



Forced displacement in Syria: challenges and avenues for civil society engagement

An analysis of the drivers and challenges of displacement movements in and from Syria, and the role of local civil society actors to mitigate them, based on data utilization for future planning

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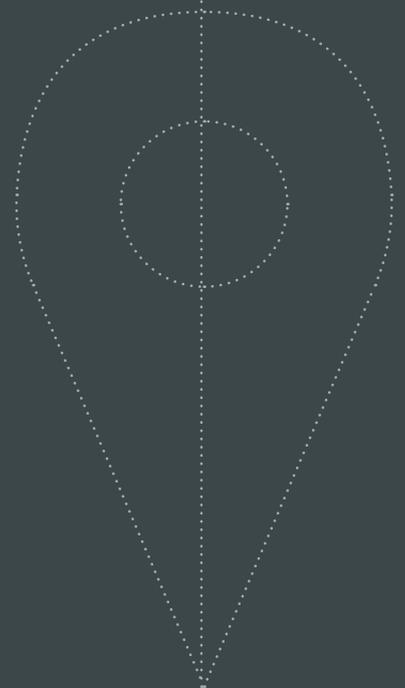
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Contents

Acronyms	3
Introduction	4
Methodology	5
Limitations	7
Syrian Civil Society and Displacement	8
Syrian Civil Society's Influence on Displacement	8
Displacement's Influence on Syrian Civil Society	9
Situation Analysis of Key Displacement Drivers and Risks in Syria	11
Governance	12
Economy	13
Protection	14
Physical Safety	14
Access to Health Services	15
Access to civil documentation	16
Housing Land and Property (HLP)	17
Gender	17
Foreseen scenarios in the short-to-medium term	18
Governance	19
Economy	19
Protection	20
Validation of findings	20
Conclusion	22
Recommendations	23
Recommendations to civil society actors	23
Recommendations to donors	23
Annex 1: Syrian CSO Questionnaire	24
Annex 2: List of Key Informants	24
Annex 3: Key Informant Questionnaire	24
Annex 4: Mapping the Drivers of Displacement (Workshop Results)	25
Annex 5: Displacement Drivers and Civil Society Mitigation Measures	26

Acronyms

- **AANES** - Autonomous Administration in Northeast Syria
- **ACU** - Assistance Coordination Unit
- **CSO** - Civil Society Organisation
- **DSP** - Durable Solutions Platform
- **IDPs** - Internally Displaced People
- **INGOs** - International Non-Governmental Organisations
- **NES** - Northeast Syria
- **PYD** - Democratic Union Party
- **UN** - United Nations
- **SIG** - Syrian Interim Government
- **WHO** - World Health Organisation

Introduction

With over 5.5 million Syrians living as refugees in neighbouring countries, and 6.7 million being internally displaced (including an estimated 2.5 million children)¹, Syria remains the world's largest displacement crisis. After more than a decade, the country is devastated. Over 13.4 million need humanitarian assistance². Syria is currently experiencing an economic crisis that has resulted in the Syrian pound losing 75% of its value, alongside a 200% price increase in basic food and household items. Additional factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, economic sanctions, and regional instability have further complicated the humanitarian outlook. The Syrian conflict is protracted; frontlines have not shifted in the past year, yet smaller battles result in consistent shelling and rocket fire along contact lines, which continue to result in civilian casualties and displacement³. A total of 1.8 million internal displacement movements were recorded across Syria in 2020, most of which took place in the Idlib and Aleppo Governorates.

The Syrian civil society has played a huge part in supporting internally displaced people (IDPs), at all levels. Providing education, health, psycho-social support, protection services, and livelihood provision, these actors have often provided essential services that have been disrupted or discontinued due to the conflict. Since the onset of the conflict, Civil Society organisations have been increasing in numbers and influence. More than 700 local CSOs operate currently across the different areas of control and with varying domains of work, from humanitarian relief to development as well as human rights and advocacy. It is noteworthy here that the work of Syrian Civil society has also been highly impacted by the progress of the conflict, whether by territorial shifts in control, changing priorities and needs, or other contextual changes including displacement waves.

This research examines the relationship between displacement and civil society in Syria in terms of how civil society actors have been able to influence main drivers for displacement in and from Syria. It then considers likely scenarios for the Syrian crisis in the next one-to-three years and concludes by assessing what this means for Syria civil society actors. The research is based on primary qualitative data and a foresight tool, to further build a scenario of expected displacements in Syria. The conclusions and recommendations are based on insights gathered by civil society actors and thematic experts.

1. <https://www.unhcr.org/sy/16061-inside-syria-millions-face-destitution-after-a-decade-of-pain.html>

2. <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/unicef-whole-syria-humanitarian-situation-report-mid-year-2021>

3. OCHA (2021): Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021



Methodology

This research relies on a combination of desk review and qualitative primary research. The qualitative research was based on the Syria Analytical Framework⁴ that was developed by the Durable Solutions Platform (DSP). Specific to the Syrian displacement context, it was developed to help various stakeholders assessing progress towards durable solutions for displaced Syrians both inside and outside the country⁵. The analytical framework identifies four criteria for assessing the conditions of living inside Syria: Physical safety, Psycho-social safety, Material safety and Legal safety. Each of these criteria has sub-criteria. This framework has served as a baseline for this research project. The various identified criteria were crossed with the main drivers for displacement and their dimensions, using the foresight tool. This was complemented by general desk review of grey literature available on the current context, mostly produced by international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) for reports on the humanitarian situation on the ground, and Syrian civil society organisations on the mapping of civil society and their activities.

The data collection began with a virtual research workshop with a dozen diaspora civil society actors in June 2021. The workshop focused on identifying and discussing the main drivers for displacements in and from Syria. A mapping of this brainstorming was made, with listed dimensions for each driver, and mitigation measures for civil society actors.

The workshop was followed by an electronic survey sent to civil society organisations (CSOs) within Syria. The survey focused on the relationship between CSO work and displacement, including their perception of how their work has been affecting drivers for displacement. A total of 31 responses were gathered. All respondents were based on Northern Syria. The survey questionnaire has been included as Annex 1.

4. <https://dsp-syria.org/syria-analytical-framework>

5. The objective of the DSP Analytical Framework is to “help researchers, monitoring and evaluation teams, and other actors to better incorporate a durable solutions lens into their methodologies, research tool design, report writing, and other efforts aimed at increasing knowledge on displacement in the Syria context”.

