

Towards a Needs-Based Approach

A Framework for Engaging External Actors
in Reconstruction in Syria



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Tammam Azzam, Syria Museum, Klimt, photomontage 2013 (courtesy of the artist)

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I. Executive Summary

Syria remains afflicted by violence and war. As the years have passed since the conflict began in 2011, the focus of conversation has recently turned to the issue of reconstruction of the country. While the United States, European Union, and most international organizations have largely refrained from any substantive support for reconstruction in Syria without a political transition, many other countries have begun to engage, with varying degrees of intensity, in coordination with the Syrian government. There is a growing lack of overlap between the needs of Syrians on the ground, and the priorities and engagement in reconstruction of not only the Syrian government, but also of these external actors who are now involved in these efforts.

This report puts forward a framework highlighting the priority needs of Syrians in reconstruction across four dimensions: livelihoods, housing, infrastructure, and services. These sectors are analyzed in terms of previous lessons learned in cases of post-conflict reconstruction, as well as the pre-conflict reality in Syria. The external priorities and engagement in Syria of Russia, Iran, China, Turkey, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and various additional actors are addressed in particular, according to the framework of needs.

Russia, Iran, and China are largely focused on infrastructure that they believe will be financially and politically beneficial for their countries, with a limited lens on the development needs of the local Syrian population. Iran has also focused on financially rewarding infrastructure while also investing in strategic locations in Syria aligned with its political priorities in the region. Turkey's efforts have concentrated in areas in the north over which they have varying degrees of control, motivated in part to see the return of Syrian refugees. Other countries also have varying levels of involvement, albeit currently limited.

There is a need for overall reconstruction of Syria to be guided along a core set of principles that improve livelihoods, build sustainable infrastructure, provide affordable housing, and enhance services. Through this lens, national and international institutions and policymakers can engage with countries, whether informally or formally, to adjust their efforts where possible to better serve the development outcomes for the local population.

Going forward, there are steps that need to be taken to ensure a needs-based approach to reconstruction. Firstly, transparency around external engagement in Syrian reconstruction needs to be improved. Secondly, coordination around reconstruction activities should be increased with an eye towards serving the needs of the population. Finally, a guiding shared statement of principles will be critical. While there may be no optimal middle ground to be found in the crisscross of diverse political agendas that converge in Syria, there needs to be a more concerted effort to put the needs of the Syrian people first in all initiatives being undertaken.

II. Setting the Scene

a. The current situation on the ground in Syria

This report collected and analyzed data current as of the end of November 2019. However, the situation in Syria continues to evolve, most notably in light of the recent COVID-19 pandemic. The needs and situation as described in this report therefore may shift, particularly in the near-term. The emergency situation will need to be met by in-country, regional, and global actors. Nevertheless, the long-term requirements as identified in this report remain and will need to be addressed both during and after the pandemic.

While the violent conflict in Syria has largely subsided in many areas, there remain flashpoints of fighting throughout the country. The conflict began with non-violent protests in the southern city of Deraa at the beginning of March 2011, but by the end of the month had morphed into large-scale demonstrations around the country. The Syrian government responded to the protests with a heavy and violent crackdown, and the crisis proceeded to evolve into a complex armed conflict with a multitude of internal and external actors with varying degrees of involvement. Throughout the past eight years there has been a huge loss of life. In 2014 alone there were over 76,000 confirmed deaths, of which 17,790 were civilians.¹ Estimates place the total number of those killed in Syria to be as high as 511,000 as of March 2018.² 2019 saw continued casualties in the north of the country, largely due to the Russian and Syrian government offensive on Idlib. There have been concerns around both the danger posed by the return of Syrian government forces to northern areas and the increased Turkish presence in the north along the border, due to the potential targeting of Kurdish-affiliated political groups and the pressure for Syrian refugees in Turkey to return to Syria.

Throughout the past eight years, actors engaged in the conflict have violated international humanitarian law and targeted civilians, as well as vital infrastructure and services. The breakdown of society and the rule of law due to the conflict also allowed for the rise of armed groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), as well as Jabhat al-Nusra, a formerly al-Qaeda affiliated group that integrated into Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). The large-scale violence, decay in services and the rule of law, and the growth of such groups have resulted in huge displacements of Syrians. Official numbers place the total of internally displaced Syrians at over 6.2 million as of October 2019 and, as of November 2019, there were over 5.6 million Syrian refugees internationally.³ As Syria's pre-war population was around 20 million, this amounts to over half the population being displaced from their homes. However, due to the decrease in active armed conflict in most of Syria, over 56,000 Syrian refugees reportedly returned in 2018, while an additional 75,501 refugees were recorded as returning to Syria between January to September 2019.

With this decrease in violence and the incremental return of Syrian refugees comes an increased attention focus on reconstruction. The United Nations (UN) estimates the cost of reconstruction of the country to be at least \$250 billion, while the Syrian government claims it could cost almost double that at around \$400 billion.⁴ (All figures are expressed in US dollars unless otherwise noted) While these numbers are largely indicative, the qualitative message behind these amounts indicate reconstruction will need to be large-scale and long-term. However, when looking at what Syria will look like as a post-conflict country, current dynamics seemingly point to a situation in which the current government will retain broad control over Syria, with some parts of the country fragmented under contested rule. Additionally, as indicated by the current situation, the heavy and continued involvement of external governments and actors in reconstruction is expected. The roadmap to reconstruction will therefore require balancing the needs of Syrians with the priorities of the government and of outside actors.

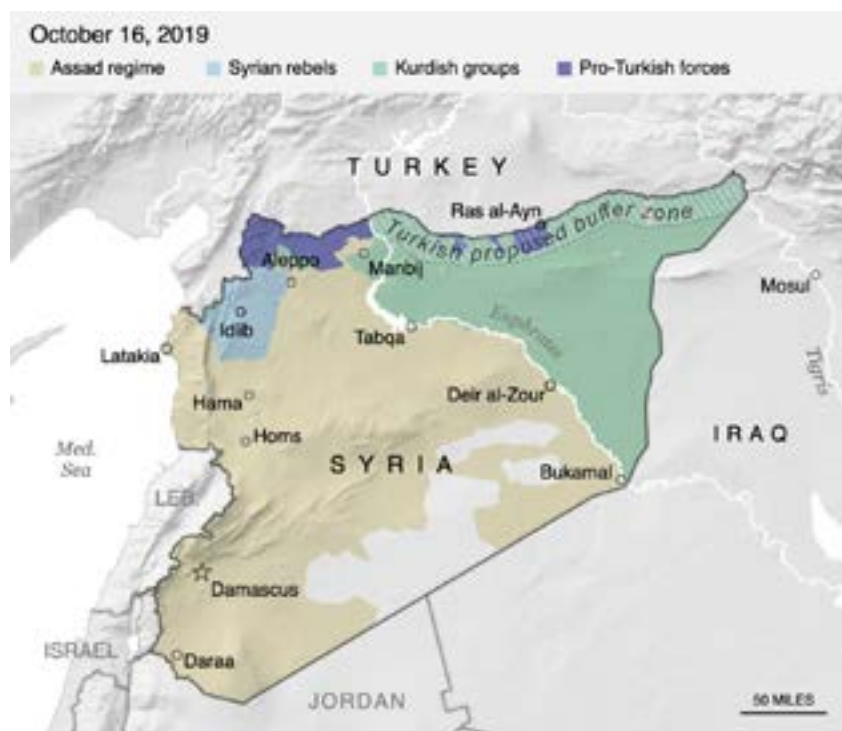


Figure 1: Map of Syria ⁵

As of November 2019, the Syrian government held military control over around 62 percent of Syria’s territory with Iranian and Russian military support.⁶ In October 2019, the United States (US) withdrew from the north of Syria and Turkey launched its latest incursion into Syria in the form of a two-week long offensive ‘Operation Peace Spring’, which resulted in agreements between Turkey and Russia on the division of territorial control of the area. These areas are marked on the above map as currently controlled by pro-Turkish forces along Syria’s northern border with Turkey. After the operation, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) control of territory dropped slightly, but still includes Manbij in the due north of the country and spans to the north of the Euphrates river to the border with Iraq. Various opposition groups have military control of small portions of the territory: in the northwest, the province of Idlib is the largest rebel-held area in the country and has been under heavy assault by Syrian and Russian forces since

March 2019. Idlib is also the sole remaining area under control of HTS. Since February 2019, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) does not control any territory in Syria, but the group still has a presence around its previous stronghold in Deir Ezzor in the northwest of the country.

The above is a snapshot of the current territorial control in Syria as of the fall of 2019. However, the situation in Syria remains fluid and the composition of military control on the ground may continue to evolve in the coming months, both in terms of internal and external forces. Additionally, while the Syrian government has de facto control of the majority of territory in Syria, many of these areas are fraught with tension and hostilities. This exists in recently reconquered areas subdued by the Syrian government, as well as in long-standing government-controlled areas where competing government-affiliated militias continue to clash, often backed by and with more deference to Iran or Russia, rather than to the Syrian government.

Regarding reconstruction, the Syrian government has already begun undertaking activities in certain areas under its control, albeit concentrated in sectors and areas according to political interest and financial resources available. Government reconstruction since 2017 has largely focused on bases of power of the government, such as Damascus, and has prioritized “capital accumulation within the country”, not necessarily the needs of the population.⁷ Reconstruction has also been undertaken by and has financially benefited prominent regime-affiliated individuals, such as Rami Makhlof, Samer Foz, and Muhammad Hamsho, whose projects include controversial housing developments that capitalize on their government affiliation and are seen as furthering government priorities. However, towards the end of 2019 some of these individuals such as Makhlof have been under increasing scrutiny by the Assad government, seemingly as the government aims to reconsolidate its power as the violence dies down.⁸ While it seems that reconstruction dynamics have allowed for this new rising class of oligarchs, the internal divisions and recent targeting of these by the Syrian government should be monitored. It is important to note as well that many pro-government businessmen undertaking reconstruction activities, including those mentioned above, are on US and European Union (EU) sanctions list.

Areas under government control have widely disparate reconstruction needs. Conditions often vary from city to city and are largely dependent on both the amount of destruction inflicted on a given area during the conflict, as well as the existing conditions before the conflict began. For example, Latakia, a long-term government stronghold, has experienced almost no violent conflict, and therefore has different post-conflict reconstruction needs than areas that experienced active fighting. On the other hand, recently-retaken areas under government control that suffered immense amounts of violence such as Eastern Ghouta in Damascus, continue to be regarded with suspicion by the central government and many of the needs on the ground of these areas are not being addressed by reconstruction efforts.⁹ Yet even areas that experienced limited violence are suffering under war economies, crony networks, and livelihoods disruption as a result of the eight years of conflict. As the conflict winds down, there is growing competition over power, resources, and assets by regime-affiliated groups, and these tensions are growing

into direct conflict and hostilities among those considered under the umbrella of regime allies. These internal dynamics are also affected by the range of regional and global actors who have been involved in the protracted conflict, many of whom are increasingly defining their respective roles in the country's reconstruction.

b. International response to the Syrian crisis

In 2012, the UN in partnership with the League of Arab States established a joint Special Envoy to Syria. Kofi Annan was appointed first to the position in 2012 and was followed by Lakhdar Brahimi until 2014. Staffan de Mistura was then the Special Envoy for the ensuing four years until Geir O. Pedersen was appointed in January 2019. The UN Security Council's Syria approach is to act as "good offices aimed at promoting a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis."¹⁰ The UN is indeed trying to play this role, but due to divergent interests of countries within the UN Security Council, it has struggled to balance the conflicting priorities and interests of member states, and the needs of Syrians on the ground. While the Brussels III conference in March 2019 raised over EUR 8.3 billion for Syria, UN-led peace talks in Geneva since 2012 have not been fruitful in finding a political solution.¹¹ There has also been continuing uncertainty and disagreement within the humanitarian community on how to engage and act in Syria. Some UN organizations who have been operating out of Damascus have been subject to restrictions and influencing efforts from the Syrian government, while others who attempted to operate outside of government-controlled areas have been banned from the country and relegated to operating solely within the borders of Turkey and Jordan.¹² Additionally, the UN and other international organizations have largely been focused on continuing to provide emergency and humanitarian support, with some limited steps towards an early recovery approach, showing a reticence to move towards full reconstruction efforts.

