



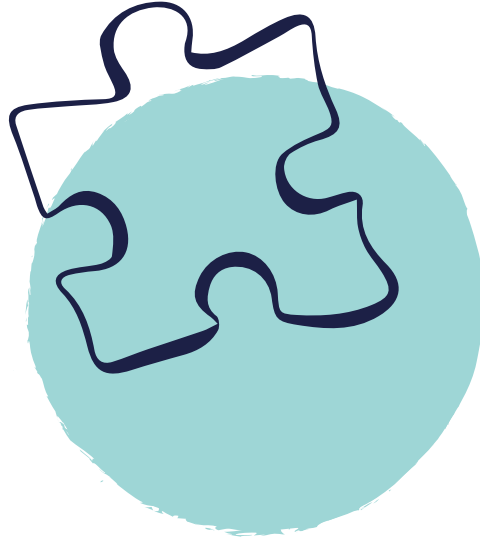
Variables of Demographic Identity and How they Affect the Social Fabric Property Rights and the Return of Refugees

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HLP Working Group



Variables of Demographic Identity and How they Affect the Social Fabric, Property Rights, and the Return of Refugees



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The Day After Association (TDA) is a Syrian organization working to support the democratic transition in Syria. Her scope of work focuses on the following areas: rule of law, transitional justice, security sector reform, electoral system design and the election of the Constituent Assembly, constitutional design, economic reform, and social policies.

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Methodology

- This research has followed a number of research methods, to allow for an objective understanding of shifts in demographic identity in Syria, and to explore the profound effects on sociological, human and human rights phenomena which have emerged on a wide and intensive scale during the conflict. In investigating these phenomena and their repercussions on Syrians' lives and rights in the present and future, a descriptive approach was required to look into the causes and events that led to a demographic crisis in Syria and the failure of development policies, especially after 1970, to deal with it both quantitatively and qualitatively. This helps to understand the deep demographic transformations that intensified after the Syrian revolution broke out in 2011, and the disintegration in structure and social values of the Syrian social fabric and its constituents, as a result of the systematic destruction policies pursued by the Syrian regime and its allies, as well as by other forces participating in the conflict.
- The research also followed a comparative analytical method, to examine and survey the effects of mass population shifts occurring in Syria over the past decade due to large-scale forced displacement. In this context, the researcher applied a qualitative approach to his study sample to highlight existential impacts on the lives of IDPs and refugees from various Syrian regions and constituents. It is also important to shed light on the impact of grave violations affecting large groups of society, and structural changes in demographic identity caused by forced displacement, a problem that cannot be viewed merely within the context of demographic change processes as it falls more within the context of connected steps to effect a new demographic identity, based on the regime's philosophy of a "useful, homogeneous Syria". This is evident through the variables paradigm, with which this study tackles the impact of changes in Syrian society during the conflict and transformations on the map, in order to understand repercussions of the demographic demarcations under numerous conflicting forms of governance and the effect on how Syrians were distributed in different areas of influence, as well as the risks of large population displacements separating Syrians from each other.
- The study also employed the inductive approach, in order to highlight the risks of new real estate policies the regime is working on, as well as the role that laws and regulatory schemes, and implementing government institutions, play in stripping millions of Syrians of their property and housing rights. This approach also aims to investigate the effects of other laws which facilitate confiscating properties of absentees who fled in mass displacement. It also aims to extrapolate difficulties and challenges facing refugees' return to their homes, in light of the specificity of Syrian displacement and host country laws and cultures influencing their inclination to return, in addition to the nature of their relationship to the homeland due to prolonged absence. This has future implications for demographic identity which will be covered in the research.



Introduction



Events stemming from the conflict in Syria indicate a theoretical and practical need to understand the extent to which transformations occurring in Syrian society are connected, from the perspective of profound changes that affect Syrian demographic identity, as this is the largest indicator to extrapolate the effects of those variables whose demographic features and identity dimensions began to take shape pre-conflict, then after the outbreak of the revolution, took dangerous forms that threatened the lives and rights of numerous Syrian groups and affected nearly two-thirds of the Syrian people. As a result of displacement and asylum, the most notable complex problems and challenges faced are: Displacement of large numbers of Syrians to the point they are uprooted from their communities and exposed to the complexities of living in unfamiliar environments, even those who experienced displacement to regime areas. The research focuses on the factors of disintegration affecting social units, undermining structures, and disrupting the system of social values. This is highlighted through in-depth individual samples of respondents, both IDPs and refugees from various regions of Syria, whose opinions reflect the impact of mass population displacements on familial and tribal ties and relations. Additionally, general indicators reveal the existence of social, class, cultural and human rights changes affecting Syrian society on the whole, with a loss of many elements of cohesion and social solidarity, and unprecedented existential challenges. The study investigates links between forced

displacement and the reconciliations enforced in conditions of submission, re-engineering the demographic identity of society to align with the policies and orientations of parties to the conflict, particularly the Syrian regime and its Iranian and Russian allies. The study also attempts to describe differing forms of governance in areas with IDPs, and how local actors running those areas impact demographic identity, as well as difficulties in restoring it while Syrians are treated differently and as separate groups governed by different spheres of control, whether in terms of military, security, political, economic, or educational aspects. This, in turn, weakens coexistence among Syrians and imposes demographic conditions unlike those required for building a unified demographic identity.

