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Building Resilience in Syria
Assessing fragilities and strengthening positive coping mechanisms

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Acronyms

AA	Autonomous Administration
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GONGO	Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organizations
HDP	Humanitarian-Development-Peace
HLP	Housing, Land, and Property
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HTS	Hay'et Tahrir Al-Sham
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organizations
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
LACs	Local Administrative Councils
LAUs	Local Administrative Units
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NES	Northeast Syria
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NWS	Northwest Syria
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
RCC	Raqqa Civil Council
SDC	Syrian Democratic Council
SDF	Syria Democratic Forces
SDP	Sport for Development and Peace
SLDP	The Syrian Legal Development Programme
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
USD	United States Dollars

Executive Summary

Communities across Syria are struggling to find a pathway out of fragility, despite decreasing levels of violence and a decade of international humanitarian response. As a result, policymakers and practitioners are increasingly looking to resilience-building and humanitarian early recovery as a way of reducing both immediate and protracted basic needs, and to enable communities to cope with prospective future shocks.

This report uses a resilience capacities framework to identify dominant fragilities, risks, and crises across Syria, and to assess political and practical obstacles to delivering principled aid. The aim of the research is to explore the coping and resilience mechanisms that communities are enacting. We draw on extensive primary and secondary data from the LSE-based Mapping Syria project across three main areas of control in Syria: the northeast, the northwest, and government-controlled areas. This approach enables us to analyse economic, social, security, and ecological dimensions of fragility, as well as communities' resilience capacities – within the context of local power dynamics – and includes granular analysis for selected districts in each area of control.

We develop a framework for a theory of change to strengthen resilience in Syria, and present comprehensive recommendations for operational and programmatic area-based activities to support and transform resilience capacities.

Findings

Local contexts and power dynamics

The three main three areas of control share several institutional commonalities, despite varying dynamics: public mistrust of the state and quasi-state governance structures; increased levels of dominance of armed actors over most local governance structures; and shrinking space for independent civic actors.

In government-controlled areas, despite the dominance of the Syrian government and its intelligence agencies, there are noticeable variations in contexts and dynamics. Contested areas that went back to the control of the government, for example, are the least resilient and most excluded from support. The power of the intelligence agencies also appears to be weaker in the countryside. The lifting of government subsidies and the relaxing of central planning is weakening the government's grip at the local level in vital sectors, particularly in the agriculture sector, and is opening up new spaces for independent action and interventions.

In some areas like Sweida, the authority of traditional community leaders and religious figures is increasing, which has transformed them into the main intermediaries operating between the local population and the state.

In the Northwest of Syria there also considerable variations between the HTS-controlled Idlib, where the civil society-led health sector succeeded in filling important space, and areas controlled by Turkey-backed armed groups, such as Northern Aleppo, where there is public mistrust towards the Turkey-backed local administrative councils despite their provision of services, and where the uncontested authority of traditional religious figures has created a hostile environment for women and women-led initiatives.

Within the Northeast of Syria, the dynamics are particularly different in the Arab-majority areas, mainly al-Raqqa and Deir al-Zour, where tension between the Kurdish-dominated authorities and the Arab-majority population is aggravating all dimensions of fragility in the area.

Dimensions of fragility

The following is our assessment of dimensions of fragility across economic, security and ecological dimensions.

Economic Dimension:

Severe electricity outages, scarcity of cooking gas, and water shortages are common in all areas, in addition to the lack of access to the formal labour market.

In government-controlled areas, average wages are too low to cover escalating costs of living. Working conditions are average for public workers but are also low in the informal private sector. Economic deterioration and lack of jobs continue to drive some people into illicit activities and to push doctors and other skilled workers into leaving the country.

In opposition-controlled Northwest Syria (Northern Aleppo), housing conditions have deteriorated and electricity infrastructure has been destroyed. Access to cooking gas is poor. Most families depend on private trucks to buy drinking water. These challenges are even greater in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. A large share of households, especially displaced families, are heavily dependent on international aid to cover their basic needs.

The decent job index is estimated to be very low and IDPs are almost completely excluded from the jobs market, which is becoming increasingly militarized.

In Al-Raqqa, the area is struggling to cope with waves of IDPs and returnees, many of whom now live in unfinished buildings. Large amounts of electricity, water, and sewage infrastructure are destroyed. There is a strong reliance on humanitarian aid for delivering basic goods. The agriculture sector faces enormous challenges, such as the recent drought, severe shortage of fodder, destruction of irrigation systems, and the absence of a strategic national agricultural plan. The Autonomous Administration is the largest employer in the area, where nepotism and bribery are key to getting a job.

Social Dimension:

In government-controlled areas, discrimination against IDPs remains. Women have entered many new economic activities, but the systemic discrimination against them continues and they suffer from a lack of protection mechanisms and unaccommodating working environments. The politicisation of the distribution of humanitarian aid is more apparent in government-controlled areas than in other areas.

Ethnic-based discrimination by the local authorities against Kurds is common in Northwest Syria, especially in Afrin. The region suffers from widespread nepotism. Public distrust in legal entities pushes people to seek support from corrupt military and security agencies or from local leaders to resolve their disputes.

In Al-Raqqa, there is growing discrimination by the local authorities against the Arab majority, who feel excluded even from education, leading to high school dropout. Because of tribalism and patriarchy, women still face discrimination and exclusion. Most people resort to nepotism and bribery to solve their problems.

Security Dimension:

In government-controlled areas, despite the decrease in conflict-related violence, the culture of using violence to resolve disputes is growing, and so is domestic violence and crime. Northwest Syria is very fragmented and unstable, as some areas are still contested. Tensions between host communities and IDPs are growing. Domestic violence has also increased, with a surge in early marriage cases.

In Al-Raqqa the tension between the authorities and the high number of frustrated and unemployed young men is increasing the risk of violent extremism.

Ecological Dimension:

Environmental fragilities, although severe, are not prioritised by any of the authorities across Syria. The agriculture sector faces grave environmental challenges, including drought, soil salinisation, and desertification. At the same time, farming lands in parts of the countryside that were deserted due to violence have better conditions and more water, but are unfortunately abandoned.

Many factors have fed into deforestation, including wildfires, illegal logging, and military operations. Most areas endure water depletion. The destruction of waste management infrastructure and deterioration services has led to the spread of uncontrolled burning and dumping.

Resilience capacities

Syrians have exhausted the coping mechanisms that they resorted to in the first five years of the conflict, such as spending their savings and selling their assets. They are adopting an array of mechanisms to mitigate the negative impact of conflict. Some of these risks have a cascading negative impact, such as taking children out of school, logging, and over-drilling wells. Most of the strategies and mechanisms adopted to face the multiple concurrent shocks are relevant for building stabilisation capacity; less is done to improve the adaptation capacity and much less to achieve a transformation capacity, as we set out below.

Stabilization Capacity:

A high number of families depend on external remittances and humanitarian aid, leading to unsustainable dependency on external support. To cut cost, many households are taking children out of schools and not seeking medical treatment when needed.

Many families had no choice but to re-locate to another area to escape violence. Most still cannot go back to their homes and land. Some have made only minimal repairs to their homes.

Some families cope with the lack of electricity by using small generators or batteries, buying electricity from private companies, and depending on solar-generated energy. These options, however, are beyond the reach of most families. Many youths continue to leave the country, leading to the depletion of human resources, and some of those who stay are involved in illegal activities.

Women's labour force participation has increased in all areas, and all areas have witnessed a growing of civic voluntarism culture despite continued attacks on civic space by most of the authorities.

Adaptation Capacity:

Shortages of electricity, fuel, and gas necessitated rational consumption and an increase in the use of sustainable energy sources in all areas. The positive shift in some farmers' working practices, such as the use of organic fertilizers, has enhanced their resilience. Demand for skilled vocational labour is growing and leading to a shift in the labour market structure towards more productive activities, although training is not widely available and wages are low. The role of civil society in providing social services like education is becoming vital in all studied areas.

Transformation Capacity:

The growing impact of civil actors and their emphasis on transparency and accountability is impacting other actors, and is positively affecting labour market conditions and the distribution of humanitarian aid. Most areas are witnessing a more empowered private sector with less dependency on local authorities, especially in terms of energy and market prices. Remote working has provided new livelihood opportunities for skilled workers to access the global job market.

Across all studied areas, there is a gradual transformation of gender roles. More women are becoming the main breadwinner in their households and are taking on jobs that are traditionally male dominated.

Obstacles and opportunities in delivering resilience programs

The process of delivering the support to strengthen resilience is as important as the outcome itself. It is often undermined by several issues, such as:

Navigating the delicate political dynamics. Politics — international, national, and local — came up in most of the interviews as a key obstacle to sustainable and principled delivery of assistance. Building resilience programming requires a degree of coordination with the authorities in charge, especially in sectors such as health, education, and agriculture. But it is often becoming a big issue due to the donors' red lines in dealing with the governing authorities in each area in Syria. The implementing partners end up playing the role of interlocutors between the donor countries and the relevant authorities. While such a role is important, it also adds a burden to these organisations, which are not designed to play such a quasi-political role.

In the last few years, all Syrian areas have witnessed new emerging spaces and opportunities for interventions at the local level that are more independent from the control of the governing authority. Even in government-controlled areas, the control of the central government at the local level has been eroding. For example, the lifting of subsidies freed farmers from the strong control the government used to have on the agriculture sector and its associations. These open spaces at the local level are getting occupied, in part, by UN agencies, International Non-Governmental Organizations, and local civil society.

Procurement and vetting processes face varying challenges across the areas of control in Syria. Difficulties in transferring funds and the government-controlled exchange rate are big obstacles. Also, many of the most empowered and competitive suppliers in government-controlled areas are regime cronies. In northeast areas, local civil society organizations complain that the opportunities made available through international organizations' procurement often go to suppliers linked to the SDF.

The most-used methods of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are borrowed from the humanitarian sector and are not very suitable for resilience building programs, which take longer time to show results. Some of the M&E mechanisms are not independent.

Lack of coordinated collective donors' response and lack of clarity as to what classifies as 'resilience-building' and 'early recovery' are some of the common complaints by implementing partners.

There is a degree of imbalance in support between different areas. This is due to donor over-reliance on accessibility rather than actual needs, and on the inability to identify the right local implementing partners, and the political and social dynamics of de facto authorities.

Syrian civil society in all areas plays a key role in building resilience, yet a number of issues limit its transformative resilience capacity: hostility and manipulation attempts by the authorities; shortage of funding; a focus on ad hoc, short-term solutions and rapid emergency responses; poor communication skills and coordination mechanisms; and weak institutional capacities.

Recommendations

Developing the theory of change and recommendations for resilience-building operations

Through answering the scoping questions of our report, we develop a theory of change for resilience building in Syria, including defining its goal, targeted beneficiaries and areas and the key sectors. We translate this to two levels of recommendations, one aiming mainly at operational design and another area-based programmes-focused recommendation.

From the operational perspective, we stress the importance of strengthening all types of resilience capacity (stabilization, adaptation, and transformation) evenly. We also advocate accommodating the timescale required for projects to generate an outcome in strengthening resilience by delivering medium- and long-term programs that enable the communities to gradually overcome their crises and supports them to interrupt the negative coping mechanisms that provide immediate solutions to a crisis, but cascade negative impacts.

We propose selection criteria for choosing and prioritising areas of support, such as areas with high societal impact on their surroundings; areas hosting large numbers of IDPs and returnees; areas that used to be contested areas; areas with potential for economic growth; and areas where tension with the authority could escalate and lead to shockwaves.

Besides supporting individuals and communities, we recommend that support should also target institutions in order to achieve sustainable improvement in resilience capacities. We suggest that targeted institutions could include: independent civil society, grassroots-led labour unions such as the emerging independent farmers' associations, local administrative units, and small and micro independent businesses.

We also identify key sectors to prioritise in delivering resilience-building assistance that addresses fragilities and strengthens the resilience of people and communities. These are:

- The agriculture sector, which checks many boxes in that it improves adaptation capacity by offering a decent source of livelihood; improves food security and food diversity; and could have a positive environmental impact. Agricultural development also could tick the box of the HDP nexus if delivered in an inclusive, conflict-sensitive manner.

- The education sector, including support to school education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and remote learning.

- Sport for Development and Peace (SDP), which could contribute to harmony and peace between groups of different ethnic backgrounds, promote socially inclusive identities, and reduce symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.

- Business development, with a focus on emerging women-led enterprises and independent businesses that are not linked to the corrupt ruling authorities.

- The health sector, which could include providing training and scholarships for medical students, medical equipment, and online professional courses for practitioners focusing on mental health issues that have surged during the conflict.

- Alternative energy solutions, which could cut support not only households but also farmers and small businesses.

- Improving internet access, which could grant both individuals and small enterprises and entrepreneurs with much-needed access to the remote workforce and the online marketplace.

We propose that it is important to explore new interpretations and operationalization of political donors' red lines so that their primary aim is met without hampering humanitarian and resilience-building responses. Rather than staying at the top political level, we suggest operationalising the red lines substantively at a lower level. This could be done through:

- ensuring that the conditionality of the funding, particularly good governance and human rights compliance, are communicated to the authorities and stressed at project level and throughout the implementation,

- up-scaling monitoring and evaluation, including that of third parties, to address all the concerns about manipulation and corruption,

- increasing site visits by monitoring officers from the donor country, which helps to generate a feeling that the donor is watching, making it more difficult to manipulate and divert the support,

- improving procurement policies and stressing the use of human rights-compliant procurement processes, and using the procurement process itself to aid the strengthening of resilience by opening the opportunities to small local enterprises, and

- adopting a context- and conflict-sensitive approach with an understanding of the social sensitivities, power dynamics and institutional structures at the at local level.

When adopting this approach in government areas-controlled areas it is important to distinguish between core regime institutions (mainly the institutions of the presidency, the armed forces, the intelligence agencies, and the Ba'ath party) and non-core regime institutions, to understand how their functions and local perceptions vary considerably. Given the institutional structure in Syria, it is extremely difficult to deliver resilience-building programmes in government-controlled areas in sectors like education, health, and agriculture without the implementing agency having a minimum level of coordination with the relevant non-core regime institutions.

Area-Specific Recommendations

The report presents the following area-based programme-focused recommendations that factor in the findings of the contextual and fragilities analysis for each area.

In northeast Syria:

- Supporting education: by supporting free schools that teach the Syrian government curriculum, offering scholarships, particularly for females, to cover tuitions fees and transportation costs, and supporting teachers' development and training.
- Empowering women: by providing grants to women-led civil society organizations and business start-ups.
- Empowering youth: by supporting TVET for youth, encouraging the establishment of youth sport centres, and increasing youth employability and job opportunities.
- Strengthening social cohesion: by promoting civic peace and tribal mediation projects led by very local civic groups, and by re-integrating women and children leaving the Al-Hol camp into their communities.
- Supporting the agriculture sector: by providing water pumps for irrigation, promoting climate-smart agriculture practices, and supporting livestock-related projects.

In northwest Syria:

- Supporting education: by offering scholarships for students to continue university education locally, supporting virtual education and training, and maintaining women and IDPs quotas in these programmes.
- Supporting the agriculture sector: by developing the agricultural sector and the food industries that are associated with it, such as olive oil pressing (while respecting HLP rights) and promoting climate-smart practices.
- Supporting sport for development and peace: by supporting sports activities that bring the IDPs and the host community together.
- Supporting IDPs in the internal camps.
- Supporting Syrian civil society-led health organisations.

In government-controlled areas:

- Supporting education: by offering small scholarships for children of deprived families to cover basic schooling costs, particularly in the countryside.
- Supporting the agriculture sector: by providing direct technical and financial support for small farmers, their new associations, promoting climate-smart practices, supporting the resumption of agriculture activities in areas that were contested.
- Supporting independent MSMEs' development and vetting beneficiaries to ensures that they have not been involved in violence, violations of human rights and corruption.
- Supporting co-working centres with uninterrupted electricity, so that the internet can be used to access the remote-working international job market and for students to access remote education programs, MSMEs, and CSOs.

1.0 Introduction

Humanitarian needs continue to increase in Syria, despite more than ten years of donor-dominated humanitarian responses to the deteriorating situation. And although levels of conflict-related violence have decreased, other forms of violence have emerged and communities across the country remain in fragile situations. Faced with this reality and with no prospect of a political solution on the horizon, Syrian civil society, INGOs, UN agencies and the donor community have realised, many years after the conflict started, that there is a need for a more sustainable response that goes beyond immediate humanitarian and security needs. But shifting to development and reconstruction paradigms which yield more sustainable outcomes was and remains constrained by two interrelated factors: the fact that the conflict is still ongoing and the desire to not reinforce corrupt political authorities and illegitimate institutions. Donor fatigue is also growing.

All of these factors prompted a trend to explore and apply different modalities of development cooperation and humanitarian assistance in Syria. Some donors adopted 'Humanitarian Early Recovery' programming and others adopted the closely related 'Resilience Building' programming as a way of reducing both immediate and protracted humanitarian needs, resulting in more sustainable outputs.[1] Livelihood resilience is defined as the capacity of ordinary citizens to sustain and improve their well-being and livelihood status despite any political, economic and social disturbances.[2] Both Humanitarian Early Recovery and Resilience Building are people-focused programmes; based on the needs of the people themselves, rather than on reconstruction and state building, which is more focused on institutions. In this respect they are attractive approaches in contexts like Syria, where there are serious issues with the legitimacy of existing governance institutions.

This shift in programming prompted new research and assessment, going beyond basic humanitarian needs and exploring the transformational potential of the programmes. But the shortage of the available resilience-oriented literature still poses a challenge to designing effective and contextually relevant Resilience-Building programming in Syria.

The major limitations of the existing resilience-oriented literature fall under two main categories: data limitation and an inability to address the full consequences of the many fragmentations of the Syrian conflict, including geographical ones.

Collecting data in conflict zones is very challenging, especially data that goes beyond immediate humanitarian needs. Therefore, most of the available data behind resilience analysis in Syria is humanitarian focused. With the exception of the Understanding Resilience: Perspective From Syrians report by CARE International[3], there is a scarcity of evidence-based resilience building analysis in Syria. Even when backed with data, that data is often limited to certain specific geographic areas, making it difficult to apply analysis and draw conclusions relevant to other areas.

The landscape of the Syrian conflict is fragmented in numerous shapes and forms, which poses a major challenge to research and analysis. The geography of the country itself is fragmented into different areas under the control of different actors. The communities, even within each area, are fragmented. The identities of the individuals and the communities are in a constant state of change. What used to be a very centralised economy fractured into a constellation of illicit and informal economic activities. Most importantly, the authority of what used to be a very centralised state was shattered, leading to a conflict landscape that is crowded not only with fragments of the state itself but also with the rising power of authorities of all kinds, new and old. Most of the available resilience-oriented literature on Syria ignores this fragmentation and primarily adopts a top-down macro analysis of the humanitarian and security situation in the country, with little attention to the different local contexts.