A series of interviews were conducted with experts on the current situation in Syria. Expertise covered a diverse range of specific topics, governance, healthcare, as well as their expectations for the near future, especially regarding future displacement. These experts were also asked about their vision of the role of Syrian civil society actors, and their recommendations to civil society and donors. Experts were also asked to comment on their expectations for the next two years of the crisis. The list of experts has been included as Annex 2. The questionnaires used in the interviews have been included as Annex 3.

In order to frame the analysis of the resultant data, the Foresight tool allowed to build a scenario of expected displacements in Syria in the next one-to-three years. The results have informed the conclusions and recommendations in this report.

CRITERIA				
	Physical safety	Psycho-social safety	Material safety	Legal safety
SUB-CRITERIA		Social Support networks	Health	Access to personal and other documentation
		Discrimination	Housing and essential services	Effective and accessible mechanisms to restore HLP
		Access to information	Education	Family reunification
			Food security	Participation in public affairs
			Social protection	Access to effective remedies and justice
			Income and employment	

Figure 1: Table of criteria, adapted from the Durable Solutions Platform’s Syria Analytical Framework

Limitations

This research presents some limitations. Firstly, it is based on qualitative data with a focus on perceptions of experts or local civil society workers. The sample of experts interviewed does not reflect all the segments of civil society or sectors of engagement (e.g., education). Furthermore, the sample of civil society actors inside Syria who responded to the survey, does not represent the civil society landscape in the country given the number of organisations that exist, and the number of responses received as well as the geographic concentration of organisations in northern Syria⁶. This particularly limits the study in that there is limited representation of the perception of actors in Government of Syria (GoS)-held areas.

The Foresight model used in this report also has a number of limitations. The model tends to be conservative and of the current +150 forecasts derived from the model, approximately 2/3 underestimate the level of displacement for the coming year. Because the model is built around national level indicators, it does not perform as well in cases where conflict and displacement is largely regionally confined. The average margin of error on the predictions of displacement in Syria from 2012 to 2020 is 15% - in the last five years the average margin of error has been 2%.

6. Idlib region (71%), Raqqa region (22.6%), Al-Hasakah region (3.2%) and Hama region (3.2%).

Syrian Civil Society and Displacement

A decade into the conflict, Syrian civil society actors still have a key role in mitigating the challenges faced by local populations, including the ones related to displacements in and from the country. Conditions for these workers on the ground are extremely difficult. The space for civil society is also decreasing; organisations face severe threats from local authorities and armed groups, these actors need protection. There are also practical barriers to their work and funding for humanitarian activities are decreasing. Despite the real challenges, many Syrian organisations remain confident in their ability to affect some of the key drivers of displacement - while also recognising structural and political issues beyond their control that affect their operations. The following section begins by reviewing Syrian civil society's perception of their ability to influence drivers of displacement and is followed by a discussion of the effect displacement has on their operations.

Syrian Civil Society's Influence on Displacement

Based on the results of the survey⁷ and workshop, there is a strong link between displacements and civil society work; 65% of survey respondents believe that their work influences displacement. When asked about how much these actors consider that their work has prevented people from being forcibly displaced, on the scale from one to three, almost half of the polled actors responded two. Only a third of respondents claimed their work did not influence displacements at all, while 16% reported their work influenced displacement movements a lot.

A significant proportion of support is directed to two main basic services: health and education. In the Northwest in particular, many areas have been through air bombardments that have severely damaged basic infrastructure and caused waves of displacement. Civil society organisations seem to be carrying the burden of stepping in and providing for these facilities, despite the shortages in funds, key supplies, and qualified technical staff in these sectors. By stepping in, Syrian organisations are influencing displacement because through their programs, they aim at addressing the challenges related to various drivers for displacement, such as psycho-social safety, access to health and education, or legal services.

7. A key limiting factor of the survey data is that it was exclusively received from actors in the north.

The importance of basic needs support such as food and shelter can also not be under-estimated, particularly as social safety nets otherwise do not exist for displaced people. Psycho-social support and integration of IDPs through social cohesion activities are also seen to influence displacement; for instance, one key informant, who works on social cohesion inside Syria explained over an interview, that her organization supports IDPs on a material and social level. By conducting awareness raising campaigns among locals, her organization prevents some people from being displaced again, as they are supported in their integration. Furthermore, an entire generation of children could grow up without having access to education and health - which would threaten the long-term well-being of Syria.

Providing protection programming such as legal support and civil documentation access that supports displaced people in accessing their rights is essential for managing sustainable, dignified returns and reducing future displacement. A key informant illustrated this issue with the example of displaced women not being able to access employment, although they are perfectly eligible, because they do not have access to their official documents and diplomas. Some organisations pointed out that their work constitutes evidence collection that can be used in current and future legal cases to bring war crimes perpetrators before a court. It was mentioned that documentation constitutes a strong link between local civil society actors, and the ones in the diaspora, as both sides significantly collaborate around documentation.

Looking ahead, experts and civil society workers worry that the already decreasing funding will mean these needs are less likely to be addressed. This could have a negative impact on displacement because this limits their material and human resources, decreasing their capacities to mitigate and manage challenges related to drivers of displacements.

Displacement's Influence on Syrian Civil Society

According to the Syrian civil society organisation survey, 77.5% of all respondents have claimed to have at least once had to change their work and programs because of displacement movements. There was some regional variation in responses; amongst respondents based in the Northwest, 87% claimed that they had to change their work because of displacement movements - however, only 50% of those in the northeast did. Even more specifically, 100% of respondents who said their work had been constantly affected by displacement were located in Idlib Governorate.

Syrian civil society organisations saw that displacement had several programmatic implications. This included the basic form of the project, such as the location, the number of beneficiaries that would be targeted and the types of needs or targeting methods used. Additionally, programmatic changes were needed to technical aspects of project design - including adapting delivery models and taking on emergency response alongside traditional programming. For example, extremist groups in the Northwest often tend to spoil all the efforts led by teams to empower and support women. When authority changes or displacement occurs and organisations need to be in the same areas as these groups, how beneficiaries are accessed may need to change. Similarly, the conflict has meant women in GoS-held areas may be reluctant to seek services as CSOs are often perceived to be rebel-aligned. Constant

changes in the situation of other actors due to displacement may mean there are practical barriers to understanding where help is available for women is a challenge due to lack of comprehensive service mapping.

Organisations also highlighted operational issues caused by displacement. This includes being forced to relocate offices, and teams. With many of the staff being forcibly displaced itself, a lot of organizations also face human resources shortages as people flee areas; this issue was particularly noted in the health and education sectors. It also causes psycho-social challenges for the staff themselves.