- As for real estate policies adopted by the regime, with current and future repercussions on HLP rights, this study attempts to show the grave effects on large groups of Syrians who, under property laws and regulatory schemes issued by the regime in recent years, are subjected to systematic dispossession of their properties, seizure and confiscation under the guise of the “law”; not to mention the regime, who played the main role in displacement, taking advantage of this situation with an aim to impose solidified realities that prevent property from being restored to their owners, while changing the demographic structure in areas where these properties are located. In this context, the study seeks to explore risks of changing the urban and demographic identity, and the legal and practical difficulties that property owners face in recovering their properties, with no political solution in sight or serious international pressures to prevent the regime from abusing Syrians’ rights, thereby allowing its continuing policies of displacing millions of Syrians from their homes and lands. Finally, the study covers repercussions of demographic variables and real estate policies on the rights of Syrian refugees, particularly to return to their original places of residence, and it identifies practical difficulties and challenges for their safe and voluntary return to the homeland. This is done by analyzing the nature of Syrian asylum and factors affecting refugees’ choice to return or choice of other options; and by extrapolating hypotheses relating to the future of refugees based on types of political solutions for the Syrian issue, challenges for a secure environment, paths of political transition, transitional justice, stability and early recovery. The aim is to form an objective approach to just solutions to the tragedy of Syrian displacement.

Topic 1

Demographic Shifts in Syria Before the Revolution



Derived from its linguistic and functional sense, demographic science is concerned, according to modern theories, with describing and measuring the population/people, carrying out statistical tasks, studying and analyzing vital population processes, and their links to the sciences of: anthropology, history, geography, sociology, economics and politics, and issues of identity, immigration and asylum.

Despite the growing importance of demographic science in the international arena, given the logical and mathematical foundations upon which it bases its research and fieldwork, many developing countries are still limited to using it for statistical reasons, to measure the distribution and size of population growth. ^[1] Therefore, it is not surprising that most of the ideological and political approaches dealing with problems in modern Syrian history did not pay enough attention to changes occurring in demographic identity and its various aspects and dimensions, even though it is a basic entry point for understanding the many transformations that the Syrian context has witnessed. Especially as modern theories of demography and UN trends in recent decades indicate the importance of investigating demographic transformations, and the role that statist policies play in transforming it either into an element of human power in various fields or into a heavy burden that brings about its functional and developmental failure.

Since taking its current form after independence in 1946, Syria is a clear example of the problem of demographic identity shift away from the space/time in which it was created and developed, highlighting since the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 the difficulty of harmonizing the perceived geography of a natural/Greater Syria, and the geographical reality that arose. The implications of this problem were not limited to issues of belonging and identity in their political and national dimensions. Rather, its demographic, social and economic backgrounds are due in part to the absence or weakness of communication between Syrians and their urban, rural and tribal extensions in neighboring countries. Earlier writings considered Syrians, despite their differences, a single population entity. ^[2] However, the diversity of Syrian society and its religious, ethnic and national components has lent its demographic composition certain features. Founders of the Syrian Republic in the 1930s viewed it as a wealth of human, cultural and social diversity, and that the developing interaction and coexistence between various components was an indication that the population was able to integrate into the specific regional scope.

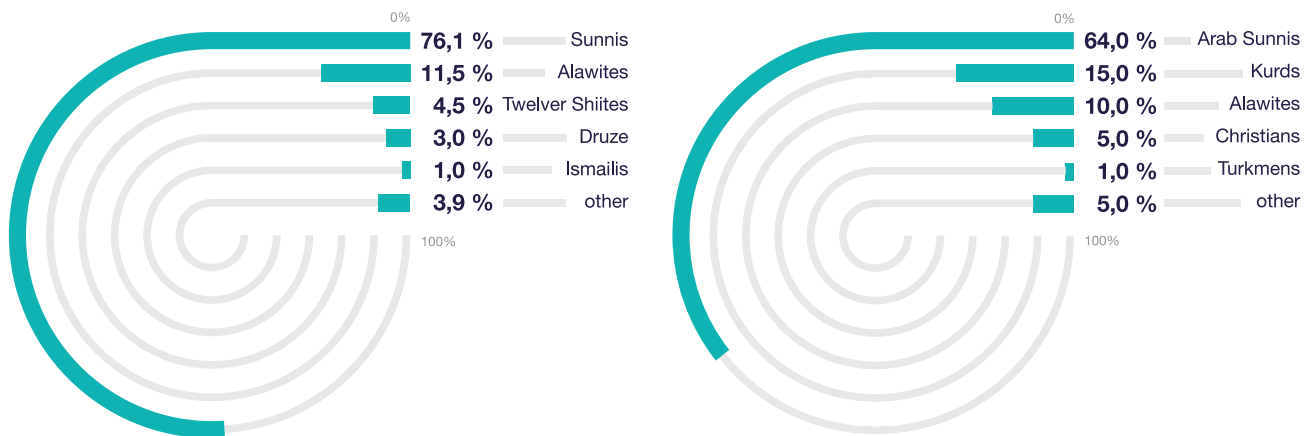
[1] - Roland Berissa - Population Analysis, Concepts, Methods and Results - Translated by Mohamed Riad Rabie - Office of University Publications, Algeria, 1985 - pp.14, 15.