The narrative around the international community's approach to Syria has largely focused on the US and Europe. Throughout the conflict, the US and EU have rebuked and sanctioned the Syrian government and have supported opposition groups, while focusing their military engagement in the country on combatting ISIS. The US and EU position on Syria reconstruction has subsequently been curtailed by their refusal to engage in reconstruction activities under the current Assad government, stating that reconstruction cannot begin without a political solution to the conflict. They are also impeding engagement in reconstruction by other actors by increasing sanctions on individuals, businesses, banking, and items such as oil.¹³ In the US, the Caesar Syrian Civilian Protection Act, passed in the US House of Representatives in 2016, and, as of November 2019, was awaiting passage in the Senate. If signed into law, the Act would impose even more sanctions on the Syrian regime. The EU position has not been consistent. Behind the official unified position of the EU, there are countries, notably ones with populist governments such as Italy, Hungary, and Poland, who are beginning to consider a changed engagement approach towards the Syrian government, largely in order to expedite the return of Syrian refugees in Europe to Syria.¹⁴

In the absence of many Western countries, others are projecting their influence and reach in Syria, and their priorities and engagement in Syrian reconstruction must be addressed. Global actors such as Russia and China, as well as regional actors Iran, Turkey, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have all been engaging in various reconstruction activities in Syria. UN- and Western-led peace talks on Syria have been overtaken by the Russian-led Astana process since 2017, supported by Iran and Turkey. The Syrian government is increasingly engaging with these partners in post-war reconstruction.

c. Focus of the report

This report aims to provide a framework of guiding priorities and engagement for reconstruction in Syria, aligned with the needs on the ground. The first section addresses the needs in reconstruction on the ground in Syria, broken into livelihoods, housing, infrastructure, and services. The second section addresses the historical context, reconstruction priorities, and active engagement of Russia, Iran, China, Turkey, and the GCC countries, as well as others. These external priorities and engagement in reconstruction are overlaid on the identified needs from the first section, and space to adjust such engagement to better serve needs is explored. The countries in focus were selected due to their intensity of engagement in Syrian reconstruction.

This report intends to be a starting point of mapping out the priorities and interests of external actors in Syrian reconstruction. The report was born out of an identified gap in analysis: much of the work addressing reconstruction in Syria is curtailed due to the belief that since the US, Western, and humanitarian actors are not yet engaging in reconstruction, reconstruction activities have not begun. However, intentions and plans for reconstruction in Syria are already underway by both the Syrian government and external actors, which should be analyzed and considered in further depth. The analysis behind this report relied on the insights provided by private sector, humanitarian organizations, and academics and analysts as well as open-source research, and proprietary analysis. This report aims to provide a starting point – not an endpoint – for understanding engagement in reconstruction based on needs on the ground.

III. Priorities in Post-Conflict Reconstruction

a. Needs in post-conflict reconstruction

In post-conflict situations it is important to address not only the physical infrastructure that must be rebuilt, but also the resumption or recreation of social and economic conditions that allow for regular activity to return. The economic impact of post-conflict reconstruction covers issues ranging from the “restoration of physical infrastructure and facilities, reestablishment of social services, creation of appropriate conditions for the private sector development, and implementation of essential structural reforms for macroeconomic stability and sustainable growth.”¹⁵ This involves a focus on rebuilding physical infrastructure coupled with the establishment of social and economic conditions that allow for positive peace to flourish in the absence of violent conflict.

This report addresses four sectors of post-conflict reconstruction: livelihoods, housing, infrastructure, and service provision. This is done largely following the framework of the 2019 World Bank Report “The Mobility of Displaced Syrians.” However, this report found it useful to separate out infrastructure from services, due to the high amount of external actors’ interest in infrastructure in Syria and a general lack of interest in service provision, and thus these two areas are analyzed separately. Additionally, the provision of peace and security in post-conflict Syria is highly complex and for the sake of concision this report does not address these aspects.

Each section first addresses relevant lessons learned from other post-conflict situations. The current conditions of the respective sectors in Syria are then analyzed, concluding with key findings as to how to address the needs of each sector in Syria. As other cases of post-conflict reconstruction have shown, the approach to reconstruction activities is equally important to the reconstruction activities themselves. Steps taken towards reconstruction have to be from a conflict-sensitive approach and foster local participation as well as collaboration between involved actors. In this sense, the ‘how’ of reconstruction is vital in terms of how livelihoods, housing, infrastructure, and services are established and provided. These sectors ideally are to be developed in a way that does not exacerbate conflict dynamics but instead is needs-based and encourages social cohesion and participation.¹⁶

In most cases of post-conflict reconstruction, there is a large number of actors involved, including local and national governing bodies, external governments, foreign aid organizations, development banks, as well as international, national, and local implementing partners in the form of NGOs and civil society organizations. The involvement of many actors can complicate post-conflict reconstruction, as these actors have their own priorities and abilities in approaching reconstruction. Post-conflict, the central government tends to prioritize the centralization of state control yet are often drained of resources to implement such control, while foreign donors can have the resources for reconstruction but can have their own political priorities and are often

guided by profit-generation. NGOs are vital for a rights- and needs-based approach, yet often stop short of being able to conduct large scale reconstruction projects, as these are often out of their remit and budget.

There are concerns around the state-centric model of reconstruction for Syria. Traditionally, post-conflict reconstruction aims to restore central state governance over a country. In this case, there is significant worry about the impact reconstruction efforts in Syria will have on strengthening the central government, with concerns around the government's approach to civilian rights and liberties, as well as the government's history of high levels of corruption. Already current reconstruction efforts under the Syrian government have been labeled by many as unequal and divisive. The continuation of government actions, which during the conflict prioritized regime survival over the security and survival of Syrians, must be closely monitored.

Prior to the conflict in Syria, there were disparate levels of livelihoods, infrastructure, housing, and service provision throughout Syria, and the conflict has had varying impacts on these throughout Syria's geography. The levels of destruction range throughout the country, sometimes even within neighborhoods and streets. Due to the variance of violent conflict throughout the past eight years, populations within Syria have also moved, resulting in population influxes and decreases, changing the demographic makeup of areas. Reconstruction has to be undertaken in a way that is sensitive to these historic and existing conditions that aims to transform Syrian society towards a more inclusive social contract. It is crucial that actors engaged in post-conflict reconstruction are aware of tensions and root causes that led to the conflict and that have developed due to the fighting over the past eight years in Syria.

Reconstruction is Not Repatriation

Over the last several years the world has faced an unprecedented crisis with over 70 million people being forcibly displaced. This was particularly due to a series of conflicts, most notably in Syria, where over half the population were either refugees or internally displaced at the height of the crisis. An estimated 3.6 million refugees have been living in Turkey, with large populations also in neighboring countries Jordan and Lebanon. Further afield, Europe faced an influx of refugees from the Syrian crisis, and in 2015 alone saw the arrival of over 1 million refugees and migrants, many of whom were from Syria. With the Syrian crisis subsiding, there is pressure on host governments from their populations to encourage repatriation. In the right circumstances and when fully voluntary, returns can advance the well-being of the displaced and contribute to post-conflict reconstruction. In particular, the following conditions are important to ensure the viability and sustainability of repatriation:

- Ensuring potential returnees have access to information to make informed decisions;
- Providing sufficient security to enable returns;
- Investing in creating economic opportunity;
- Addressing refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in legal agreements ending conflicts; and
- Implementing inclusive solutions and processes of justice.

What this means is that even in cases of successful reconstruction, there are other state-building and conflict resolution efforts that will reinforce the necessary state of affairs that would encourage and facilitate the return of refugees. It means that reconstruction efforts, no matter how successful, are only part of a solution and in this case will not address the demands of many political parties, in Europe and neighboring countries to Syria in particular. Therefore, this report must be complimented with other analysis and recommendations to ensure a holistic view of the encompassing needs for a sustainable post-conflict Syria.

b. Livelihoods

Lessons Learned from Post-Conflict Reconstruction

From a development perspective, livelihoods are seen as encompassing the “capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required to ensure a means of living.”¹⁷ Livelihoods consist of capital assets and the environment in which they can be used, and therefore requires access to both resources and markets.¹⁸ In short, establishing livelihoods post-conflict is a way to return to normalcy and systems unaffected by violence. Without ways to support themselves, individuals are not able to return to their homes nor turn away from the economic systems developed during the conflict.

Despite the critical role that livelihoods play in restoring and maintaining post-conflict stability, they are often disregarded in post-conflict reconstruction, as there is often a greater focus on physical reconstruction and service provision resumption, instead of on livelihoods and employment.¹⁹ Research on post-conflict environments have found that individuals are largely left to rebuild their livelihoods on their own, and that most post-conflict environments have seen limited economic recovery.²⁰ However, in undertaking the physical reconstruction, such as housing and infrastructure as well as providing for services, such activities can be an important part of income and livelihood-generation in post-conflict periods.

In post-conflict situations, livelihoods should be developed along all levels of the value chain as well as across geographic distribution to address a variety of needs and skills.²¹ Agriculture-based livelihoods are particularly important in post-conflict settings, as the sector can absorb a large number of employees and provide food security, both of which are often vital in post-war situations.²² Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can also play a critical role in post-conflict livelihoods. According to the Conflict Research Programme at the London School of Economics and Political Science, SMEs are often able to remain separate from “the corrupt power structure” and, if supported properly, can “revive the legitimate local economy, therefore providing new jobs and breaking people’s dependence on aid,”²³ while also contributing to reconstruction.