To the extent possible, organisations reported trying to ensure they have plans to follow their beneficiaries. When these people are displaced, it becomes almost impossible to keep track of their needs, and the process in place is thus cut. This often leads organizations to be affected in their ability to deliver tangible results when implementing programs.

Narrative survey responses explaining the impact of displacement on programming:

“Displacements cause our centres to move to other places, which changes our work plans, which eventually leads to significant delays in obtaining the expected results.”

“When IDPs arrive to a safe zone, and register their children in local schools, this causes a need for a response from the school, a change in distribution plans, a need to increase the amount of distributing material, or more water and other resources. There is also a need to dedicate more staff to respond to the needs of the displaced.”

“Our working centres have moved several times; most of our team members are IDPs.”

“We harmonize the planification of education, according to displacements’ context and evolutions. Quite a few times we had to resort to home schooling in small groups; this was a response to displacement waves causing many children being unschooled due to lack of place and means. Sometimes we responded through the creation of educational tents. Even teaching methods are adapted to bridge gaps of knowledge between pupils with various backgrounds coming from various places.”

“When displacements happened from the southern suburb to the norther suburb of Idlib, plans had to be shifted, and an emergency intervention plan was set up. Even when we moved from our office because of a bombing in Termanin, the situation was handled through an emergency plan, following the evolution of the situation step by step.”



Situation Analysis of Key Displacement Drivers and Risks in Syria

There are now an estimated 6.5 million internally displaced people (IDPs) in Syria. The displacement situation can largely be considered protracted; 70% of IDPs have been displaced for over five years. Returns have been occurring consistently, though are limited by access, safety, and services. In 2020, 448,000 spontaneous IDP returns were recorded, of which 75% were within the same governorate. In parallel, 38,000 Syrians returned to Syria from abroad in 2020.

To understand the future role of civil society organisation in Syria, it is necessary to understand the current and projected displacement situation in Syria. The following section seeks to address this issue. It has been organised into priority areas that were initially identified by the Syrian Diaspora CSO workshop conducted in June 2021. While the DSP Syria Analytical Framework was used as a baseline; it was altered to better reflect what participants felt were the main drivers of displacement (beyond protection). These were identified to be the economy, governance, physical safety and security, and psycho-social safety (See Annex 4 for the full mapping diagram). For ease of analysis, and to better reflect the data collected through key informant interviews, this has been modified into three broader sections: governance, economy, and protection - with protection including physical safety and health care; civil documentation; housing, land, and property (HLP); and gender.

Governance

Syria is currently fragmented into three territories, controlled by different and opposed military forces.

- The Government of Syria (GoS) and its Russian and Iranian allies' control much of the country, including the southern regions. Practically, this is fragmented and combines varying local governance systems, though GoS-held areas still hold a strong bureaucracy. The role of Russian and Iranian forces is thought to outweigh the will of the GoS in many areas. In Dara'a for instance, even though the GoS has militarily reconquered the region, there are still inefficient negotiations between the roles of Russian and Iranian forces and a clear ambiguity of authority. The operation of detention centres is a clear example of continued state power; 100,000 of documented people are still in detention, many of whom are subject to documented torture. Many see the continued strong administration of the prison system as a communication tool used by the GoS to demonstrate authority and risk to those who are in opposition to GoS policies and/or forces.
- The Autonomous Administration in Northeast Syria (AANES): The Kurdish-led local governance structure was initially backed by the US as part of the global coalition against the Islamic State (ISIS). The resultant coalition now controls the majority of Al-Hasakah Governorate and portions of Raqqa and Dier-ar-Zor Governorates. The future of this region is uncertain, particularly considering the possibility of a full American withdrawal from Northeast Syria (NES). This would give room to Turkey, who considers the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the main political force in AANES, to be a terrorist group. As a result, Turkey occupied a border strip in October 2019, dubbed the 'Peace Spring Operation', to try to counter PYD authority. It is also possible Russian and Iranian forces may use their local influence to claim the territory for the GoS who still control limited areas of NES.
- Finally, the third area of control is a mix of Turkish-controlled areas, Syrian opposition groups, and some extremist groups (e.g., Hayat Tahrir al Sham) in Aleppo and Idlib governorates. In terms of governance, two main structures can be outlined. In areas under control of Turkey and Opposition forces, there exist a network of local councils, and general directorates that are connected to the Syrian interim government (also based in Turkey) and to the Turkish administrative system (the local governors in the border cities). While the areas under HTS control, a local government known as the Salvation government runs the region administratively through the Syrian Interim Government (based in southern Turkey) Ministries, and local councils. The Turkish political question will strongly depend on the relationships between the country and the European Union, especially on the topic of refugees.

In those three groups, there are different dynamics. Thus, there is a lack of a cohesive state, which is reflected in how Syrians understand the political landscape. As the political situation remains unstable, there is a consistent fear of power shifting, resulting in retaliation and further displacement. However, there is evidence that the crisis has become 'normalised' over time with international actors; there normalisation of the relations with the GoS is observed among Arab actors such as Jordan, UAE, or Egypt. This has been thought to have been accelerated by the Lebanese crisis, which has been an opportunity to reduce the pressure and impact of sanctions on Syria and shift regional focus.

Economy

Over a decade into the conflict in Syria, the economy is struggling. According to UNESCWA, the destruction of the country's physical capital is estimated at around US\$ 230 billion, and the loss of GDP at nearly US\$ 325 billion.⁸ International sanctions on Syria have practically frozen trade with many countries. Most of the agricultural and oil resources are in the North-East, thus under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The COVID-19 pandemic has caused additional uncertainty