[2] - Fruma Zachs- Making of a Syrian Identity / Intellectuals and Merchants in Nineteenth Century Beirut - Brill House 2005

1. Diversity of the Syrian Social Fabric

The Syrian fabric consists of several national or ethnic groups (Arabs - Kurds - Turkmen - Circassians - Armenians - Syrians - Assyrians - Aramaic - Chaldeans), and there are numerous religious and sectarian groups (Sunni Muslims - Alawites - Christians - Druze - Twelver Shiites - Yazidis). [3] According to the 1985 census, 76.1% of them are Sunni Muslims, 11.5% are Alawites, 3% Druze, 1% Ismailis, between 0.4% and 4.5% are Twelver Shi'ites, and there are other very small minorities. [4] Arabs make up at least 92% of Syria's population, whether Christian or Muslim. [5] While a study by the Washington Institute published in 2011 revealed that Sunni Arabs constitute 64% of the population in Syria, Kurds 15%, Christians 5%, Turkmen 1%, Alawites 10% and 5% other minorities. [6] Note that the latter is limited to an ethnic classification of Kurds, and does not consider that the majority of them are Sunnis. Meanwhile, a group of researchers concluded in their book "The Question of Syria's Kurds: Reality - History - Myth" that according to growth rates up to 2010, the proportion of Syrian Kurds peaked at 7.6% of the total population in Syria.

Proportions of Ethnic and Religious groups in Syrian society



Arabs make up at least **92%** of Syria's population

[3] - Nashwan al-Atassi - The Development of Syrian Society 1831-2011 - Atlas House / 2015 - p51

[4] - Demographics in Syria - Al Jazeera Net website <https://bit.ly/3umFQT5> - Last seen 20/2/2021

[5] - Muhammad Jamal Barout - The Last Decade in the History of Syria, The Dialectic of Stagnation and Reform - Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies - Beirut - March 2012 -p389

[6] - Will Syria Lose its Religious and Ethnic Diversity – Enab Baladi Newspaper – <https://enabbaladi.net/archives/452499> - Last seen 21/2/2021

Changes in Syria over time gradually show an inverse proportion between increasing rates of population growth and declining rates of development and economic growth, with the population of Syria doubling more than twenty times over between 1900 and 2010. The estimated population of Syria mid-2011 was around 21 million, according to estimates close to the UN, more than half of them in the workforce.^[7]

This population increase in Syrian society was not matched with qualitative development and economic policies to bridge the gap between high growth rates, peaking at 3.29% in 1981-1994;^[8] and the resulting gradual structural imbalance in population distribution, increasing poverty and unemployment rates, were among the problems that escalated rapidly following Hafez Assad assuming power in 1970, and a unilateral political, security and economic approach was established to deal with the shifts in demographic identity.

A developmental approach helps us investigate the regime's methods in managing Syrian diversity and the impact of its general policies on demographic characteristics of the population: fueling identity concerns in a religiously and ethnically diverse society such as the Syrian, by focusing on a threatened component of the complex identity and overlooking the rest of the components.^[9] In dealing with demographic identity transformations, the regime also adopted policies and plans that separate the growth rate as a quantitative concept from development as a qualitative concept, to create a phenomenon of bubble growth, which in development terms means high growth rates without development, and restructuring society economically, socially and politically in a way that led to the disintegration of the social rules upon which the Syrian political system was based.^[10]

2. Population Imbalance and the Spread of Irregular Housing

Marginalization of cities and peripheral regions in Syria, and neglect of the countryside at all levels, economic, educational and health, led to successive migrations from the countryside to major cities between the 1970s and 2000; a phenomenon known as "Ruralization".^[11]

[7] - "State of World Population 2011" - United Nations Population Fund - 10/31/2011 - <https://cutt.us/ZvcyP> Last seen 20/2/2021

[8] - Dr. Muhammad Akram Al-Qash - previous reference

[9] - See Amin Maalouf's book, Killer Identities

[10] - Interview conducted by Dr. Badr Al-Din Aroudaki with researcher Muhammad Jamal Barout - 2/7/2020 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCYMO422F88> - Last seen 22/2/2021

[11] - FUTURE : for advanced research and studies - Why has the phenomenon of urbanization increased in the Arab region? 21 February 2019

This was due to the concentration of businesses and services in those cities, exacerbated by increased drought seasons the country, especially between 2003-2009, simultaneous with drilling irregular artesian wells in agricultural lands. This gradually led to destruction of the agricultural sector, spread of unemployment rates in the countryside, and concentration of poverty in rural areas, reaching 62% in 2004, most of all in northeastern regions.^[12] Internal migration towards urban metropolises meant that Damascus, Aleppo and Homs were the main receptors, with no urban or housing plans made by successive Syrian governments to alleviate the demographic pressure on these cities, as well as a chronic failure to develop rural areas. Accordingly, factors and conditions were set in place for a population explosion, and approximately 44% of the population of Syria now resides in the governorates of Damascus and countryside, and Aleppo and countryside.^[13]

0% **44%** of Syria's population live in the governorates of Damascus, Damascus Countryside, and Aleppo & countryside 100%

With these demographic shifts, residential neighborhoods began to expand outside urban planning areas in an irregular and random peripheral form around the cities, mostly on agricultural lands on the outskirts, from the late 60s and to around 2010, resulting in a 200-250% increase in density of population and housing from 1999-2004.^[14] The urban and demographic chaos caused by overcrowding and misery resulted in complex economic and societal problems, most prominent of which are: the phenomenon of swollen cities such as Damascus and Aleppo with declining qualitative population features; for example, illiteracy rose to reach a rate of 18% in 2004.^[15] Additionally, there were many vital indicators showing low levels of human development, a worsening structural imbalance in the relationship between growth and development, and deteriorating status of the middle class of which large groups joined the ranks of impoverished classes. The second national report on the population in Syria indicated that absolute poverty had exceeded a rate of 45%, those making less than \$1 per person per day, in 2010, and that Syria's population was increasing annually by about 500,000 and was expected to reach 28,351,000 by 2025. The report warned of a scenario of development erosion and approaching catastrophe.^[16]

[12] - 3rd national report on Millennium Development Goals in the Syrian Arab Republic 2010

[13] - Interview conducted by Dr. Badr Al-Din Aroudaki with researcher Muhammad Jamal Barout - previous reference

[14] - Elias Al-Dairi - Irregular Housing Areas in Syria and Characteristics of Families and Residents - Central Bureau of Statistics, Damascus 2007 - p.16 - <http://cbssyr.sy/studies/st24.pdf> - Last seen 22/2/2021

[15] - United Nations Development Program, Human Development Report, 2005, p. 222.