Understanding resilience in Syria, at the individual, household and community levels, largely depends on the contextual specificities of each area. This includes examining the social norms and dynamics (e.g., family ties and tribal affiliations); access to information related to conflict-driven events; inter-group social cohesion; pre-conflict livelihood strategies; access to financial savings and assets; the power dynamics in the area; and the level of trust in sub-national governance structures, amongst other factors. Ignoring the fragmentation and the local context leads to very general recommendations. For example, most reports would recommend improving access to basic services such as health and education. But taking this recommendation to the ground in different areas in Syria would translate to very different types of interventions within these sectors, depending on the area.

The aim of this report is to present evidence-based resilience analysis in Syria that takes into consideration the local context and power dynamics of the different areas in Syria. We do this by using mixed methodology, including collecting primary data from these different areas.

The report addresses the following key questions:

1. Against which risks and crises and with regard to which vulnerabilities should resilience be strengthened?

2. What is the current statues of resilience capacity?

3. What is the goal of resilience strengthening?

4. Where should resilience be strengthened?

5. Whose resilience is to be strengthened?

6. In which areas or sectors should resilience be strengthened as a priority?

7. How should resilience be strengthened?

In answering these questions, Section 7 of this report aims to develop a framework for the theory of change for strengthening resilience in Syria and Section 8 recommends activities that fall within this framework.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Analytical framework

We developed an analytical framework for our analysis that utilises the BMZ resilience capacities framework and the OECD dimensions of fragility with a contextual approach. Our framework is summarised in Figure 1. We adopt the definition of livelihood resilience as the capacity of ordinary citizens to sustain and improve their well-being and livelihood status during political, economic or social disturbances and shocks.[4] The adopted BMZ resilience capacities framework[5] defines the aim of building resilience as strengthening the resilience of people and local structures against the impact and consequences of crises and to empower them to: cope independently with crises, prepare themselves for recurring stresses in order to mitigate negative effects of crises and gradually overcome them permanently through structural changes.

We examine resilience at three different levels according to the BMZ resilience capacities framework:

1. Stabilisation capacity: people's ability to meet their basic needs and ensuring their survival during times of crisis.

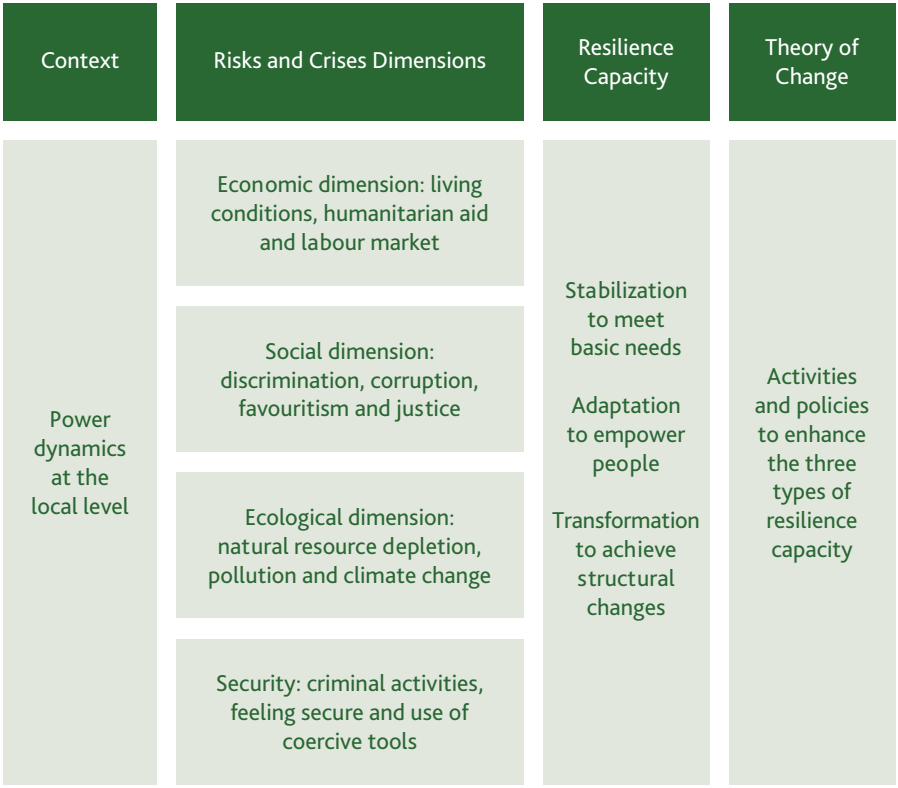
2. Adaptation capacity: people's ability to cope with the negative impacts of crisis and adapt to long-term changes; and

3. Transformation capacity: people's capabilities to promote structural changes that deals with the root causes of their livelihood vulnerability.[6]

In order to answer the question of 'against which risks and crises and with regard to which vulnerabilities should resilience be strengthened?', we use the OECD dimensions of fragility: economic, social, ecological and security,[7] while examining the political dynamics as a cross-cutting analytical lens that transcends all dimensions of fragility.

Furthermore, considering the complexity of the Syrian conflict, where different areas have different conflict dynamics, de-facto authorities, and significant variations in societal and economic configurations, the analytical approach is contextually tailored, taking into consideration the local power dynamics that influence Syrians' livelihoods.

Figure 1: Analytical framework



2.2 Empirical evidence

The evidence underpinning our analysis is drawn from four sources. First, a desk review of academic publications, grey literature and relevant reports and analysis from INGOs and UN agencies. Second, semi-structured KIIs with eight Syrian NGOs and five international actors and donor agencies. Third, in-country Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with selected key informants and sectoral experts. We conducted three FGDs in the targeted governorate: Sweida, Raqqa and Northern Aleppo, with a total number of 21 different participants from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, i.e. seven participants in each FGD session. Finally, we use the wealth of primary data provided by the LSE-based Mapping Syria project. The Mapping Syria platform harvests primary data through semi-structured surveys that collect quantitative and qualitative information on institutional, economic and social conditions at the district level. These surveys are conducted by a trained team of in-country local researchers and a team of local key experts in the sectors of health, education, justice, business, environment, living standards and humanitarian assistance.[8]

We use these four different resources to conduct resilience analyses on three different geographical levels: the national level, the main areas of control level and the local district level. The main three areas of control we cover constitute most of the country and have very different dynamics, de facto authorities and local socio-political structures. These are the government-controlled area; the northeast of Syria, controlled by SDF; and the northwest of Syria, controlled by different actors including Syrian armed opposition and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).

The Mapping Syria project provides further detailed data from certain key districts within the areas of control, allowing for a granular understanding of local dynamics and resilience mechanisms. These districts are selected based on their population (including IDPs) and the level of influence over adjacent areas. While the results of detailed analysis of these particular districts do not apply fully to other districts, we use the other available resources to expand our analysis to other districts. The districts we analyse in depth are the Sweida, Salkhad and Shahba in the government-controlled governorate of Sweida; the SDF-controlled districts of Al-Raqqa and Tabqa within the governorate of Al-Raqqa, in addition to the districts of Tal Abyad (al-Raqqa governorate). In northwest Syria, the report primarily focuses on Azaz (northwest Aleppo) which are controlled by the Turkey-backed opposition forces.

3.0 Local contexts and power dynamics

In order to provide an in-depth examination of the different variations that affect the resilience capacities of local communities across the different areas of control, it is key to highlight the local power dynamics from an actor-centric perspective at the national and sub-national levels. Despite the division into areas under the control of different authorities, our data shows several institutional commonalities that transcend these areas and are relevant for resilience analysis, including:

1) Public mistrust of the state and quasi-state governance structures, because of weak legitimacy and institutional capacities; the spread of corruption; and the lack of active public participation, transparency and social accountability.

2) Increased influence of state and non-state armed actors that dominate most local governance structures. This influence has significantly weakened social acceptance of these structures and undermined their ability to provide needs-based services in an impartial and equitable manner.

3) Decline in autonomous space for independent civic actors and civilian-led collective actions. Most active CSOs/NGOs are facing difficulties in obtaining the required funding for their work; reaching the most vulnerable groups, such as IDPs; and building their organizational capacities to address the accumulated needs of their local communities.

4) Monopolization of bargaining spaces between local communities and the de facto authorities by traditional community actors, such as religious figures and tribal leaders. These actors are acting as the de facto judicial system and the main mediators for most local disputes.

Below, we discuss power dynamics in the main areas targeted by our research.

3.1 Government-controlled area

Although the dominance and oppression of the Syrian government enforces many commonalities in the districts under its control, yet there are considerable variations in the power dynamics between and within different areas including:

1. The functions of and public perception towards different government institutions vary considerably. The intelligence agencies score the lowest in all legitimacy indicators and they have by far the worst public perception.[10] Local governance bodies, on the other hand, fare better in terms of their function and legitimacy, but they score lower in their level of influence.

2. Areas that were under opposition control and then taken back into government control have very different power dynamics from areas that were always under government control. This is because of the widespread destruction of vital infrastructure caused by the intensified military operations when these areas were recaptured, and the dismantling of most local governance structures. The way the government recaptured these areas also plays a role. Areas recaptured with the use of violence alone, such as Khan Sheikhoun, saw severe levels of destruction, had fewer returnees and are mainly controlled by state-led armed actors, with a very narrow space for traditional and civic actors. Areas that have been recaptured using both local negotiations and violence, such as Al Waar in Homs, suffered less destruction, had more people returning and more active civic and traditional actors.

3. There are differences between the countryside and the urban areas. The power of the intelligence agencies seems to be weaker in the countryside.

4. The lifting of government subsidies and relaxing of central planning is weakening the government's grip, especially at the local level and is opening up new spaces of independent action, particularly in the agriculture sector. The government used to control this sector, limiting farmers' choices through strong central planning and market regulation. This included providing inputs for subsidised prices, setting fixed prices and controlling the farmers' union. The lifting of subsidies increased costs but it also freed farmers from the control of the government and pushed them towards market-oriented decisions.

In the government-controlled area, we explored in-depth the three districts of the governorate of Sweida

3.1.1 The local context and power dynamics in the governorate of Sweida

The governorate of Sweida is located in southern Syria, 110km south of the capital, Damascus. It has an estimated population of 500,000 people distributed over three main districts: Sweida, Salkhad and Shahba. The majority of the governorate's population resides in the countryside and relies on farming, whether arable or pastoral, and other agriculture-related activities as the most important source of income. Remittances from expatriates is the second biggest source of household income, due to the significant increase in Sweida's refugees to neighbouring countries, mainly Lebanon and Jordan.[11]

Throughout Syria's conflict, the governorate remained under the control of the Syrian government. Its political and governance dynamics are largely dominated by the state-led security agencies and the Ba'ath party. The pre-war identity-based social configuration played a significant role in allowing religious figures to have a relatively wide margin of autonomy from the state. At the onset of the conflict, the Syrian regime granted Sweida's religious figures a margin of the local authority. This was due to the regime's desire to contain the intensity of the sectarian-based tension in the governorate. This made the Syrian regime to accept several political concessions, such as allowing localised non-state armed actors to exist in the region, under the direct influence of Sweida's religious leaders. The political and social influence of these community leaders comes from their dominance over the bargaining spaces between the public and the state and non-state actors, which transformed them into the main intermediaries and 'gate keepers' of civilian-state interactions and an incubator of some CSOs/NGOs in the governorate. Their bargaining space with the state, however, is controlled, to a degree, by the intelligence/security branches in the province.[12]

The influence of the LACs is relatively weak in the rural areas. Their ability to provide services is usually concentrated in the urban centres. Most participants in our FGDs have reported an institutional incompetence driven by corruption, nepotism, and patronage, in addition to the exclusion of IDPs from most basic services. The level of influence of these LACs is significantly weak in the district of Shahba, the stronghold of most of Sweida's anti-government non-state armed actors. Therefore, the Syrian regime has intentionally reduced its technical and financial support to Shahba's LACs as a collective punishment. Shahba's non-state armed actors have also failed to establish an alternative governance system.[13]

Several small-scale and locally based CSOs and NGOs have emerged after the start of the conflict. They could fill several governance gaps in services provision, education, and community mobilisation, which afforded them with social and political influence over the local communities. However, their activities, presence, societal influence, and scope remain relatively low because of the excessively tight security grip of the intelligence institutions. Most of these CSOs were unable to obtain official registration from the government, and the ones that have such status are required to bargain with the intelligence institutions. Moreover, civic actors lack proper access to international funding.

The most influential de facto authorities are the intelligence and security institutions (Figure 2), which dominate most of the service sectors in the province, such as health and education.

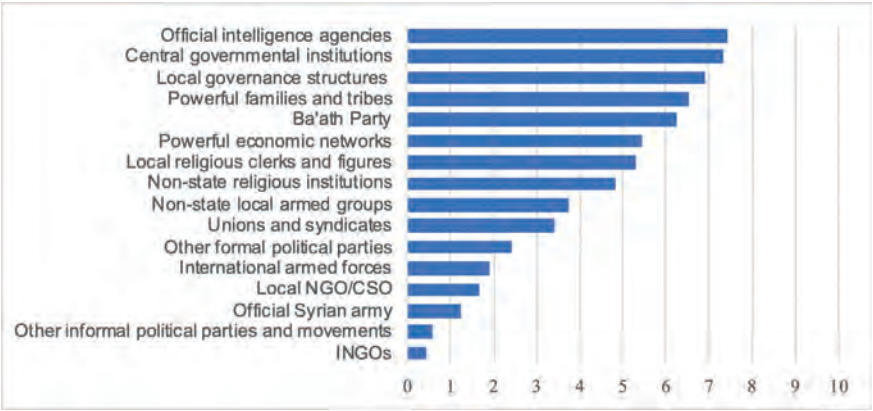


Figure 2: Level of Influence* in Sweida by Actor. Source: MappingSyria Survey, 2021
* Scale between 0 and 10 where 0 is very low and 10 is very high

3.2 The northwest of Syria

NWS comprises two main areas controlled by various armed factions with different governance systems and spaces for civil society actors. These are:

1) Idlib Governorate, mainly controlled by the Islamist extreme group HTS; and

2) Northern Aleppo, which is dominated by Turkey-backed armed groups, and The Syrian National Army (SNA).

Both areas rely on civilian-managed LACs as the primary form of local governance system. However, these LACs have different political and administrative affiliations depending on the de facto local authorities.

In the governorate of Idlib, the LACs are directly affiliated with the HTS-led administrative body, the Salvation Government (SG). Despite the provision of some basic services, this HTS-led government and its affiliated LACs have failed to meet the needs of the communities they govern. This is due to two main reasons. First, the reluctance of most international donor agencies to provide direct financial or logistical support to the governorate, especially since HTS is classified as an extremist organisation. Second, the incompetence of reliance of HTS and its heavy reliance on coercive measures.

Although HTS's control over civil society actors is very strong, allowing only restricted space for them to operate, it has had no choice but to accept the active presence of Syrian civil society-led medical organisations. These organisations deliver most of the health services in the governorate, including running most hospitals and health centres — an indispensable service to the community that HTS is unable to deliver. This gives these organisations some space to operate and, often, push back on HTS when it attempts to interfere in their work.

3.2.1 The local context and power dynamics in Northern Aleppo (Azaz)

The district of Azaz is located in the rural northern parts of Aleppo's governorate, 50km north of the city of Aleppo. It has an estimated current population of 170,000 people, around half of them IDPs. Because of the city's proximity to the Turkish border, through the Bab al-Salama border crossing, its economy has become dependent on importing goods from Turkey — either formally or through smuggling networks, which have increased significantly since 2011. The city is considered the main economic hub for north-west Syria (NWS), thanks to the establishment of Hawala offices and the presence of an official branch of the Turkish postal services, enabling growing currency trading activities. Other livelihood activities include cultivating wheat, summer vegetables and the production and trade of olive oil.

The relative economic and security stability in the district of Azaz has attracted most Syrian CSOs/NGOs, including Turkey-based ones, to relocate to the city, creating job opportunities for many educated and skilled youths. However, the political influence of the Turkey-backed LACs has been limiting the scope of the work of civil society actors, where service provision in key sectors, such as health and education, are monopolised by LACs.

Most basic services in northern rural Aleppo are provided by the LACs, which are the most influential actor in the area (Figure 3). The direct affiliation of these LACs with the Turkish authorities has granted them high levels of influence over the population. This affiliation is manifested in the appointment of councillors, the control of funding and scope of work, and institutional interventions in procurement procedures. All of this has minimised active public participation with LACs, weakening their transparency and social accountability. Several participants on the FGDs have reported a general sense of mistrust towards LACs, in addition to several cases of corruption and appropriation by armed actors.

The Health and Education Directorates in the region have a supervisory role, in addition to paying salaries for teachers and school administrators, with very limited capacity to implement rehabilitation programmes and provide medical services.

The Turkey-backed National Army is the main military actor in rural Aleppo. It includes several rival armed factions, which creates intra-group rifts and instability. The primary sources of power of the National Army are:

1) The political clout that stems from the military and financial support by the Turkish authorities.

2) Tts control of the border crossings with Turkey, which generates a steady stream of revenue.

3) Extortion and coercion measures and domination over religious and tribal leaders.

Several participants in the FGDs have reported repeated cases of human rights violations, violence, and illegal appropriation of private property committed by multiple factions within the National Army.

Most CSOs/NGOs in rural Aleppo are located in the city of Azaz, where there is relative stability compared to the surrounding areas. These civic actors are the main pillars of health and medical services and the distribution of humanitarian aid. However, their societal impact is largely undermined due to constant intervention by the local governance structures and the increasing influence of the armed actors.

The influence of traditional community leaders, such as powerful tribes and religious figures, in rural Aleppo, reinforced by the armed factions, has created a hostile environment for women-led organisations and women-centric initiatives. For instance, most of these organizations find it difficult to publicly announce their projects, send public invitations for women to attend trainings or hold dialogues about certain topics such as reproductive and sexual health. Therefore, the majority either work through local partners, mostly humanitarian NGOs, or use different terms to describe their activities, like renaming their sexual health dialogues as "family wellbeing".

