



ماعت للسلام والتنمية وحقوق الإنسان
Maat For Peace, Development, and Human Rights

The Impact of the Syrian Conflict on Development

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Preamble:

The Syrian Arab Republic has recently returned to the Arab League. However, it should be noted that Syria is still a fragile state that is unable to recover due to the gross human rights violations committed by all parties, especially the armed militias in western and northeastern Syria. This situation is even exacerbated by Militias' control of parts of the territory, acting as de facto authorities. The imposition of unilateral coercive measures by the USA and the European Union still plays a decisive role in the deterioration of the human rights situation in Syria, especially the deterioration of economic and social rights.

The conflict has disrupted supply and trade chains, raised levels of inflation and unemployment, severely damaged the health and well-being of citizens, caused widespread destruction to the country's industries and infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, as well as water and sanitation systems. Besides, it has undermined economic growth, the political system, and human rights in Syria, and caused mass displacement of millions of people from their homes to seek refuge in neighboring countries or within Syria itself, which created one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world and led to huge losses in terms of development.

The various measures taken at the international level have exacerbated the difficulties and undermined development in Syria instead of driving improvements in the field of development in all its aspects. Syria's membership suspension from the League of Arab States (LAS), the imposition of sanctions and unilateral coercive measures by western countries on Syria, and the prevention of aid, support, and international relief to the Syrian government, exacerbated the losses of development in Syria and created serious repercussions on all aspects of development in Syria, which necessarily affected the well-being and quality of life of the citizens in Syria.

In light of the above, this study seeks to answer the research's main question, which is: **What is the Impact of the Conflict on Development in Syria?** To answer this question, the study examines the economic, political and social impacts of the Syrian conflict, including the destruction of infrastructure and industries, disruption of supply and trade; the role of external actors in exacerbating or mitigating damage; as well as the challenges and opportunities for reconstruction and recovery.

Study Goals:

This study seeks to achieve a set of main goals highlighted as follows:

1. Providing a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the conflict impact on the development of Syria's economic, political and social sectors;



2. Identifying the main challenges and opportunities for reconstruction and recovery in Syria;
3. Examining the role of external actors in exacerbating or mitigating development damage;
4. Providing recommendations to policy makers, humanitarian organizations and other stakeholders involved in addressing the needs of the Syrian population to support reconstruction and recovery efforts in Syria.

Study Methodology:

This study adopts a mixed method of research that combines quantitative and qualitative sampling, data collection, and analysis techniques. This approach is based primarily on a comprehensive literature review and relevant reports to develop a comprehensive understanding of the Syrian conflict and its impact on development, including reports from the Syrian government, NGOs, academic articles and news sources, as well as surveys to collect quantitative data on key indicators of development such as economic growth, social welfare and political stability.

Study Division:

The current study focusses on four main axes as follows:

Axis I: Economic Impact of the Conflict

Axis II: Social Impact of the Conflict

Axis III: Political Impact of the Conflict

Axis IV: Challenges and Opportunities of Reconstruction and Recovery

Conclusion & Recommendations

Axis I: Economic Impact of the Conflict

The Syrian conflict, which has been escalating for more than 12 years, has had a devastating toll on the Syrian economy, causing an estimated losses since 2011 at more than \$530 billion, that is 9.7 times the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2010¹. In this context, the vicious war has debilitated the state's infrastructure and various economic sectors, including the industrial and agricultural ones, and has disrupted the supply and trade chains and pushed inflation and unemployment to high levels, thus impacting the quality of life and well-being of citizens in Syria. The conflict impact on economic development in Syria can be highlighted as follows:

¹ Syria.. From self-sufficiency to complete collapse, Arabi 21, March 19, 2022, link: <https://bit.ly/3LkzFcM>