In protracted periods of crisis, individuals – and in particular youth – may turn to supporting themselves by joining armed groups or by entering illicit or war economies. In light of this, conflict-sensitive approaches such as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) are key in post-conflict reconstruction of livelihoods for young people. If done in a conflict- and context-sensitive way, livelihoods in post-conflict reconstruction can play an important role in transitioning individuals away from the war economy and in promoting cooperation between previously conflicting groups, thus building social cohesion.²⁴ Post-conflict livelihoods must also take into account changed demographic and gender dynamics that result from periods of conflict. Women who have become heads-of-households or primary income generators in

post-conflict situations often suffer the 'double-burden' of such responsibilities in addition to pre-existing responsibilities as primary caregivers.²⁵

Pre-War and Current Conditions in Syria

Prior to the beginning of the war, Syria's economy was largely dominated by mining, trade, and agriculture in 2010, and was showing signs of growth, with real GDP growing 5 percent annually.²⁶ However, concurrently around 28 percent of Syrians were living in poverty.²⁷ Official numbers recorded unemployment to be around 8 percent in 2010, albeit having seen a decrease after having risen to over 10 percent in 2008.²⁸ However, as unemployment rates are difficult to capture, official numbers of unemployment were likely lower than the actual rate. Looking further into these dynamics, female participation in the formal labor force had substantially dropped, from 20 to 13 percent, in the ten years leading to the war.²⁹ SMEs are reported to have comprised more than 99 percent of all businesses in Syria before the war.³⁰

Leading up to the beginning of the conflict there was existing inequality in economic impact across the various sectors and geographic areas of Syria. Historically, Syria's northeast region has had high concentrations of poverty, notably in rural areas, and the economic divide between urban and rural areas had grown since the late 1990s. As the Syrian economy slowly began to open and liberalize throughout the early 2000s, a new business class of wealthy elites grew. Almost simultaneously, rural areas in the east and north of the country were hit by drought, beginning in 2008. The rural northeast of Syria was already the most economically poor area in Syria in 2007, while home to 44 percent of the population.³¹ The 2008 spike in unemployment is tied to the drought, as the percentage of employment in agriculture fell from around 33 percent in 2000, to just over 13 percent in 2011.³² This combination of "increased poverty and inequality" happening "alongside the rise of a new wealthy business elite made for a potentially combustible mix," ahead of the outbreak of armed fighting.³³

The past eight years of conflict have had a number of effects on livelihoods throughout Syria. Estimates have found that 2.4 million net jobs were lost between 2010 to 2015, and construction and industry were the sectors that suffered the most.³⁴ As of 2019, reports of unemployment rates in Syria vary, but estimates place rates at over 55 percent, with between 83 and 89 percent of Syrians living under the poverty line.³⁵ Even individuals who have managed to remain employed in the country have been affected by the steep rise in the cost of commodities and the fall in value of the Syrian currency.³⁶ According to the Global Wealth Report, the average wealth of a Syrian adult in mid-2019 was estimated to be \$2,179, one-fifth the estimated average amount of \$10,505 in 2010.³⁷ There has been a clear increase in unemployment and poverty in Syria due to the war, discernible even from the limited data that exists. Manufacturers were largely forced to close or leave the country due to the violence, while those who stayed operating in-country have been hit by sanctions and have struggled to survive.³⁸ Many SMEs also failed to survive under the war conditions in Syria, and some of the Syrian SMEs in northern Syria that have continued to exist have done so by relocating to Turkey.³⁹

Livelihoods in agriculture continued to suffer during the war. Agriculture GDP contracted by 41 percent between 2011 and 2015, on top of the previous 10 percent decline in 2010.⁴⁰ The percentage of employment in agriculture decreased to around 9 percent in 2015, and between 2011 and 2016 the Syrian agriculture sector lost \$16 billion.⁴¹ The UN estimates that it would require between \$11–17 billion to rebuild the sector.⁴² The largest damage to agriculture was to annual crops, followed by livestock, and was due to a myriad of factors such as the conflict notably hitting areas of wheat production, a shortage of agricultural inputs, and destruction of facilities.⁴³

The years of conflict have also had an impact on gender dynamics in the workforce in Syria. With the decrease of working men in Syria – largely due to death, injury, or having to leave the country for safety or for work – the demographics of the Syrian workforce have changed throughout the war. Female employment varies throughout Syria and is difficult to capture, but some areas surveyed in 2015 showed women comprising up to 90 percent of the agricultural labor force. According to these reports, women-headed households in Syria⁴⁴ comprise between 12 and 17 percent of households in Syria.

It is vital to note how the armed conflict in Syria has allowed for war economy trends to flourish both in areas under opposition groups and in areas under the Syrian government and its allies. These dynamics have taken the form of “an increase in informal economic activity, smuggling, extortionary violence and illegal activities, and the development of new centers of political power.”⁴⁵ Many of those who have maintained employment throughout the last eight years of conflict have largely turned to the war economy or informal employment to survive.⁴⁶ A number of industries in Syria have become controlled by armed groups and have been brought into the illicit economy, and contracts have been granted on the basis of militia leadership or closeness to the central government.⁴⁷ These dynamics can be seen in debris-clearing contracts being given to regime-affiliated individuals who first profited during periods of violence, and who have subsequently leveraged financial gain and connections gathered under the conflict into positions of power in reconstruction.⁴⁸

Guiding Principles in Reconstruction

Post-war reconstruction in Syria has to prioritize the livelihoods of local communities and, where possible, aim to correct not just the uneven effect the destruction that the conflict has had on Syria, but also pre-war inequities. The widespread reconstruction efforts across sectors such as infrastructure, housing, and services, will provide an opportunity for training and employment of local Syrians. Development of livelihoods in post-conflict Syria must also account for a conflict- and youth-sensitive approach, including DDR approaches. Additionally, in order to combat and reverse the centralization of resources into crony-capitalist networks over the past years, reconstruction of livelihoods must foster a system that supports equal and vast employment throughout the country, which can be done through SMEs. Specific attention to agricultural

livelihoods and environmental sustainability is needed, and post-conflict livelihoods in Syria additionally need to be flexible to female employment, while sensitive to existing social norms around gender and the work force.

c. Housing

Lessons Learned from Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Housing needs in post-conflict reconstruction involve more than just physical shelter, which is often considered under emergency humanitarian needs. Long-term housing needs include legal registration and ownership of housing, property and land, as well as the rights and regulation of these assets. Previous post-conflict situations have seen that “violations of housing, land and property rights have often not been given the same priority as other human rights violations, despite their importance.”⁴⁹ The importance of housing revolves around the role it plays as a center of identity, the ability for IDPs or refugees to return, and the re-establishment of significant assets.⁵⁰ Housing and property rights are additionally complicated because they need to address individual and family needs, community and neighborhood needs, city and town needs, as well as falling under regional and national legislation and standardization. All of these pieces need to be understood and considered when developing a post-conflict reconstruction plan for housing, land and property.

Issues that can arise in post-conflict housing and property rights range from the need for affordable housing to concerns over those taking advantage of the system breakdown regarding legal ownership of housing and property. Examples of the abuse of the breakdown in the legal sector include: the inability of individuals to prove legitimate claim to houses and property; mismanagement, unregistered or unofficial transfers of property; and purchase of property under coercion, along with others. There are also complications that can pre-exist conflict such as in cases where there never existed a clear title to the land or property, which need to be addressed with contextual sensitivity. Previous approaches to housing, land, and property issues in post-conflict situations have involved establishing housing commissions to manage these arenas. Specific to post-conflict or post-disaster situations is the issue of debris, and how rubble and destroyed buildings will be repaired or reused safely is a key question for reconstruction.⁵¹ Overall, housing is where some of the most sizable investments are made in reconstruction, and thus the sector can serve as an important income generator for SMEs and individuals alike.

Pre-War and Current Conditions in Syria

Prior to the conflict the population of Syria was roughly divided between urban and rural areas, a balance that was caused by rapid urbanization largely due to droughts around the country from 2006 to 2011. While estimates claim that around 50 percent of land in Syria was officially registered, approximately 38 percent of housing units in Syria were informal and not de jure

recognized by the state in 2004.⁵² Housing issues were historically a point of contention in Syria: housing prices were consistently increasing, with an average 30 percent rise per year between 2003 and 2006, with a 40 percent increase in 2009 alone in some locations.⁵³ Economic and political conditions also allowed for land and property rights and legislation to be frequently used as political tools.⁵⁴ Issues of housing and property ownership and legislation came up in the initial uprising period of the conflict: when a government delegation was sent to meet with protestors in Daraa in March 2011, protestors articulated concerns and sought reforms related in part to land and property registration and ownership.⁵⁵

Due to the conflict, around 73 percent of Syria's population is now urban-dwelling.⁵⁶ According to a World Bank survey of 15 cities in Syria, approximately 20 percent of residential buildings around the country have been damaged, of which 25 percent have been completely destroyed.⁵⁷ Estimates have found that the clearing of around 20 million tons of debris in just the two cities of Aleppo and Homs alone will take years.⁵⁸ There is significant variation in damage across cities in Syria due to the geographic variance of the violence. The World Bank survey found that maximum building damage reached almost 30 percent in some cities such as Al-Qusayr, a city in the Homs province in western Syria, while it found that Yabrud, a city in Damascus province, had zero percent building destruction: despite these variations throughout the country, there is an estimated 28 percent housing shortage among these 15 cities.⁵⁹ Syrian officials themselves have stated that the country needs between 1.2 and 1.8 million new housing units, and 201,000 claims have been submitted for compensation for housing destruction.⁶⁰

Simultaneous to the destruction caused by the war, the housing sector in Syria has also seen the passing of new registration and legislation laws; by and large these have not been guided by the needs on the ground. Decrees 63 and 66 in 2012, Decree 11 in 2016, and Law 10 in 2018 have allowed the Syrian government to gain control of land and properties for demolition and redevelopment with little room for claims or disputes by the land or property owners.⁶¹ Additionally, as registration of housing and property was not entirely formalized prior to the conflict, this lack of clarity and registration has only increased during the war. There is evidence of fires destroying land registry offices as part of alleged deliberate destruction of land records in accordance of the objective of some para-military forces to serve the demographic re-engineering of areas.⁶² There are additional reports that the government conducted "large-scale" falsification of property records throughout Syria as a measure to "prevent the population from returning and from claiming any rights."⁶³

Coupled with demographic shifts, businessmen and business ventures have capitalized on abandoned properties and manipulated property registration laxity to undertake predatory housing projects. To date, housing reconstruction undertaken in Syria has focused on high-income housing developments, while little desperately needed low-income housing has been planned. Instead, the Syrian government has widely publicized plans to develop high-end real estate projects like Marota City and luxury hotels.⁶⁴ There has been a focus on tourism, including

religious tourism to various holy sites in Syria, due to the financial possibilities afforded by the sector.⁶⁵ A recent housing conference was held in Damascus in August 2019, yet no tangible progress was made to national housing development.⁶⁶

Guiding Principles in Reconstruction

The existing needs for housing in Syria mean that a focus on affordable housing, across all geographic areas of Syria is needed, not just among high-profile or strategically located communities. As illustrated above, the level of destruction and therefore housing needs vary throughout Syria, but largely sustainable and safe housing is needed for medium- to low-income individuals. There need to be mechanisms developed to protect against land seizure, forced demographic changes, and socioeconomic predation through housing and property development. Conflict sensitivities around demographic shifts and population displacement must also be implemented in housing plans. As housing and property acts as a center of identity and society, community engagement and buy-in is essential when undertaking housing reconstruction. The economic opportunities provided by debris removal and housing reconstruction should also be distributed among local markets and SMEs to support livelihoods creation.

d. Infrastructure

Lessons Learned from Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Infrastructure is a main focus in post-conflict reconstruction. There are many approaches to infrastructure sector categorization, and this report has leveraged approaches from a range of international financial institutions. For this report, infrastructure refers to large-scale infrastructure, which includes five sectors: transportation; extractive; power; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), and information and communications technology (ICT). This framework is largely found in the World Bank Strategy Update “Transformation through Infrastructure”,⁶⁷ although extractive infrastructure has been built out as a separate sector, due to its importance in light of the specific situation in Syria. Some other aspects, such as industrial and economic infrastructure may not be fully captured in this framework and are highlighted wherever possible.

Infrastructure in post-conflict situations is needed for holistic development of the economy and society. Transportation infrastructure is needed to foster national cohesion and economic aspects such as trade; ICT is needed for social development as well as economic connection; power infrastructure is needed for electrical services throughout the country; extractive infrastructure is vital for national economies that are often dependent on such resources; and WASH is vital for public health.