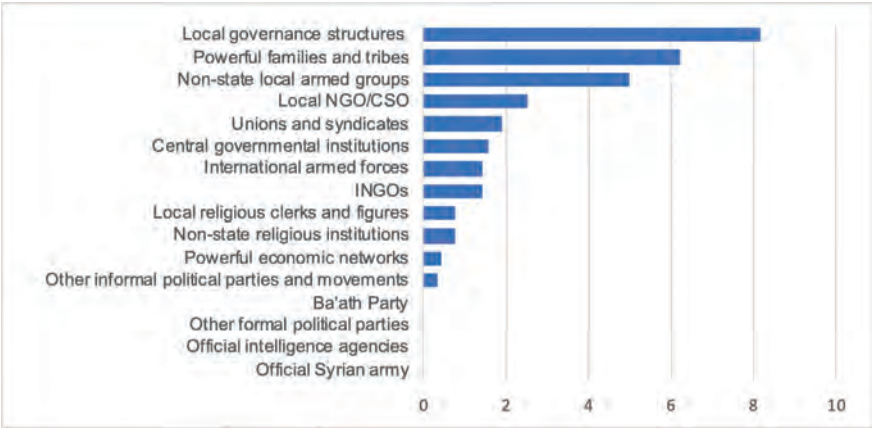


Figure 3: Level of Influence* in Azaz by Actor. Source: Mapping Syria Survey, 2021
* Scale between 0 and 10 where 0 is very low and 10 is very high

3.3 The northeast of Syria

The region of Northeast Syria (NES) is strictly controlled by the US-backed, Kurdish-dominated SDF and its political interface, the SDC. Most SDF-controlled areas follow the AA model, which is a cantonal-based governance system comprising different administrative layers. Cantons, the highest administrative layer, incorporate several City Councils, which include a number of District Councils that represent the Local Communes, a collection of tens of households. The only notable exceptions in terms of governance systems are found in the governorates of al-Raqqa and Deir al-Zour, which were previously under ISIS control. The ethnic configuration of al-Raqqa and Deir al-Zour, where the majority of its residents are tribal Arabs, has compelled SDF to adopt a different governance approach compared to other Kurdish-majority areas. All service provision decision-making is delegated to civilian-led administrative councils that are politically affiliated to the SDC. For instance, RCC constitutes several Arab and Kurdish councillors, appointed by the SDC and distributed over several executive committees responsible for providing basic services in the health, education, agriculture and utilities sectors.

Civic actors enjoy a relatively wider space. Mainly in the sectors of protection, education, health, humanitarian relief, public awareness campaigns and inter-ethnic dialogues. However, their accessibility to decision-making and their level of social influence is limited and minimised by the constant interference of the SDF. One of the largest refugee camps in northern Syria, al-Hol camp, is located in NES. It hosts more than 60,000 individuals, the majority of which are IDPs who fled ISIS-controlled areas, including family members of ISIS fighters. Access to the camp is strictly controlled by SDF, and only a handful of NGOs and UN agencies are allowed to operate within the camp. The security situation in the camp is extremely volatile. The humanitarian conditions of the camp are rapidly deteriorating, with a limited capacity from the de facto authorities and NGOs to address the accumulating needs of its residents..[15] Over the past year, several families have left the camp and resettled in makeshift camps on the outskirts of al-Raqqa. However, since most of these returnees are stigmatised as "ISIS families", they have been socially isolated and are facing increasing discrimination.

In the following sections, we place particular focus on the al-Raqqa areas because of the high and specific needs in these areas. We conduct an in-depth exploration of the three districts of Al-Raqqa, Tal Abyad and Tabqa in the governorate of Al-Raqqa.

3.3.1 The local context and power dynamics in the governorate of Al-Raqqa

The governorate of Al-Raqqa is located in north-eastern Syria, 160 km east of the city of Aleppo, with an estimated current population of 300,000 people, distributed over three main districts: Al-Raqqa, Tal Abyad and Tabqa. Given the rural nature of the governorate, its main livelihood activities are agriculture-based activities. The second main income for households comes from daily casual labour, especially amongst returnees.

From early 2014 till 2017, the governorate was captured by ISIS, which established its own governance system, heavily relying on tribal dynamics and violent coercive measures to consolidate its influence and forcibly extract social compliance. Since October 2017, Al-Raqqa has been controlled by SDF and its political interface, the SDC. The latter has established RCC, which is the main quasi-state service provider in the governorate. Despite the RCC's monopolisation over service provision in the province, its own political influence, however, remains marginal, where all political, judicial and financial planning are concentrated in the hands of the SDF/SDC central leadership.

The SDC-led AA delegates most of its service provision implementation to RCC in the sectors of health, education, agriculture and humanitarian aid. However, the political and military decisions remain centralised at the top-tier leadership of the SDC. The RCC receives most of its funding from the AA and some international donor agencies. It dominates the service provision sector in the governorate and concentrates most of its activities within the urban centres at the Al-Raqqa district, while other rural districts, such as Tabqa and Tal Abyad, are usually deprived of most services, and the rehabilitation of vital infrastructure. Participants in the FGDs reported several cases of systemic corruption, in addition to common discriminatory behaviour against the Arabs, leading to imbalanced aid distribution and exclusion from decision-making.

Local CSOs/NGOs are directly involved in health, education and community-based dialogue between Arabs and Kurds. Most of these CSOs/NGOs are formally registered with the AA and have good access to international funding. However, the level of collaboration amongst them is relatively low. Several participants in the FGD, which included Arabs and Kurds, reported that a lot of the recruitment and procurement procedures of these civil society actors are largely dictated by the RCC and AA, which undermines their independence and social acceptance, especially amongst Arabs.

The most influential political actors are the SDC and SDF (Figure 4), which heavily rely on a combination of persuasive measures and repressive coercion.

The SDC/SDF reliance on a complex network of Arab tribal leaders and religious figures, specifically in the districts of Tabqa and Tal Abyad, has transformed them into the main local intermediaries between them and the Arab. However, their impact on decision-making is marginalised by the Kurdish-dominated leadership of the SDC/SDF. Despite their inability to provide services, these leaders play a major role in conflict resolution at the local level.

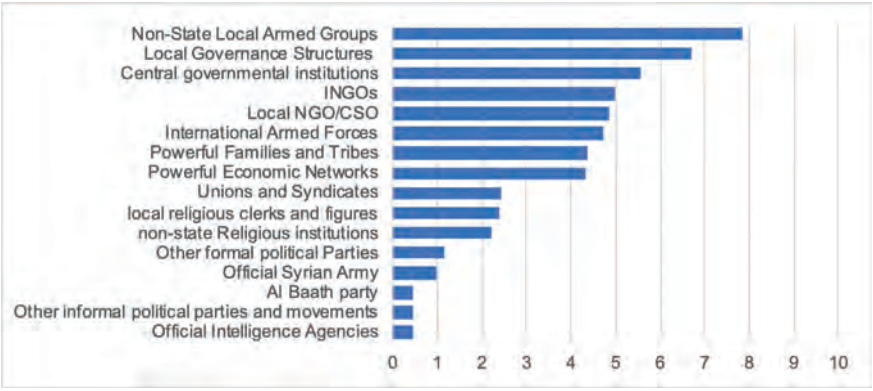


Figure 4: Level of Influence* in Al-Raqqa by Actor Source: Mapping Syria Survey, 2021
* Scale between 0 and 10 where 0 is very low and 10 is very high

4.0 Dimensions of fragility

We analyse the four dimensions of fragility using data from the Mapping Syria project and conclude a resilience matrix for each dimension, highlighting the differences between the areas studied in depth.

4.1 Economic dimension

We use three proxy variables to understand the economic dynamics at a local community level. These are the living conditions index, humanitarian aid, and the labour market. The living conditions index is the average of six subindices: housing conditions, household assets and the availability of and accessibility to electricity, cooking gas, drinking water and sewage systems. The humanitarian aid reflects the effectiveness of related actors in distributing aid to families in need. The labour market includes the analysis of salary, working conditions and skills-matching.

The deterioration of living conditions in the three areas appears to be chronic since the authorities are incapable of repairing damaged infrastructure and providing basic goods and services to households. This is due to lack of financial resources, unstable security conditions, widespread corruption and cronyism, and inefficient governance. Additionally, the grave environment challenges, including droughts and desertification, have directly affected the wellbeing of local communities by reducing local production and job opportunities and increasing food insecurity.

Most families do not have the means to renew lost assets or to fulfil their needs of basic goods and services. Within this context, the gap in living conditions is increasing between most deprived families and the few rich families that still own essential assets, such as land or property.

Most households have received humanitarian aid at least once. The aid appears to enhance the resilience capacity of families as it helps them to mitigate the impact of the dire economic conditions. The impact of this aid on local community resilience depends on the type of aid, providers, and level of effectiveness, which differs across the three areas. The conflict has caused a sharp deterioration in salaries and working conditions. It has also forced people to accept work in activities that do not match their skills. Illegal and conflict-induced activities have surged, including kidnapping, smuggling, drug trafficking and participation in militias and armed groups. The labour market has witnessed some positive changes that reflect the resilience of local communities, such as the increasing role of women and widespread use of home-made products and home farming techniques.

4.1.1 The Economic dimension in the governorate of Sweida

Living conditions

Housing conditions are relatively good and building materials are reliable, although expensive. The governorate has witnessed a few military operations located mainly in the north and northeast Shahba, which has destroyed a limited number of houses. Families cannot afford to build new dwellings or repair existing ones, which may negatively affect housing conditions in the long run.

Most houses in urban Sweida have the necessary equipment and appliances. In rural areas, these are less available. During the conflict, the difficult economic conditions and high level of security uncertainty affected household decisions to buy new equipment or replace old ones. Thus, the availability and quality of family assets has dropped compared to pre-conflict times.

All areas in Sweida experience electricity power outages that can reach more than 16 hours per day and even longer in rural regions. Public electricity is not reliable. It fluctuates and damages appliances. Few families are able to pay for electricity generators. The lack of subsidized fuel drives them to buy from the black market at very high prices, which makes private generators unsustainable solution even for well-off families, in addition to the air and noise pollution caused by these generators.

Cooking gas in the three sub-districts of Sweida is rarely available at subsidized prices and is always available on the black market at very high price. There are networks of traders, public workers and security officers that benefit from selling cooking gas on the black market. The high price of cooking gas has surged the cost of living for households and the operational cost for many micro and small enterprises, such as catering businesses.

The public drinking water network covers most areas in the Sweida governorate, except for a few rural regions in Salkhad. During summer, the water provided by this network is not sufficient for most families, forcing them to buy water privately. Many households in rural areas depend on water from wells, leading to further depletion of natural resources.

The availability of a public sewage system differs across areas in Sweida. It covers more than 80% of households in urban areas, whereas, in rural areas, especially in the Salkhad subdistrict, it covers less than 30%. Figure 5 shows that the living conditions index in Sweida is slightly below average.

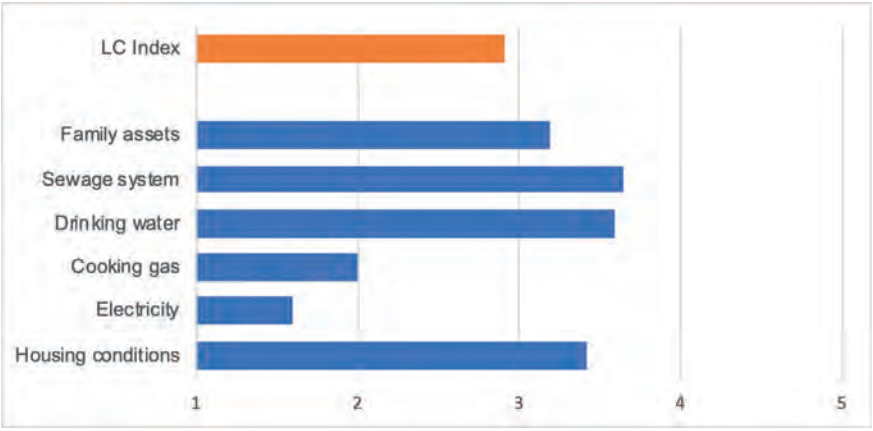


Figure 5: Living Conditions Index* and Subindices in Sweida**. Source: Mapping Syria Survey, 2021
* The index is the simple average of the six subindices
**Scale between 1 and 5 where 0 is very bad and 5 is very good

Humanitarian aid

The UN agencies are the largest providers of humanitarian aid. They distribute this aid directly through their officers in the area or indirectly via local NGOs and municipalities. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the Syria Trust for Development are the most influential actors responsible for aid distribution.[16] The two organisations are considered being pro-regime GONGOs.[17]

In Sweida city, faith-based organizations also have a substantial role in providing aid. Among them are the Druze charity centre and the Department of Ecumenical Relations and Development at the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch. They claim to support households regardless of their religious backgrounds. But many local experts indicated they give preference to their followers. In Shahba and Salkhad, the diaspora has a crucial role in sending financial and in-kind support to deprived families. In Salkhad, a local armed group distributes aid, at a small scale, to their supporters and networks. [18]

According to several participants in our Sweida FGDs, most humanitarian aid comes as food baskets distributed by NGOs — mainly Syrian Arab Red Crescent and local municipalities — targeting IDPs and a few local families. The World Health Organization coordinates with local organisations to provide families with health kits. UNHCR and local leaders equip IDPs and deprived families with blankets and clothes for cold weather. The diaspora sends a wide range of aid, including financial support, medicines and clothes.

FGD participants also reported that the humanitarian aid distribution process suffers from corruption and a lack of efficiency, because of nepotism and the absence of robust monitoring schemes. This benefits security agencies, pro-regime militias and the Ba'ath party, who shore up their control by stealing a share of the aid or distributing it to their relatives and friends. These actors re-sell the stolen goods in the black market. They also direct the stolen resources to the regime's loyalists and deprive IDPs that are thought to be regime opponents of aid. Local civic organizations and initiatives distribute humanitarian aid efficiently but on a small scale.

Labour market

In the three sub-districts in Sweida, average wages cannot cover the cost of essential goods and services for households. More than half of workers in the formal sector are employed by public entities where the average monthly salary is around 25 USD compared to more than 200 USD before the conflict. A small minority has the opportunity to work at international organisations with good wages, which contributes to the increasing inequality between households.

Working conditions are deteriorating because of the absence of the rule of law, poor financial capacities and the widespread informal sector. Many private entities force their employees to work without contracts and for long hours without compensation. Thus, workers are not secure and have no labour rights. The government cannot afford to renovate public offices or provide them with the necessary supplies, such as heating and fuel, to maintain good working conditions. The low salaries have forced many highly educated individuals and senior public officials to work as low-skilled laborers. Many of those who could not leave the country are involved in conflict-related activities which have spread in Sweida, including kidnapping, joining armed groups, fuel and drug trafficking to Jordan. Moreover, several participants in our FGDs have emphasised the impact of the weak telecommunication infrastructure on their livelihood opportunities. The poor and unstable internet connections deprive many skilled young people from accessing and getting remote jobs that have relatively high income, such as IT development and online retailing. Figure 8 in Appendix I shows that the decent job index in Sweida is bad, where salary level is very bad compared to the cost of living, skills matching is bad, and working conditions are acceptable.

4.1.2 The Economic dimension in Northern Aleppo

Living conditions

Housing conditions are below average in rural Aleppo areas. Conditions have deteriorated during the conflict due to the intensive military operations, besides the increasing number of IDPs who settled in unfinished buildings or tents. These factors have affected different parts of rural Aleppo on different scales. For instance, many houses in Afrin are uninhabitable since brutal military operations occurred in this area, whereas in Al-Bab, there is a large number of IDPs who live in buildings or camps that lack the minimum level of health and safety requirements.

In rural Aleppo, few households have essential domestic appliances and equipment. This is for several reasons. Firstly, households lack the financial capacity to buy new equipment or replace old appliances. Secondly, these areas have many IDPs who escaped armed conflict or brutal violence elsewhere and left all their belongings at home. Another reason is the lack of electricity that most appliances need.

A large part of the electricity infrastructure has been destroyed. Most areas depend on private electricity generators, which are expensive, unreliable, and insufficient. Few cities, such as Azaz, have a good and reliable electricity supply with support from the Turkish electricity network, but access to it is expensive for local communities suffering from dire economic conditions. The high cost of electricity in all rural Aleppo areas therefore places an additional financial burden on deprived families.

Households have poor access to cooking gas. The security conditions affect the supply of gas. But, in general, the available quantity cannot cover the local demand. The black market has expanded to sell cooking gas at high prices, which are not affordable for most families. Many homes have shifted to cheaper and more available alternatives like wood, which have a catastrophic environmental impact.

During the conflict, water networks and sewage systems have been severely damaged. Families in areas like Afrin and Al-Bab buy drinking water from private trucks. In Azaz city, water networks are functioning, but water is not drinkable and used only for washing and cleaning. As for the sewage system, families, especially those living in camps, use inappropriately designed pit latrines which harm health and the environment.

The area of Northern Aleppo also hosts several makeshift IDP camps, which are witnessing an acute deterioration in living conditions and overall humanitarian situation. A number of these camps, such as Zoghra camp in Jarablus, lack the basic infrastructure necessities, such as schools and health facilities.[19] Most of these camps are run by Turkey-appointed managers who restrict the access of many local NGOs and therefore deprive these IDPs from many services, such as durable protection mechanisms and resilience-based humanitarian and development assistance.

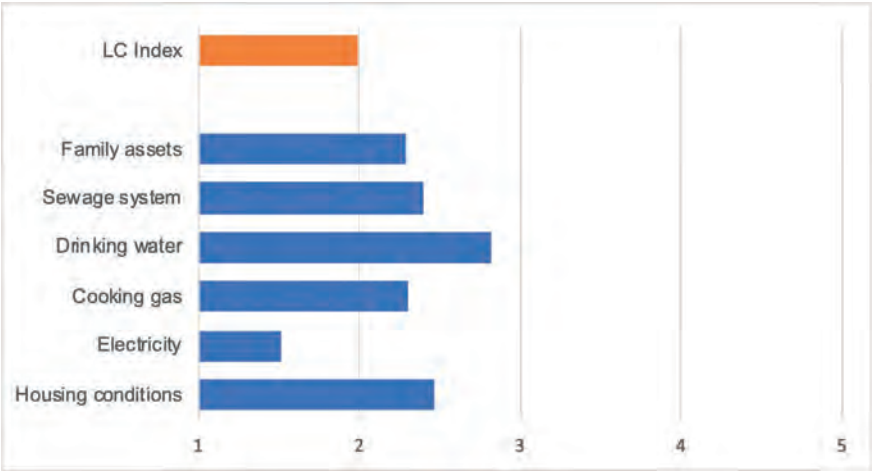


Figure 6: Living Conditions Index* and Subindices in Northern Aleppo** Source: Mapping Syria Survey, 2021
* The index is the simple average of the six subindices
**Scale between 1 and 5 where 0 is very bad and 5 is very good

Humanitarian aid

Local councils coordinate with local and international organizations, including the UN agencies, to distribute aid. These councils also cooperate with the Turkish and Qatari Red Crescent to provide essential support to deprived families and IDPs, particularly in Afrin and Al-Bab. Faith-based charities have a substantial role in helping deprived families by distributing food baskets and financial assets. These charities usually receive funds from businesspersons, diaspora, and international organisations. In Al-Bab, local armed groups have contributed to establishing appropriate shelter centres to receive IDPs coming from areas recaptured by the Syrian regime.