1. Destruction of Infrastructure and Economic Sectors

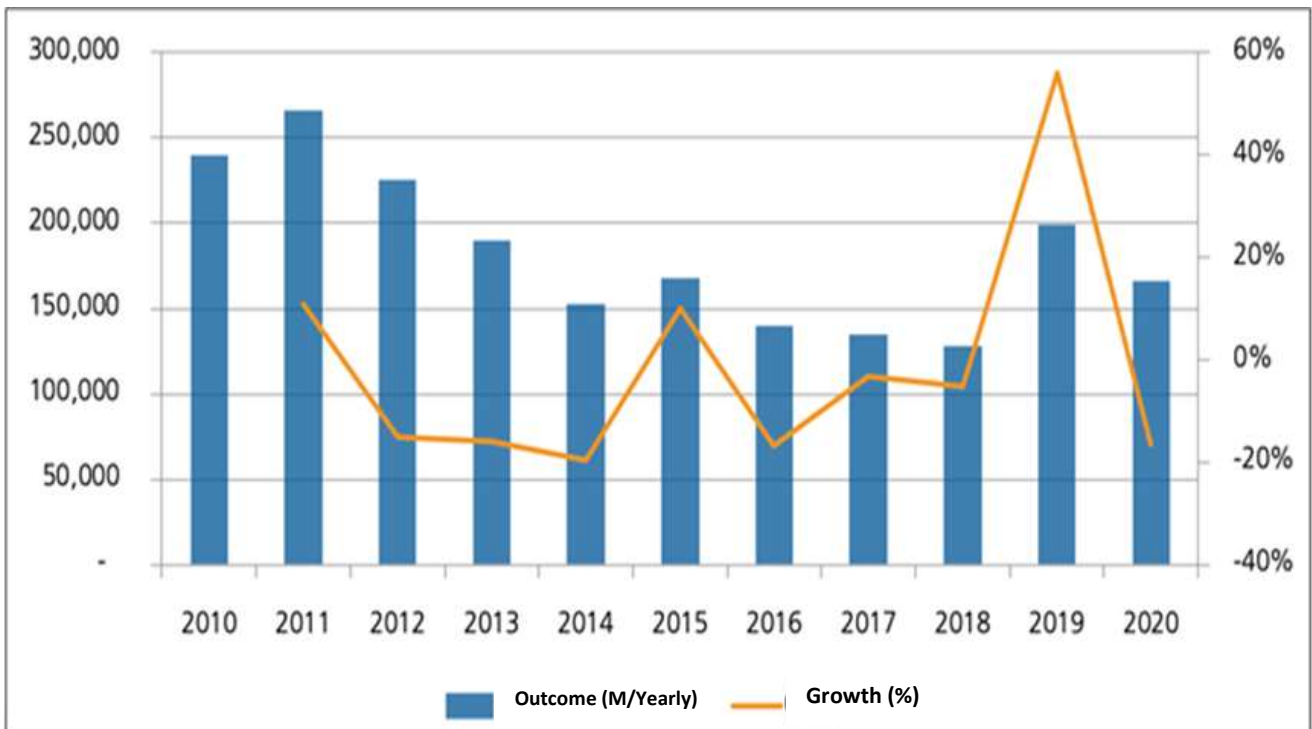
The worsening Syrian conflict since 2011 destroyed the Syrian infrastructure and various economic sectors, including the agricultural and industrial sectors. According to the latest estimates of Maat, the 12-year-long war and hostilities carried out have destroyed about 90% of basic infrastructure including roads, bridges, factories, oil refineries, irrigation networks and water sources, which severely affected the country's productive capacity and hindered economic growth.²

In this context, the conflict in Syria destroyed a large part of the infrastructure of the agricultural sector and negatively affected the agricultural production. Since the outbreak of the civil war, the agricultural sector in Syria has witnessed declining activity in agricultural labour market after more than a quarter of a million agricultural workers left the labor market, in addition to the destruction of irrigation networks, restricted access to water sources, theft and looting of machinery and crops, a sharp decline in the supply of fuel needed for greenhouses and water pumping, inability to secure the necessary supplies for agricultural production such as fertilizers, seeds and agricultural remedies , not to mention the difficulty of farmers' access to their lands as a result of checkpoints, military operations, assaults on agricultural land ownership, and politicization of food production. The conflict has also disastrously affected the agricultural transport sector internally and with neighboring countries, which negatively affected supply chains and sales. The negative repercussions on the agricultural sector as a result of the conflict in Syria affected the local production of agricultural crops, as wheat production decreased significantly during the years of the conflict, reaching its lowest level in 2018 by about 1.2 million tons compared to about 3.8 million tons in 2011. Overall, the agricultural sector's GDP declined as a result of the conflict by more than 30% between 2010 and 2020.