These are all infrastructure areas that, from a public finance perspective, the state plays a critical role in, which during conflict is often weakened and control of these industries is often contested.⁶⁸

The large amount of finance needed to restore such infrastructure often requires funding from governments (internal or external) or multilaterals. These infrastructure projects involve large amounts of regulation, technical skills, and manpower to operate. In addition, environmental and social impact assessments and monitoring need to be conducted for infrastructure projects, all of which are difficult to undertake in post-conflict contexts.⁶⁹

Prioritization of infrastructure in post-conflict reconstruction is a challenge. Should the focus be on infrastructure that produces income-generation for the country, such as extractive sector, or on infrastructure that focuses on human development, such as transportation or WASH? Historical post-conflict infrastructure investment trends show that while ICT projects tend to receive funding directly after periods of conflict due to high rates of return, transportation, power and extractive, and water projects subsequently follow in order of investment.⁷⁰ It should be noted that often times, external investments in infrastructure tend to prioritize “regions linked to lucrative industrial sectors and exports” while “paying less attention to the needs of poorer areas and vulnerable groups within the country.”⁷¹ Despite this, if income generation from revenue-generating infrastructure is allocated evenly throughout the country, the geographic disparity can be mitigated by equal distribution of resources.⁷²

Infrastructure reconstruction in post-conflict contexts needs to be done with consideration of livelihoods: infrastructure projects can and should “focus on re-establishing livelihoods and replacing livelihoods that are based on the wartime economy.”⁷³ While infrastructure projects are difficult to manage, as seen above, they can provide contracts and employment opportunities across a host of industries, professions, and skillsets. Infrastructure in post-conflict reconstruction can be a major generator of livelihoods in post-conflict environments.⁷⁴ Infrastructure projects can not only generate employment and income, but also build social cohesion. Transportation and ICT infrastructure can integrate regions divided by war, while infrastructure that requires a variety of skills and labor can “emphasize social acceptance and community participation, including that of women.”⁷⁵

Pre-War and Current Conditions in Syria

Transportation Infrastructure

Transportation infrastructure can be segmented into road, rail, air, and maritime transportation. Prior to the outbreak of the war in Syria, the road network grew to match the increasing population and expanding economy: the number of roads increased by 10 percent in the 2000s, with most major roads located in the west of the country.⁷⁶ Transportation infrastructure has since been hugely affected by the conflict, yet according to the levels of violence the damage has fluctuated. The top provinces with the most damage to transportation infrastructure are Aleppo and Homs, with 44 percent and 28 percent damage respectively,⁷⁷ while rural Damascus and Hasakah only suffered 3 percent and 2 percent damage respectively. The previous rail system in Syria spanned a total of 2,423 km,⁷⁸ hosting regionally important lines such as the Hejaz

railway, which opened in 1908 and connected Damascus to Medina in Saudi Arabia. In 2010, 3.5 million people travelled by rail and over 8.5 million ton of freight was transported by rail,⁷⁹ yet the rail system was rendered effectively nonoperational during the war. In 2015, rail services resumed between the government strong-hold coastal cities of Latakia and Tartous, allegedly to improve civilian travel, but these routes align more with meeting military transport needs than civil needs.⁸⁰ Additionally in 2017 and 2018, passenger and freight trains resumed limited services between select cities in Syria.⁸¹

Syria had 26 airports prior to the conflict. The three international airports in Damascus, Aleppo, and Latakia collectively had an annual average of 2.5 million passengers.⁸² The number of aviation passengers dropped to around 500,000 in 2013, with only a slight increase from 2013 to 2017.⁸³ In terms of naval transportation, Syria has been largely serviced by ports in Latakia and Tartous. The number of incoming and outgoing containers at Latakia and Tartous ports in 2010 was around 280,000, and between 28,000 and 33,000, respectively.⁸⁴ The number of containers at both ports dropped drastically in 2013, and while the numbers have slightly increased at Latakia port, the 2017 numbers of containers at Tartous port were the lowest in over ten years.⁸⁵ The impact of the war clearly affected the use of naval infrastructure, although it has not been physically damaged by the conflict. The two ports have essentially ceased transit use, and current activity is severely curtailed. The collapse in of phosphate exports because of the war and the damage to railways has particularly caused use of the Tartous port to plummet, and it is now only serving military naval purposes.⁸⁶

Extractive Infrastructure

Extractive infrastructure in Syria includes oil and natural gas, as well as the mining of minerals such as phosphate. Between 2005 and 2010, oil and gas revenue accounted for about 25 percent of annual government revenue.⁸⁷ However, due to the conflict, half of the oil refining capacity has been lost, which has resulted in improvised oil refining, causing large environmental and health concerns in Syria.⁸⁸ Despite attacks on natural gas infrastructure in 2014, natural gas infrastructure and production have been less affected by the conflict than oil for a host of reasons: main gas fields have remained under government control; natural gas is harder to trade so is therefore less susceptible to war pilfering; and the electricity grid in Syria is dependent on the natural gas infrastructure in order to power government and non-government areas.⁸⁹

In 2009, Syria was producing about 1.9 percent of global phosphate amounts and ranked 9th in global production.⁹⁰ Phosphates ranked at the top of principal exports from Syria in 2014 with an estimated worth of around \$100 million.⁹¹ The phosphate fields were taken over by ISIS in 2015 when they gained control of the area around Palmyra, but the resource was re-taken by Iranian forces and subsequently by Russian forces. This has resulted in a power struggle between Iran and Russia over control of Syria's phosphate supply, with Russia emerging victorious when it was granted the rights to the country's phosphate resources in 2018 (see Russian engagement subsequently covered in this report).⁹²

Power Infrastructure

Power infrastructure in Syria is interrelated with extractive infrastructure, due to the dependence of the energy sector in Syria on natural gas. Before the conflict the electricity sector already needed reform, as it was plagued by a gap between demand and supply, a large amount of waste, and lack of governance and investment.⁹³ Due to the conflict, over 5 percent of power infrastructure have been completely destroyed, with over 7 percent partially damaged, and under 10 percent fully functioning.⁹⁴ There have been direct attacks on energy infrastructure, and the energy sector has also been degraded due to lack of maintenance.⁹⁵ Many conflict-hit areas have resorted to energy sources outside of the public grid, instead using options such as private generators and car batteries.⁹⁶ In 2018 it was found that around half the population has access to less than an average of 12 hours of electricity each day.⁹⁷ However, it should be noted that throughout the conflict, access to energy service has extended beyond government-controlled areas to rebel-held territory, alluding to some coordination over these resources between the competing parties.⁹⁸

WASH Infrastructure

While Syria has access to water resources, policies in place did not prioritize water conservation, thus leading to Syria to be considered water scarce by some estimates. As a result, water shortages were common before the conflict, particularly in certain regions and during summer months, and illegal water connections in new settlements located in urban areas were common.⁹⁹ Regarding sanitation, while prior to the war most Syrian urban areas had adequate sewage collection, only some of these systems were connected to treatment plants. There were only around 20 treatment facilities in Syria and their treatment did not always meet international standards.¹⁰⁰ Further, rivers and coastal areas in Syria have been heavily polluted by industrial, municipal, and agricultural emissions and pollution.¹⁰¹

Due to the conflict, a significant portion of the population lacks basic access to water. It is estimated that 26 percent of water infrastructure has suffered damage: specific infrastructure damage includes 51 percent of wells, 23 percent of water towers/tankers, and 9 percent of pumping stations having been damaged by the war.¹⁰² Regarding sanitation, at least 50 percent of the sewage systems are not functional due to the war and 70 percent of sewage is untreated: this results in only 9 percent of the population still being served by functional wastewater treatment systems.¹⁰³ Additionally, as water systems rely on the power infrastructure, damage to these systems in turn degrades WASH infrastructure.¹⁰⁴

ICT Infrastructure

ICT infrastructure in Syria was found to be the least developed, yet most regulated, in the Middle East prior to the conflict.¹⁰⁵ Syrian internet penetration rates were at less than 20 percent as of

2011,¹⁰⁶ and government censorship monitored and controlled access to certain websites.¹⁰⁷ While Syria only had two main mobile companies, Syriatel and MTN, telecommunications were widespread. According to Syrian Telecommunications Establishment (STE) findings, there were near to 10 million subscribers to telecommunications services in 2009.¹⁰⁸

Throughout the conflict, telecommunications and internet services have been severed, with causes ranging from the physical cutting of cables, government interference, and armed groups interfering in the provision of services.¹⁰⁹ Syrian government reports stated in 2013 that up 40 percent of the landline telecommunications network was damaged by the war, and that the STE was unable to fund the repairs.¹¹⁰ Conversely, according to recent estimates by the International Telecommunication Union, nearly 30 percent of Syrians had access to the internet in 2018, and this number has likely risen as the conflict has continued to subside. Additionally, this report shows that penetration of mobile phones has increased and has become more affordable in some areas in Syria between 2017 and 2018.¹¹¹

Guiding Principles in Reconstruction

Infrastructure rehabilitation is vital for the resumption of normal life in Syria. There are specific aspects of each of the sectors that must be considered in reconstruction. Transportation infrastructure is needed to restart economic and social interconnectivity throughout Syria. Due to the financial power of extractive infrastructure, the distribution of revenue generation from this industry must serve the whole population of Syria, not only in terms of investment in other needed infrastructure, but also in generating employment opportunities in either constructing or maintaining such infrastructure. However, as the industry has environmental concerns, mechanisms must be put in place for sustainable extraction plans. The power infrastructure needs to be improved to allow for a sustainable standard of living, not just restored to pre-war conditions. WASH infrastructure must also address sustainability and environmental concerns, as well as health implications of water treatment. ICT communication should prioritize connectivity within the country and to global markets, while ensuring safeguarding measures against possible predatory or surveillance activities. Overall, while the infrastructure needs of Syria are extensive and complex, the reconstruction and improvement of these sectors can provide huge opportunities for employment of Syrians across professions and geographic areas, as well as financial resources for the whole country.

e. Services

Lessons Learned from Post-Conflict Reconstruction

The World Bank has coined the term 'human capital' to capture how the above sectors, when combined with service provision, can produce positive impacts for a country's population. When it launched the

Human Capital Project in 2017, the World Bank stated that “human capital consists of the knowledge, skills, and health that people accumulate throughout their lives, enabling them to realize their potential as productive members of society.”¹¹² Human capital is built by investing in areas such as health care and quality education, and “is key to ending extreme poverty and creating more inclusive societies.”¹¹³ The term is linked to physical capital, as physical capital is needed to produce human capital, while a population with strong human capital in turn can produce and invest in physical capital.