[16] - The Status of Syria's Population: 2nd National Report: The Demographic Window of Opportunities and Challenges - Damascus - Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and the United Nations Population Fund, 2010.

3. Role of Authorities in Demographic Identity Problems

The demographic crisis in Syria, and how to deal with it, has always been the subject of debate and a point of contention between the national vision, limited to development policies pursued by the regime, and proposals by international developmental and financial institutions who had different approaches. The authoritarian nature of the regime and its attempts to liberalize the economy without a legislative, administrative and productive environment, as well as deep-rooted bureaucracy and administrative corruption and the absence of institutional reform, all prevented the building of a solid national economy and the infrastructure to launch a comprehensive and balanced development process.

The plans and programs of successive governments, from the third 5-year plan in 1972 and subsequent 5-year plans up to the second millennium, were characterized by confusion and floundering, rather than progression towards achieving results that fit into new human development contexts. Numerous attempts have gone unheeded: research, conferences and proposed projects to bridge the gap between quantitative growth and qualitative development in Syria. When facts and figures of the demographic crisis cropped up year after year, and political, economic and development crises were aggravated, the regime treated them by containing and controlling the problems and complexities of the demographic phenomenon, rather than by following sound scientific and institutional treatments.

Instead of solving the reasons for migration from countryside to city and urbanization of large cities, the regime ignored the expansion of irregular housing, which became accommodation for almost half of the population. Official statistics published by Syria's Central Bureau of Statistics in 2007 showed that 50% of all housing in Syria was irregular, and 45% of the population of Damascus resided in "irregular areas," as did 35% of the population of Aleppo and 42% of the population of Homs.^[17] These irregular housings became "irregular neighborhoods", their populations distributed within enclaves, bearing the identities and characteristics of their original regions and communities, and reinforcing social and population isolation from their new surroundings. They are sometimes even used to militarize and secure society as part of plans to re-engineer the demographic structure and produce an authoritarian society in centers and regions where the regime's authoritarian institutions are located, thus turning neighborhoods into ones with an Alawite majority in Damascus and Homs. Among the most important of these neighborhoods in Damascus are Esh al-Warwar, Mazzeh 86, Al-Somaria, Masaken Al-Haras, Dahiyat Al-Assad, and Masaken Al-Dimas.^[18] In Homs, there are the neighborhoods of Al-Nuzha, Al-Zahra, Karm Al-Lawz, and Al-Waleed and Akrama suburbs.^[19]

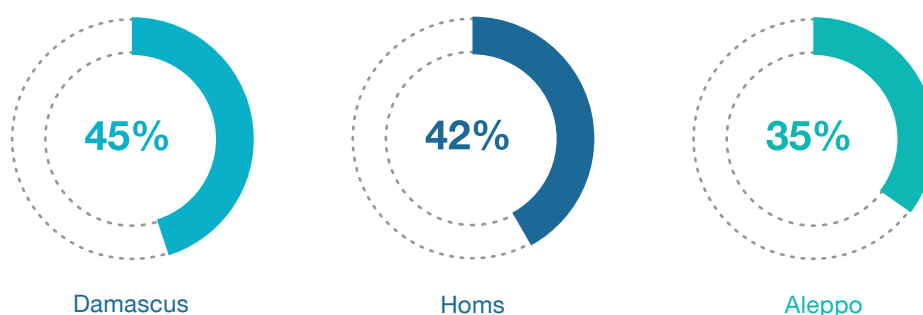
[17] - Yassin Sweiha - If Fascism Could Speak; Irregular Housing in Syria as an Example - Al-Jumhuriya Net - 19 December 2012 <https://www.aljumhuriya.net/ar/203> - Last seen 23/2/2021

[18] - Ahmed Hamza - Arab Slums, 5 Decades of Demographic Change in Damascus - al-Arabi al-Jadid 5 November 2015 - <https://bit.ly/3vo4xQp> - Last seen 24/2/2021

[19] - Walid Al-Faris - Homs: The Great Siege - The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies - June 2015 - p.20