Figure (1): GDP of the Agricultural Sector and its Growth Rates at Constant Prices (2010-2020)³

² Syrians mark 12 years of civil war with no end in sight, PBS News Hour Mar 15, 2023, link: <https://to.pbs.org/3LCmTqj>

³ Mechanisms of Exploitation: Economic and Social Changes in Syria During the Conflict, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, September 2022, p29, link: <https://bit.ly/40IFxIG>



On the industrial sector level, the Syrian that broke out in 2011 has led to the destruction of many industrial facilities and infrastructure needed for industrial activities, including electricity, water, roads, and transportation networks. The conflict also negatively affected the supply chains necessary for industrial production, as the ability of industrial facilities to get production supplies, including raw materials, intermediates, and industrial machinery that was sharply reduced. In addition, huge industrial facilities were looted and stolen by the various warring parties, which encouraged the flight of capital, expertise and industrial labor outside the country. As a result, the production of the processing industry in Syria decreased by about 43% in 2020 compared to 2010.

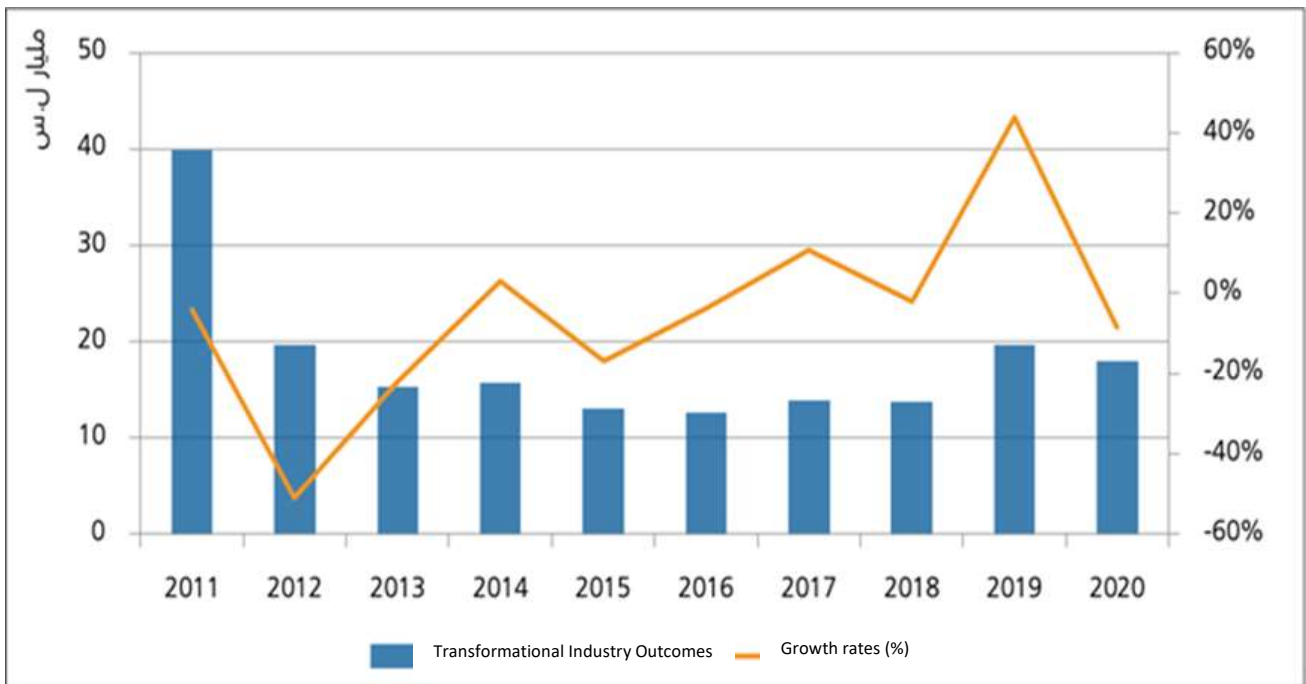


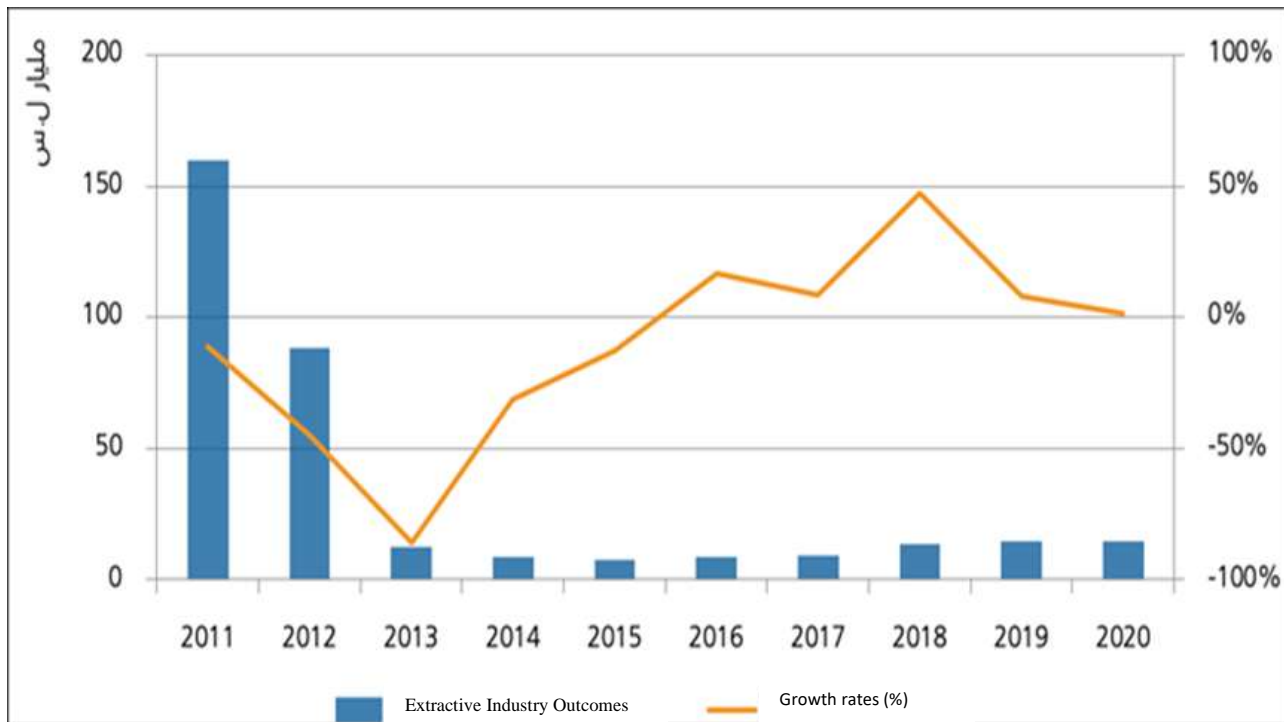
Figure 2: GDP of Transformational Industry (2011-2020)⁴

As for extractive industries, they witnessed a sharp fall as a result of the withdrawal of foreign investments in oil fields after the oil and gas fields and installations were subjected to deliberate looting and vandalism by the parties to the conflict, which put them out of production process. In this regard, the estimated value of the production of extractive industries in Syria in 2020 was about 10% of its rate in 2010, which means that the production of the extractive industry has fallen in Syria by about 90% in 2020 compared to 2010.

Figure 3: Extractive Industry GDP (2011-2020)⁵

⁴ Mechanisms of Exploitation: Economic and Social Changes in Syria During the Conflict, p 34.

⁵ Mechanisms of Exploitation: Economic and Social Changes in Syria During the Conflict, p 35.



2. Supply and Trade Chains Disruption

The Syrian conflict, which has been escalating for more than 12 years, has negatively affected the Syrian trade and supply chains internally and externally. As a result of the escalation of hostilities in Syria throughout the years of the conflict, more than 90% of the basic infrastructure in Syria has been destroyed, including roads, bridges, railways, ports, factories and oil refineries, which impeded the movement of goods, disrupted the flow of goods and services, and made it difficult for companies to transport and distribute their products, which severely affected Syrian internal and external trade.

