or child marriage.

### *Destruction of Infrastructure*

The Task Force recommends that:

- The UNDP govern the distribution of electricity, prioritizing healthcare facilities and shelter of vulnerable populations.\*\*\*
- The UNDP begin reconstruction efforts with the rebuilding of housing in areas which are most stable.\*\*\*
- The UNDP prioritize maintenance and repair of water pumping stations in order to ensure uninterrupted flow.

- The UNDP install rainwater collection tanks throughout the coastal region in order to alleviate the stresses of water scarcity in agriculture.
- The FAO of the UN fill the gap in agricultural input by providing aid in the form of seeds, fertilizer and pesticides to farmers.
- The FAO of the UN re-establish veterinary services whose vital services protect livestock from disease.
- The UNDP assist in the repair and maintenance of current irrigation systems and eventual replacement of outdated irrigation infrastructure in order to conserve and prevent the continued degradation of water supplies.
- The UNDP prioritize the restoration of serviceable roads in order to facilitate the movement of aid and reconstruction supplies.

### *Lack of Healthcare*

The Task Force recommends that:

- The WHO increase distribution of hygiene products especially to females.
- The WHO expand healthcare in unofficial settlements and last-resort sites.
- The UNDP prioritize Hospitals and clinics in energy distribution.
- The WHO push for vaccinations/immunizations especially among those living in crowded areas.
- The WHO increase hygiene and sanitation assistance in crowded areas such as camps and informal settlements.

### *“Brain-Drain”*

The Task Force recommends that:

- The WHO introduce updated medical curriculum for all medical personnel working within Syria in order to build skill and expertise.
- UNICEF assist in the expansion of educational opportunities for both children and adults.
- The UN Economic and Social Council subsidize the employment of professionals in order to incentivize their return.

### *Lack of Economic Opportunity*

The Task Force recommends that:

- The UN Economic and Social Council assist the Syrian regime in protecting economic and social institutions from becoming ineffective or corrupt in order to limit informal economic activity.\*\*\*
- The UN Economic and Social Council provide funding to regions in order to promote and train citizens to work within the formal economy, i.e., bankers, construction workers, teachers, sect.
- The UN Economic and Social Council assist the Syrian regime in creating short and long term goals to gradually transition its system from the informal economy to the formal economy.

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