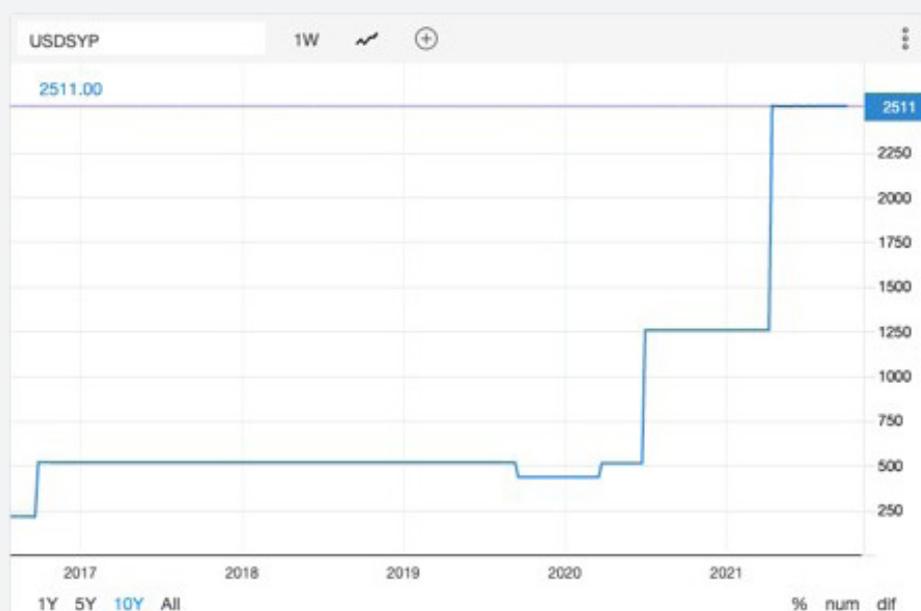


Figure 2: Evolution of the Syrian Pound⁹

At the household level, almost 90% of the Syrian population currently lives under the poverty rate¹⁰. The Syrian pound has been massively devaluating since 2019, reaching new historically low levels after April 2021. In September 2021, it traded at 0.000795 against the US Dollar¹¹. With soaring inflation, food and fuel have become unaffordable. The average cost of living for a Damascene family of five is 1.840 million Syrian pounds per month, when the minimum Syrian salary is 72,000 Syrian pounds per month.

A large proportion of the Syrian population currently depends on three resources to survive: humanitarian aid, subsidies on basic goods, and remittances from the diaspora. According to Joseph Daher, a researcher affiliated with the European University Institute and its Wartime and Post-conflict in Syria program, the exact extent of reliance is difficult to say precisely, but it could be up to 70% of the country.

8. <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/pubs/executive-summary/syria-at-war-report-sum-en.pdf>

9. <https://tradingeconomics.com/>

10. <https://www.unhcr.org/fr/news/stories/2021/3/60509870a/syrie-millions-personnes-vivent-denuement-apres-decennie-souffrances.html>

11. <https://www.xe.com/fr/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=1&From=SYP&To=USD>

Joseph Daher points out one of the reasons for the catastrophic situation as being that the government of Syria has stopped investing in the future and wellbeing of Syrian people, particularly by stopping investments in the economy that could create jobs and rehabilitate damaged markets. He identifies the government, its policy, and the nature of its leadership as the main factor for the crisis. There is no investment in a productive economy, and Syrian workers and farmers face extreme difficulties. Neo-liberal and austerity policies introduced prior to the conflict are deepening. This has been seen as a major loss from the initial starting point of the Syrian resistance, which wished to go beyond achieving a democratic election system and also wanted improved freedoms, better opportunities, and socio-economic rights.

Foreign investments are now paltry, and the sanctions on Syria have only exacerbated these difficulties. Furthermore, the dire economic crisis in Lebanon also reinforces the deteriorating situation in Syria, partly because a consequent portion of Syrians have money in Lebanon. Furthermore, Syrians who traditionally have found work in the Arabian Gulf and been able to channel money back to Syria have been cut off from these opportunities. Similarly, those from the Gulf who worked in Syria to develop business linkages have permanently left - creating an additional gap in the economy, resulting in job losses and general economic loss (e.g., rent, expenses spent on local businesses). Large-scale reconstruction is unlikely to occur quickly. Private holdings and private equity funds are involved in luxury real estate projects in Syria, but these are limited and do not benefit most of society.

Protection

The protection environment remains complex in Syria due to years of repeated and protracted displacement, fragmented government and legal structures, and lack of capacity for many households to attend to their basic needs for physical protection and wellbeing. Host communities have grown weary of displaced communities. Lack of social cohesion further challenges IDPs ability to access their rights and secure a basic livelihood. This can have gendered effects. For example, displaced women who are perceived as coming from a culture that is ‘too open-minded’ are rejected for the assumption that they or their children may have a bad influence on local families. There are additional concerns for a population that has undergone a high degree of trauma but also face socio-cultural barriers to accessing psychosocial support (in addition to the practical barriers of insufficient services). The protection issues are deeply linked to political and economic issues already described. The following section reviews several of these concerns, including physical safety, access to civil documentation and legal support, as well as housing, land, and property (HLP) rights. It concludes with some reflections on the role of gender in securing rights.

Physical Safety

While the physical security and safety threat has reduced over time¹², there remains ongoing concerns about basic security and challenges to basic human rights. Syrian civilians continue to suffer severe hardships and human rights violations and are still being killed. According to the latest report of the UN Syria Commission of Inquiry covering the period of July 1st 2020 to June 30th 2021, violence and fighting have increased in the northeast, the

12. Syria is now considered to present a “low intensity violence”, corresponding to 10 to 20 deaths per week.

northwest and south of the country, causing forced displacements and documented torture¹³. The parties to the conflict continue to perpetrate war crimes and crimes against humanity. “The war on Syrian civilians continues, and it is difficult for them to find security or safe haven in this war-torn country” said Paulo Pinheiro, Chair of the Commission at a press conference in Geneva¹⁴.

Access to Health Services

The unrelenting conflict in Syria has caused a heavy toll on the country's health infrastructure; approximately 50% of facilities have been destroyed¹⁵. Up to 70% of the health workers have been forced to leave the country, as migrants or refugees¹⁶. The COVID-19 pandemic has further tested the quality and structure of health systems across the country.

In general, the quality and level of service varies based on region, following the three regions of control outlined above. In north-western Syria, most medical and health facilities rely on Syrian civil society organisations, or diaspora organisations supporting local programs. These actors handle the work related to the Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU) of the Syrian Interim Government (SIG) health surveillance systems. Throughout the crisis, these organisations have had higher standards for information sharing and transparency than other regions; however, they are under a constant threat from extremist groups (e.g., Hayat Tahrir al-Sham) that try to influence the organisation of these structures. Regarding human resources, the region is in a critical situation; most of the local staff has either been killed, left, or are in the process of leaving the area. There is currently no viable replacement strategy for that staff. Since there is no public sector, these facilities all rely on non-governmental organisations for support. This means that the regional healthcare system solely relies on external funding, which is not a sustainable model. Areas in the Northwest that are under control by Turkish forces do benefit from improved healthcare modelled on the Turkish system and linked with cities in southern Turkey (i.e., Antakya or Gaziantep); however, this structure has also made the COVID-19 crisis management extremely complicated. One expert observed an unwillingness from the Turkish authorities to cooperate with the ACU surveillance monitoring systems and high levels of staff turnover, which makes for a high degree of inconsistency in quality and practice.