In addition, the Syrian conflict had a significant impact on Syria's economic relationship with other countries of the world, as many countries, including the USA, imposed economic sanctions on Syria, and many border crossings between Syria and neighboring countries were closed, which made it difficult for Syrian companies to export goods abroad, imposing more restrictions on commercial activities, restricting access to financial services, and creating barriers to international trade. This has severely affected supply and trade chains in Syria, and led to shortages of basic commodities, such as food, medicine, and fuel.

3. High Levels of Unemployment and Inflation

The conflict in Syria had a profound impact on the levels of unemployment inside Syria. The hostilities that erupted in Syria during the years of the conflict led to the disruption of economic activity in various sectors, the loss of productive capacity, and the lack of



job opportunities, which contributed to the high levels of unemployment in Syria to unprecedented levels. According to the latest statistics published in this context, unemployment levels in Syria in 2015 reached more than 50%, whereas current official data in Syria indicates that the unemployment rate has reached about 20 % of the total labor force⁶.

The conflict in Syria has also had a significant impact on inflation rates, as it led to the disruption of supply chains, the imposition of more restrictions on trade movements, and the decline in production capacity. All of these factors led to a shortage of basic commodities and an increase in their prices, a decrease in the value of the Syrian currency, the cost of living has increased significantly and inflation rates have reached unprecedented levels. According to the latest statistics, Syria currently has an inflation rate of 878 % compared to 2010, and the exchange rate of the Syrian pound against the US dollar in the unofficial market since January 2021 has exceeded more than 3,000 Syrian pounds per dollar⁷.

Axis II: Social Impact of the Conflict

The Syrian conflict, which broke out in 2011, has had a deep and extensive impact on the social fabric of the Syrian community. In this section, the Study seeks to examine the social consequences of the conflict, with a specific focus on crucial issues such as displacement, migration, loss of life, education disruption, and health care challenges, which are addressed as follows:

1. Displacement, Migration, and Loss of Life

The conflict in Syria has significantly affected the country's demographic map, as a result of several factors, including asylum, migration, displacement, and high mortality rate. In this regard, the Syrian conflict has resulted in a large-scale displacement of Syrians within the country and a significant refugee crisis outside its borders, along with the tragic loss of hundreds of thousands of lives. The war in Syria has been estimated to have caused more than 400,000 deaths and forced over half the population to flee their homes and seek safety either within or outside the country's border, leading to significant deterioration in the quality of life of Syrian civilians⁸.

2. Disruption of Education

The education sector in Syria has been severely affected by the prolonged conflict, which has been escalating for more than 12 years. As a result of the conflict,

⁶ Social researcher: The unemployment rate in Syria is 20 percent.. Is the percentage real?, Syria TV, September 27, 2022, link: <https://bit.ly/3BpiHcA>

⁷ Syria's Economic Collapse and Its Impact on the Most Vulnerable, Center for Strategic & International Studies, February 18, 2021, link: <https://bit.ly/3prhCKv>

⁸ The Toll of War: Economic and Social Impact Analysis (ESIA) of the Conflict in Syria- Key Facts, The World Bank Group, link: <https://bit.ly/3pxOVM5>



infrastructure of schools, institutes and universities have been debilitated, negatively impacting the availability of teaching staff members and the ability of students to enroll in education, according to the latest estimates published in this regard. As a result of the conflict, the number of basic education schools in Syria decreased to less than 9,000 in 2020, after it exceeded 17,000 in 2010, which means that nearly 50 % of schools have been disrupted as a result of the conflict. The conflict in Syria has resulted in a significant decrease in the number of qualified teachers in the education sector as a result of asylum, migration, arrest, or enforced disappearance, from about 221 thousand teachers in 2010 to less than 150 thousand teachers in 2020, a decrease of 32%⁹.

3. Health Care Challenges

The Syrian conflict has severely affected the health care infrastructure, and created various challenges to access medical care services and the availability of essential medicines. In this context, the conflict has resulted in the destruction of many health facilities in all Syrian regions. According to estimates issued in this regard, the Syrian conflict caused the destruction of between 40 and 45 % of hospitals and health units in Syria by the end of 2020. Moreover, the healthcare sector has also experienced a drastic reduction in medical personnel due to arrests and killings that have targeted doctors and healthcare workers, as well as waves of displacement and mass asylum, which have been a major factor in the loss of medical skills and expertise. Approximately 70 % of workers in the health sector left Syria abroad, which led to a significant decrease in the ratio of doctors to the population. Currently, there is one doctor for every ten thousand people inside Syria.