In this context, the regime sometimes turned a blind eye and sometimes facilitated the construction of irregular neighborhoods, or the expansion of others, which acquired distinct social, religious, regional and ethnic identities, such as the Kurdish-majority neighborhoods of Ashrafieh and Sheikh Maqsoud in Aleppo, Christian majority Tabala and Dui-la'a, and Nahr Aisha and Al-Dahadeel in Damascus for inhabitants coming from Horan, and Jaramana which mostly consisted of Druze before it was inhabited by other groups, as well as neighborhoods made up of a mixture of inhabitants from various Syrian regions, as in Al-Tadamon in Damascus and Al-Raml in Lattakia . This led to the emergence of a tense demographic structure which prevented the formation of a public space for national integration. The most dangerous result was the creation of social, class, sectarian and regional sensitivities and tensions.^[20] On the other hand, the regime tried to use Palestinian camps and groups spread throughout Syria to barter with in its foreign policies,^[21] and the same applied to displaced populations from the Golan. It is no secret that the regime also made attempts to stir up problems and civil strife amongst Syrians. The most prominent examples of this are: The role of security forces in clashes that occurred between Bedouins and Druze in Suwayda in 2000, and subsequent disputes and tensions between them, with the purpose of emerging as the only guarantor of civil peace. The regime's treatment of Kurds in Syria, which highlights its role in consolidating policies of discrimination against them, such as its refusal for decades to amend their deprivation of rights resulting from the 1962 census, and resorting to security forces to address societal tensions that could have been avoided, as happened in the events of Qamishli in 2004, as well as using the PKK politically as pressure when disagreements escalated with Turkey in the 80s and 90s.^[22]

Percentage of population residing in "irregular areas" by city



[20] - Intervention by a source during a dialogue session organized by TDA (The Day After) on the impact of demographic variables on property rights and the return of refugees 19/2/2021

[21] - For more details, see study by Captain Rashid Hourani on the Assad regime and its pragmatic investment in the Palestinian cause, published by Toran Research Center - December 2017

[22] - Suwayda and Qamishli uprisings and Assad's approach to creating and exploiting seditions - 'Nedaa Souria' website - April 27 2020 <https://nedaa-sy.com/articles/81> Last seen 23/2/2021

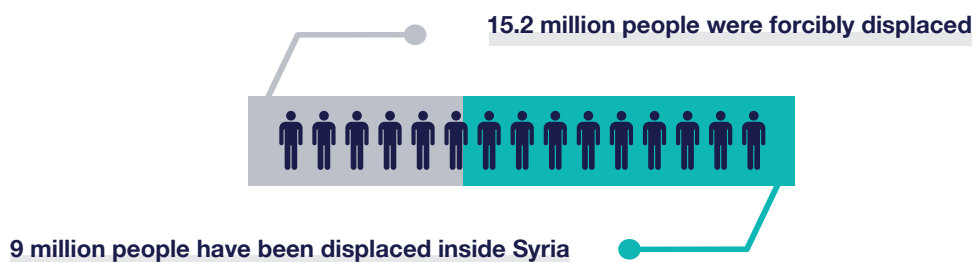
Topic 2

Repercussions of the Conflict on the Syrian Social Fabric



When the Syrian tragedy is described as the most severe and brutal tragedy witnessed in the modern era, it is often in terms of human and material loss, numbers and statistics, which do not illustrate social, psychological, cultural and behavioral effects and repercussions on units (familial and tribal) that make up the Syrian social fabric with its urban and Bedouin composition. The previous topic discussed the most pessimistic expectations for a critical demographic environment beleaguered by the structural problems of a complex national identity. Various stages of the conflict during the Syrian revolution revealed the magnitude of damage which led to severe problems, difficulties and complications that threaten Syrian society and speed up the disintegration of its structures, relations and bonds. This is evidenced by the displacement of at least 60% of Syrian society.^[23]

After the outbreak of the Syrian revolution in 2011, large groups of society became involved, the regime's repression and violence intensified, and Syria entered a cycle of conflict that included various forms and parties and fronts. The waves of displacement both inside and outside Syria increased as the conflict escalated. The Syrian Network for Human Rights estimates that approximately 15.2 million people have been forcibly displaced since March 2011, including 9 million people displaced inside Syria, most of whom experienced internal displacement more than once.^[24] The timeline of displacement and movement is important to provide an overview of the situation in general, such as the fluidity of population movements and causes of displacement, and they form the basis for identifying IDPs during the conflict. Data such as gender, age, location and diversity (eg ethnicity, language or region of origin of IDPs) are also of paramount importance for understanding the differences between IDP groups.^[25]



[23] - 9th Annual Report on Enforced Disappearance in Syria, Syrian Network for Human Rights, 2020. http://sn4hr.org/public_html/wp-content/pdf/arabic/The_Ninth_Annual_Report_on_Enforced_Disappearance_in_Syria_on_the_Intern - Last seen 22/2/2021

[24] - 9th Annual Report on Enforced Disappearance in Syria - previous reference

[25] - DURABLE SOLUTIONS <https://bit.ly/3uhBD37> Last seen 23/2/2021

On the other hand, the variables paradigm, which is concerned with causal relations between a human group and elements of its subjective and objective transformations, is useful in studying and understanding that group's relationship with human rights, economic and political frameworks regulating it, as a group experiencing displacement.^[26] Accordingly, the problem in studying both the Syrian cases of displacement and asylum, in terms of their effects on the social fabric, is the size and nature of population movement, due to large-scale and successive waves of displacement which make it difficult to accurately identify the systematic destruction of social structures and the profound, drastic changes that snowballed catastrophically. The experience of being uprooted is not limited to forcibly displaced persons (as we will discuss in detail in a separate topic), but has also affected millions of IDPs and refugees of all ages and genders, regions and backgrounds, who found themselves facing existential challenges, such as individual and collective survival, the dangers of disintegration of social units to which they belong, and the multiplicity of legal centers they experienced during their displacement and asylum.

I: Disintegration of Social Units

In order to investigate the effects of displacement and asylum on disrupting social relations and ties within families and tribes in Syria, the researcher, following a qualitative approach, resorted to in-depth samples of IDPs and refugees, of different ages and both sexes, and from various social environments, to clarify the disintegration and destruction that affected smaller social units.