In north-eastern Syria, there is an independent health system, in the form of Health Committees as a part of AANES governance structure. The health Committees manage a few public hospitals and clinics, with very limited resources. In NES there is also a strong presence from the United Nations (UN)-including the World Health Organisation (WHO)-which are both linked to and centralized in Damascus in their local response, and are to a greater extent focusing on areas that are under GoS control (e.g. the security squares in Al-Hasakah and Qamishli). Additionally, several NGOs are also involved in the health care management systems including major INGOs such as MSF, or local ones, most notable the Kurdish Red Crescent. This constitutes a serious complexity for the management in the region. Once again, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted stresses in the system; diagnostic tests

13. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=27456&LangID=E>

14. <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/un-syria-commission-increasing-violence-and-fighting-add-syria-s-woes>

15. According to Physicians for Human Rights, 600 attacks on at least 350 separate facilities, as well as the killing of 930 medical personnel were documented between March 2011 and June 2021. See: <https://syriamap.phr.org/#/en/findings>

16. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/USG%20Lowcock%20Syria%20Anniversary%20PR_%2006032020.pdf

conducted in the Northeast had to then be sent to laboratories in Damascus, only for patients to receive a positive response to the test over two weeks later - which did not allow for effective management or containment. Recently some testing kits were provided to AANES from Kurdistan Region Iraq in order to carry on tests locally, however those remain very limited and insufficient. The Northeast is facing the same difficulties as the Northwest in terms of staffing but had a weaker baseline for infrastructure and skilled personnel prior to the conflict and has therefore additional obstacles.

When it comes to GoS-held areas, there is a health governance system through the Ministry of Health - which is an advantage in terms of centralizing health response. There are more available medical professionals in GoS-held areas due to better infrastructure and continued replenishment of young graduates in medicine, pharmacy, or other health sciences fields. On the other hand, the poor economic and political situation is a major threat as skilled people look to move to a more stable context. Furthermore, reconstruction of healthcare infrastructure is limited as donors seem to be reluctant to fund reconstruction inside GoS-held areas, further limited by ongoing sanctions. COVID-19 was not managed markedly better in GoS held areas despite their relative advantage due to political decision making; the COVID-19 pandemic has been considered and treated as a security threat, rather than a health crisis, which led to low levels of testing and reported cases.

Access to civil documentation

Civil documentation is often a challenge in conflict, where administrative systems and record keeping is weak or non-existent. In Syria this presents an issue mainly in areas that are out of the GoS control, as well as in regions that witnessed control shifts in the last years. Emerging local governance structures in areas outside GoS have mostly incorporated civic documentation procedures into the work of their entities (mostly local councils); however, they remain largely unstructured and inconsistent. Most importantly, the legitimacy and recognition of those systems present a major challenge going forward. For example, when GoS forces recaptured large swaths of the country in 2018, many of registered marriages, deaths, births were not recognised by GoS authorities. Uncertified marriages in areas that were controlled by ISIS - especially marriages to foreign fighters - and non-documented births still represent a challenge for many families in NES. Loss of documents because of destruction of houses and/or displacement also adds to the complex situation.

Lack of documentation presents a huge challenge to resumption of lives for many households as it can complicate access to jobs, former properties, education, and inheritance. For example, even though a person may have a degree or may be perfectly qualified for a job, they will not be able to be formally recruited without their diploma. In some cases, the university where the diploma was issued no longer has complete records or is unable to reissue certificates. Women face additional barriers accessing their documents due to systemic discrimination.

Housing Land and Property (HLP)

Syrian citizens have been deprived from their rights to space, from basic services to their own lands and properties. These urban issues and related government policies have been contributing to inequality, segregation, direct injustices and land expropriation. Many of these issues directly contributed to the popular resistance movement that

sparked the civil war in 2011. Throughout the war, 'urbicide' - or the specific targeting of urban areas - has been a tactic in the conflict, with urban centres and vital services within the north held by the opposition specifically targeted in the first half of the war (e.g., Aleppo). The destruction of pre-existing infrastructure, housing, and services opens up opportunities for politicized reconstruction in the future.

Beyond the use of property and urban development in national political strategy, HLP issues are an ongoing source of displacement and occur at all stages of the displacement cycle - in places of origin, destination, and upon return. For example, those returning may find their former home has been sold multiple times, with their property's documentation can be manipulated in their absence. This can result in the need to return to informal - and insecure - settlements. While this is expected to be a consistent issue across Syria, some urban centres will be more changed than others. Architect and Urban Planner, Sawsan Abou Zainedin, highlighted the example of Idlib City. Prior to 2011, informal settlements constituted less than 20% of settlements in Idlib, an insignificant number compared to the reality in other major Syrian cities like Homs, Aleppo, and Damascus where informality constituted 40-50%. The conflict has resulted in displacement waves to the North, which resulted in IDP camps that are slowly shifting into poorer more permanent slums (organically and through planned actions). Furthermore, de-facto governance bodies in the North risk having their efforts to manage land and property rights not to be recognized by the central government, unless major considerations are accounted for in the political process. Political processes will need to include a wide range of political actors, including the GoS, extremist groups with high degrees of localized control,¹⁷ and the de facto northern Government.

Gender

The ongoing conflict in Syria has placed additional challenges on women, who have traditionally struggled with strong patriarchal norms that limit their freedom. Despite these challenges, it has been difficult for organisations to address gender issues due to lack of trust, pressure from household members to resist engagement with organisations, and their lack of autonomy in the household. Organisations have found that it is particularly difficult to keep in touch with women either due to mobility or resistance from their household.

Women present distinct vulnerabilities based on their socio-economic status. Women from better-off backgrounds tend to have more resources and education but are very reluctant to seek help and support due to fear of appearing 'weak' and the taboo of seeking psychosocial support in general. Women in middle and lower socio-economic strata have historically been subject to higher levels of spousal abuse and encouraged not to study or work, and as marriage is often seen as a way to secure one's situation and stability. This was seen to have intensified amongst these groups.

Although there are quite a lot of organisations that focus on women empowerment in the country, and more and more initiatives aiming at creating a safe space for women flourish, their impact remains limited for several reasons, that may vary depending on the geographic area of activity. Overall, there is a much higher level of need than support available.

17. For example, IDPs who left Ghouta and are now in the North will need to contend with Jaysh-al-Islam (Army of Islam), who are the largest rebel faction in the area. For example, IDPs who left Ghouta and are now in the North will need to contend with Jaysh-al-Islam (Army of Islam), who are the largest rebel faction in the area.

Foreseen scenarios in the short-to-medium term

To best support Syrian civil society organisations, it is important to consider how the displacement situation in Syria is expected to change in the next two-to-three-year period. To address this issue, this research undertook several interviews with regional experts to gain insight into the key issues of governance, economy, and protection (including basic services access). To validate these results, the research then used the Foresight Tool to project displacement figures for the coming years. This section details the results of those two initiatives.