Moreover, the negative repercussions of the conflict in Syria on foreign trade and supply chains have had a widespread impact on the availability of medicines inside Syria. As a result of the destruction of pharmaceutical factories, disruptions in the supply chain, and limited access to international pharmaceutical markets, there is a shortage of life-saving medicines; vaccines; and other essential medical supplies, which greatly affected the ability to provide adequate health care, and endangered the lives of many Syrians¹⁰.

4. Citizens' Wellbeing

The conflict in Syria has widely affected the well-being of the population. As a result of more than 12 years of war in Syria, the standard of living among the population has decreased, and poverty rates have risen to unprecedented levels. In this context, the

⁹ Mechanisms of Exploitation: Economic and Social Changes in Syria during the Conflict, p 54.

¹⁰ Ibid, p59-63.



latest estimates indicate that about 90 % of families in Syria are currently live in poverty, and more than 50 % of families are currently suffer from food insecurity¹¹.

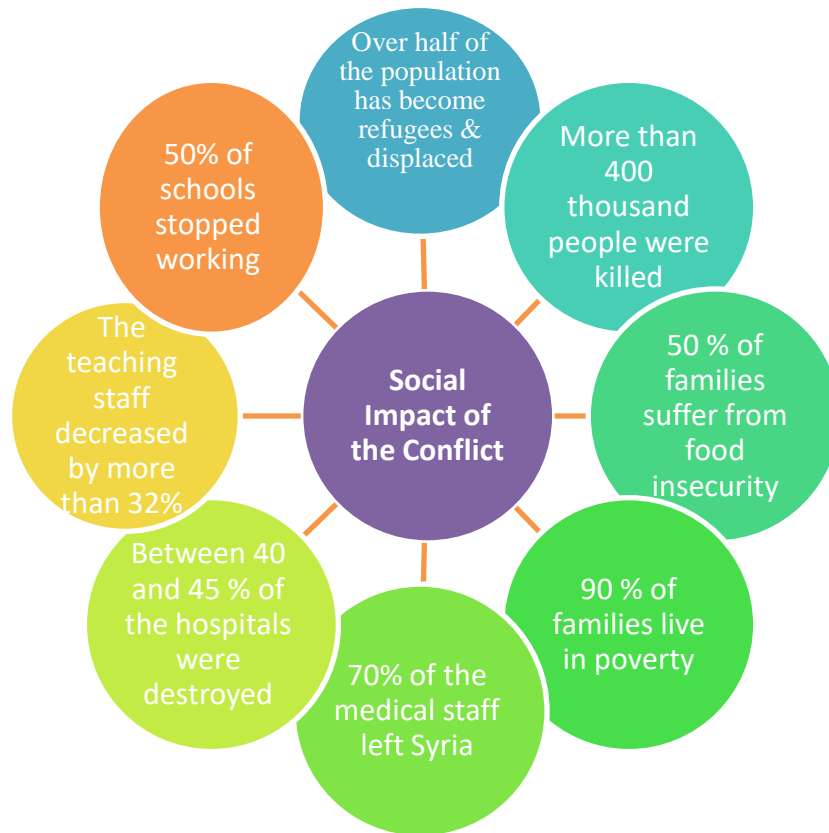


Figure 4: Social Impact of the Conflict in Syria

Axis III: Political Impact of the Conflict

The Syrian conflict has had a profound and far-reaching impact on the political situation and aspects of political development in Syria. In this regard, the Study seeks to examine the political consequences of the conflict on development, with a special focus on the main areas that affected the political development in Syria, including the State's instability and fragmentation, and increasing regional and international polarization, which are discussed as follows:

1. State Instability and Fragmentation

The worsening Syrian conflict since 2011 has affected the state's stability and peace, led to the fragmentation of the central authority, and created profound repercussions on state institutions and the structure of public governance. In this context, one of the main results of the Syrian conflict was the emergence of multiple armed groups and factions, each including its own political agenda. This led to the decentralization of power in Syria, the collapse of the general governance structure, the weakness of the control of

¹¹ The Syrian crisis..after more than a decade of conflict, children are still paying the biggest price, UNICEF, link: <https://uni.cf/3Q417OX>



the central authority, and the creation of challenges to establishing stability, cohesion and the rule of law inside Syria, thus impacting all aspects of political development in Syria.