Services such as healthcare and education, as well as other social services, therefore, complement hard infrastructure needed at a national level. Community engagement is vital in developing these services to ensure they address the needs and context of local populations.¹¹⁴ However, service development in post-conflict situations also require a holistic, often-national framework to operate successfully and sustainably. Analysis of these services are vital in post-conflict reconstruction, especially in Syria. Surveyed communities in Syria have stated that along with livelihoods, basic service provision is among their primary concerns.¹¹⁵

Healthcare can be divided into a framework of primary, secondary, and tertiary care.¹¹⁶ Primary care is the first line of contact in a health care system, such as family doctors or general practice physicians, and is largely community oriented. Secondary care often constitutes necessary treatment for short-term but acute sickness, often requiring specialized care at a hospital, and usually is found at the district level of a country. Tertiary care involves long-term management of conditions, such as cancer and palliative care, and is often centralized in national programs and urban centers. The WHO approaches healthcare under the term universal health coverage (UHC) that states “all people and communities can use the promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health services they need, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship.”¹¹⁷

In conflicts, all aspects of healthcare systems and services are negatively impacted to a certain extent, and their reconstruction is needed to recover the health and life expectancy of the population.¹¹⁸ Primary healthcare services have been found to suffer the most under conditions of conflict, while health services are likely to be relegated to secondary and tertiary levels.¹¹⁹ Due to the complicated and delicate nature of health care systems in post-conflict situations, their reconstruction often “requires significant donor input” and “a multi-faceted rebuilding process that the state cannot support in isolation.”¹²⁰

However, due to the shortage of funding in post-conflict reconstruction, there is often a tension between providing for immediate health needs and supporting long-term health interventions, both of which are needed to address the effects of the conflict.¹²¹ Immediate and specific health needs, such as gendered healthcare, need to be included in reconstruction as investing in maternal and child health can vitally reduce the mortality among these populations.¹²² An equally important facet of healthcare in post-conflict settings is the ability to develop a long-term response to specific issues such as the increased need for mental health and psychological

services. Research has found that exposure to armed conflict leads to an “increased prevalence of psychological disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety.”¹²³ As articulated by the World Bank, mental and psycho-social services span primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of healthcare,¹²⁴ and these services are difficult to successfully implement even in the best functioning health care systems.

Regarding education services, the Global Education Monitoring Report and SDG 4 breaks up education into levels, often grouped into early childhood, primary and secondary (K-12), and then tertiary and vocational.¹²⁵ Overall, education allows for investments in the future development of the country and its postponement in post-conflict situations delays and denies the development of the youth population.¹²⁶

In this light, education in post-conflict reconstruction needs to be conflict-sensitive. If the physical infrastructure of a school is rebuilt but the curriculum is imbued with messages that reinstate conflict tensions between students, then the educational system can become a source of conflict. Therefore, reconstruction of education systems and services must reconcile questions of how history is written about the conflict in line with trauma-sensitive approaches. There is also often a need to update education curriculums from pre-conflict states, as sometimes these have omitted minority languages and cultures within a country. Post-conflict development of education systems must also be done in a way that supports DDR efforts, especially for youths who may have had their education interrupted due to the war, with a specific emphasis on vocational training.¹²⁷

Pre-War and Current Conditions in Syria

Healthcare Services

Government spending on healthcare did not rise according to the population growth Syria experienced in the years before the war.¹²⁸ Total government spending on health was under 3 percent of GDP in 2009, according to WHO data.¹²⁹ Despite this, life expectancy at birth increased from 56 in 1970 to over 73 in 2009.¹³⁰ Before the conflict, 96 percent of births were attended by a skilled attendant and 88 percent received prenatal care.¹³¹ Regarding maternal health, maternal mortality in Syria dropped almost 50 percent from 1993 to 2008 – from 107 to 56 for every 100,000 births.¹³² In 2009, Syria was in an epidemiological transition from communicable to non-communicable diseases; data showed 77 percent of the country’s mortalities were caused by non-communicable diseases (NCDs).¹³³ Additionally, before the conflict, Syria had a large domestic pharmaceutical industry.

The Syrian Ministry of Health is responsible for most primary care in the country and prior to the war healthcare was mostly implemented at the governorate level.¹³⁴ Healthcare prior to the conflict in Syria was below average in the Middle East and varied throughout Syria’s geography.¹³⁵ Major cities had a concentration of advanced medical care infrastructure, while outside of urban centers “the healthcare infrastructure was suboptimal,” with “insufficient funds and inadequate equipment.”¹³⁶ In 2010, Syria had 1.5 hospital beds and physicians for every 1,000 people, according to UNDP.¹³⁷

With limited government funding for public healthcare came the rise of private health services, which increased inequality in access to health care in the country.¹³⁸ Pre-conflict mental health in Syria was extremely limited, with claims from the WHO that all of Syria had only two public psychiatric hospitals and 70 psychiatrists.¹³⁹

Due to the conflict the World Bank has estimated that “more people may have been killed in Syria due to a breakdown of the health system than due to direct fatalities from the fighting.”¹⁴⁰ Already by the end of 2014, only half the primary health centers in the country were still functional and life expectancy at birth had fallen to under 56 years.¹⁴¹ 46 percent of hospitals and primary health care facilities are either “partially functional or not functional as a result of damage inflicted by hostilities” as of 2018, with 167 health facilities reportedly completely destroyed.¹⁴² Healthcare infrastructure has been intentionally targeted throughout the conflict by a host of actors.¹⁴³

There had been a re-occurrence of preventable communicable diseases like measles, mumps, and leishmaniasis,¹⁴⁴ as well as polio, the cases of which are now in decline.¹⁴⁵ Regarding maternal care, the number of women who had medical assistance at childbirth dropped to 72 percent due to the war and there was an increase in elective caesarian sections, due to concerns around limited spontaneous medical support.¹⁴⁶ The WHO reports that in all of Syria, there is a ratio of approximately 50 gynecologists per 4 million people.¹⁴⁷ It is now estimated that less than a quarter of women have access to reproductive services.¹⁴⁸ Mental health needs of Syrians due to the war are difficult to trace, but some estimates by UNHCR have found 2 million people are experiencing mild-to-moderate mental health problems in Syria, while 350,000 are suffering from severe mental health disorders. Regardless of the actual numbers of those in need, the country is severely lacking in mental health practitioners and services.¹⁴⁹ Syria’s pharmaceutical capacity, which prior to the conflict provided the country with around 90 percent of its medical needs, has been reduced to only 10 percent.¹⁵⁰

It is important to note that just because there is access to the physical medical infrastructure does not mean that there is access to medical services. There has been a major shortage of medication and necessary equipment, as well as an acute drain of qualified professionals from the country.¹⁵¹ Additionally, reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health has specifically suffered. The physical destruction of medical services, lack of access to existing medical centers, and financial inability to access services have all placed huge barriers to accessing health.¹⁵²

Education Services

As with health funding, government spending on education similarly did not increase proportionally to the population needs in the years leading up to the conflict.¹⁵³ In Syria in 2009, only 17 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds were receiving early childhood care or education, while 55 percent of this age group experienced childhood development activities in some way.¹⁵⁴ In the 2009-2010 school year, the net enrollment rate in Syria was 93 percent for primary school, while for secondary school it was 67 percent: the latter was above the average for the region.¹⁵⁵ It is estimated that before the

war around 20 percent of Syrians had some higher education. More specific estimates find that 26 percent of the urban population across genders, versus 17 percent of men and 15 percent of women in rural areas in Syria had a level of tertiary or vocational education.¹⁵⁶

However, due to the conflict 2.1 million children, over a third of children in Syria, are out of school and a further 1.3 million children are at risk of dropping out.¹⁵⁷ Enrollment in education dropped from 85 percent in 2010 to 61 percent in 2018 for children between 5 and 17 years of age.¹⁵⁸ Around 43 percent of the education infrastructure has been rendered non-functional in Syria; secondary and vocational schools have been among the most targeted education structures, with more than 14 percent of the buildings fully damaged.¹⁵⁹ Conversely, primary schools and universities have been less damaged, with fully damaged percentages slightly under 7 percent and 6 percent respectively.¹⁶⁰ Estimated amounts of enrollment in tertiary education dropped to under 5 percent in 2016 due to the war.¹⁶¹ The number of teachers in the formal education system is less than half the pre-war level.¹⁶² Additionally, movement of populations has meant that while some schools are over capacity, others are underutilized.¹⁶³ Physical destruction of schools is the primary reason for low enrollment rates, yet social conditions such as underage labor and child marriage are also contributors.¹⁶⁴ It should be noted that early childhood education has received limited attention in Syria, due its lack of availability in Syria before the crisis, and during the crisis the need for basic and secondary education has been prioritized over early childhood education.¹⁶⁵

Guiding Principles in Reconstruction

For both healthcare and education, challenges to post-conflict reconstruction span from destruction of facilities, risks associated with traveling for services, the drain of specialized personnel, and indirect complications arising from the conflict such as forced child labor and marriage. In addressing healthcare needs, reconstruction of the healthcare system in Syria has to take into account a conflict-sensitive approach, one which addresses the specialized health needs that have arisen with the conflict in Syria. This includes sensitivity to gendered health needs and addressing the psychological needs of the population. In meeting education needs, reconstruction plans need to take a youth- and conflict- sensitive approach and must also guard against politicization. Primary and secondary education should support community cohesion, as engagement around education can act as a source of social rebuilding and post-conflict reconciliation, while tertiary education should take into account training and employment needs (across age, capability, and gender) to rebuild the skills needed for a sustainable economy in Syria.

Overall for the reconstruction of services, while education and healthcare must be developed in post-conflict Syria along a national framework, the local needs of populations must guide the development of and access to these services. Both of these systems also need to ensure equitable and affordable options throughout Syria's geography and to take into account the shifts in population size and resulting needs throughout Syria. Services need rehabilitation in terms of physical buildings and equipment, as well as training of conflict-sensitive approaches, to fully develop Syria's human capital.

f. Summary of guiding principles in post-conflict reconstruction

Based on the above findings, the guiding principles that reconstruction should adhere to in Syria are consolidated in a framework below. While not exhaustive, the framework can guide how better reconstruction activities can target needs on the ground in Syria.

Table 1: Guiding Principles for Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Overall Guiding Principles

- Geographic breadth
- Community and local engagement
- Involvement of SMEs
- Affordability and sustainability
- Conflict-, gender-, and youth- sensitivity
- Environmentally conscious approach

Livelihoods

- Foster SMEs (including through housing, infrastructure, and services)
- Emphasize DDR approaches and youth sensitivity
- Address gender dynamics regarding employment and households
- Support agricultural livelihoods and sustainability

Housing

- Focus on affordable and equal access to housing
- Take into account demographic shifts and population displacement
- Highlight community engagement and locally-led efforts
- Ensure local employment opportunities in debris removal and housing reconstruction

Infrastructure

- Prioritize equality and interconnectivity throughout Syria to foster economic growth
- Enable extractive infrastructure revenue to support investment in other needed infrastructure
- Incorporate local production, employment, and training among Syrians
- Assess sustainability and waste concerns, as well as health implications

Services

- Integrate conflict-, youth- and gender-sensitive approach to education and health development
- Provide equitable and affordable options throughout country
- Complement community cohesion and engagement
- Establish locally-led development of service delivery

IV. External Actors in Syria Reconstruction

This report covers the engagement of several key countries in the emerging reconstruction and re-investment in Syria. The countries were chosen due to having the most significant engagement in Syria reconstruction. Russia, Iran, and China are stated allies in reconstruction by the Syrian government, and Turkey has been increasing its presence and reconstruction footprint in northern Syria. Furthermore, the historic engagement between Syria and GCC countries is vital to capture, even if there is little evidence of significant reconstruction projects to date. Finally, there are additional actors, who while have not been as engaged in reconstruction, nevertheless deserve analysis and further attention.