Governance

Kheder Khaddour, non-resident scholar at the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, observes that the current status quo in Syria is likely to continue due to the 'cantonisation phenomenon': each of the three parties have territories, their own specific bonds, and they are involved in their own affairs - all without cooperating with each other. As there is no common project between these parties, it seems unlikely they would be motivated to collectively move to a transition at the national level. However, that doesn't necessarily mean that it will continue existing with the exact same power relations and structure. There could be three sub-scenarios within the status-quo:

- The situation retains the status quo, with a potential intensification of the cantonisation phenomenon. This is considered the most likely scenario when it comes to conflict outside of minor shifts in the current frontlines. This could be accompanied by further normalization of diplomatic relationships, especially from Eastern European actors and European far-right key figures. Internal displacement is still highly likely to take place. The main development that could alter this trajectory would be a full withdrawal of US troops from the Northeast, which could cause rivalry and conflict over control of the area by different parties involved in the conflict. Russia is likely to continue to exert pressure on this area in both cases.
- A bargain between Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the GoS, as it advances militarily into the northwest. However, this is unlikely as Syrian Democratic Forces are backed by the Americans, with over hundreds of fighters, among whom half are trained. The Turkish forces in the Northeast may look to consolidate their control, mostly in a vision of stabilizing some regions to be able to return Syrian asylum seekers.
- The creation of a new formed international platform getting involved to put the fragmented regions together. However, in order for this potential platform to operate, it would need a basis on the ground.

Economy

The economic situation does not present any sign of potential improvement. As such, it is expected that GDP per capita will decrease, and both unemployment and economic inequality continue to increase. It is expected that the educated and qualified portion of the population will seek opportunities in Gulf countries or Europe going forward, leading to further 'brain drain'. As the political situation remains unresolved, it is unlikely the economy will stabilize. Several of the interviewed key informants expect future displacements in and from Syria related to the economic crisis in the country. Furthermore, it was highlighted that a potential wave of normalisation of the relations with the government of Syria could impact the economy in the country; any shift in the sanctions and related reconstruction will result from a political decision.

Protection

The human rights situation is expected to further deteriorate in the country, as space for civil society is shrinking in all regions. HLP issues will continue with expulsions, evictions and laws that are set in place to support such mechanisms. The needs of women are going to continue to rise.

Access to services is expected to deteriorate for a number of reasons. Reduced aid and humanitarian assistance, partly due to the financial sanctions, is coming into many parts of the country and a significant number of services are contingent on external funding. Private sector service provision, such as private health care, may play a more important role in the future, but given the dire economic situation - in the short term - few Syrians are expected to benefit from this. Furthermore, the space for civil society is shrinking which limits their ability to act as service providers in areas where there is an absence of state services. Qualified staff - doctors, nurses, teachers, etc. - continue to be displaced or leave the country which limits the quality of services being provided. One development that could counter these trends and potentially improve service provisions is the fact that there could be a wave of normalization of the relations with the GoS, especially from Gulf states and eastern European countries. This could open up for more bilateral aid being provided to GoS, which could potentially trickle-down into better service provisions in government-controlled areas.

The complexity in healthcare management and protocols will remain: the fragmentation of the country also translates in health-related issues being managed differently in the three regions. While the focus for the last decade has been 'war medicine' (emergency surgical needs), this is expected to shift to classic internal medicine. Reduction in donor funding is likely to put further strain on populations relying on services supported by CSOs, such as healthcare, protection, and basic needs support. Furthermore, there is a need to keep in mind burnout amongst care providers - teams providing support are often themselves displaced and struggling with issues like the programme beneficiaries.

Validation of Findings with the Foresight Tool

In order to forecast the displacement scenario, the Foresight Tool was used. The model is based on a theoretical framework focusing on the root causes or macro-level drivers of displacement, which are grouped into five categories: economy, violence, governance, environment, and population. The data is derived from open-source portals.¹⁸ In total, the system aggregates data from 18 sources, and contains 148 indicators.

Based on the conducted analysis of the status and particularly expected future developments, a scenario-based forecast of displacement has been calculated. The Foresight's model is forecasting that total displacement (IDPs, Refugees and Asylum seekers) in and from Syria could reach 13.88 million in 2022¹⁹ - an increase of more than 500,000 compared to the number of displaced persons in 2020. The baseline forecast in the Foresight model is already predicting an increase of 400,000 in 2022 and the most-likely scenario-based forecasts adds another 110,000 to the forecasted displacement. The numbers are further expected to slightly decline in 2023 to reach 13.55 million in the baseline forecast and 13.66 million in the scenario-based forecast (Figure 3).

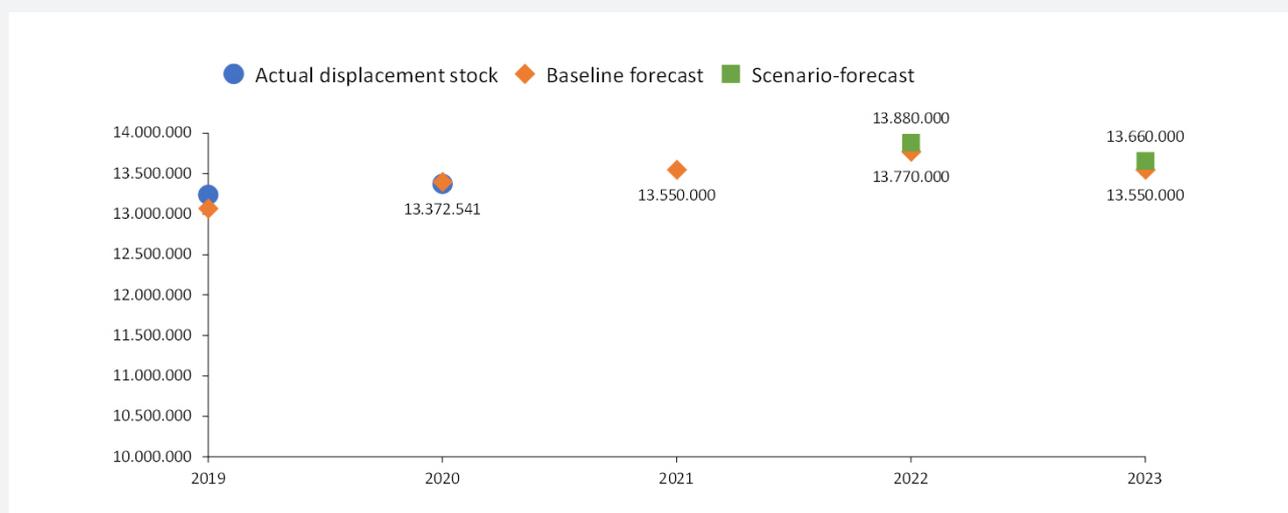


Figure 3: Forecast of displacements in Syria developed through the Foresight Tool²⁰

This model generally supports the interview findings, with experts believing the status quo will largely be maintained - but that the maintenance of some factors (i.e., continued steady economic decline, continued human right violations and front-line battles) will continue to cause new displacement over time. While some continued levels of spontaneous/voluntary return may reduce the overall displaced person stock overall, it is not likely to outpace new displacements. This points to a continued role for Syrian civil society organisations - but also a continuation of the difficult working environment and related programme challenges.