The disintegration of power in Syria and the inability of the central government to tighten control over all regions of the country had negative repercussions on the general political stability of the country. The absence of a unified governance structure and the weaknesses of central authority in Syria have created conditions that are favorable for the growth of extremist groups and the emergence of non-state actors, including the terrorist organizations Da'esh, Jabhat al-Nusra, the Syrian Democratic Forces, and other actors in Syria that have exploited the power vacuum to implement their agendas, further destabilizing the political situation.

2. Increasing Regional and International Polarization

The Syrian conflict has attracted many regional and international powers, as it has provided a favorable environment for many regional and international powers to intervene in the Syrian crisis in order to protect their interests and achieve their national goals and projects for various pretexts, including supporting the process of democratic transition in Syria, protecting human rights, facilitating the peaceful transfer of power, and combating terrorist and extremist groups. In this context, many regional and international powers such as Turkey, Iran, Russia and the United States of America have intervened in the Syrian crisis and played multiple roles in the Syrian conflict, whether with the consent of the Syrian government or without it. While the Syrian government approves the Russian and Iranian presence in Syria, it describes this presence as aggression and external occupation. These external interventions have contributed to the destabilization of the Syrian state, exacerbated human rights violations, undermined Syria's political stability, and created challenges to opportunities for making and building peace; establishing stability and cohesion; and the rule of law inside Syria, thus impacting all aspects of political development in Syria.

Axis IV: Challenges & Opportunities of Reconstruction and Recovery

Since 2011, the worsening conflict in Syria has inflicted huge damage on all aspects of economic, political and social development, as it has caused disruptions to supply and trade chains, pushed inflation and unemployment to high levels, severely damaged the health and well-being of citizens, and caused widespread destruction of the country's industries and infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, and water and sanitation systems, and has undermined economic growth and human rights in Syria, causing millions of people to flee from their homes seeking refuge in neighboring countries or within Syria itself, creating one of the worst humanitarian crises in Syria and the whole world.



Comprehensive development in all its economic, social and political aspects in Syria faces huge challenges that prevent achieving them. These challenges stem from the complex Syrian interior and the outside world, most of whose countries adopt political, economic and diplomatic stances opposing the current Syrian government. However, Syria still has many opportunities to achieve reconstruction and recover from the impact of the conflict that has been going on for more than a decade, in order to achieve comprehensive development for the Syrian people on all economic, social and political aspects. The main challenges and opportunities for reconstruction and recovery in Syria are outlines as follows:

1. Challenges of Reconstruction and Recovery

The main challenges impeding reconstruction and recovery efforts in Syria are as follows¹²:

Lack of security and stability: Some areas in Syria are still witnessing military operations, internal fighting, the spread of terrorist organizations, which impedes reconstruction efforts and harms the state's security climate.

Lack of expertise and cadres: Syria lacks qualified cadres to supervise reconstruction operations and provide a strong and effective infrastructure, due to the migration of a large part of technical, economic and professional competencies and expertise during the war.

Infrastructure destruction: The conflict caused massive damage to infrastructure, including housing, healthcare facilities, schools, and transportation networks. Rehabilitating and rebuilding this critical infrastructure requires significant resources, planning, and coordination.

Lack of financial resources: The huge scale of destruction and the expensive costs of reconstruction require large financial resources that exceed Syria's current capacity, which undermines Syria's ability to rebuild and recover, especially in light of its inability to access external financing due to political and economic restrictions imposed by the international community.

International sanctions and unilateral coercive measures: The USA and European countries impose economic sanctions on Syria and the entities that cooperate with the Syrian regime under the Caesar Act. These countries also prevent aid and financial support to the Syrian government, which exacerbated the losses of development in

¹² Comparative Perspectives on the Challenges of Reconstruction in Syria, Carnegie Middle East Center, December 2014, link: <https://bit.ly/3pFdg2E>



Syria, created serious repercussions on all aspects of development in Syria, and hindered reconstruction efforts there.