It should be noted, that data on actual engagement in Syria's reconstruction is difficult to obtain, and much of the analysis below relies on statements of intent through memorandums of understanding (MoUs), official announcements, and reports that indicate intended activities of engagement in reconstruction. Therefore, these projects can change or end up not occurring, as some already have. Additionally, the below should be seen as indicative, not exhaustive, of external countries' engagement in Syria reconstruction. The tables in this section capture expressed or existing engagement of these external countries, analyzed according to the framework of sectors developed in Section III of this report and they also include possible avenues for reconstruction engagement to better align with needs in Syria according to the above guiding principles.

a. Russia

Context

The Syrian Arab Republic and the Russian Federation have a long and fluctuating history of relations that span back to before Syria was officially independent and to when Russia was still the Soviet Union. Historical engagement between the two countries have revolved around significant military support from Russia to Syria. Russian military presence in Syria, specifically at the Tartous base, dates back to the 1980s, and has since continued. Moscow further secured its presence in both the Tartous naval base and Khmeimim air base in 2017. As of November 2019, Russia has used its veto power at the UN Security Council thirteen times to defend Syria against the body's action beginning in 2011. In February 2019, President Putin hosted the Iranian President and the Turkish President in Sochi to discuss the resolution of the civil war in Syria, which were the first Russian-held peace talks since the US announced its intent to withdraw from Syria.¹⁶⁶ The meeting indicated the continued importance between the three countries of coordination on a post-conflict Syria. Prior to this, Russia, Turkey, and Iran held talks in Astana in February 2017 and have since convened a total of 13 talks as of August 2019.¹⁶⁷

As military support for the Syrian government becomes less relevant as the conflict subsides,

power dynamics between these allies will begin to shift. While Russia still has its military presence in Syria in the current phase of the conflict, it aims to leverage its military support into a lasting presence in Syria for strategic geopolitical and financial objectives. Notably, with the 2019 contract for Stroytransgaz to control the commercial ports in Tartous, Russia now controls the whole production and export chain for phosphate in Syria. While Russia has not extended credit nor humanitarian aid in the numbers that Iran or the GCC have, it has offered Syria goods in circumvention of US and EU sanctions, including printing Syrian currency.¹⁶⁸ Russia is also interested in facilitating access to global financial markets to ensure Assad is able to remain in power and to leverage funding needed for reconstruction.¹⁶⁹ Moscow has publicly insisted on being the primary broker of reconstruction in Syria, after spending around \$1.2 billion per year on military operations in Syria.¹⁷⁰ However, Russia does not seem to be willing to finance reconstruction in Syria alone. While the 2018 Yalta Forum saw around \$1 billion in contracts signed between Syria and Russia, the 2019 Forum saw no such deals, showing a growing reluctance of Russian investors to commit to projects in Syria.¹⁷¹ Russia is instead encouraging others, namely Western donors, to financially provide for reconstruction in Syria, while seeking to maintain control over the delegation of reconstruction contracts, either to its own companies or to allies.¹⁷²

Table 2: Russian Priorities in Syria Reconstruction¹⁷³

Russia’s priorities in Syria’s reconstruction are largely focused on extractive infrastructure and resources (oil, gas, and phosphorus), as well as key transportation infrastructure (naval and air). As Russia aims to position itself as the interlocuter leading external engagement in Syrian reconstruction, there would be a need to leverage Russia’s priorities to address needs on the ground, including but not limited to the prioritization of local Syrian employment, engagement with Syrian SMEs for construction and infrastructure projects, and ensuring that reconstruction efforts in Syria serve civilian needs and benefit the local population.

Engagement

Livelihoods

- Signed 2 MoUs with Russian company Yugra Construction on rehabilitation, expansion, management of 2 grain silos in Lattakia Port and Tartous (2019)
- Plans to import 1.5 million tons of wheat, mainly from Russia (2018)
- Agreement for 3-year deal for 1 million tons of soft milling wheat per year paid by EUR 494.25 million credit line from Russia (2017)
- More than half of all wheat imports into Syria were from Russia: 165,000 out of 253,000 tons (2017)

Housing

- Signed \$19.7 million contract for import of 144 machines and construction equipment from Russian company Stroyexpert (first shipment of equipment arrived 2019, signed in 2018)
- Work started on \$90 million tourist resort near Tartous by Russian company STG Logistic (2018)
- Indication of Russian interest in construction of housing in Lattakia, Homs, Tartous and other cities (on-going)

Addressing Needs

Livelihoods

- Employ locally for construction and development of agriculture needs
- Set fair price contracts and fair trade for exporting Syrian agriculture
- Provide imports based on economic and local need
- Prevent dependency on Russian agriculture imports, instead foster Syrian self-sustainability

Housing

- Train and employ local Syrians in housing projects
- Widen geographic coverage of housing projects
- Include affordable housing options
- Engage Syrian SMEs for procurement

Table 2 is continued on the following page

Infrastructure

Transportation

- Discussions underway around Russian interest in renovating and increasing capacity of Damascus Airport (2019)
- Contract awarded to Stroytransgaz for 49 year contract controlling the commercial ports in Tartous (2019)
- Interest from Rostec-Uralvagonzavod and Russian Railways to repair Syria's railway system, initially largely around phosphate production path (2018)
- Contract awarded to Stroytransgaz for 49 year contract controlling the military port in Tartous (2017)

Extractive

- Awarded 2 Russian companies Mercury and Velada 3 contracts for the right to explore for oil and gas in Damascus, Hassakah and near border with Iraq (2019)
- Rights awarded to Stroytransgaz to develop phosphate mines in Sharqiyah and Kneifis, restore and manage phosphate plant near Homs: range from 30-35% of the revenues reserved for the Syrian state (2017-2019)
- Signed framework agreement with Russian company Rosgeo, includes surveys for underground gas reserve, offshore reserves, consultancy and training (2017)
- Awarded Russian company Evro Polis 5-year contract for 25% of all oil and gas from territory regained by the regime with Russian support (2016)

Power

- Signed MoU for over EUR 2 billion 'roadmap agreement' to build new power plants and turbines with total output of 2,650 MW across 4 areas: Aleppo, Mhardeh, Tishreen, Deir Ez-Zor – concerns over lack of Syrian funds (2018)

WASH

- Awarded Stroytransgaz EUR 193 million contract to build a water pumping station on the Tigris River to irrigate around 214,000 hectares of land (2014)

Infrastructure

- Ensure airport and railway services for civilian use
- Employ and train local population in phosphate and oil extraction and production
- Prevent environmental harm done by infrastructure development
- Build downstream benefits from infrastructure development
- Prevent predatory practices funneling revenues out of Syria
- Address power infrastructure in light of financial concerns

b. Iran

Context

Syria was the first Arab country to recognize the Islamic Republic after the revolution in 1979. Additionally, Syria sided with Iran in the Iran-Iraq war in 1980, undermining a pan-Arab position on the conflict. A large component of Syrian-Iranian historical engagements centers on Lebanon; Iran's prioritization of being able to access Hezbollah in Lebanon has guided its engagement in the Syrian conflict. Throughout history, Syria has been a conduit through which Iran delivered supplies to Hezbollah and monitored Israel. With regard to soft power engagement, over the years Iran has engaged in cultural diplomacy in supporting Shia holy sites and Iranian religious tourism to Syria.¹⁷⁴ In fact, while almost all tourism has ceased in Syria for the past eight years, religious tourism from Iranian pilgrims has continued.¹⁷⁵

During the conflict, Iran has heavily supported Syrian government forces through Hezbollah and other Iranian or Iranian-funded militias. There still remain between 10,000 to 35,000 fighters in Syrian government-held territory from Iranian proxy groups, while there are between 7,000 to 10,000 additional fighters from Hezbollah.¹⁷⁶ Estimates claim that Iran has spent between \$16 billion and \$48 billion in Syria since 2012, depending on sources.¹⁷⁷ The numbers span a wide range due to a lack of reporting, as well as how indirect financial support from Iran in Syria can be quantified. Either way, Iran is expecting post-conflict returns on its support given to the Syrian government. Most of Iran's reconstruction priorities are geographically located along the path from Iran and Iraq to southern Lebanon through Syria, or in 'bubbles' around holy sites.¹⁷⁸

Outside of its military support, Iran has also extended lines of credit worth over \$6.6 billion to Syria since 2013. Iran has stipulated that these lines of credit can only be spent through contracts with Iranian companies, ensuring continued Iranian economic engagement in Syria.¹⁷⁹ Iran's reconstruction aspirations in Syria are constrained by both countries being under US sanctions, curtailing the banking and financial capabilities. The re-imposition of US sanctions on Iran in the fall of 2018 directly impacted Iranian support to the Syrian government. While Iran was sending around 3 million barrels of oil a month to Syria before the sanctions were imposed, oil shipments ceased from November 2018 to April 2019, resulting in a severe gasoline shortage in Damascus.¹⁸⁰ Oil shipments from Iran to Syria finally resumed in May 2019.¹⁸¹

Iran's participation in the September 2019 Damascus International Trade Fair increased from the previous year, with the Iranian delegation comprising the largest presence at the Fair.¹⁸² However, as can be seen in Table 3, many of the agreements signed between Syria and Iran are in the form of non-binding MoUs, and there is a lack of details around many of the projects. While recent visits and statements between the two countries in the fall of 2019 show interest and stated engagement, past and recent MOUs have not materialized into contracts nor projects.¹⁸³

Table 3: Iranian Priorities in Syria Reconstruction¹⁸⁴

Iranian priorities in Syrian reconstruction revolve around exerting power, both hard and soft, concentrated geographically around areas of religious and cultural importance, as well as along strategic areas connecting Iran through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. Iran has focused on developing religious sites in Syria and regional integration through developing joint systems between the three countries. While announcements and agreements have been signed, many projects have not been able to materialize, thus calling into question the ability of Iran to engage in reconstruction in Syria. Iran has also engaged in livelihoods support through agriculture. Iranian engagement in Syria should ensure against creating divisions or unequal development of areas, as well as fostering wide geographic buy-in among Syrians.

Engagement

Livelihoods

- Contract for EUR 62.6 million for 5 flour mills in Al-Thawra, Izraa, Raqqa, Suweida, funded by the \$1 billion credit line from Iran (credit and contract in 2013, first mill and two silos completed in Suweida in 2019)
- Interest in supporting livelihoods in underserved areas, including agricultural support in areas around Euphrates Valley (2018)
- Signed contract with Iran Tractor Manufacturing Company for 3,000 agricultural tractors at predicted value of \$27 million (2018)
- Signed MoU for 2 sugar refinement production lines at the Tal Salhab plant (no cost specified) (2017)
- Plans for Razi Institute for Serums and Vaccines in Iran to build \$25 million veterinary vaccine plant in Lattakia (2017)

Housing

- MoU signed for Iranian project for 200,000 housing units in Damascus (2019)
- MoU signed for Syrian-Iranian Joint Committee in the field of Public Works and Housing to build new cities (2019)
- Interest in developing tourism real estate: holy sites in Daraya, old city and Seyada Zeinab area of Damascus, Aleppo, and Deir Ezzor (2018)
- Interest in property ownership in Homs, Hama, & Damascus (2018)
- MoU signed with Iranian Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization to increase services and religious tourism sites in Syria (2015)

Addressing Needs

Livelihoods

- Ensure local community engagement and environmental sustainability in agricultural projects

Housing

- Develop affordable housing
- Ensure geographic inclusion of surrounding communities
- Avoid any demographic changes being undertaken by these housing project developments
- Allow for open participation of SMEs not subject to local paramilitary networks in procurement

Table 3 is continued on the following page

Infrastructure

Transportation

- Signed MoU between railway companies of both countries to link Iran, Syria and Iraq by rail (2019)

Extractive

- Plans of Iran's Research Center of Petroleum Industry (RIPI) to build \$1 billion oil refinery with 140,000 barrels a day capacity in Homs (2017)