18. the World Bank development indicators, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), EM-DAT, UN agencies (UNHCR, the World Food Programme, The Food and Agriculture Organization), Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), etc.

19. The data on forced displacement depend wholly on the numbers from UNHCR and IDMC. There is a discrepancy between these figures and those reported in the UNOCHA-led Humanitarian Needs Overview.

20. <https://drc-foresight.eu-de.mybluemix.net/>. The Foresight tool uses an ensemble machine learning model. An ensemble model works by leveraging several constituent models to generate independent forecasts that are then aggregated. Here we employ two gradient boosted trees to generate the point forecasts. The model hyperparameters were determined by means of a grid search. Each year-ahead forecast has a separate model. In other words, we train a set of Ensemble models for $y(t+h) = f(x(t))$, where $h = 0, 1, 2, 3$. The associated confidence intervals were generated by empirical bootstrap method, where the source error distributions were generated on a retrospective analysis. Model training data was limited to data since 1995.

Conclusion

Civil society's work in Syria has been responsive to and driven by displacement waves in various ways. Staff and offices have been physically moved and projects have faced disruption as a result of conflict and displacement. Yet, **Syrian organisations continue to address the urgent needs of displaced people, providing access to health and education, providing psycho-social support, documenting displacements and human rights abuses, and supporting the integration of IDPs into new places.** Over the past decade, organisations and activists on the ground have developed many mitigation systems and programs to meet the needs caused by displacements, with some gaps (e.g., education).

Looking at all the data gathered through this research, it seems that in the coming years, civil society will continue their crucial role in mitigating challenges related to displacements. This is because **the context in Syria is not expected to improve - all experts interviewed for this study anticipate that the situation is likely to remain close to the status quo in the next two-year period.** As part of the status quo, space for civil society is expected to continue to shrink overtime as political actors become more entrenched, funding will continue to reduce, and economic sanctions will most likely be maintained. Syrian organisations and staff members take on a great deal of personal risk providing services to their communities; the constant danger is likely to continue for teams on the ground. After coping with the challenges of serving displaced populations, staff themselves must manage the fact that they themselves are often IDPs.

As a result of the anticipated status quo, **the role Syrian civil society organisations have been playing for the past decade in providing services will most likely continue to be needed.** Civil society actors are already filling many gaps in basic services and basic needs for displaced families. The continued trend of qualified staff - particularly doctors, nurses, and teachers - will place additional burden on organisations to deliver quality services. The situation will continue to be challenging as displacement could reach 13,88 million in 2022, according to the forecasted scenario developed through the Foresight model. Contrary to the previous years, a large proportion of future displacements is expected to be driven by economic needs. Many experts agree that the next few years to come, will mark a new era in the Syrian conflict.

Recommendations

Several recommendations emerged from this research. These recommendations are addressed to civil society workers and donors.

Recommendations to civil society actors

- Centralize data regarding IDPs, and coordinate efforts with other regional actors, in order to ensure sustainability of services, continuous access to target groups, and mitigate challenges related to displacements.
- Map all available support centres and services for IDPs (including most vulnerable groups, especially women) available in each region so civil society workers can easily hand in to those in need of support across sectors.
- Focus on supporting the displaced youth so that the generation of Syrians who grew up within the war and in displacement can have productive lives and improved mental health.
- Focus on social cohesion to ensure IDPs can be integrated in their new areas of residency in the long term.
- Continue to document human rights violations, even if the conflict situation is not evolving.
- As economic sanctions are not expected to be lifted in the near future, civil society actors should develop ways to provide more transparency and develop alternative solutions to mitigate donors' hesitancy.
- When engaging women, identify the decision makers in the household that often act as detractors from project participation and ensure they have proper awareness about programming.
- Develop follow-up mechanisms with internally displaced people to maintain connections with them and follow up on needs.

Recommendations to donors

- Acknowledge that civil society workers are not to be distinguished from the people; they themselves are often displaced and should not be considered solely as intermediaries with communities. This can be partially addressed through providing psycho-social support to civil society actors themselves.
- Incorporate the resolution of HLP issue as a dimension of sustainable returns and long-term peace when working on the political process (e.g., support, rights for displaced people, government compensation).
- Invest in more permanent solutions for the HLP rights related issues where possible, including more investment in understanding HLP issues and supporting HLP programming.
- Extend the duration and flexibility of grants in terms of project's scope, location, and budget in order to provide more consistent results - which will reduce the burden on overwhelmed civil society workers.
- Provide contingency funds to civil society organizations, providing them with a margin of response in case of a wave of forced displacements.
- Support more programmes that address the specific needs of women in displacement, including social cohesion and integration support, and ensure the different profiles of women (employment status, ethnic group, socio-economic status) when funding women empowerment projects.
- Support quantitative research looking into the drivers and challenges of displacement, in the time (before, during, and after displacement occurs).
- Support a study of the rebuilding process for civil society organisations after a displacement movement, looking at elements and events as quantitative variables.

Annex 1: Syrian CSO Questionnaire

1. Which of these regions do you operate in?
(answer to be selected among the following options: "Damascus/Rif Dimashq"; "Dara'a"; "As-suwayda"; "Quneitra"; "Homs"; "Hama"; "Idlib"; "Latakia"; "Tartus"; "Aleppo"; "Raqqa"; "Deir ez-Zor"; "Al-Hassakah")
2. On a scale from 1 to 3 (1= not at all; 3= a lot), how much do you consider that your work as a Civil Society Actor prevents people from being forcibly displaced?
3. Have your workplans and programs ever been affected/changed by displacement movements? Did you ever have to change your plans because of populations' movements in/from the country?
(answer to be selected among the following options: "Never"; "Yes, once of a few times"; "Constantly")
4. If yes, how? Can you tell us a bit about how you managed this event?