2. Opportunities of Reconstruction and Recovery

The main opportunities for reconstruction and recovery in Syria are outlined as follows:

Syria's return to the League of Arab States (LAS): The return of Syria to the LAS on May 7, 2023 and the reform of relations between Syria and the Arab countries represent a favorable opportunity for reconstruction and recovery in Syria, given the potential contribution of Arab investments and financial surpluses to support reconstruction efforts and recovery in Syria.¹³

Commitment of international community to support reconstruction and recovery: The international community provided support, in more than one occasion, to the reconstruction and recovery efforts in Syria. In 2013, for example, the Syria Reconstruction Trust Fund was launched, which is an international fund aimed at providing financing to rebuild infrastructure in Syria. However, the fund still faces difficulties in attracting funding from donors due to lack of international agreement on how to distribute costs and responsibilities for the reconstruction of Syria. In March 2023, the international community provided 7 billion euros for the reconstruction of Syria and Turkey after the recent earthquake that struck the two countries in February 2023.¹⁴

Natural Resources: Syria has great natural resources, including natural gas, oil, phosphates, grains and fruits, which can be used to promote economic growth and achieve reconstruction.

¹³ Details of the official decision to return Syria to the League of Arab States, Sky News Arabia, May 7, 2023, link: <https://bit.ly/3W1vRC2>

¹⁴ An international conference that raises 7 billion euros for those affected in Turkey and Syria, Al Arabiya, March 20, 2023, link: <https://bit.ly/3Mtt5m8>



Figure (5): Challenges and Opportunities of Reconstruction and Recovery



Conclusion & Recommendations:

In conclusion, it can be said that the conflict that has raged in Syria since 2011 has exacerbated the losses of development in Syria, and caused massive damage to all aspects of economic, political and social development. The conflict has disrupted supply and trade chains, increased inflation and unemployment rates, caused severe damage to the health of citizens and their welfare, debilitated state's infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, and water and sanitation systems, undermined economic growth, the political system, and human rights in Syria, and forced millions of people to flee their homes seeking refuge in neighboring countries or within Syria itself, creating one of the worst humanity crises in the world, and led to huge losses in terms of development.

The various measures taken at the international level also exacerbated the difficulties and losses of development in Syria instead of leading to improvements at all aspects. Syria's membership suspension from the LAS, the imposition of unilateral sanctions and coercive measures by Western countries on Syria, and the prevention of international aid have all cast a shadow on development in Syria, and created serious repercussions on all aspects of development in Syria, which necessarily affected the well-being and quality of life of citizens.

In light of the above, **Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights** presents its recommendations to the Syrian government and the international



community, including governments, policymakers, humanitarian organizations and other stakeholders involved in meeting the needs of the Syrian population to achieve development in all its political, economic and social aspects and to support reconstruction and recovery efforts in Syria as follows:

- ☛ The international community and the Syrian government should work to improve security and stability in Syria, by rebuilding the security structure, securing borders, and combating extremism and terrorism;
- ☛ The international community should cancel the sanctions imposed on the Syrian government, and allow it access the international market;
- ☛ The international community should provide the necessary aid and financial support to the Syrian government to support development, reconstruction and recovery efforts;
- ☛ The Syrian government and the international community should enhance education and training in Syria, by providing educational and training opportunities for young people and developing the skills needed for the labor market;
- ☛ The Syrian government, the opposition and the international community should work to promote political dialogue and find a political solution to the conflict in the country;
- ☛ The Syrian government should provide an attractive investment environment for local and international investors, by improving the infrastructure and providing legal protection for investors;
- ☛ The Syrian government and the international community should work to rebuild the infrastructure in Syria and rebuild schools, hospitals, homes and other facilities that were damaged by the conflict, and provide the necessary funding for that;
- ☛ The international community and humanitarian organizations should provide the necessary assistance to civilians affected by the conflict in Syria, by providing food, water, medicine, shelter and health care;
- ☛ The Syrian government and the international community should provide safe conditions for the return of refugees and displaced persons to their countries, and rehabilitate the affected areas to enable them to return and integrate into society.