Most local and international organisations provide different types of aid, including food baskets, medical and hygiene kits, blankets and clothes. Because of the large number of IDPs in rural Aleppo, displaced families have priority in receiving humanitarian aid in some areas. The distribution process depends on lists of families sorted by type of need, provided by local councils. Yet, some types of aid are distributed without considering the actual needs of families and the potential impact on health and the environment. For instance, many households have received charcoal during winter, although they do not have a charcoal fireplace.

Current levels of humanitarian aid cannot cover the increasing needs of families in rural Aleppo because of the difficult economic conditions. This is also the case in northern Aleppo's makeshift IDP camps, whose humanitarian needs are insufficiently covered by under-funded local NGOs, which lack the institutional capacities to address the increasing needs of these camps' residents, especially during winter.

However, increasing the efficiency of the distribution process could improve the coverage rate of this aid to the residents of rural Aleppo and its IDP camps. There are many cases where families have received assistance because they are loyal or have good relations with a specific armed group. Members of these groups may also consume aid supplies themselves or sell them on the market. Thus, establishing an effective monitoring system could minimize cronyism and corruption during the distribution process.

Labour market

The salaries paid in the region are relatively low compared to wages before the conflict and compared to household living requirements. As for working conditions, they are not appropriate because of the lack of basic work requirements and the absence of laws and regulations that protect workers' rights, which significantly affects the performance levels of workers. Moreover, employees in local authority and private sectors do not usually have contracts that protect them and define their tasks. The available jobs often do not match skills. Highly qualified individuals have to accept jobs below their competency level due to financial need, lack of decent job opportunities and the spread of favouritism. Furthermore, most residents in northern Aleppo's IDP camps are excluded from the formal and informal labour market. Several factors contribute to such exclusion, such as lack of access to proper education and vocational trainings; the restricted access of many local CSOs to these camps; the lack of identification papers for many residents of these camps; and an increasing social tension with the host communities. This creates an overreliance on internationally backed relief operations and food baskets amongst them.

Smuggling of legal and illegal goods is spreading between rural Aleppo and regime-controlled areas. It is also increasing with neighbouring Turkey. Due to the lack of job opportunities, many individuals, particularly youth, join the armed groups. The profitable arms sales is also spreading. Figure 9 in Appendix I shows that the decent job index in northern Aleppo is bad.

4.1.3 The Economic dimension in the governorate of Al-Raqqa

Living conditions

Housing conditions have deteriorated in Al-Raqqa due to the vast destruction caused by the continuing armed conflict, and in particular the aerial campaign against ISIS. Conditions did not improve much after the campaign because of the lack of housing materials and weak financial capacity of families to build new houses or rehabilitate the damaged ones. Some areas like Tal-Abyad have received many IDPs. Many of these IDPs live in unfinished buildings with poor health and safety conditions.

Most families in the Al-Raqqah Governorate, especially in al-Raqqa city, have lost their assets due to destruction or theft. Others have lost their household equipment and appliances because of being displaced multiple times, leaving their belongings in their previous places of residency. Moreover, the difficult economic conditions limit the capacities of families to buy new household assets or replace old ones.

In the Al-Raqqa sub-districts, public electricity networks suffer from destruction, lootings, and a lack of spare parts, which result in continuous power cuts. In Tal-Abyad, besides the poor infrastructure, any security or military tensions could cause an electrical power outage. Thus, households in Al-Raqqa and Tal-Abyad depend on private electricity generators to secure the minimum level of their electricity demand. In Tabqa, electricity is more reliable, since the area is close to the Euphrates dam, which has enormous power generators.

In all parts of Al-Raqqa, cooking gas is not sufficient to cover the needs of all households. There is a growing black market to sell this basic good at higher prices, which many families cannot afford. In the Al-Raqqa subdistrict that includes Al-Raqqa city, the cooking gas cylinders are of low quality, posing a danger hazard for households. Moreover, traders sell cylinders containing less gas than is advertised.

The intensive military operations in the Al-Raqqah Governorate have destroyed a large part of the public water network and sewage systems. For instance, more than 60% of the sewage system in the Al-Raqqa subdistrict is out of service, which forces many households to use inappropriate pit latrines. Water coming from the public network is not clean enough for drinking. Thus, most families depend on buying water from private trucks or using wells.

Figure 7 shows that the living conditions index in Al-Raqqa is slightly above the bad level. The availability of and accessibility to electricity is the lowest and close to very bad. All other indicators are below average.

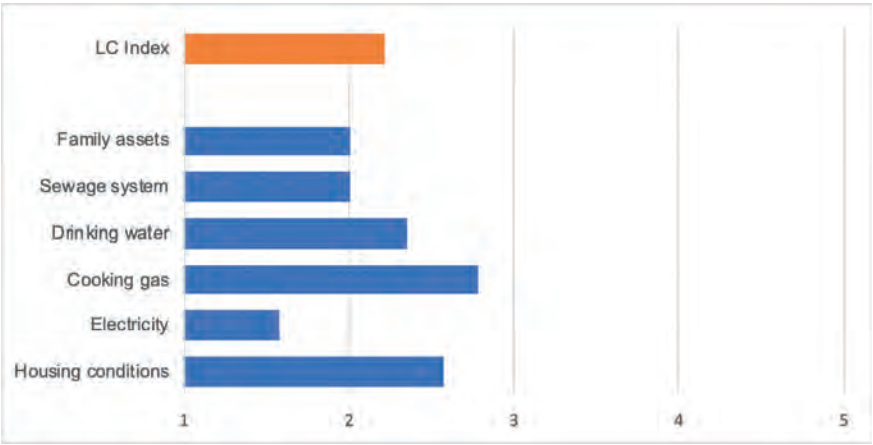


Figure 7: Living Conditions Index* and Subindices in Al-Raqqa** . Source: Mapping Syria Survey, 2021
* The index is the simple average of the six subindices
**Scale between 1 and 5 where 0 is very bad and 5 is very good

Humanitarian aid

Local and international organisations are the largest humanitarian aid providers in the Al-Raqqa region. They usually coordinate with local councils to identify poor households, including IDPs. Other significant providers are the faith-based charities which mainly target IDPs, widows and orphans. They receive most of their funds from businesspersons. In Al-Raqqa, relations at the family and tribe levels are strong. Thus, deprived households get assistance from relatives and other families of the same tribe. These relations are weaker because of the difficult economic status that limits the capabilities of families to support each other.

Humanitarian aid in Al-Raqqa includes the distribution of food baskets, health and hygiene kits, kitchen tools for IDPs, blankets and clothes. Many relief activities focus on delivering drinking water and supporting public cleaning services, particularly in IDP camps. In Al-Raqqa city, some organisations adopt the cash transfer approach to support families. They regularly send 50 USD for each household to buy essential goods. However, this approach is costly since it requires enormous administrative and monitoring work.

The poor monitoring of the humanitarian aid distributing process has affected the aid, including food and health kits. Some humanitarian workers sell good-quality supplies on the market and replace them with low-quality goods. But in general, the available aid is not sufficient to cover the increasing needs of households in Al-Raqqa. Thus, providers look for cheaper goods to help more deprived families. Local and international organisations depend on surveys to identify the types and quantity of aid, yet the aid distributing process is not always transparent and evidence based. Some employees in local authorities redirect this aid to benefit their friends and relatives.

Labour market

Job-related income has dropped sharply in all Al-Raqqa areas. The agriculture sector used to be a vital source of income for many households. It faces enormous challenges, including drought; destruction of irrigation systems; high price of fertilizers and seeds; and low profitability of agriculture activities. Additionally, the livestock output has dropped to more than half of its level before the conflict due to the high price and unavailability of fodder, poor market demand and lack of support from local authorities. At the same time, Al-Raqqa governorate has witnessed an increasing number of job opportunities in local and international civil society organisations. Yet these jobs are limited to a few skilled workers and those with strong ties with influential figures. AA civil entities and the SDFs are the largest employer in Al-Raqqa. They pay salaries that are likely to cover the essential needs of households. That said, many complain that there is strong favouritism in their employment practices and an expectation that employees should demonstrate public political support for them and, at times, to the PYD.

Like other areas in Syria, working conditions are challenging in Al-Raqqa. Although there are labour unions and syndicates, most private sector entities can abuse their employees and force them to work without contracts that protect their rights. The lack of decent job opportunities encourages individuals to participate in conflict-related activities, including smuggling goods, especially fuel, into regime-controlled areas. Figure 10 in Appendix I shows that the decent job index in Al-Raqqa is between very bad and bad levels, where working conditions are very bad, and salaries level and skills matching are close to bad.

4.2 Social dimension

During the conflict, all Syrian areas have witnessed a surge in negative social phenomena, including discrimination, cronyism, and corruption. These phenomena existed before the conflict, but now they have become more visible and have taken different forms with the new local power dynamics. The widespread violence and lack of a rule of law have further lessened the already low accountability. This contributed to a deterioration of social cohesion and feelings of social security, which has negatively affected resilience capacity at the local community level. In that respect, there are many commonalities between the three studied areas. Although the role of local actors and social norms differs between them.

The three areas suffer from a surge in the school dropout rates for many reasons, including the destruction of schools, lack of skilled educational staff, school enrolment costs, child labour and low return to education. The culture of apathy and lack of interest in education affect human capital in all of Syria in the short and long term. Moreover, the different and even clashing curriculums across areas reduces social cohesion at the national level and deepens fragmentation. All authorities use education to indoctrinate a culture of hatred toward others. These policies also have a catastrophic effect on social capital at the national level.

Most FGD participants identified the almost complete absence of well-structured, durable, and effective projects that focus on the mental wellbeing of individuals as a major gap across all areas of control in Syria. More than a decade of violent conflict has resulted in chronic effects on the mental health of the population. This mental and psychological distress is caused by experiencing different forms of direct violence by war and other factors, such as constant and recurring displacement; social isolation resulting from the disintegration of pre-war social safety networks; the prevalence of gender-based violence in the absence of effective protection mechanisms; and the unprecedented deterioration in living conditions and security. All of these factors and the traumatic everyday experiences of individuals have caused widespread and severe mental disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These mental disorders and other types of psychological distress are likely to continue for decades after the settling of the conflict.

4.2.1 The Social dimension in the governorate of Sweida

The region has received several waves of IDPs. Initially, local communities provided them with support. But gradually discrimination against them by many influential actors started growing, motivated by insufficient resources and loyalty to political identities. Local authorities and some national and international organizations prioritise local communities and not IDPs while distributing humanitarian aid. Many religious institutions and local leaders have encouraged this discrimination, and the security agencies invested in it to present themselves as the protectors of local communities' rights.

Discrimination against women continues in all regions in Sweida, even though they became active in many new economic activities during the conflict. This discrimination is rooted in social norms that hinder women from exercising their basic rights and the culture of violence, and the dominance of armed powers further contributed to this. For instance, women could be subject to social rejection if they report gender-based violence. In Sweida, women are usually expected to attempt to solve these issues within the family or through religious institutions, which in most cases are biased towards men.

Favouritism is rampant due to the strong influence of family ties. This becomes more evident in the distribution of humanitarian aid and essential goods. Many officials and humanitarian workers prioritise their relatives regardless of their needs. Corruption is also spreading, particularly in public organisations, pro-regime militias and security entities. The widespread corruption is related to insufficient goods and services and the lack of trust in formal justice institutions. At the same time, local communities have no means of holding military and security actors accountable for corruption, as they could face violent consequences. On the other hand, religious and local leaders are usually more transparent and accountable because they know that their influence correlates with the level of credibility and trust between them and local communities.

4.2.2 The Social dimension in Northern Aleppo

The local authorities and communities in this region do not generally discriminate against IDPs. However, there is discrimination on an ethnic basis, especially in Afrin. Many Kurdish families had to leave their homes to protect themselves from potential violence and harassment. As for discrimination against women, the local communities are very patriarchal. Women are unable to complain against their male relatives, even if these relatives have harassed them and abuse them. The lack of an efficient legal framework, the fear of women being socially rejected, and the culture of violence further deepen this issue.

The region suffers from widespread corruption and favouritism. There is a lack of trust in the efficiency of formal legal entities. Thus, people seek support from corrupt military and security agencies or local leaders to solve their problems. In many cases, military officers have forced courts to issue illegal decisions. Individuals also depend on family relations to facilitate business activities or solve commercial disputes. At the same time, some religious and local leaders are more transparent and trustworthy. They try to work on solving local communities' problems in a fair and just manner. However, it is challenging, and sometimes dangerous, for them to confront the influence of military and security agencies.

4.2.3 The Social dimension in the governorate of Al-Raqqa

The declared aim of the formal authorities in Al-Raqqa is to empower women at the social and political levels. However, there is a wide gap between this aim and the actual practices. Tribalism dominates social relations in all areas in Al-Raqqa. Local communities and families are patriarchal, where women are expected to obey their male relatives. The number of cases of women reporting the common harassment or gender-based violence is low, although they have, in theory, the formal support to do so. Patriarchal tribal norms and traditions still form the main framework for solving family disputes in Al-Raqqa. Many civil society organizations and NGOs benefit from the formal authorities' support and launch different awareness campaigns on women's rights. But their impact remains marginal compared to the influence of the traditional actors.

After the AA controlled the area, Al-Raqqa has witnessed growing ethnic-based discrimination. In the areas of the Arab majority, local communities believe that Kurds dominate key civil and military positions. A Kurdish official, who may not even be Syrian or even speak Arabic, should approve all decisions at the regional and local levels. This discrimination has increased the lack of trust between local communities and authorities. At the same time, the accountability mechanisms are not efficient. Favouritism and bribery are the techniques that most people adopt to solve their problems.

4.3 Security dimension

The conflict has caused a drastic deterioration of the security and safety conditions in all areas. All the controlling authorities rely predominantly on coercive tools to maintain their powers. These tools include detentions, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearance, torture and brutal military force. Additionally, most areas have witnessed a surge in violent criminal activities that were exacerbated by the deteriorating economy, such as armed robbery, murder, and domestic violence.

4.3.1 The Security dimension in the governorate of Sweida

The security and military agencies of the regime have one of the highest influence levels in all areas in Sweida, although they are the actors with the least trust and support from local communities. They practice different types of violence to control the region. They detain and torture many political and civil activists and keep everyone under the fear of being arbitrarily arrested and disappeared. Local communities living in eastern rural areas face the threat of extremist groups that have killed, detained, kidnapped, and tortured many people. These communities believe that the regime's military and security agencies are not willing to protect them from these groups.

Widespread conflict-related activities, such as smuggling and drug trafficking, have promoted the use of weapons, especially by young people.[22] Weapons, including grenades, are accessible to anyone. With the lack of efficient problem-solving mechanisms, many people depend on weapons to solve their individual and family disputes. The spread of the culture of violence has largely increased the number of domestic violence and honour killings.[23] This culture, coupled with dire economic conditions, has encouraged young people to engage in violent activities and armed groups and gangs.

4.3.2 The Security dimension in Northern Aleppo

Rural Aleppo has witnessed intensive military operations during the conflict, which forced inhabitants to flee their homes several times. This area has also received IDPs from different regions in Syria. The population movement has caused tensions between host communities and IDPs who have different ethnic backgrounds. For instance, Afrin used to have a Kurdish majority and was controlled by the Kurdish-led AA. Currently, it hosts hundreds of displaced Arab families from Idleb and Ghouta in rural Damascus. Rural Aleppo suffers from continuing security instability as control of different areas is contested by the Syrian regime, AA, extremist groups, and the current authorities supported by Turkey.

4.3.3 The Security dimension in the governorate of Al-Raqqa

The Turkish-backed armed groups use coercive methods to control the resources in these areas. Local communities believe that most of the leaders of these groups are involved in kidnapping, smuggling and looting activities. The armed groups abuse their influence to arbitrarily arrest people, accusing them of cooperation with the regime or the AA or extremist groups. In many cases, these groups use the charges to extort detainees' families to pay money for releasing their relatives. The lack of the rule of law and the difficult economic conditions have encouraged the proliferation of criminal gangs and activities. Domestic violence has also increased with a surge in arbitrary divorces and early marriage cases.

Like other Syrian areas, Al-Raqqa suffers from high incidents of arbitrary arrest. The authorities often accuse detainees of supporting the Syrian regime, extremist groups, and Turkish-led militias. Due to the lack of the rule of law, the process of detention, investigation and release is subject to corruption and favouritism. Confrontation of illegal activities is improving, yet many neighbourhoods and areas still have a high rate of criminal activity, including armed burglary.

4.4 Ecological dimension

The conflict in Syria has two main types of impact on human ecology. The first is the indirect impact. Before the conflict, the Syrian government had cooperated with international organisations to mitigate the negative effect of climate change on the agriculture sector and natural resources. The crisis halted this cooperation and put environmental-related issues at the bottom of the government's priorities. The second type is the direct impact of conflict consequences on the environment. For instance, the proliferation of many conflict-related activities, such as oil refineries and illegal logging, has enormously damaged the environment.

The agriculture sector is one of the sources of income for most households in the studied areas. It faces grave challenges during the conflict. These include drought and changes in the rainfall season, surges in the prices of fertilizers and seeds, destruction of irrigation systems, lack of fuel for water pumps and other agriculture equipment, and the low profitability of working in this sector. These obstacles have forced many farmers to abandon their lands to work in other activities or leave the country. The neglected land suffers from soil salinisation, which also contributes to desertification. The bad weather conditions and the unstable security status have negatively impacted the availability of appropriate lands for sheep grazing, which contributes to deteriorating livestock in all areas. The shortage in rainfall in 2021 had a particularly severe impact on northeast Syria, leading to losses in the harvested crop area of over 75% and a deterioration of the livestock feed and fodder market, having a major impact on livestock production in 2022.[24]

Sweida and Rural Aleppo suffer from deforestation. Many factors have fed into this, including frequent wildfires; lack of effective institutions and regulations to protect forests; and illegal logging. The latter has surged due to household dependency on wood for heating, caused by the high price and unavailability of fuel. Military operations in the three areas have contributed to the destruction of tree cover and agricultural lands. They have also resulted in increased air pollution and a rise in the number of illegal oil refineries operating in Al-Raqqa.

The three studied areas endure water depletion and exhausted water sources. During the conflict, households have compensated for water shortages in the public networks by drilling wells, which deplete water reserves. It is worth noting that local NGOs supported the drilling of many wells with funds from international donors. Water from wells and private water trucks could be contaminated and inadequately sanitated. This risk of water pollution is due to the lack of public monitoring.

The lack of waste management is another ecological issue that has been exacerbated during the conflict. The destruction of waste management infrastructure and the deterioration in the coverage of waste management services have led to the spread of uncontrolled burning and dumping. These techniques, adopted by many households and industrial workshops in the three areas, have a catastrophic and long-term impact on the environment since they pollute soil, water, and air.