Power

- Construction begun by Iranian company Mapna of 540 MW steam power plant in Lattakia costing around \$472 million (2019)
- MoU signed on development of power plants and transmission lines, possible connection of Iran and Syria through Iraq (no value disclosed) (2019)
- Contract signed with Iranian company Novin to build a 5 MW renewable energy power plant in the province of Homs (no details disclosed) (2019)
- Signed 2 contracts for 5 25 MW gas-fired power generators to Aleppo Thermal Plant for EUR 110 million, and renovation of a power generator in the Baniyas Power Station to increase capacity to 38 MW for EUR 8.8 million (2017)
- Signed MoU for Iran to rehab power plants in Damascus, Aleppo, Lattakia, Baniyas, Homs and Deir Ez-Zor; concerns around Syrian funds (2017)

ICT

- Signed agreement with Mobile Telecommunication Company of Iran (MCI) to establish mobile phone operator in Syria (2017)

Services

- Claims of education, medical, and other services have been offered in towns along the route from Iran to Lebanon (ongoing)
- Interest in establishing new Faculty of Islamic Schools of Thought at Damascus University (2018)
- Plans to establish Islamic Azad University branches in all Syrian cities in addition to the already existing exchange program with University of Aleppo (2018)

Infrastructure

- Re-invest revenue locally
- Ensure transportation serves Syrian needs
- Verify that telecommunications investments allow for economic connectivity rather than private networks for political needs

Services

- Ensure a needs-based approach to services, not just population or location

c. China

Context

Historical engagement between China and Syria has been relatively limited in recent years and focused prominently on military relations and bilateral trade. Previously during the Cold War years, China maintained a close alliance with Syria. Bilateral trade between China and Syria in 2011 was \$2.4 billion, and China is the world's largest oil importing country and relies significantly on energy imports from the Middle East.¹⁸⁵ Throughout the conflict, China has kept its embassy open in Damascus and vetoed many resolutions against the Syrian government at the UN Security Council since 2011. China's approach to international relations has overwhelmingly been of formal non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states. It should also be noted that China has expressed concerns about violent extremism spillover from Syria targeting Chinese interests.¹⁸⁶

Throughout the war, Syria has been reliant on Chinese trade and imports, the latter of which comprised 25 percent of all of Syria's imports in 2017.¹⁸⁷ This same year, China hosted the First Trade Fair on Syrian Reconstruction Projects and committed to contribute \$2 billion toward building industrial parks for at least 150 companies.¹⁸⁸ Out of the options for financial support for Syria's reconstruction, China is seen as promising.¹⁸⁹ This is namely because other countries such as Russia and Iran have been either burdened by years of financial engagement in the Syrian war and/or are under Western sanctions. 200 mainly state-owned Chinese companies participated in the 60th Damascus International Trade Fair in September 2018, and there was a large presence at the 2019 event as well.¹⁹⁰

China traditionally approaches foreign development through loans and often mandates that Chinese companies undertake the projects, the latter of which means that projects usually do not result in the employment of locals.¹⁹¹ Engagement in development in other countries has often been according to the Belt-Road Initiative (BRI), which is China's global development strategy that aims to connect China to other parts of Asia, as well as to Africa and Europe by land and maritime transit routes.¹⁹² Syria is strategically vital to the BRI due to its location providing land and sea connections. With regard to post-conflict reconstruction, across the wider Middle East, China has also been undertaking large infrastructure reconstruction in Iraq since the violence has died down.¹⁹³ However, there are concerns that Chinese loans for large-scale infrastructure projects will become debt-traps for countries including those in the Middle East, who will then be unable to repay China for projects, resulting in China controlling vital infrastructure and the associated revenue.¹⁹⁴

Table 4: Chinese Priorities in Syria Reconstruction¹⁹⁵

China's priorities in Syria revolve around the Belt-Road Initiative (BRI), focused on developing transportation lines and access for trade transit routes through Syria. There has additionally been increased Chinese interest in the housing and construction sector, as well as industrial infrastructure. A key area in which China's engagement in Syria post-conflict reconstruction can address needs on the ground is through training and employment of Syrian workers and development of supply chains, as well as ensuring that any housing and/or infrastructure projects benefit local populations.

Engagement

Housing

- Chinese company SINOMA to build 3 cement production lines (1.5 million tons per year each) in Adra, Tartous and Hama cement plants (2019)
- Discussions with China Zhenjiang International Economic-Technical Cooperation Corporation (CZICC) on possible real estate partnerships in Damascus, Aleppo, and Suweida (2019)
- Contracts with Chinese companies for 94 heavy machines for \$15.3 million (2018)

Infrastructure

Transportation

- Expressed interest in connecting BRI in Syria through building roads and railroads for cargo transport from land to sea (on-going)

Extractive

- State-owned China National Petroleum Corporation is major stakeholder in two of Syria's largest oil companies: signed development and production contract with Syria's Minister of Petroleum and Mineral resources (2003); jointly purchased with Indian oil company 38% stake of Al-Furat Petroleum (2005); signed agreement for 35% interest in Syria Shell Petroleum Development Company (2010)

Addressing Needs

Housing

- Encourage affordable housing options
- Train and employ Syrians in Chinese-led projects

Infrastructure

- Prevent high-indebted nature of projects and predatory conditionality
- Ensure transportation is built and serves local livelihoods and economy
- Engage community engagement across project areas
- Integrate livelihoods for Syrians downstream

Table 4 is continued on the following page

Power

- MoU between Chinese company Jin Jiang and Syrian construction company Cham Engineering and Contracting exploring renewable energy and construction (2019)
- Delivery of 800 electrical power transformers and 60 km long electric cables as part of \$12 million grant from Chinese government (2018)
- Interest from Chinese company PowerChina in building a power station in Lattakia of 600 MW (2017)
- Chinese companies Xian Electric Engineering and Ri Liu Power International won EUR 13 million contract to build electric substation in Lattakia (2016)

ICT

- Commitment from Huawei to help rebuild telecommunication system by 2020
- PCCW company based in Hong Kong was main provider of internet traffic into Syria (2012)

*Other**

- Announced plans to open permanent trade center near Damascus in Adra Industrial City of 7,000 sqm and over 200 Chinese companies (2019)
- Hosted First Trade Fair on Syrian Reconstruction Projects committed to contribute \$2 billion toward building industrial parks for at least 150 companies (2017)

**Industrial parks and centers can be considered under economic infrastructure, which outside of these limited Chinese projects this report largely does not address.*

- Take into account environmental considerations
- Train and employ local populations to develop and build electrical infrastructure
- Foster skills development of STEM professions locally

d. Turkey

Context

Turkey shares the longest border with Syria and historically the relationship between the two has been tense due to territorial issues over the Hatay region, water issues over the Euphrates and Asi rivers and the approach of the two countries towards Kurdish political and militant groups.¹⁹⁶ During the conflict between the Turkish government and the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) in the 1980s and 1990s, the Syrian government supported and allowed for the PKK and its leader Abdullah Öcalan to operate and conduct attacks on Turkey out of Syria.¹⁹⁷ However, tensions subsided once Syria ended its support for the PKK in the late 1990s. Over the following years, Turkey and Syria saw improved relations, including a free-trade agreement in 2007 and Turkey moving production of materials into Syria.¹⁹⁸ In 2010, Turkey was responsible for almost 10 percent of all imports into Syria, the largest single country, with around \$1.8 billion in sales in 2010. In the same year, Turkey was among Syria's top export destinations, with over 5 percent of all exports from Syria going to Turkey.¹⁹⁹

Relations between Turkey and Syria soured once again when the Turkish government called for Assad to step down in 2011. Once the conflict began in Syria, exports from Turkey to Syria dropped to only \$498 million in 2012; however, in 2014, exports hit pre-conflict levels of \$1.8 billion, in part due to the number of Syrian businesses that moved into Turkey as a result of the conflict.²⁰⁰ Turkey, along with Syria's other neighboring countries, has received large numbers of Syria refugees fleeing the violence; as of November 2019, the country had over 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees.²⁰¹

Turkey has actively operated in Syria either by backing forces like the Free Syrian Army (FSA) or directly militarily intervening in Syria in 2016 (Operation Euphrates Shield), 2018 (Operation Olive Branch), and 2019 (Operation Peace Spring). The result of these operations has been Turkish control of a swath of land along the Syrian border with Turkey and most recently an increased Turkish-Russian partnership in northern areas of Syria. Turkey has provided security and police forces, while also conducting reconstruction activities in the areas under their control as the Turkish government aims to establish an area to which Syrian refugees in Turkey can return. Turkey asserts that more than 365,000 Syrians have returned to Syria in areas controlled under Turkish rule as of November 2019²⁰², due to the "atmosphere of tranquility and peace" provided by their operations²⁰³. There are claims that Syrians from within Syria have relocated to areas under Turkish control, due to Turkey's reconstruction activities²⁰⁴. However, there are also concerns around forced repatriation, threats to civilians in these areas and renewed clashes.

Table 5: Turkish Priorities in Syria Reconstruction²⁰⁵

Turkey’s engagement and overall priorities in Syria reconstruction are currently exclusively located in land under their influence or control in the geographic northeast. In these areas, they are undertaking significant reconstruction activities spanning livelihoods, housing, infrastructure, and services. Turkish aims in engaging in reconstruction are multifaceted, ranging from maintaining their own political security by securing the border and containing Kurdish political and militant groups, facilitating the return of Syrians out of Turkey and financially benefiting from reconstruction contracts. The Turkish government and companies should be encouraged to pursue localization, local integration and non-discriminatory inclusion of local Syrians in projects.

Engagement

Livelihoods

- Paid for salaries of approx. 3,000 Syrian professions like teachers, doctors, and policemen (2019)
- Syrian personnel have been employed in medical services: 226 in total in 19 branches (2019)
- Cleared mines and explosives from farmland to allow for agricultural production for both crops and livestock (2017)
- Directly employed Syrians for civil society/NGOs: around 1,144 people (2017)

Housing

- Stated intention to undertake housing projects in ‘buffer zone’ in an approx. \$27 billion construction project in northeast for resettlement of 1 million Syrian refugees in 140 villages (2019)
- Gaziantep Governorship has undertaken debris removal of over 600 tons of rubble (2019)
- Industrial zone being built in Al-Bab of 56,100 sqm (2018)

Addressing Needs

Livelihoods

- Train local population to support societal needs such as teachers, doctors, and police, and support livelihoods
- Ensure sustainable funding to maintain employment and working conditions
- Procure locally when possible, instead of transporting Turkish work or goods

Housing

- Verify housing to be provided based on needs, not on demographic aims
- Protect against demographic changes

Table 5 is continued on the following page

Infrastructure

Transportation

- Undertaken road building and paving: e.g. more than 305 tons of asphalt has been used in Azaz (2018)
- Development of bus transport services linking Aleppo and Idlib regions (2018)

Power

- Signed 10-year agreement for \$7 million 30 MW generators and electricity networks around Azaz by ET Energy, Turkish company (2018)

WASH

- Provided dump tractors, waste collection trucks, 600 garbage dumpsters and built 138 lavatories in Jarablus (2017)
- Supplied generators for 25 water pumping centers in 4 cities of Azaz, Jarablus, al-Bab and Çobanbey (2017)

ICT

- Türk Telekom and Turkcell have established cell towers in north-east towns, connecting to Turkey's telecommunication network (2018)

Services

- 508,846 Syrian children returned to school and 222,869 Syrians have been given vocational certification in areas such as foreign languages, computer sciences, and carpet weaving; built 4 high schools, 12 middle schools, 98 elementary schools, and educational center in Jarablus (2019)
- Gaziantep University opened vocational training center in Jarablus; plans to open branches in Al-Bab, Marea, and Azaz (2018)
- Harran University opened campus in Al-Bab in Arabic, Turkish, and English (2018)
- Construction of medical centers, including hospital in Jarablus, staffed with Syrian personnel (2016 - 2019)
- Women's health and conflict-sensitive services offered at Women's Committees, women and youth centers, orphanages and disability programs (2019)

Infrastructure

- Engage local companies and SMEs in the procurement of various infrastructure projects
- Prevent annexation of land through infrastructure control
- Infrastructure to train and employ local population

Services

- Provide community-based and context-sensitive services
- Ensure services to be free from political biases especially in education curriculum
- Tailor vocational and tertiary education & training towards skills development of region

e. Gulf Cooperation Council

Context

Historical engagement between the six GCC countries – Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman – and Syria have seen fluctuating periods of positive and negative relations. The relationship between Syria and Saudi Arabia has been central to the GCC's position towards Syria. Syria's siding with Iran during the 1980s Iran-Iraq war increased tensions between Syria and Saudi Arabia. Conversely, they both sided similarly on both the Taif Agreement that ended the Lebanese civil war in 1989 and against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, positions that solidified positive engagement between the two. However, the assassination of Saudi-ally Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005, as well as Syria's overt backing of Hezbollah in the Israel-Lebanon war in 2006, once again soured relations.