1 Impact of Displacement

The researcher's asked about the causes of displacement and its effects on the lives of the displaced, their relationship to the place they were displaced from, and the social changes that befell their status, families and tribes following displacement? Answers were as follows:

■ Um Abdullah Al-Saoud: A displaced grandmother in her sixties answers: "I was living with my family in Maarat al-Numan, and our life was stable in terms of family, livelihood and emotional wellbeing. Because the city was subjected to heavy bombardment by regime forces in 2012, during the battles of Wadi Deif, my family and I were forced to flee to Kafranbel, and after Maarat was liberated, I returned to my home. At the end of 2019, I was displaced for a second time to Azaz after a fierce military campaign by the regime and its allies to regain control of the city. The second time, my biggest concern was for my

[26] - Ayman Abu Hashem - Palestinian Syrians between rights violations and identity challenges - Issued by Omran Center 2020

family and I to survive death. As time went on, my biggest pain became the feeling of being uprooted from my home and the city where I was born and grew up.” She says, “displacement is a bitter experience, and those who suffer its consequences the most are the elderly. We faced great difficulties because the whole family was living in one house, while in Maarat each family had its own independent house, as well as difficulties in securing the basic necessities of life. On the other hand, I feel great sadness because my family and neighbors in Maarat are scattered due to displacement, and we fear to contact relatives and acquaintances living in regime areas, as it could place them at security risk.”^[27]

■ Ahmad “Abu Al-Kheir”: A 43-year-old displaced father replies: “I used to live with my small family in Al-Tadamon neighborhood in Damascus, and our situation was relatively stable, I had a shop for repairing electrical appliances to support my family. We were displaced from Al-Tadamon in the beginning of 2013, because the neighborhood was repeatedly bombed by regime forces, and we went to stay in my brother’s house in Al-Zahira Al-Jadida. My brother's house was too small to host his family and mine, and because of that many problems arose, which forced me five months later to move with my family to my mother-in-law's house in Jaramana. We experienced there the same problems of overcrowding, loss of family independence, and living costs were increasing day after day. Nine months later, I moved to Suwayda, fearing for my eldest son who was approaching the age for compulsory military service. I am still displaced in Suwayda. My biggest difficulties are securing living basics for my family and the lack of stability. Without the help of friends and relatives, our situation would have been very miserable.”^[28]

■ Jamila S.A.: A 34-year-old displaced mother replies: I was displaced together with my husband and children from Masaken Hanano at the beginning of 2014, to my family-in-law’s house in Idlib, because our neighborhood was repeatedly attacked with barrel bombs by regime warplanes. Our displacement experience was harsh, it was the first time I had to leave my city. In 2016, my husband was martyred in a raid by the regime on Sarmada, and he was the only breadwinner in the family. This forced me to look for work, so I joined several educational and training courses in the field of nursing, and worked in a number of hospitals and clinics, in order to support my family, and I carried the financial burden of raising my three children. My extended family was scattered during the war, some of them did not leave Aleppo and remained in regime areas, communication with them is almost completely cut off for security concerns. Others sought refuge outside Syria in European countries. The experience of providing for my family is a great challenge and responsibility for me in the difficult conditions we are going through.”^[29]

[27] - Interview conducted by researcher with Mrs. Umm Abdullah Al-Saud, on 2/21/2021

[28] - Interview conducted by researcher with Mr. Ahmed Abu al-Khair, on 22/2/ 2021

[29] - Interview conducted by researcher with Mrs. Jamila, on 23/2/2021

■ Nassir Al Hawari: A 25-year-old displaced man replies: I was displaced with my family from Raqqa, after ISIS took control of it at the beginning of 2014, and we headed to Hama, and since then I have felt alienated even though it is a part of my country. This is because I am cut off from my relatives, friends and neighbors with whom I have always lived. Because my father and mother feared I was approaching the age for compulsory military service, I moved alone and with the help of acquaintances, to Aleppo western countryside and stayed there for a year and a half. After it was subjected to continuous bombardment by regime forces, I was displaced to Ariha, where one of my uncles lives, I was injured by shrapnel in the massacre committed by regime warplanes on January 5, 2020, which caused a permanent disability in my left foot. My displacement experience was harsh, I lost direct contact with my family, relatives and friends, and my injury caused additional psychological suffering.^[30]

Participants' answers in the sample reveal the type of complex suffering they experienced during displacement; the feeling of loss of societal environment in which they lived, causing a sense of instability, worsened by the harsh living conditions in the areas to which they were displaced. The sample also showed similarities in causes for displacement among respondents: to escape death was the main reason, whether because regime forces were targeting civilian areas, or fear of living under the control of extremist forces such as ISIS. Some answers also reflect changes in the roles of displaced families who lose their breadwinner and women are forced to work and their responsibilities multiply in raising their children. As for the youth, they are more likely to flee from joining compulsory military service, a main factor as some of the answers revealed. We also note the impact of displacement on disintegration of the family in terms of scattering its members over multiple geographical areas, or security fears of contacting other family members and relatives. Not to mention the familial pressures caused by displacement, as some families are forced to live together in one house. Additionally, continued risks of death and injury in the areas to which they were displaced.

2 Impact of Asylum

On the other hand, to investigate the effects of asylum on the disintegration of social groups that left Syria for other countries, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with a sample of varying ages and both sexes, and multiple social environments. Questions centered around the reasons for asylum and the dates? The extent it reflected on family and tribal ties and relations? How different is a refugee's legal status in the country of asylum in comparison with his homeland?