Annex 2: List of Key Informants

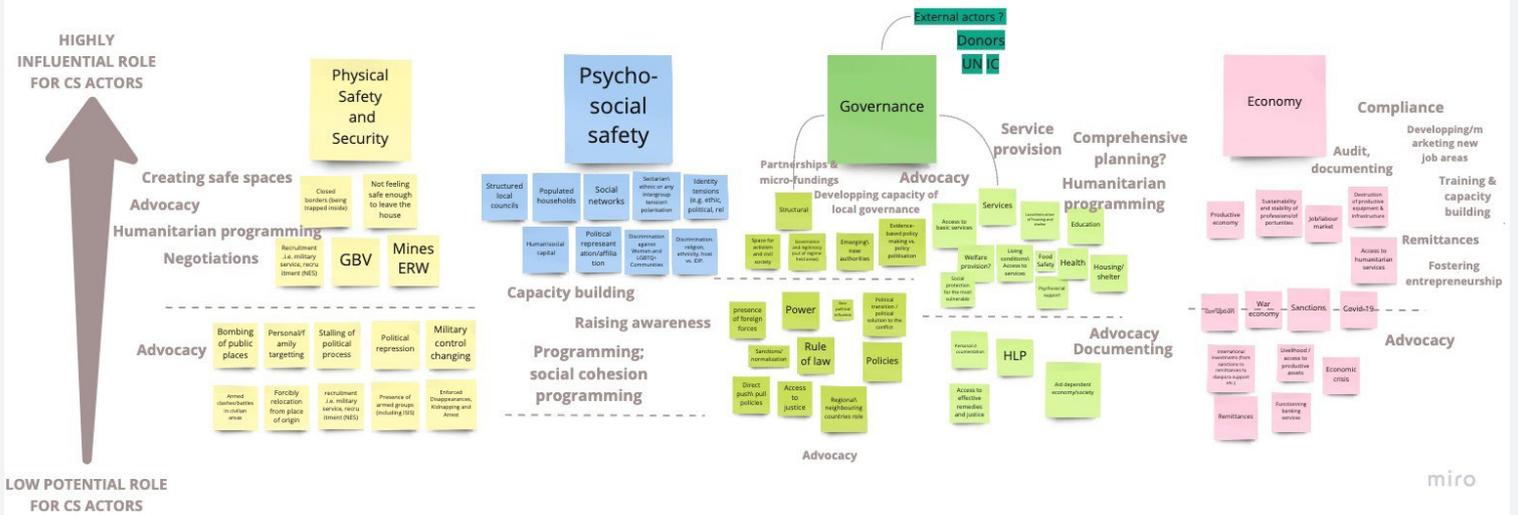
- Dina, specialist in women empowerment & capacity strengthening, Program Manager at the organization Women Now for Development
- Hazem Rihawi, Senior Programs Manager at the American Relief Coalition for Syria
- Joseph Daher, researcher and writer, specialized in political economy
- Kheder Khaddour, a nonresident scholar at the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut. His research centers on civil military relations and local identities in the Levant, with a focus on Syria
- Nemat Aftimos, (whose name has been changed for security reasons) a local civil society actor in Damascus suburb, graduate Law student, specialized in International Relations and Management
- Sawsan Abou Zainedin, Architect and Architect & Urban Development Planner
- Ziad Majed, political scientist, university teacher and researcher

Annex 3: Key Informant Questionnaire

1. What is the current situation in Syrian in regards to (expert's topic)?
2. To what extent do you think this has caused displacements in/from the country?
3. What do you think the role of Civil Society is towards this issue?
4. How do you expect the situation (regarding expert's topic) to evolve in the next 1-3 years?
5. Do you think there will be more forced displacements in/from the country in the next 1-3 years?
6. Do you have recommendations for civil society organizations or donors in regards to this topic?

Annex 4: Mapping the Drivers of Displacement (Workshop Results)

MAPPING DRIVERS' DIMENSIONS & POTENTIAL FOR CS



Annex 5: Displacement Drivers and Civil Society Mitigation Measures

DRIVERS' DIMENSIONS & MITIGATION MEASURES FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS						
		Physical safety	Psycho-social safety	Governance		Economy
DIMENSIONS WITH AN INFLUENCE POTENTIAL FOR CS ACTORS	Dimensions	Closed borders	Presence of structural and local councils	Structural governance	Space for activism & civil society	Productive economy
		Not feeling safe enough to leave the house	Populated households		Governance and legitimacy in areas outside of the regime's control	Sustainability and stability of pressions / opportunities
		Gender-based violence	Social networks		Emerging authorities	Job market
		Mines & explosive remnants of war	Sectarian/ethnic /identity inter-group tensions and polarization		Evidence-based policy making vs. policy politicization	Destruction of productive equipment & infrastructure
			Human/social capital	Access to health and education services	Access to humanitarian services	
			Political representation/affiliation	Welfare provision	Corruption	
			Discrimination against women, LGBTQ+communities religious groups, IDPs	Social protection for the most vulnerable	War economy	
				Living conditions	Covid-19 pandemic related crisis	
				Housing and shelter		
		Food safety				
				Psychosocial support		
	Mitigation means for CS actors	Humanitarian programming; Creating safe spaces; Advocacy; Negotiations.	Capacity building; awareness raising; social cohesion programming.	Both	Partnerships & Micro-funding; capacity development for local governance; Advocacy; service provision; Comprehensive planning; Humanitarian programming.	Compliance; Audit; Documentation; Developing/marketing new job areas; Training & capacity building; Remittances; Fostering entrepreneurship

DIMENSIONS WITHOUT/WITH VERY LOW INFLUENCE POTENTIAL FOR CS ACTORS	Dimensions	Bombing of public places		Structural governance	Presence of foreign forces	Sanctions
		Personal / family targeting			Power	international investments (sanctions, remittances, diaspora support, etc.)
		Political process stalling			Sanctions	Livelihood
		Military control changing			Normalization of relations with the regime	Access to productive assets
		Armed clashes in civilian areas			Direct push/pull policies	functioning banking services
		Forcibly relocation from places of origin			Geopolitical influence	Economic crisis
					Rule of law	
					Access to justice	
					Political transition/solution to the conflict	
		Military retuitment		Services	Personal documentation	
Presence of armed groups	Access to effective remedies					
Enforced disappearances, kidnapping and arrests	HLP rights					
			Aid-dependent economy / society			
Mitigation means for cs actors	Advocacy; Documentation		Both	Advocacy; Documentation	Advocacy; Documentation	



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