5.0 Resilience capacity

We summarise in this section what the existing literature and the empirical evidence we collected tells us about the status of resilience in Syria. The model we use frames the resilience capacities under three categories: stabilisation, adaptation, and transformation capacities. Some of the available literature adds to this the anticipatory capacity, which is defined as the ability of individuals, households, and communities to foresee and therefore reduce the impact of hazards that are likely to occur, and to be ready for unexpected events through prevention, preparedness and planning.[25] We do not cover this type of resilience capacity in our report, since it is typically linked to climate-related crises. The conflict in Syria has multiple dimensions, and climate-related issues are only part of them.

Some of the stabilisation and adaptation capacities that are cited in the literature and that are based on data collected before 2020 are not an option anymore for the vast majority of Syrians. For example, to face the security fragilities, some communities resorted to fleeing from their current place of residence, which is strongly linked to:

1) the availability of financial savings (e.g., cash) and easy-to-move assets (e.g., jewellery or cars);[26] and

2) the social configuration in the areas they are fleeing to, such as the existence of family or tribal ties or the commonalities with the host community's societal structure in terms of ethnicity and/or religion.[27]

But this option is not even affordable for many Syrians. The level of violence has decreased in the last two years, leading to less movement between different areas. Although conflict-induced internal migration in Syria is no longer common, the fleeing and displacement that took place since 2011 has had mid- and long-term negative effects on the resilience of local communities. For instance, it has led to the cessation of agricultural activities, such as ploughing, irrigating, and cultivating lands in some areas [28], while increasing economic pressures and sometimes social tension in other areas.

Another example is stocking food as an adaptation mechanism, especially in the cases of families who decide to stay or are unable to reallocate to other areas [29]. Stocking food is now not an affordable option for most Syrians, even when they anticipate food shortages or sharp increases in the price of food.

Local communities in the three areas have adopted an array of mechanisms to mitigate the negative impact of conflict on their living conditions and maintain their ability to obtain the minimum required level of essential goods and services. Despite the different de facto actors in the studied areas, there are many commonalities in the techniques that the local communities adopted to meet their basic needs, adapt to long-term change and cope with the difficult conflict circumstances.

We summarise in the following sub-sections the most common current resilience capacities we mapped. We classify them under the same headings of the dimensions of fragility that we mapped in section 4. When certain mechanisms are adopted areas more than others; we point these out. Where area(s) are not mentioned, then the listed mechanism applies to most areas.

Some of the coping mechanisms that people are resorting to face crises have negative impacts and some of them have cascading negative impacts. However, it is challenging to have a sharp distinction between positive and negative mechanisms, since many of them could have mixed impact on the overall households' livelihoods.

5.1 Stabilisation capacity

Most of the strategies and mechanisms adopted to face the multiple concurrent shocks are relevant for building the stabilisation capacity, less is done to improve the adaptation capacity and much less to achieve a transformation capacity, as we set out below.

5.1.1 Coping with economic fragilities

Living conditions

Many families have made minor repairs to their damaged homes to make them more habitable. Local and international organizations have provided some support for families, but this remains well below the actual demands for the repair of damaged homes.
Many households in Rural Aleppo and Al-Raqqa have replaced the now destroyed sewage systems with pit latrines. Similarly, camps in rural Azaz depend on these pits, since they do not have access to a proper sewage system. Despite the inappropriate design of these pits, they serve many families, especially in Rural Aleppo and Al-Raqqa.

The three areas have different techniques to cope with the common issue of very poor access to electricity. In government-controlled areas, the government does not allow the selling of electricity to households via private companies. A few families have their own small electricity generators. Some other houses depend on solar panels. But these two techniques are relatively expensive, and most households cannot afford them. More affordable and common, but also more limited in capacity, is the use of small batteries. These are used to power low energy light bulbs, LED lights and internet routers; and to charge mobile phones. In the northeast and northwest, most households buy their electricity from private companies and traders that own large-capacity generators, and which have licences from the local authorities to sell electricity. Additionally, many families adopt the same methods used in government-controlled areas, including solar panels, small generators and small batteries. Some businesses and farms are also using large solar panels to generate electricity.

To face the shortage and increased price of cooking gas and heating fuel, households are resorting to alternatives, mainly wood from logging activities. These methods are causing environmental damage, but they provide families with a temporary solution to face the problem. Many families turn to external remittances from family members who live abroad.[30]

Humanitarian aid

Humanitarian aid represents a crucial source of support for devastated households and families to meet their basic needs, including food, clothes, and medicines. It enhances the resilience capacity of local communities and IDPs in meeting some of their basic needs. At the same time, this aid has several disadvantages that could affect local resilience, including the increasing dependency on external support, high uncertainty, fluctuation and lack of sustainability, waste of resources due to bureaucracy, corruption, and cronyism.

Labour market

The difficult economic conditions and the absence of male breadwinner in many families have pushed an increasing number of women to participate in the labour market. They are even taking up some roles that used to be reserved for men, such as taxi drivers. Although the increasing number of women in the labour market is positive, the lack of the rule of law and protection policies puts working women in significant risk of abuse.

Many households have launched micro and small home-based business activities to compensate for the drop in income. These include, for example, sewing, making jams and grain packing. In the rural areas, families invest small lands near their homes in small-scale cultivation and livestock for self-consumption and to sell in local markets. The sustainability of these activities faces many challenges, including low demand, poor competitiveness, currency fluctuation and a lack of raw materials.
There is an increased rate of migration of skilled workers, which reflects, in part, the levels of frustration experienced by the population in finding decent job opportunities. This is a coping mechanism that has a negative cascading effect on the community as it harms the availability of human capital in the short and long run and deprives many households of their breadwinners.
The widespread conflict-induced activity has caused tremendous distortions in the labour market. This is a negative coping mechanism with a cascading effect. These activities are dangerous, but very profitable. Thus, it is challenging to attract people to re-join productive but less profitable economic sectors. The growth of the informal economy and illicit economic activities is another negative coping mechanism with a cascading effect. It is leading to exploitative working practices;[31] weakened social protection schemes;[32] and limiting access to education.

5.1.2 Coping with social fragilities

The difficult living conditions drive many members of local communities to volunteer their time and effort to support deprived families and IDPs. The voluntary activities also cover vital sectors such as education. Several initiatives give free lessons for children who dropped out of school. Although it is still limited and differs across areas in terms of scale, women's participation in these activities is growing with the proliferation of civil society initiatives and the support of INGOs.

Moreover, the absence of the rule of law and lack of public trust in state and quasi-state institutions at the national and sub-national levels has led to an increasing role for traditional power structures, such as religious and tribal leaders, who, in many cases, are perceived as patriarchal and exclusionary actors. Such actors are taking the role of de facto judicial institutions, leading to arbitrary regulations that discriminate against women and weaken their potential by depriving them of their inheritance or housing, land and property rights.[34]

All areas have witnessed an increase in the school dropout rates in an attempt by some parents to reduce spending. Although most schools are free, many families are unable to afford the costs of transportation, stationery, and uniforms. Moreover, many families take their children out of school to send them to work. This is a negative coping mechanism with a severe cascading effect.

Due to the high prices of the more efficient and reliable private health services, most families have either stopped seeking medical advice when needed or shifted towards traditional medicine. They do not seek health services at private hospitals unless the health problems are very acute.

5.1.3 Coping with Ecological fragilities

Most of the mechanisms adopted to cope with the water shortage have negative cascading effect. Digging wells for agriculture and household consumption is very common and, in some areas, it depletes the internal water.

Households secure their drinking water from several sources other than the unreliable public networks in the three areas. Many families buy water from private trucks. Others depend on water wells. The scale of the water problem is related to the weather, and it differs between rural and urban areas. Water scarcity is severe for IDPs living in camps in rural Azaz.

Many households boil the water they get from wells and private water trucks to make it safer for drinking. Yet, the boiling process depends on fuel that is expensive and not always available, or charcoal that largely contributes to deforestation. Thus, boiling water is a good sanitation technique but not sustainable.

Due to the lack of proper waste management, households engage in dumping and burning to dispose of their waste. These techniques have a catastrophic impact on the environment.

5.1.4 Coping with security fragilities

Many families have left their homes in conflict zones to reach more secure areas. Families have escaped due to different security conditions, including intensive military operations, fear of detention, increased discrimination based on ethnicity or sect, destruction of their homes and the confiscation of their assets. Some families pay bribes to security and military actors to facilitate their activities and protect themselves from arbitrary detention. This negative coping mechanism contributes to empowering corrupt and violent institutions.

5.2 Adaptation capacity

5.2.1 Coping with economic fragilities

Living conditions

The challenging living conditions have forced most families, in all areas, to develop a behaviour of rational consumption of essential goods like water, electricity and cooking gas. This behaviour is essential for sustainable development at a local level; however, it should not be caused by deprivation, as is the case for most households in all areas. All areas have witnessed a growing use of sustainable energy sources (solar panels), which has developed a whole new sector of economic activity. The proliferation of workshops and trading companies working in clean energy reflects the institutionalization of this new sector.

Humanitarian aid

Many civil society organizations and initiatives have been established to organize and monitor the distribution of this aid. Most of these entities aim to sustain the availability of basic needs for deprived families. Many of them have expanded their activities to include livelihoods and local development projects. Due to the delivery of aid that does not always match needs, many families sell some of the humanitarian aid, such as cooking oil, in the market. Others convert excess aid to other products. For example, warm blankets have been used to make warm clothing.

Labour market

Some of the new economic activities that have developed from micro and individual projects to small and medium businesses have forward and backward economic linkages. This development serves the reactivation of productive economic activities and adjusts the labour market distortions.

The minor repair of houses needs skilled vocational labour, such as carpenters and electric technicians. The growing demand for these skills is shifting the labour market structure towards more productive activities.

Many families resort to adjusting their livelihood strategies, such as home-based vegetable and poultry farming;[35] relying on personal skills or assets to create new job opportunities (e.g., private tutoring or transforming a private vehicle into a taxi).[36]

5.2.2 Coping with social fragilities

Many civil society initiatives provide social services such as informal education and provide protection to the most vulnerable. They also regularly launch awareness campaigns against negative social phenomena, such as smuggling, corruption and gender-based violence.

5.2.1 Coping with Ecological fragilities

Many farmers stopped cultivating heavy water-consuming crops, such as cotton in Al-Raqqa, to cope with the water scarcity. This scarcity is due to bad weather conditions and the threat of Turkey cutting the water on the Euphrates River. In some areas of Rural Aleppo, farmers depend on the energy of solar panels to pump water to their lands. But these panels are expensive for most farmers and the ones that are available are of low quality.

Some farmers are using climate-smart practices for agricultural sustainability, such as growing fodder with techniques that require little water. But knowledge of these practices remains very limited. Some farmers are using organic fertilisers to compensate for the shortage of chemical fertilisers.

5.2.2 Coping with security fragilities

Local communities in some areas have established armed groups to confront the brutality and violence of de facto authorities. In areas like Sweida, these groups have also increased the bargaining power of local communities while negotiating the release of detainees or other security-related issues with de facto authorities. But more often such groups contributed to further deterioration of the security.

5.3 Transformation capacity

Most literature shows that transformative capacity is inconsistent across different Syrian regions. Local communities' capabilities to affect their environment to create long-term and systemic changes remain low or non-existent.[37, 38] Transformative capacity to influence the drivers of risk is significantly constrained, if not deteriorating.[39] The only promising exceptions are a) the civil society and volunteering, b) the transformation of gender roles through the increased women participation in the economic activities and public life in general c) the development of independent private sector, d) the access to remote working opportunities and e) the increased use of renewable energy and climate-smart practices.

5.3.1 Coping with economic fragilities

Living conditions

The lack of basic goods and services provoked civil society to protest against the current local authorities. The cities of Sweida and Azaz have witnessed many demonstrations demanding the authorities improve services provisions. The three areas have more organised and active civil movements to challenge the inefficient and corrupt dominant institutions. However, the coercive measures have still managed to limit the space for civil activists and contain all civic demonstrations.

Some small businesses that provide alternative green energy are emerging and some of them are reaching advanced levels. They provide enough energy to run factories and farms. Solar energy is the most common. This is leading to the empowerment of the independent private sector.

Humanitarian aid

The essential role of civil society entities in distributing aid gives them more influence and space within their communities. These changes in the local power dynamics could limit the authority of military, security and business entities that currently control and redirect most resources to serve their interests. Some organizations buy part of their humanitarian aid from local markets, which activates productive economic sectors and generates income and job opportunities for local communities.

Labour market

Many skilled individuals are resorting to remote working by finding job opportunities abroad which could be done remotely. Skilled graphic designers and programmers are also seeking online opportunities to deliver their services. But this requires good electricity and internet connectivity, which is often not available. Another problem is the inability to receive funds into bank accounts. Several solutions are presented to face this issue, such as asking for wages/fees to be transferred to the bank accounts of relatives abroad, who then use the Hawala system to transfer the money to inside Syria.

Civil society organisations, national and international, have been offering decent jobs opportunities. The areas have witnessed a growing role for civil society in advocating for workers' rights and decent job opportunities. This role is still limited, but it could be developed to make a change in the structure of the labour market to be fairer for all workers.

5.3.2 Coping with social fragilities

All areas have witnessed the expansion of some positive social phenomena, including voluntarism and women's participation in civic activities despite enormous challenges related to norms and traditions. Women's roles are still limited, but the growing of these positive phenomena could establish the foundation for genuine social change in the medium and long run.

One notable transformative resilience capacity is the transformation of gender roles regarding women taking on new duties and jobs that were traditionally male dominated in the pre-conflict era. This was accompanied by a change in a number of gender patterns associated with women, as the percentage of women heads of household increased from 4% in the pre-conflict period to 22%.[40] However, playing both roles as breadwinners and caregivers is exposing most of these women to an enormous amount of physical and psychological stress.[41] Additionally, there are still many restrictions in the way of women's active participation in public life, such as the absence of protection mechanisms for women, the emergence of de facto authorities which exclude women from openly working in the public space, the total absence of laws that guarantee the active participation of women in local governance structures and the dominance of men over most of the influential positions in civil space and political structures.[42] These restrictions differ across areas, but in general, it is still difficult for women to make progress up the ladder in most businesses.

5.3.3 Coping with ecological fragilities

Many civil society initiatives aim to increase public awareness of environmental challenges, such as illegal logging. Other initiatives, in Sweida for instance, have launched several afforestation campaigns. Although these initiatives are crucial for sustainable development, their impacts are minimal, since the environment is not a priority for households and local authorities. The use of some climate-smart agricultural practices had a positive impact on farmers and the environment.

5.3.4 Coping with security fragilities

Civil society plays a vital role in highlighting the corruption and brutality of some influential actors, using social media. This informal type of monitoring over security and military actors is an entry point to change the current structure of power dynamics in many areas.

6.0 Obstacles and opportunities in delivering resilience programs

The implementation of humanitarian and resilience-building programmes often battles with the complicated international and national political dynamics, in addition to practical logistical issues. In this section we summaries the main issues and opportunities in relation to the actual delivery of resilience-building programmes that came out of our interviews with UN agencies, INGOs and Syrian civil society working on resilience-building related programs.

6.1 Navigating the delicate political dynamics

Political limitations — international, national, and local — came up in most interviews as a key obstacle in the way of principled delivery of assistance. It is affecting not only the modalities of response but also many aspects of humanitarian programming that should in theory be apolitical, such the selection of targeted areas, projects, and beneficiaries, which should be primarily needs-dependent.

As discussed in section 3, there are serious issues with the legitimacy of all governing authorities in Syria, although to a varying degree this depends on the area. Programming in all three main areas is affected by the political position of the donor country towards this governing authority. Many donors have strict red lines in dealing with the governing authorities in each area in Syria. But often, building resilience programming requires a degree of coordination with the authorities in charge, especially in sectors such as health, education, and agriculture.

Some of the implementing partners argued that as the conflict enters its 12th year, and with all the fragmentations and transformations that took place it is important to find new ways to deliver the needed support without reinforcing or legitimizing corrupt authorities and without spurring on the drivers of conflict.

What is clear from the interviews is that in all the three main areas in Syria, the UN agencies, INGOs and some of the Syrian CSOs are becoming the interlocutors between the donor countries and the relevant institutions of the governing authorities. While such a role is important, especially to ensure the safety of those implementing the programs, it also adds a burden to these organisations, which are not designed to play such a quasi-political role.

In what follow we outline the main relevant political dynamics that came up in the interviews in each of the main three areas.

6.1.1 Government-controlled areas

The main Western donors' red lines in Government-controlled areas are direct cooperation with the Syrian regime and allowing the regime and other corrupt actors to benefit from their aid support. But at the same time, and in order to be able to function and deliver their programs, implementing agencies often have no choice but to have minimum coordination with the government. One of the main issues that came out of the interviews with implementing agencies in government-controlled areas is the difficulty of being "stuck between a rock and a hard place" in dealing with this reality while having at the same time to respect the red lines. On one hand, they complain that they must deal with donor's conditions, and on the other hand, they have to handle all the restrictions and manipulation attempts of the Syrian government.

Typically, these agencies design their programmes and receive donor funding based on commitments to guarantee some conditions, such as no-interference from the government on the selection of beneficiaries. They then submit their plans to the relevant governmental institute to obtain approvals needed to implement the programmes. The government often treats them as the representatives of the donors and attempts to pass messages through them, to add pressure and to delay the approval if they do not like the conditions of the donors. After some toing and froing, the agencies then tell the government that they risk losing the funding if they do not get the approvals on time. More recently, they report that the government eventually grants the approval in most cases.

Implementing agencies complained about the lack of understanding of the donors' capitals to the nature of their work inside Syria and the necessity of coordinating with certain governmental institutions in vital sectors, such as health, education, or agriculture. They cited examples of funding being terminated because of coordination with governmental service institutions, especially in the agricultural and educational sectors. Given the nature of the Syrian state, these sectors are mainly controlled by the government.

A typical example of the conundrum comes from the agriculture sector, which is key to building resilience and insuring food security in Syria. Supporting major agricultural projects requires providing water and that in turns often requires restoring the irrigation infrastructure such as the irrigation canals. The main canals belong to the state, and it is not possible to restore them without coordinating with the ministry of agriculture. This is seen as a red line by most donors. In some examples, and after some back and forth between the donor and the government via the implementing agency, a compromise was agreed, which is that the agency restores the sub-canals that go through farmers' lands while the government restores the main canal leading up to these lands. Eventually the project is implemented based on this division of labour and the water arrived at large areas benefiting many thousands families. Inevitably, this requires more coordination on the restoration work with the ministry of agriculture. When one of the donors learned about this, they terminated the funding for the continuation of the project.

Similar stories come from the education sector. Some issues relate to crossing the fine line between what is classified as an acceptable restoration for school buildings and what is classified as 'reconstruction', which is another red line. In one example, the implementing agency was allowed to restore the first floor of a school but was not allowed by the same donor to work on the second floor or the same school because the type of work needed to restore the second floor classifies as 'reconstruction'. Given that this school, as most schools in Syria, is a state school, reconstructing a state property is not allowed.