The UAE has also had an intermittent and shifting relationship with Syria throughout the years. Prior to the war, UAE and Syria bilateral trade was around \$254 million in 2007 and was expected to increase.²⁰⁶ Kuwait has kept good relations with Syria due to Syria's support for Kuwait during the Iraqi invasion in 1990 and the two countries remained close allies after the conclusion of the invasion into the 1990s. Bahrain and Oman have had limited historical engagement with Syria, while Qatar had positive relations with the Syrian government, in part due to strong personal ties between Assad and the Qatari Emir prior to the war. There are subcurrents of historical links between Gulf countries and Syria in the form of tribal connections; some Syrian tribal members have dual citizenship of Gulf states and these links have provided financial and political connections between Syria and other GCC countries.²⁰⁷

There has been no consistent policy for Gulf countries towards Syria since the start of the conflict, although all six countries have applied pressure on Assad to mitigate the conflict. The GCC initially hoped that the uprising in Syria could allow for Gulf support and ultimately dislodge Iranian control over the country, yet Assad chose to turn to Iran even further during the conflict, largely rejecting Gulf engagement.²⁰⁸ This led the Gulf states to change approach and instead began to directly oppose the Syrian government in the conflict. In 2012 Saudi and Bahrain closed their embassies in Syria, followed by all other GCC states except for Oman, who has kept diplomatic relations throughout the conflict.

While GCC countries are financially capable, it seems unlikely for major GCC funding to go to Syrian reconstruction while Iranian relations remain so strong. The UAE and Kuwait have instead so far positioned themselves as key providers of humanitarian aid (mainly to non-government areas). Between 2011 and 2019 the UAE has reported it has contributed \$5.01 billion in aid to Syria.²⁰⁹ Kuwait has hosted international pledging conferences for Syria each year from 2013 to 2015, as well as co-hosting a conference in London in 2016 – the first three events alone raised a total of \$7.5 billion.²¹⁰

Beginning at the end of 2018, there has been noticeable movement on Gulf re-engagement with Syria. The UAE reopened its embassy in Damascus in December 2018, followed by announcements that Bahrain would do the same, while Kuwait stated it would as well, as long as the move was approved by the Arab League.²¹¹ Since the UAE embassy has reopened, it has conducted one public event, a food aid program in Damascus for Ramadan 2019.²¹² Qatar, which had an active relationship with the Assad government prior to 2011 and was providing significant investment in the country, has refrained from re-establishing relations. Current trade policy between the countries remains inconsistent, as it is not clear what activities can be allowed in light of US sanctions. Given the close relationship between the GCC and the US, it is unlikely to see a significant shift towards Syria, although some preparations and overtures are being made. Some states were willing to reconsider Syria's membership of the Arab League in 2019, yet the issue of its re-admittance was not addressed at the March 2019 meeting. A re-instatement of Syria to the League would not only effectively accept Assad as the victor of the war, but also effectively condone Syria's long-term engagement with Iran.²¹³

GCC Priorities in Syria Reconstruction

GCC countries' willingness to play a large role in Syria's reconstruction is still unclear. The UAE notably hosted an inaugural UAE-Syria Private Sector Forum in Abu Dhabi in January 2019 which saw a delegation of Syrian businesses and representatives "to attract investments particularly to their agriculture, tourism, trade, infrastructure, and renewable energy sectors" from Emirati investors.²¹⁴ At almost the same time, the EU released a list of sanctioned Syrian businessmen, some of whom were in Abu Dhabi at the time.²¹⁵ Since that meeting, however, any significant plans have been put on hold, apparently due to US pressure.²¹⁶ Individual UAE companies such as DAMAC Properties and Emaar, who had activities in Syria prior to the conflict, had been tentatively exploring next steps in their engagement.²¹⁷

It is likely that as the violence continues to reduce, major developers from both partially state-owned as well as private companies engaged in the construction and housing sector will re-engage in Syria. This could be followed by those in the retail and food and beverage sector. The UAE and Oman sent the largest delegations since 2011 to participate in the September 2019 Damascus International Trade Fair, despite warning against engagement by the US government; as of the end of 2019 no deals have been announced or disclosed.²¹⁸

f. Additional actors

While Syria's neighbors besides Turkey – **Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq** – are less financially capable of being as involved in Syria's reconstruction, there is opportunity for some engagement. All three countries have experienced financial burdens from the spillover from the Syrian war, largely in the form of massive refugee influxes. The three countries have also all expressed interest in acting as conduits for reconstruction in Syria. Lebanon's potential as a transit hub into Syria is being explored, notably with rising Chinese interest in the development of the Tripoli port in northern Lebanon as a possible gateway to reconstruction in Syria.²¹⁹ However, the re-opening of the Nasib border in October 2018 between Syria and Jordan did not have the economic effect on Jordan that some analysts predicted and the impact of the re-opening of the Boukamal border between Syria and Iraq at the end of September 2019 remains to be seen.

The role that **Syria's diaspora** could play in reconstruction of the country cannot be ignored. As stated in the onset of this report, much of Syria's business community has fled, with the World Bank reporting that private investors' share of GDP dropped from 12 percent in 2010 to 4 percent in 2015.²²⁰ It should also be noted that the financial value of external remittances into Syria is massive. Syrian expatriate remittances in 2016 amounted to \$1.62 billion, more than 10 percent of GDP.²²¹ Businessmen who have remained in Syria have largely done so due to their ties to the Syrian government and have solidified their hold on the Syrian economy, yet are at risk of being targeted by US and EU sanctions (as some already have).²²² Syrian businessmen external to Syria and without ties to the Syrian government could benefit from Syria's post-conflict reconstruction and could address Syrian-needs and locally-led reconstruction that abides by international regulations. Syrian businessmen in Turkey are waiting for contracts to re-enter the territory and develop trade in Syria once again.²²³

The engagement of countries from **South and East Asia** in Syrian reconstruction has been minor but should be monitored as the situation moves towards stability. India was involved in extractive industries in Syria prior to the war and there was high-profile engagement between the countries as recently as 2018, when Syria's foreign minister visited India.²²⁴ There was a notable Indian presence at both the 2018 and 2019 Damascus International Trade Fair.²²⁵ In May 2019, the Indian company Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) visited Damascus in order to consider re-instigating work on the 2008 contract for a \$466 million project to add 400 MW capability to the Tishreen Power Plant, the initial work on which had ceased in 2011.²²⁶ Early in the conflict, South Korea hosted the third Economic Recovery Working Group for Syria in December 2013, as it sees itself as being able to provide expertise on post-conflict reconstruction.²²⁷ In 2014 contracts for electrical equipment between South Korea and Syria amounted to over EUR 43 million, and a similar contract was awarded in 2016 to South Korean company LS Networks for EUR 2.1 million.²²⁸ Malaysian companies have expressed interest in WASH infrastructure projects in Syria, with delegations visiting Syria in 2018.²²⁹

V. The Way Forward

Countries, as expected, are prioritizing their own internal objectives, resource needs and geopolitics when engaging in reconstruction efforts. There are large gaps in addressing the needs across livelihoods, affordable housing, services and infrastructure that would advance development of the country and improve the human capital development of the Syrian population. This report is an initial step in providing guiding principles for addressing the post-conflict needs of the overall population in Syria rather than narrow political interests.

a. Recommendations

There is no optimal way forward in Syria. The world is presented with an unfortunate reality of conflicting political agendas and an unresolved situation on the ground in Syria itself. With so many competing interests, the interests of the Syrian people often come last. While this report provides a clear framework of action of how to engage the broader cross-section of actors active in the reconstruction of the country, there are three other needs that are worth emphasizing: transparency, constructive conversations, and a statement of principles.

Need for Transparency

This report, especially in the priorities and needs analysis of Syria, has relied on the diligent work of humanitarian and development organizations to map out livelihoods, housing, infrastructure and service needs in Syria. Open-source announcements, interviews and proprietary analysis were used to track external state involvement in Syria reconstruction. Work that the Syria Report and the Syrian Legal Development Programme's Human Rights and Business Unit²³⁰ have undertaken is extremely valuable in tracking reconstruction in Syria, yet more collection must be done to bolster analysis of external priorities and engagement in reconstruction in Syria. Moreover, a body such as the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Damascus – whose independence would need to be ensured and maintained – could establish a central registrar for all reconstruction projects involving external countries. It could provide a needs assessment and evaluation for relevant projects to ensure alignment with needs on the ground. A separate and regular review by a coalition of civil society actors would be critical to ensure a secondary perspective on progress.

Need for Constructive Conversations

Improved collaboration on a way forward on Syria's reconstruction is essential. Stakeholders need to meet to discuss how reconstruction in Syria can and should prioritize the needs of Syrians. The 'hands-off' approach of the US and the EU to reconstruction until there is a political transition in Syria has left the conversation around reconstruction in a vacuum and the prioritization of the

needs of local populations relegated to the margins. It is critical that forums, informal and formal, are created so that there is a constructive dialogue to ensure that the needs of Syrians are put first and foremost on the agendas of any country participating in the reconstruction efforts in Syria.

Need for a Statement of Principles

Finally, a statement of principles needs to be adopted by all engaged parties on reconstruction in Syria. Projects and engagement must be bound to improving the lives of Syrians, either through livelihoods, housing, infrastructure or services. Using this report and others as a framework, the UN Security Council could adopt a resolution that puts forth clear parameters of how the needs of the Syrian population must come first. Previous cases of post-conflict reconstruction have given the international community valuable lessons learned for how post-conflict reconstruction can look. These experiences where relevant can guide steps forward for Syria.

b. Conclusion

The war in Syria has taken enough from Syrians. Reconstruction has to prioritize a transition to a needs- and rights-based society, economy and political system. External priorities in Syria must come second to the needs and rights of Syrians, both those who have remained in the country and those who may return. A needs-based approach is critical to ensure that reconstruction efforts do not simply become another vehicle for external interests and local networks to benefit at the expense of everyday people. Uneven reconstruction in the areas of livelihoods, housing, infrastructure and services can result in further inequality and regional division within Syria and destabilize local communities further. Syria and Syrians deserve better and it is time for the conversation on reconstruction to ensure the right needs are put at the top of the agenda.

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