Most agencies pointed out that the concerns of the donors could be addressed through:

1. Agreeing on practises and mechanisms that address these concerns such as vetting processes, monitoring and evaluation.

2. Through conducting conflict-sensitive approaches that take into consideration the different local dynamics - not just the macro-ones, in order to avoid risks and unintended negative impacts.

3. Through more involvement of the donors themselves, including in adding the right strings to the funding and sending representatives to visit project sites.

6.1.2 The northeast

When it comes to European countries, one of the key red lines in working in the northeast is supporting the AA. This, in part, has to do with having to respect the Turkish red line on this issue, given that the donors need Turkey's consent to their presence in southern Turkey and for access and support to the Syrian northwest.

This is on top of the same red lines that apply to the Syrian government in relation to any activity that has to do with state institutions. The combination of these two red lines in this area results in distorted support for the education sector in the Arab majority areas in this region, which is in much need of support. The two available educational systems in this area are the schools of the AA and the schooling system of the Syrian government. The latter is preferred by the local Arab families, firstly because it is a formal system, meaning that their children receive school certificates that would allow them to progress to further education, and because parents do not favour the ideological AA curriculum. But because state-run schools do not function in this area, the Arab families register their children as 'free students' to sit the state school exams in the nearby villages and towns under government control that have state schools, they prepare their children for these exams during the year, then send them by buses to sit the exams in the state schools during the examination period in nearby government-controlled areas.

Not wanting to support either educational system, some donors are resorting to supporting informal education. But as the local Syrian civil society organisations we interviewed pointed out, the informal system does not equip students with an accredited certificate that would allow them to progress to the next stage.

Some organisations complained that although some of the major donors do not go through the AA related institutes such as the RCC, but that in practice the implementation of many of the projects is eventually going to contractors and service providers that are associated with them. They complained about high levels of corruption and nepotism in this area and the need to bribe the AA to get licences to be able to operate. All of this is hampering the ability of independent civil society and business to grow and develop.

6.1.3 The northwest

The most important of donors' red lines in this area is to avoid dealing with and benefiting HTS. The Syrian organisations we interviewed complained that at times this red line is translating into the termination of support, particularly for the type of institution and activities that are needed to stand up to HTS and deprive them of public space. The health sector in this area is the most significant example. It is dominated by Syrian civil society medical organisations. They themselves must handle the delicate relationship with the de facto government, which is close to HTS. However, through their very organised work and community services, which the Salvation government is unable to deliver, these organisations enjoy reasonable levels of agency and authority. When, for example, funding is axed for one of the local hospitals that they run, the Salvation government steps in and tries to run the hospital itself, therefore gaining more power and control over the local community. Local doctors and health workers also then find themselves facing a very difficult choice. When working for the civil society run health facilities, they have the agency to push back on policies and regulations that the Salvation government tries to impose. But if they work for Salvation government facilities, they will not have much choice but to implement them.

6.2 Opening opportunities at the local level

In all areas, implementing agencies and local civil society pointed out the opening of opportunities for interventions at the local level that are more independent from the control of the governing authority. This is particularly the trend in the last two years in government-controlled areas. With the continuous economic deterioration in this area, and with the government running out of resources, its control of the activities at the local level has been eroding. This has opened a space that is getting occupied, in part, by UN agencies, INGOs and civil society.

One good example of this is the agricultural sector. As pointed in section 3.1, the central state control of this sector is eroding especially after the lifting of government subsidies which ended its control of the market and farmers' choices. Farmers are now making commercial choices when choosing what to grow. This has opened areas for intervention in the agriculture sector that have not been available before. Some of the implementing agencies' project in government-controlled areas are making good use of this space. They promote a more commercial and grassroots led approach to agriculture that breaks away from central planning. For example, they promote effective grassroots planning, getting farmers involved in new grassroots organizations such as farmers organizations, water-users associations, and seed producer groups. All these activities used to be controlled in the past by the government-controlled Farmers Union.

Other local openings are taking place in the rural local councils. As noted in section 3.1 the influence of governmental institutions in the countryside is less than its influence in the urban centres, which is giving more space for local actors to operate. One example of this is the rural district of Shahba (section 3.1.1.).

The conditions coming from the donor's side restricting work with central government institutions are also giving implementing agencies good excuses to work on the local level. Some of them reported having an understanding with the government that they are not doing any capacity building at a central level, and that their work is very de-centralised and is very area based. UN agencies and INGOs also reported that recently they have been given more freedom to move around the country and visit the field and increased the ability to put more international staff back in field locations. They also reported an increase in the number of visas given to internationals and representatives of the donors to visit the locations of the project they support. This is resulting in an increased understanding of the context and the situation on the ground.

The UN agencies also reported increased ability to fund local Syrian CSOs. The Syria humanitarian fund, for example, is now able to fund many more national NGOs, while before it used to fund mainly UN agencies. This shift in funding approach is due to several reasons, including the limited capacity of these agencies to meet the growing needs and the increasing number of qualified and skilled local partners.

6.3 Procurement and Vetting Process

Procurement policies and practices for both goods and services play several important roles, and they deserve much attention from donors in Syria, given the complexity of the setting and the nature of the market and available suppliers. Not only are procurement policies important to ensure the timely delivery of assistance, but they are also important to curb corruption and favouritism, and they could have an impact on the local economy. Therefore, monitoring this area is not only a matter of good governance, but it also affects resilience capacity itself, since procurement practices could affect the power structure and the economic fragility. Digging deep into the procurement policies and practices in Syria is beyond the scope of this report. We highlight here some of the issues that came up in our research and are related to the implementation of resilience programming.

Each area in Syria has its own procurement issues. In government-controlled areas, two major issues stand out, particularly in relation to the UN.

The first issue is the exchange rate. The Syrian government requires that all INGOs should transfer all funds for projects in Syria using the official exchange rate, which is at times representing 30% less than the strongly fluctuating market rate. Although the UN was able to negotiate a preferential rate, it remains less than the market rate. This requirement causes a reduction in the available funds for the projects on the ground and for procurement. A few organizations depend on external agents to finalize procurements with projects inside Syria. Yet, this method is also costly due to the high commissions that must be paid for more than one agent. To avoid losing funds because of the exchange rate, the UN channels more than 60% of its procurement for assistance in Syria in the international and regional market. While this resolves part of the problem but it also results in a missed opportunity to develop the local economy by procuring locally.

The second issue relates to the vetting of local suppliers. The government-controlled area is crowded with suppliers that have committed human rights abuses and are linked to the Syrian regime. The independent private sector, on the other hand, suffered significantly during the last ten years. Some of the businesses left the country, others ceased to exist, and others remained, but are struggling up against multiple obstacles. They often struggle to win tenders because their capacity has shrunk over the years. In some sectors, such as telecom, security and fuel, there are no available suppliers except those closely linked to the regime.

The UN in Syria recently came under fire because of its procurement practices. UN agencies were accused by Human Rights Watch (HRW) and The Syrian Legal Development Programme (SLDP) that they do not sufficiently incorporate human rights principles in their assessment of the suppliers and partners in Syria and that this "exposes them to significant reputational and actual risk of financing abusive actors and/or actors that operate in high-risk sectors without sufficient safeguards."[43] They specifically mentioned three contracts awarded by the UN to two security companies and one service provider in Aleppo, who all have been implicated in human rights violations and committed war crimes.

In its response, the UN in Syria welcomed the scrutiny that "allows the UN to identify areas of improvement in policies and practices, including Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD)"[44]. They pointed out that their vetting process did not highlight an issue of concern regarding the two security companies they contracted, but they denied having contracted the third service provider in Aleppo. They also pointed out that having a due diligence process in place that manages the delicate balance between risk management and operational effectiveness is very challenging in such a milieu. The UN stated that "prospect vendors are not only vetted against previous performance and UN sanction lists, but also assessed on previous negative public records and allegations."[45]

From the resilience-strengthening point of view, it is important that procurement policies and vetting processes do not empower corrupt and criminal entities that are a key part of the corrupt ruling authorities, since it means empowering the very same authorities and structures that are behind some of the crises that people face. But it is equally important to consider the opportunities that procurement practices itself could open to strengthening resilience, which we further discuss in section 7.6.

In the Arab-majority areas of the northeast, Syrian CSOs complained that the opportunities made available through INGOs procurement often go to suppliers with close linked to SDF and PYD, leading to the development of a corrupt private sector and hampering the opportunities for new, independent local businesses to develop.

6.4 Monitoring and evaluations

Implementing agencies pointed out that the impact of resilience building programming is usually difficult to evaluate during or shortly after the end of the project. The actual impact of such projects takes years to show. They also pointed out that they tend to monitor the outputs of the projects, and that they are not very good at monitoring outcomes. This could be a consequence of the dominance of humanitarian projects in Syria which is usually monitored and evaluated by emphasising the outputs rather that the outcomes.

They also pointed out the difficulties in finding the right indicators to measure the improvement in resilience as a result of the interventions. It is worth mentioning that evaluating the impact of resilience-related projects is challenging within a conflict context. The socioeconomic and institutional environment in Syria is very dynamic and it is affected by several and fast changing internal and external factors.

Implementing agencies also pointed out that more involvement from the donors and more visits of their representatives to the field are a very important part of the monitoring process.

The UN also pointed out that one of its current monitoring priorities is to get unrestricted access to the returnees (refugees going back to Syria). One of the pillars of the UN strategic framework for Syria is "enabling [an] environment for a resilient return".[46] The UN needs to be able to monitor everyone that comes back and ensure their safety and wellbeing. Returnees face multiple challenges, including:

a) the loss of their properties due to destruction or confiscation or poor HLP rights;

b) interrogations and harassment by the intelligence services;

c) being called for conscription; and

d) difficult economic conditions and inability to restart their businesses, or to go back to their jobs.

Reviewing the monitoring and evaluation processes of the UN that are listed in the UN strategic framework reveals another gap in the monitoring and evaluation of UN work in Syria. The Planning and International Cooperation Commission (PICC), which is the governmental counterpart of the UN, is part of the M&E process. A third-party independent monitoring is only done at the end of the two years period. It is important to have a separate independent monitoring mechanism for the UN work in place during the implementation phase.

6.5 Donor's coordination and position towards supporting resilience

Most implementing agencies expressed frustration at the low level of coordination among donors, even among the like-minded donors. They also talked about the confusion in regard to the position towards supporting resilience building and early recovery and the lack of agreement on what exactly qualifies as resilience building and early recovery programming. This is because different donors have a different interpretation of the terms and what kind of programmes they translate to in different areas in Syria.

Some donors, like the US, specified what Humanitarian Early Recovery programming in Syria meant for them.[47] They define the objectives of early recovery as improving access to basic services and strengthening livelihoods through income-generation activities. Other donors are still not very clear about their approach.

There are several coordination mechanisms, some themed, about particular sectors, such as the resilience building forum, the forum for humanitarian aid exchange, and the UN Regional Dialogue Mechanism. But it is not clear how much coordination there is between these different fora. Such coordination would be a very good way of exploring avenues for the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

In general, there is a clear need for a more collective response from like-minded donors.

6.6 Funds transfers

Both Syrian and international organisations complained about this issue, but its impact seems to be even more severe on local civil society. Transferring money to humanitarian and resilience-related projects is a challenge for all international organizations due to two reasons. The first is the formal exchange rate, discussed in section 6.3. The second is the economic sanctions and the de-risking effect. These sanctions force humanitarian agencies into a complex bureaucratic process to be exempted and obtain approval before sending money to Syria. Even with approval, most banks prefer not to have any Syria-related transactions to avoid potential risks (over compliance).[48]

6.7 Imbalance of support between areas

Humanitarian and developmental support should ideally be based on needs considering other operational factors like accessibility and availability of independent and efficient implementing partners. In practice, this support suffers from imbalanced for a variety of reasons, including:

a) The Syrian government makes access to some areas and communities more difficult. This is often done to punish these areas because they supported the opposition before returning to regime control (e.g., Ghouta). But such areas that used to be contested and have now returned to Syrian government control have very high needs because of destruction, displacement and deliberate negligence by the Syrian government.

b) Sometimes donors demand a balanced distribution of projects between different areas of control in part to improved access to 'difficult to reach' areas. Donors should consider that needs could in some cases be different in different sectors across Syria.

c) In some areas, such as Sweida, there is relatively more space for civil society to act than in other government-controlled areas, which makes the area popular target for supporting CSOs. While this is a good investment in available opportunities, but it is also leading to imbalance in CSO support, which is much needed in other areas.

6.8 Syrian civil society

The nascent Syrian civil society and non-governmental organizations have a multifaceted role with regards to building resilience. On one hand, they are positively contributing to the coping and adaptive mechanisms of local communities by providing basic services and humanitarian aid; supporting the education and health systems; securing job opportunities for the youth; holding vocational trainings; integrating IDPs within their host communities; and opening new spaces for intra-groups dialogue and social cohesion.[49, 50]

However, the effect of Syrian civil society and NGOs over transformative resilience capacity remains relatively limited across Syria's different areas of control. This is due to several factors, such as the poor national and international funding policies for multiyear, multi-layered resilience programmes;[51] the focus on ad hoc, short-term solutions and rapid emergency responses rather than long-term sustainable development strategies;[52] poor communication and coordination mechanisms; and weak institutional capacities.[53]

The Syrian organisations we interviewed complained that they still feel that international funding is inaccessible to them and that even when small grants are made available, their access requirements and paperwork are too complex for them to handle. They also complained about feeling overpowered by INGOs, which obtain most of the available funding and support, and about the lack of sustainable investment in the capacity of local organisations to enable them to grow and become capable of delivering larger projects and receiving more funds.

Similar trends could be seen in the role of sub-national governance structures, such as LACs or technical directorates. They have reinforced the ability of local communities to absorb and adapt to some of the shocks resulting from the conflict, by providing services in the fields of electricity, water, education and the rehabilitation of some vital infrastructure[54] Their transformative capacity, however, remains very weak, mainly as a result of the appropriation of these local governance systems by the political and armed actors; their short-sighted strategic planning; high levels of corruption and patronage; inadequate public participation; and the absence of social accountability.[55]

7.0 Developing the theory of change and recommendations for resilience-building operations

Sections 3 and 4 answered the first two scoping questions listed in the introduction about the crises and the current status of resilience capacity. In this section, we answer the rest of the scoping questions based on the evidence and analysis presented in this report. In answering these questions, we are also suggesting operational recommendations and developing a framework for a theory of change for strengthening resilience in Syria. In section 8 we focus on programmatic area-based recommendations.

7.1 What is the goal of resilience strengthening?

The goal of resilience strengthening in Syria is to enable people to adopt an effective response to the main existing and potential fragilities they face through a comprehensive strategy that:

1. is primarily needs-based and takes into consideration the local context and power dynamics;

2. accommodates the timescale needed to generate an outcome in strengthening resilience and the nature of the protracted conflict by delivering medium- and long-term programs that enable the communities to gradually overcome the crises;

3. generates the following outputs:

    a. strengthening all types of resilience capacity evenly: stabilization, adaptation and transformation;

    b. empowering people, local independent civic structures and small businesses;

    c. interrupting negative coping mechanisms to the crisis that are leading to cascading negative impacts;

    d. delivering resilience-building activities that address multiple dimensions of fragility including building on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (HDP nexus);

4. generates the following outcomes:

    a. contributes to structural changes that are further conducive for strengthening resilience, including by adopting mechanisms that avoid empowering illegitimate governing authorities and corrupt structures;

    b. communities that can cope independently, to adopt resilience responses to potential crises and to address the root causes of problems;

5. achieves impacts through making an improvement in the well-being of both individuals and households.

7.2 Where to support resilience?

To address the issues highlighted in section 6.7, we propose a process for choosing/ prioritising areas of support that consider one or more of the following criteria:
Selection Criteria: where to support resilience?

1. Areas hosting large numbers of IDPs, returnees and vulnerable groups (since this adds pressure on the resources of the area and increases social tensions).

2. Areas with potential for economic growth, specifically areas with agricultural-based economy and/or skilled labour.

3. Areas that used to be contested areas (e.g., Ghouta & parts of the countryside of Hama and Homs), especially rural areas where farmers lost their farms and village houses and were displaced.

4. Areas with high societal impact on their surroundings. For example, small central cities that are highly connected to the surrounding countryside, or areas containing influential tribal and community leaders

5. The actual needs of local communities regarding humanitarian assistance and the availability of vital infrastructure (health facilities, schools etc.), rather than trying to achieve equal distribution of support between several areas with very different levels of need.

6. The availability of civic actors who can operate relatively independently of the authorities (while maintaining their personal safety). Caution should be taken to focus resources on areas which have the potential for civil society growth but lack adequate attention and support, rather than areas with already flourishing supported civil society.

7. Areas where tension with the authority could escalate and lead to shockwaves and multiple conflicts (e.g., Al-Raqqa).

Based on these criteria, we suggest the following focus areas in the coming period:

I. **The northeast of Syria:** the areas recaptured from ISIS are very important to target. These areas, especially Al-Raqqa and Deir al Zour, meet almost all the criteria above, including the tension with the local authorities. Targeting this area is also important for countering extremism.

II. **In government-controlled areas:**

a. Re-captured areas that used to be under opposition-control. For example, parts of the countryside of Damascus, such as Ghouta, Eastern Aleppo, Deraa, Idleb's southern countryside (e.g., Maaret Al Numan and Khan Shaykhun), parts of the countryside of Hama and Homs.

b. The city of Homs has several areas that used to be under opposition-control, such as the old city and the suburbs of Baba Amer and al-Waar. It is also a city that has a good mix of traditional and new local civil society organisations that could be potential partners. Homs is also a city that is closely linked to its countryside and hosts many IDPs.

c. The city of Sweida and the town of Jaramana (on the outskirt of Damascus). In both these locations, there is potential for improving transformational resilience as there is relatively more space available for civil society. Jaramana is a very crowded and highly diverse town which hosts a very high number of IDPs.

III. Aleppo countryside:

a. IDP camps such as Zoghra camp in Jarablus. See section 4.1.2.

b. Azaz and Tal Abyad, given the active civil society and the potential for transformation.

7.3 Whose resilience is to be strengthened?

While individuals and communities should be the primary target of resilience-building, it is also important to support some institutions in order to achieve sustainable improvement in total resilience capacity. Institutions which contribute to strengthening community resilience and could be targeted include:

1. Local, independent small- and medium-scale civil society initiatives, organisations and networks.

2. Local Administrative Unites by providing capacity building and technical support and on how to increase independence, efficiency, accountability, and transparency. It is important to consider that the significant part of the power dynamics at the national level is often projected at the LAUs level. To ensure that any support for LAUs is not going to reinforce or reproduce the same power dynamics it is important to involve local independent civil society at several stages including needs assessment, the monitoring and evaluation and the selection of beneficiaries. UN HABITAT produced important set of principles and considerations to factor in when supporting local public services in Syria and working with LAUs [56];

3. Grassroots-led labour unions and workers' groups, such as the emerging independent farmers' associations.

4. Medium, small and micro independent businesses, especially within the sectors identified in section 7.5, with a strong emphasis on maintaining independence.

5. Health institutions: local ones, such as rural clinics, in government-controlled areas and civil society-led ones in the northeast and northwest where civil society leads the health sector.

In terms of targeted communities, we recommend a special focus on targeting returnees (both IDPs and refugees returning to their areas). While some needs for the returnees could be similar to those of the local community they return to, and thus could be addressed for both of them, other needs are different. These include proper identification documents and civil registries, social integration programmes within their host communities, and literacy and life skills courses, among other returnees-tailored programmes.

We also recommend gender mainstreaming across all programmes, in a way that ensures an economic empowerment and safe environment for women, gender-balanced service delivery and an active women participation in needs assessments and programmes' design. Even though programming should target all those in need, but there is an increasing need to focus on women in most programmes while ensuring a buy-in from the wider local communities in such programmes. Most of the women whom we interviewed and who participated in our FGDs requested gender mainstreaming and gender-specific programmes, such as targeting women-led organisations and SMEs.

The same applies to the youths, another priority target group, which are largely overlooked in many programmes.

7.4 In which areas or sectors should resilience be strengthened as a priority?

We identify key sectors to prioritise in delivering resilience-building assistance, that address the identified fragilities and strengthen resilience of the people and the communities. In all these sectors local support is key. Even if the programmes of support require central planning, the aim should be to fill and make use of the openings at the local levels identified in this report, including in section 6.2. These identified sectors are:

1. The education sector: including support to school education, TVET remote learning and knowledge transfer. Especially knowledge that strengthens resilience, such as learning the practices of climate smart agriculture, how to cope with psychological traumas and how to protect children. Support for access to remote education platforms, including language and university courses, is also another safe and efficient area for intervention.

Platforms for remote learning became even more developed and popular after COVID-19, offering a unique opportunity for students who are unable to otherwise access these opportunities. But local students in most areas are often unable to afford these opportunities or do not have access to the internet. Placing a special focus on women in the education sector is also a good way to support the transformation of gender roles in Syria. This should not translate to supporting the education for women only, but in some areas special measures are needed to help them to break the barriers and to have equal opportunities like men. This could be, for example, special grants for women.

2. The agriculture sector: support for the agriculture sector checks many boxes. It improves adaptation capacity as it offers a decent source of livelihood; improves food security and food diversity; and it could have a positive environmental impact. Agricultural development also ticks the box of HDP nexus if delivered in an inclusive conflict-sensitive manner. It improves the availability and diversity of food; it generates income and creates jobs, thus reducing the motivation to join armed groups. It is also known to have an impact on the reduction of violence[57]. There are several examples in Syria where young men leave armed groups to work in farming.[58] If planned rightly it can improve community cohesion as it motivates the community to work together to regulate access to resources and to jointly address environmental challenges. Grassroot associations to regulate the access to water and the distribution of seeds, for example, are emerging across Syria. The increased decentralisation of this sector, particularly in government areas, as discussed in section 6.2, presents an opportunity for resilience strengthening at the local level. One potential vehicle for supporting this sector is The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) since it is able to oversee at national level issues such as the management of water resources, and the spread of diseases and can access and communicate with more areas than the government itself whose control is limited to its own controlled areas. INGOs could also provide technical and financial support for small-scale cultivation and livestock. They could also provide information and training on climate-smart agricultural practices and solutions and contribute to the introduction of a modern irrigation system to mitigate the impact of droughts, water scarcity, and excessive well-digging. In coordination with local activists, these organizations can increase public awareness about environmental hazards, such as logging and dumping and burning waste. They could suggest and financially support environment-friendly alternatives for logging and solid waste management.

3. Sport for Development and Peace (SDP): this is one of the least explored and much needed avenues of intervention in Syria, particularly outside government-controlled areas. It is also an area that meets the HDP nexus criteria since it improves mental and physical health, in addition to contributing to development and peace by design. It is also a relatively safe area of intervention, given its apolitical nature. Research shows that carefully designed SDP programmes in conflict zones could facilitate social interventions; contribute to harmony and peace between groups of different ethnic and racial backgrounds; promote socially inclusive identities; reduce symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression; and aid human rights agendas.[59] As such, if designed rightly and in a conflict-sensitive manner, SDP programmes could strengthen resilience capacities in different ways by responding to several of the main issues that were cited in the sections on social fragilities, including social tensions and high numbers of people with trauma and mental health problems. Additionally, supporting sport development targets one of the most important target groups in Syria: the youth. It gives them hope and something to look forward to, away from the daily misery of their lives; an outlet for their energy; an opportunity to grow healthier; and good use of their time. Supporting sport beyond the provision of facilities and equipment, such as organising teams and tournaments, could be an important tool for addressing many of the community tensions.

4. Business development: supporting independent entrepreneurs and medium, small, and micro enterprises is an important priority for addressing economic fragilities and strengthening the resilience of the community in a more sustainable way. Focusing support on independent businesses, including home-made activities that are not linked to the corrupt ruling authorities is very important and strengthens both adaptation and transformation resilience capacities by giving agency to more independent actors. Supporting the emerging women-led enterprises is also another good way of building positively on the transformation of gender roles in Syria.

5. Health sector: this sector faces enormous challenges in all areas, including weak infrastructure, outdated equipment, and a lack of medical staff. International donors could support CSOs-led health sector by providing scholarships for medical students, medical equipment, and online professional courses for practitioners focusing on mental health issues that have surged during the conflict.

6. Alternative energy solutions: because of the destruction of the power infrastructure and the high price and low availability of fuel; households, farmers and small manufacturers have turned to alternative energy in all areas of Syria. Solar panels of all types and scales are the most popular. They are used to provide hot water and/or electricity. Although in the long run they are more economical than relying on generators, many families and businesses are unable to afford their high start-up and running costs. Many businesses have also been established to provide and construct solar energy solutions. The panels themselves are imported, but the structures needed to install them are developed and built locally. Supporting this sector strengthens resilience at several levels. It improves living conditions by resolving the issue of acute shortages of fuel used for cooking, heating, and generating electricity. It cuts down households' monthly living costs and has a positive impact on the environment. Helping farmers install solar panels to provide electricity needed on their farms, especially for pumping water, also helps improve livelihoods. Support could take several forms, including supporting alternative energy MSMEs, help in removing the obstacles to sourcing better quality solar panels, and providing vocational training. Such obstacles might include the ability to import high-quality solar panels and the lack of trained technicians.

7. Improving internet access: while this is not a sector on its own but improving internet accessibility is vital for almost all other sectors, especially with the increased use of digital and online tools, such as online skills trainings and foreign language learning. This support could have a significant impact on both the education and business sectors.[60] It provides individuals, particularly the youth, with online tools for distant learning and essential online courses. Additionally, it grants both small enterprises and entrepreneurs with the much-needed access to the remote workforce and the online marketplace. It also allows skilled individuals inside Syria to access the global job market. International actors could provide financial and technical support to create and promote learning platforms and online marketplaces. Improving stable internet accessibility could be done by for example, supporting co-working spaces as suggested in section 8.3.4.

Some of these sectors could be targeted together in one cross-sectoral activity. For example, supporting the development of businesses providing solar energy solutions to power farms. This combines the support for business development, agriculture, and green energies.

7.5 How should resilience be strengthened

The process of providing support to strengthen resilience is as important as the outcome itself. In this sub section, we answer the question of how resilience should be strengthened by addressing the issues raised by those implementing resilience programs in Syria in section 6.

7.5.1 Navigating the Red lines

In each area we studied, political red lines stand at times in the way of strengthening resilience. The broad red lines are well justified. They aim at avoiding supporting and consolidating the very same authorities that are behind most of the crises that people are facing. But as the conflict enters its twelfth year with no political solution on the horizon, it is important to explore new interpretation and operationalisation of these red lines so that their main aim is met without hampering humanitarian and resilience-building responses.

This is particularly needed in government-controlled areas. As discussed in section 3, the Syrian state, despite all the fragmentations, remains in principle a centrally controlled state. The state controls education, health, and agriculture, and allows only limited space for the private sector to operate in each of these main sectors. Private education and health services are also far beyond the reach of most Syrians, who still rely on state-run schools and hospitals in this area. Full state control over these sectors is eroding, especially at the local level. Yet, it is very difficult to envisage the delivery of any impactful programmes within these sectors in government-controlled areas without minimal coordination with some of the relevant state institutions.

We also noted in section 3 that the function and perception of different government institutions varies considerably. It is important to distinguish between core regime institutions and non-core regime institutions. Core regime institutions are mainly the institutions of the presidency, the armed forces, the intelligence agencies, and the Ba'ath party. The ministries of the interior, foreign affairs and information come in a second tier, and, to a large degree, they are controlled by the core institutions. Both the function and local perception of core regime institutions varies considerably from those of non-core regime institutions, such as the ministries of education, agriculture, and local affairs. This is despite all the failings and shortcomings of these institutions.

A minimum level of coordination with the relevant non-core regime institutions is difficult to avoid in the implementation of resilience-building programmes in government-controlled areas. Such coordination could be employed for the benefit of the programmes. For example, it could be used to communicate and stress the conditionality of the donor on issues like counter corruption and good governance measures, impartiality, independent monitoring and evaluation and ensuring access to the difficult to access areas where strengthening resilience is much needed. It is also important to ensure that the programme is not getting manipulated or directed towards undesired beneficiaries.

Rather than staying at top political level, we suggest operationalising the red lines substantively at a lower level. This could be done through ensuring that the conditionality of the funding, particularly good governance and human rights compliance are communicated to the authorities and stressed at projects' level and throughout the implementation in addition to improving the three areas of monitoring and evaluation, procurement policies and conflict sensitivity, as elaborated below.

7.5.2 Monitoring and evaluations

It is very important to upscale monitoring and evaluation in all areas. It is not only needed to ensure the delivery of the programme as planned but also to ensure that funds do not go to the wrong hands.

We recommend that effective methods for monitoring and evaluating resilience-building programmes in Syria are explored. Most of the ones currently used are more suitable for evaluating humanitarian projects. Evaluating the success of resilience strengthening projects is very difficult; the indicators of success take time to show up and new indicators, including proxy-indicators, must be explored. The monitoring and evaluation methods should also be simple and flexible to cope with rapidly changing conflict dynamics.

It is very important also to have a third-party independent monitoring and evaluation and to involve civil society in the process, especially for UN run projects in government-controlled areas. This is because, as discussed in section 6.4, the Planning and International Cooperation Commission, which is the governmental counterpart of the UN, is part of the monitoring and evaluation process.

Where possible, site-visits by people from the donor country are also recommended and are an important way of monitoring the implementation of projects.

7.5.3 Procurement and vetting process

As discussed in section 6.3, procurement policies and vetting process is particularly important area to watch for multiple reasons. We recommend that:

- Implementing partners to be encouraged to use human rights-compliant procurement processes. HRW and SLDP produced an elaborate guide on how to implement such a process in Syria, including a practical toolkit to assess human rights risks.[61]

- Encourage implementing partners to go beyond the standard vetting of suppliers and partners against the sanctions' lists. Additional research and investigations are needed, especially for big suppliers.

- Use the procurement process itself to aid the strengthening of resilience. This could be achieved through local procurement that is targeted at independent suppliers and that encourages micro, small and medium-sized enterprises to explore the opened opportunities. It also helps create jobs and revive local economies, and it enhances the diversity of the supply base.

7.5.4 Context and conflict-sensitive approach

As we stressed in several areas in this report, understanding the sensitivity of the context in which the projects are implemented is very important. The approach of our report, the methodology and the recommendations all take this into consideration. Even within the same area of control, we see very different contexts at the local level. It is vital that resilience programming is done in a context and conflict-sensitive way, which requires understanding the power dynamics at the local and area level and the social composition and sensitivities. Context and conflict-sensitive approach is also key for avoiding strengthening and cementing corrupt authorities.

7.5.5 Collective donor response

There is a need for a more collective response from the donors on resilience and early recovery programming and more clarity about the different meanings and interpretations, strengthening resilience and supporting early recovery. This could be achieved, for instance, by periodic sectoral coordination meetings at the donors' level, which include representatives of implementing agencies and local CSOs.

8.0 Area-Specific Recommendations

The framework of the theory of change we suggest is to design activities that:

1. address the fragilities identified in section 4;
2. generate the outputs, outcomes and impact identified in section 7.1;
3. factor in the local context and power dynamics analysed in section 3;
4. build on the resilience capacities identified in section 5;
5. accommodate the answers to the scoping questions and the issues identified in section 6.

We suggest the following three cross-cutting recommendations for all areas:

1. Support for civil society in all areas and through all the programmes and projects listed below. A community that has its own active grassroots civil society is much more able to face shocks than a community aided mainly by external actors, including INGOS. It is important to look for new emerging organisations and initiatives and provide the support needed at their level, including technical support and access to small grants. International donors could also invest in local programmes or initiatives that encourage voluntarism culture and increase awareness and social cohesion. Supporting nascent civil society requires patience and creative solutions to overcome the many practical difficulties, such as the lack of access to formal banking. But this patience pays off in the medium and long term when the supported organisations grow to become essential implementing partners.

2. Support the development of medium, small and micro enterprises in all areas and across all sections.

3. Support alternative energy solutions as discussed in section 7.4.

Tables that summaries for each recommendation, the dimensions of fragility addressed, the resilience capacity and the expected output are included in Annex II.

8.1 The northeast Arab-majority areas

The situation in the Arab majority areas in the northeast is a good example of why both the power dynamics and the relations between the donor and governing authority are key factors that cannot be ignored in any strategy aiming at strengthening resilience. The policies of the AA and the tension between the AA and the Arab-majority population are aggravating all dimensions of fragility in the area.

8.1.1 Support for Education

Rationale: the AA imposes its own curriculum on the schools in this area, which is rejected by Arab locals. Most importantly, since these schools are also not accredited, a certificate from them does not enable the student to enter tertiary education. Families in this area much prefer the schooling system and curriculum of the Syrian government. But there are no Syrian government-run schools in this area. As a solution, the families send their children during the year to privately run tutoring centres that prepare them for the end-of-year exam at Syrian government-run examination centres in the nearby government-controlled areas. Some of these centres are in existing schools. Others, like the one in Sabkha (30 km away from Al-Raqqa), were specially created for students from Al-Raqqa. This solution, although complicated, empowers students with school certificates so they can progress to further education. But it also has many disadvantages, including the increased costs on parents who must cover 50 USD a month in tuition fees and the costs of transport and accommodation during the exam period. Although the costs are low, they are out of the reach of most families, which is leading to school dropouts and parents having to prioritise which child to send to receive an education. Often, the male children are the chosen ones. The AA policies make these education arrangements even less favourable to women. This is because they do not to allow the tuition centres to operate during the opening hours of the AA schools. This means that these centres can only operate in the evenings. Given the security situation, families are reluctant to allow their daughters to take the risky evening journey to the centres. This policy has led to a significant drop out of female students. In general, this problem increased the school drop up among the Arab population in comparison to the Kurds and consequently the skills and employability of the youth of the Arab community, and it increased community tension as the Arabs are seen as falling behind in education and jobs.

Recommendation: To support education programmes that enable students to receive accredited certificates, and that take into consideration the issues of the education sector in this area. This could translate to:

1. Supporting free schools that teach the Syrian government curriculum.

2. Offering scholarships to school-aged students that cover their tuition fees and other related costs such as travel costs to the exam centres.

3. Offering scholarships targeted at female students to encourage their return to school. This could cover the costs of private buses for their journeys to the tuition centres.

4. Support teachers' development and training.

But for such programmes to be permitted by the AA, pressure needs to be directly applied by donors. It is not sufficient to leave implementing partners to exert this pressure alone. More leverage is needed at a higher level.

8.1.2 Women's empowerment

Rationale: several factors are conspiring together against women in this area and hampering their access to new opportunities, including the tribal, patriarchal nature of the social fabric of the area. Also, access to grants, permissions and opportunities in this area is becoming subject to one's ability to infiltrate corrupt networks of nepotism. Women are typically either unwilling or unable to access these networks. Empowered and educated women are very well-positioned to protect their community against the threat of extremism.[63]

Recommendations:

1. Special grants to women-led civil society organisations.

2. Special grants and capacity building programmes to women-led business start-ups.

3. Require all organisations supported by the donor to have gender policies and a quota for women staff.

4. Offer scholarships to cover women's participation in online-based further education and English language courses.

5. Local awareness-raising activities, including open discussions and informal meetings with key figures, on the positive impact of women's social and economic active participation.

8.1.3 Youth empowerment

Rationale: High number of young people with no education, no jobs, who feel excluded and have hope for the future in an environment where the sharks of extremism are circling around. Growing up with no opportunities significantly undermines the resilience capacity of the community as it increases the chance of individuals getting involved in crime, illicit activities, and violence.

Recommendation:

In addition to supporting the education recommended above, we recommend:

1. Support for TVET for youth that is particularly targeted to the job market in this area. For example, agricultural TVET.

2. Support youth sport centres.

3. Actively help youth with skills to either find jobs (through cash-for-work programmes for instance), farm their family lands, or start their own business.

8.1.4 Social Cohesion

Rationale: ISIS left this area with significant damage to its social fabric. Inter- and intra-tribal feuds and tensions caused by previous affiliation, or perceived affiliation, with ISIS is shattering the community and damaging its capacity to resolve conflicts and absorb shocks. The tension with the AA is adding to this issue with some tribal figures looking down at other tribal figures who collaborate with the AA.

Also, some women and children are leaving the Al-Hol camp after intervention and guarantees from their own tribes. But they go back to communities that are not very welcoming to them, with no opportunities to live independently. Their children suffer from stigma by other children in the community.

This area has its very own social nature, and it requires a response from the very heart of the community itself. Therefore, it is crucial that any civic peace project is led by people from within the community.

Recommendations:

To support grassroots-led civic actors to run projects aimed at:

1. Promoting civic peace, dialogue, and tribal mediation projects.

2. Re-integrating women and children leaving the Al-Hol camp into their communities including by offering rehabilitation and training to find jobs.

3. Supporting Sport for Development and Peace projects as elaborated in section 7.4.

8.1.5 Supporting agriculture development

Rationale: The economy of this area used to be primarily based on the agriculture sector. War and climate change is severely affecting this sector, leading to economic deterioration, and threatening food security.

Recommendations:

1. Support projects aimed at developing the agricultural sector specially designed for this area. For example, providing water pumps to draw water for irrigation from the Euphrates River, rehabilitating the irrigation system.

2. Promote knowledge of climate-smart agricultural practices and raise awareness about the risk of excessive use of groundwater.

3. Urgently interfere to stop the rapid decline in livestock (caused by expensive and unavailable fodder), as this decline could have an impact for many years. This could include help to import fodder to address the immediate problem and learning how to grow fodder by using techniques that use less water and soil such as growing Hydroponics Fodder.

8.2 The northwest: areas controlled by the Turkish-backed National Army

Control by Turkish-backed armed groups and local councils is a cause of much tension in this area, especially between the IDPs and locals. Additionally, Turkey controls access to humanitarian and service sectors which must go either through Turkish institutes or through local councils, which are completely co-opted by Turkey and enjoy little trust in the area. There is, however, more room for civil society to be active away from the service sector. There is also an active Turkey-based civil society with strong links in the area and who are already running initiatives to strengthen the resilience of the community.

8.2.1 Supporting Education

Rationale: students have now the opportunity to study in the local newly established universities. Although the annual tuition fees are as low as a few hundred USD, they remain out of the reach of many students, especially IDPs and women. Also, these local universities are short of providing training for the required skills in this area and they do not empower students with tools such as pro-active learning, using modern academic and statistical software and access to online libraries and open-source datasets.

Recommendations:

1. To offer scholarship programmes that cover the tuition fees and living costs for students to study at the local universities.

2. To offer scholarships programmes to cover participation in online-based further education, English language courses and other educational resources.

3. To reserve a quota for women and IDPs in both these scholarships programmes.

8.2.2 Supporting agricultural development

Rationale: the economy of this area used to be based on the agriculture sector, which was hit by climate, displacement, and violence. Some of the local farmers, particularly in Afrin and its countryside, were forced to leave the area, and others from distant urban centres such as Homs, with no skills in agriculture, moved in.

Recommendations:

1. To support projects specially designed for this area and aimed at developing the agricultural sector and the food industries that are associated with it such as olive oil pressing.

2. To promote knowledge of climate smart agricultural practices and increase awareness towards water scarcity and the negative impact of excessive well-digging.

3. To have a strong emphasis on the respect of HLP rights in the use of farming lands and facilities in this area by ensuring that the farmers have the rights to use the land.

8.2.3 Supporting Sport for Development and Peace Projects

Rationale: the area is full of morally outraged and frustrated youth with little hope for the future. There is also much tension between IDPs and the host community, especially in Afrin.

Recommendations: To support Development and Peace projects as elaborated in section 7.4 that bring the IDPs and the host community together and that offer all the other very positive benefits that such programmes have.

8.2.4 Supporting IDPs in the internal camps

Rationale: five years after they have been displaced from Homs, the residents of IDP camps in the northern countryside of Aleppo are still living in tents in a very remote area with extremely poor facilities and very bad conditions. The communities in the camps are almost completely dependent on aid.

Recommendations: to target the IDP camps in this area with a flexible support programme that goes beyond delivering the basic aid (transition from humanitarian aid to more resilience strengthening programmes). Decisions about what and how support will be provided must be based on consultations with the residents of the camp and with the Turkish authorities. Some camp residents requested for example providing free buses that could transport the people from the camps to the neighbouring towns and villages to access services, education, and jobs.

8.2.5 Supporting Syrian civil society-led health organisations

Rationale: the health needs are high in this area. The Syrian-led medical organisations are the main providers of health services. Empowering these organizations helps in maximizing their positive role in the local power dynamics.

Recommendations: Financial, technical, and institutional capacity support for Syrian civil society-led health organisations to cover the needs of the health sector in this area. Many of these organisations have their headquarters abroad in Turkey and Europe and are therefore accessible to donors.

8.3 Government-controlled areas

As explained in section 6.1.1, and for the benefit of delivering the much-needed resilience strengthening programmes in this area, there is a need to distinguish between core and non-core regime institutions. There is also a need to allow implementers to have minimum coordination with some of the relevant non-core state institutions to deliver the projects and to ensure that the donor's conditionality is communicated and stressed. But this should be done together with the measures recommended in section 7.5 on monitoring and evaluation; procurement and vetting processes; and adopting context and conflict-sensitive approach.

8.3.1 Supporting Education

Rationale: high number of schools need renovation, especially in areas that used to be contested areas. Also, although schools are free, many families are unable to afford even the low transportation and stationary costs leading to students drop out, especially female and especially in the countryside.

Recommendations: To offer small scholarship programmes for children of disadvantaged families to cover the costs of sending their children to schools or alternatively offer free stationery and school transport in the most affected areas.

8.3.2 Supporting agriculture development

Rationale: the needs for support for agriculture in this area is very high in general, but some areas require additional attention. The countryside was particularly hit by the violence. The villages and towns that changed control from the regime to the opposition and then were taken by the regime again are the most affected. Many of them are almost deserted now. But particularly because these areas were deserted for a while, the environmental conditions in them are better than other areas. For example, the internal water was not depleted. As explained in sections 6.2 and 7.4 new spaces opportunities are emerging at the local level in the agriculture sector in this area with the central eroding control of the sector.

Recommendations:

1. To increase the focus on supporting the agriculture sector in this area, to empower farmers and the support to the new farmers' associations.

2. Give special focus to areas where control was contested and support the resumption of agriculture activities in these areas, encouraging farmers and their families to return to their villages.

3. Promote knowledge of climate-smart agricultural practices. This could target local agriculture experts via online materials specially designed for the problems that farmers in Syria face. For example, videos in Arabic demonstrating how to grow Hydroponics fodder. Such content could be used nationwide. These experts have the expertise and capacity to implement what they learn from the available materials.

4. Support projects related to local cultivation and aimed at developing the agricultural sector with a focus on small-scale cultivation and poultry farming.

8.3.3 Supporting independent MSMEs development

Rationale: the private sector operating within the small and micro levels were in the hands of ordinary people in Syria who are not linked to the corrupt regime. But for several reasons, this sector took a severe hit, leading to losses in livelihood, job opportunities and agency.

Recommendations: to support projects offering support and training for MSMEs. A vetting process should be developed to ensure that that beneficiaries have not been involved in violence, violations of human rights and corruption (see section 7.6). The Syrian Enterprise and Business Centre (SEBC), which was set up by the EU to provide business development in Syria before 2011, could be a potential partner for such a project, given its expertise and long history of receiving and managing grants from the European institutions. Although SEBC's funding sharply declined after 2011, it still receives funding from donors, alas on a smaller scale.

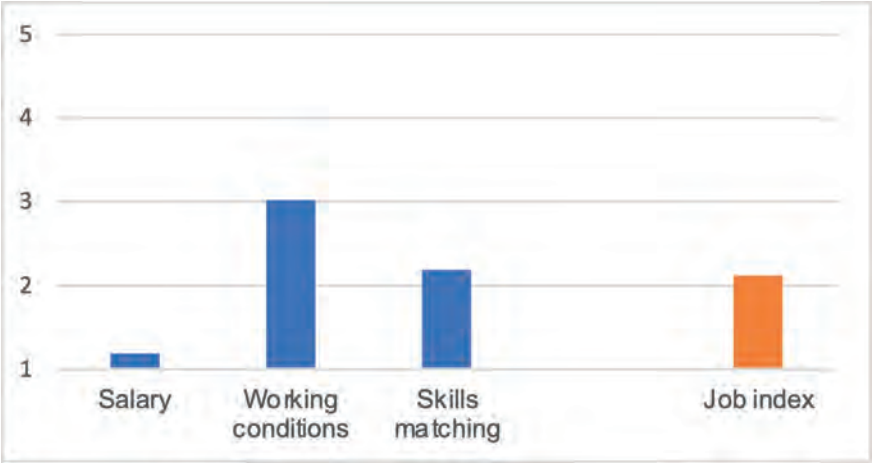
8.3.4 Supporting co-working centres

Rationale: skills people are struggling to find decent jobs. Many are migrating for opportunities abroad. Others are making the best out of the increased trend of remote jobs after COVID-19. For example, programmers, graphic designers, videographers, translators and many others are finding decently paid remote job opportunities outside Syria which they can deliver from inside. But they face the problem of very poor electricity and access to the internet.

Recommendations: Support new co-working centres that could offer shared working space with uninterrupted electricity, internet, and other essential services. Such centres could also be used to support students on remote education programs and MSMEs in need of working space and new civil society organisations.

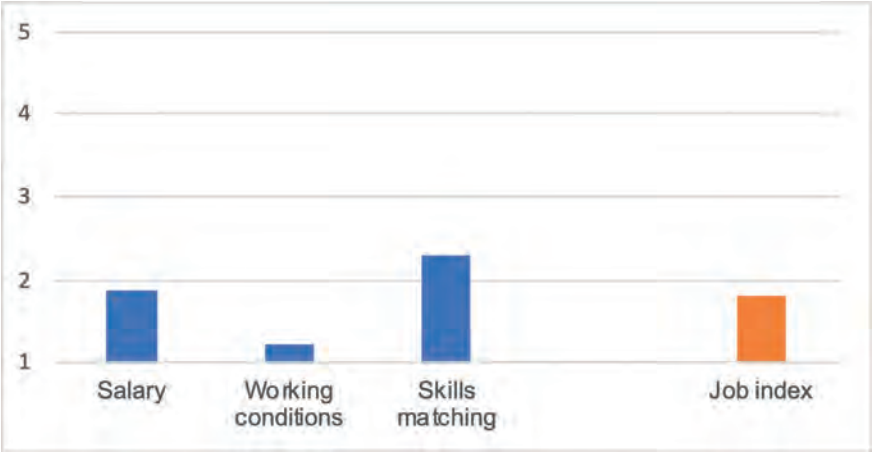
Annex I: Decent Job Index and Subindices

Source: Mapping Syria Survey, 2021
The Index is a simple average of the three subindices (salary, working conditions and skills matching)
Scale between 1 and 5 where 0 is very bad and 5 is very good



Decent Job Index and Subindices in Sweida.

Decent Job Index and Subindices in Northern Aleppo.



Decent Job Index and Subindices in Al-Raqqa.

Annex II: Summary of dimensions of fragilities and recommendations in each area

The northeast Arab-majority areas

Support for Education

Dimensions of fragility addressed	
Social dimension	- A surge in the school dropout rates - Increased Arab/Kurdish community tension - Increased polarization within local communities
Economic dimension	- Unemployable youth, lacking skills and educating - Low productivity level
Ecological dimension	- Lack of awareness on environment-related issues (poor informal and formal education)
Coping mechanisms/ resilience capacity	- Parents taking children out of school. - A negative coping mechanism with a cascading effect - Addressed in Coping with social fragilities section
Opportunities	- Large number of young willing students and low-cost education
Outputs of support	- Strengthening transformation capacity, - Empowering people, - Interrupting negative coping mechanisms

Women's empowerment

Dimensions of fragility addressed	
Social dimension	- Discrimination against women leading to excluding them from education and work opportunities - Empowering authoritarian and patriarchal social system
Economic dimension	- Discrimination against women leading to excluding them from work opportunities and business development despite increasing number of women-led households - Losing the economic potentials that women could add - Imposing difficult working conditions on women
Coping mechanisms/ resilience capacity	- Women entering the job market, but are not equipped enough with education and are unable to access business opportunities and support for civil society activities - Addressed in Coping with social fragilities section
Opportunities	- Transformation of gender roles - Increasing inclusivity and social participation - Limiting negative social phenomena related to women (harassment, honour crimes, and early marriage)
Outputs of support	- Strengthening adaptation and transformation capacity, - empowering women, local independent civic structures and small businesses, - Increasing income at the households level

Youth empowerment

Dimensions of fragility addressed	
Economic dimension	- Very high number of unemployed youths - Youth involvement in conflict-related activities
Social dimension	- Youth state of frustration pushing them to drugs, criminal behaviours, and migration
Security dimension	- Area prone to the risk of violent extremism
Coping mechanisms/ resilience capacity	- Getting involved in trouble, illicit activities and violence - Working at very low paid jobs in very bad conditions - Seeking migration/refuge
Opportunities	- Strengthening stabilisation and adaptation capacity - Empowering people, and small businesses;

Social Cohesion

Dimensions of fragility addressed	
Social dimension	- Inter community tension and conflicts - Women and children in camps under very difficult conditions - The dominance of authoritarian and patriarchal actors
Economic dimension	- High business uncertainty due to unstable security conditions
Security dimension	- Area prone to the risk of violent extremism - Children growing into adults in an environment like al-Hol camp could cause security risk
Coping mechanisms/ resilience capacity	- Local civil society leading community dialogue - Tribal figures interfering to release women and children from their clans from al-Hol camp, but they fail to integrate them in the community
Opportunities	- Local civil society is able to play an active role
Outputs of support	- Strengthening stabilisation and adaptation and capacity, - empowering people, local independent civic structures - Address multiple dimensions of fragility

Supporting agriculture development

Dimensions of fragility addressed	
Economic dimension	- Loosing income and job opportunities - Worsening food security
Ecologic dimension	- Draught and salination of soil
Security dimension	- Area prone to the risk of violent extremism
Coping mechanisms/ resilience capacity	- Lands are left unfarmed - Increased migration - Increased reliance on humanitarian aid - Selling assets
Opportunities	- Large areas of land that could be cultivated and new climate-smart agricultural practices that could be learned and implemented
Outputs of support	- Strengthening stabilization and adaptation capacity, - Empowering people, and increasing income and job opportunities - Increasing food security and reducing dependency on external markets;

The northwest: areas controlled by the Turkish-backed National Army

Support for Education

Dimensions of fragility addressed	
Social dimension	- Disadvantaged students and IDPs are unable to access local universities
Economic dimension	- Unemployment due to low skills
Coping mechanisms/ resilience capacity	- Relining on humanitarian aid - Accepting low-paid jobs under poor conditions.
Opportunities	- Large number of school graduates willing to attend universities, and very low university fees.
Outputs of support	- Strengthening transformation capacity, - Empowering people, - Better working conditions - Higher productivity

Supporting agricultural development

Dimensions of fragility addressed	
Economic dimension	- Loosing income - Worsening food security - Dependency on external markets
Ecological dimension	- Draught, soil salination, arbitrary use of water resources
Coping mechanisms/ resilience capacity	- Increased reliance on humanitarian aid - Selling assets including land - Lands are left unfarmed
Opportunities	- Large areas of land that could be cultivated and new climate-smart agricultural practices that could be learned and implemented
Outputs of support	- Strengthening stabilization and adaptation capacity, - Generating households income and creating job opportunities, - Improving food security status;

Supporting Sport for Development and Peace Projects

Dimensions of fragility addressed	
Social dimension	- Discrimination against IDPs and tensions with host communities - Myriad of mental health problems
Security dimension	- Unemployed youth who could get involved in violence
Coping mechanisms/ resilience capacity	- Getting involved in violence and illicit activities
Opportunities	- Underexplored sector - Youth enthusiasm for sport activities,
Outputs of support	- Strengthening adaptation capacity, - Empowering people including improving physical and mental health, - Increasing social cohesion;

Supporting IDPs in the internal camps

Dimensions of fragility addressed	
Social dimension	- Discrimination against IDPs, - Increased negative social phenomena within camps like violence, particularly against women,
Economic dimension	- Difficult living conditions of IDPs - Lack of job opportunities - High dependency on humanitarian aid
Security dimension	- State of frustration could get them involved in extremist violence
Coping mechanisms/ resilience capacity	- Getting involved in violence and illicit activities - Depending on external support
Opportunities	- Available support from different organizations, - Willingness of local NGOs and IDPs communities to help
Outputs of support	- Strengthening stabilization capacity, - Increasing social cohesion between IDPs and host communities - Reducing current and potential security risks

Supporting Syrian civil society-led health organisations

Dimensions of fragility addressed	
Social dimension	- Poor community health, - Spreading of unhealthy habits and prescriptions - A surge in mental health-related issues
Economic dimension	- Insufficient health services for all
Coping mechanisms/ resilience capacity	- Avoiding visits to medical clinics - Neglecting health needs - Depending on traditional medical methods suggested by unskilled practitioners
Opportunities	- Availability of skilled medical individuals and organizations, - Willingness of local and international NGOs to help
Outputs of support	- Strengthening stabilization capacity, - Improving community health, - Increasing the role and space for civil society

Government-controlled areas

Supporting Education

Dimensions of fragility addressed	
Social dimension	- A surge in the school dropout rates - Lack of interest in education among the youth - Increasing the gender gap in terms of education
Economic dimension	- Poor employability among the youth - Lack of skills required by jobs
Coping mechanisms/ resilience capacity	- School dropout - Child labour - Addressed in coping with social fragilities section
Opportunities	- Large number of young willing students and low-cost education
Outputs of support	- Strengthening transformation capacity, - Empowering people, - Interrupting negative coping mechanisms

Supporting agricultural development

Dimensions of fragility addressed	
Economic dimension	- Loosing income and job opportunities - Worsening food security
Ecological dimension	- Climate change, soil salination, deforestation
Coping mechanisms/ resilience capacity	- Increased reliance on humanitarian aid - Lands are left unfarmed - Working in activities other than the agriculture sector
Opportunities	- Large areas of land that could be cultivated using new and developed techniques, - The areas still have many skilled workers
Outputs of support	- Strengthening stabilization and adaptation capacity - Generating households income and creating job opportunities, - Improving food security status;

Supporting independent SMEs development

Dimensions of fragility addressed	
Economic dimension	- Lack of decent job opportunities - Low income and dependency on external market - Monopoly over local markets by cronies
Social dimension	- Spreading of illegal activities - Favouritism in doing business
Coping mechanisms/ resilience capacity	- Involved in conflict-related activities - Migration/refuge - Accepting to work in difficult conditions
Opportunities	- Willingness of many youths to establish small businesses - Potentials that need to be invested (agrifood workshops, traditional products)
Outputs of support	- Strengthening stabilization and adaptation capacity - Generating income and creating job opportunities - Increasing local productivity

Supporting co-working centres

Dimensions of fragility addressed	
Economic dimension	- Lack of decent job opportunities - Low income and economic difficulties - Difficult working conditions (low salary and skills mismatch)
Economic dimension	- Discrimination against women in working places - Spreading of illegal activities - Increasing state of frustration among skilled youth
Coping mechanisms/ resilience capacity	- Involved in conflict-related activities - Migration/refuge - Dependency on external income (aid and remittances)
Opportunities	- Youth with high skills and still in the country - High demand in international markets for skilled young professional who can work remotely
Outputs of support	- Strengthening stabilization and adaptation capacity - Generating income and creating job opportunities - Increasing interaction between youth inside the country and external business environment

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PeaceRep is a research consortium based at Edinburgh Law School. Our research is rethinking peace and transition processes in the light of changing conflict dynamics, changing demands of inclusion, and changes in patterns of global intervention in conflict and peace/mediation/transition management processes.

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