■ A. Khalaf Mwan Jbara Al Jabouri: 54-year-old refugee father in Turkey, notable of the Jabour tribe, replied: My family and I fled to Turkey in 2013, after the Ghweran neighborhood in Hasaka, where we lived, was attacked repeatedly by regime forces.

[30] - Interview conducted by researcher with Nasser Al-Hawari, 24/2/2021

Since the center of the tribe's sheikhdom is in Hasaka, as a result of the split between supporters and opponents of the regime, a vertical split occurred in the house chiefdom, as well as a horizontal division between its sons. This is something the tribe, known for its unity before the conflict, had never experienced. This has led to an almost complete breakdown in communication between residents of regime areas, residents of liberated areas, and those who sought refuge in Turkey. He said this problem was not limited to the Jabour tribe, it affected all other Syrian tribes (Akidat - Shammar - Baggara - Mawali - Haddiya.. etc), and he added, "Since we came to Turkey, we have seen a difference between our legal status in Syria, where the tribe's customs have a great impact on our lives, and Turkish law, which counts us as refugees according to the temporary protection system".^[31]

■ F. Khaiba: A refugee mother, aged 40, replied: My small family and I sought refuge in Europe in the middle of 2012, because my city Douma was repeatedly attacked by regime forces, by air and by land. The war affected us as a family greatly. While my children and I were smuggled to Europe,^[32] my husband remained trapped in Ghouta for several years, until he was able to catch up with us in 2015. Since I left with my children 9 years ago, I have not seen any of my family, and I do not even know my nieces and nephews who were born during this long period. She added: I come from a large family in Douma, and our family has been scattered, as IDPs and refugees over many countries, only less than 40% of them remain in Douma, and communication between us has become very poor and limited. Our legal status in the country of asylum is characterized by stability, and it enhances our feeling there is a law that protects us.^[32]

■ Mahmoud Al Basha: A 33-year-old displaced man replies: I lived through regime detention in 2011 because of my activism, then I lived through the siege in the eastern neighborhoods of Aleppo, until I was able to leave for Turkey in 2016. My life after the revolution has changed dramatically socially. Because of my convictions, after my release from prison many of my relatives and friends cut me off, and after my brother Anas was martyred, they were even more afraid to approach me, as the regime had instilled fear in the hearts of the residents of Aleppo since the events of the 80s. On the other hand, during the revolution I met a new social community, and made many friends and acquaintances with common thoughts and interests. He added: "The experience of asylum has greatly affected my outlook on life, I see the absence of rule of law in Syria is what led us to this situation".^[34]

■ Sulafa Kh.: A 27-year-old displaced woman replies: I fled with my family from Amuda to Erbil in the summer of 2013, after some activists died in an attack by the PKK and my father received threats because of his attitudes towards them. Even though all these years

[31] - Interview conducted by researcher with Mr. Khalaf Mawan Jbara Al-Jubouri, on February 25, 2021

[32] - For more information on the horrors that refugees faced during fatal smuggling operations by sea crossing to Europe, refer to the book "Escaping Death: Syrians and the Path to Europe" by German journalist Wolfgang Bauer - translated by Jamal Khalil Sobh

[33] - Interview conducted by researcher with Ms. F. Khebeya - 26/2/ 2021

[34] - Interview conducted by researcher with Mr Mahmoud Al Basha, 26/2/2021

have passed since asylum, I still miss my relatives, friends and neighbors in Amuda. She added: Although I live in Erbil within a Kurdish center, as we are Kurds, I feel alienated in many respects. The financial situation is essential here, and we have gone through difficult financial conditions, because all that is available to us is jobs in the private sector and seasons will pass when we cannot find work, as is happening now because of Coronavirus. As for legal status as refugees, our situation is stable in terms of safety, compared to the conditions of war in Syria. ^[35]

Participants' responses illustrate similar effects on the social unit (family, tribe) in terms of levels of disconnection and disintegration in social ties, and repercussions of the divisions caused by attitudes towards the regime and the revolution. At the tribal level, vertical and horizontal divisions have affected them, resulting in multiple leadership figures to a tribe. Added to this is difficulties communicating amongst family members due to the geographical diaspora which asylum conditions have greatly increased. As for the extended family, the war has caused massive internal and external population displacement, from areas that previously housed all family members, resulting in the breakdown of social communication as they each have their own different conditions in different locations. Meanwhile, there is another impact of political attitudes and security concerns on relations amongst families, relatives and friends, as asylum has opened their eyes to the freedom of choice of new relations and social ties. As for differing legal conditions, the sample revealed the legal protections that host countries provide for refugees, in terms of a sense of stability and relative personal and family security.

II: General Indications that Structures are being Destroyed

As a result of the gradual structural deterioration that afflicted Syrian society during the years of war, and in light of the increasing categories of victims and afflicted persons, affecting most of society, the radical forms of violations against individual and group rights, and destruction of factors of survival and societal resilience, problems and diseases afflicting social values have increased steadily as the conflict continues. A number of general indicators indicate the levels of erosion and rupture in the social fabric. The most prominent of these are:

1 The Spread of Multifaceted Poverty

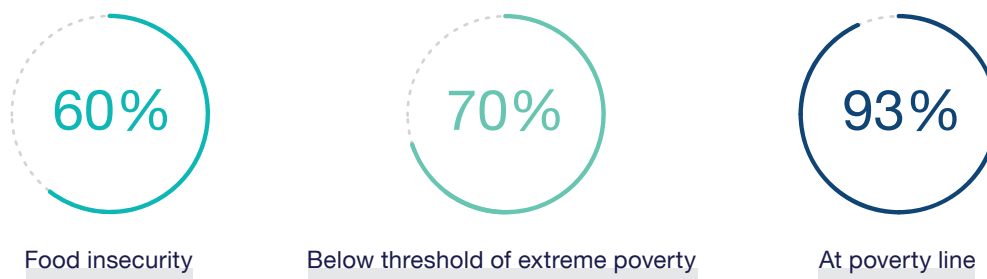
The Syrian economy's total paralysis during the war; exacerbation of impoverishment due to the systemic escalation of punitive impoverishment practiced by the regime against rebellious areas, strangling them economically; the increase in looting and corruption networks; the spread of unemployment in which Syria ranked first in the world, as according to the International Labor Organization, the unemployment rate in Syria was 50% in 2015, with the rate among youth exceeding 78%;^[36]

[35] - Interview conducted by researcher with Sulafa Kh., 27/2/2021

[36] - World Bank - Syrian economy lost 226 billion dollars due to the war - <https://www.dw.com/ar/> - Last seen 24/2/2021

as well as the collapse of the Syrian pound and weak purchasing power, reaching just under 4,000 SP per Dollar;^[37] all these factors as well as others have caused 93% Syrian society to fall to the poverty line, and more than 70% below the extreme poverty threshold, with nine out of ten Syrians now living in poverty, in complete contrast to the global rate, where in every ten people, one is poor. This is the highest multidimensional poverty rate on the planet.^[38] Poverty in Syria during the war ranged from general poverty to extreme poverty to absolute poverty which means extreme deprivation and the inability to meet basic needs (food, clothing, housing, health care and education). The World Food Program estimates that at least 12.4 million people, or 60% of the population, suffer from food insecurity and hunger, and this number increased by 4.5 million in one year.^[39]

Rate of poverty in Syrian society



With the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic, the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria has warned that among the groups most vulnerable to the impact of the Covid-19 virus, are more than 6.5 million Syrian IDPs. This includes more than a million civilians, mostly women and children, living in the open, or in overcrowded tents and makeshift camps along the Syrian-Turkish border in Idlib Governorate. Their access to clean water or sanitation is very limited. Elsewhere in the country, tens of thousands more are still detained with limited access to medical care, including 70,000 mostly women and children in the al-Hol camp in eastern Syria.^[40]

[37] - Unprecedented deterioration of the Syrian pound - Al-Khaleej newspaper - March 3

[38] - A study diagnosing Syrian social destruction - Dr. Talal Mustafa - Dr. Hossam Saad - Prof. Wajih Haddad - Issued by Harmon Center - January 4 2021

[39] - Humanitarian needs in Syria are increasing - Al-Hurra website - February 20, 2021

[40] - OHCHR website - March 28, 2020 - <https://www.ohchr.org/AR/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=25755&LangID=> Last seen 23/2/2021

2 Overlaying Social Problems and Diseases

A prominent feature of the disintegration of Syrian social fabric is the weakness in family ties during the war, as displacement, asylum, and impoverishment have resulted in destitution and deprivation, dispersion, generations of students without an education, high school dropout rates, and the effects of political division and war, such as severe societal divisions, and emerging chronic social problems. Syrian families suffered, most commonly: Divorce, polygamy, underage marriage, violence against women and children, increase in number of orphaned children, illegitimate children, child labour, school dropouts, reluctance to marry and a high rate of celibacy among males and females, the spread of vagrancy and beggary, and the spread of mental illnesses especially among those subjected to physical and psychological abuse, and who experienced arrest, torture and rape. These problems and diseases deepened with a collective feeling of despair and frustration, the longer the conflict dragged on.^[41]

In general, these and other phenomena that affected ties and relations amongst Syrian families, the largest of social units, revealed the gradual erosion of social solidarity, one of the most prominent characteristics of Syrian society, and because a large section of society had lost everything, it now lived on charitable subsidies and aid.

3 Interchanging Roles within Social Units

Due to internal displacement and forced displacement, there has been a shift in the Syrian family from the nucleus (father, mother and children) to the extended (fathers, sons with their wives and children in one house) associated with pre-modern societies. This explains the increase in family disputes and lack of family privacy. This mainly applies to places where more than one family lives, such as camps, shelters, or homes where two and three families are gathered.^[42]

Among images of the effects of the war are also those related to changing roles within the family. Studies indicate that 28% of Syrian refugee families are led by a woman, of whom 35% are also employed.^[43] A parallel shift occurred in the standards of social status, with the collapse of the middle class in society, due to sharp class inequality arising from the effects of the war.

[41] - See: Report on children's rights in the Syrian Arab Republic presented at the 43rd session of the Human Rights Council - January 13, 2020

- See: The War in Syria and Accompanying Social Phenomena, Fatima Haj Musa, Tyre Magazine - January 31, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3yEyOwl> Last seen 24/2/2021

[42] - Shatha Dhafer Al-Jundi - After 7 years of War, the Syrian Family amid Social Disintegration - Geroun website - December 11, 2017 <https://bit.ly/34pE60B> Last seen 25/2/2021

[43] - A short prospective report on the work of refugee women in Jordan, issued by Tamkeen Center in 2016- http://tamkeen-jo.org/upload/Women_Refugee_in_Jordan-ar.pdf Last seen 25/2/2021

On the other hand, with millions of young men and women displaced to neighboring countries, Europe and further, due to fear of military conscription or retribution if they return, economic and social consequences have led to a change in the behavior and customs of families.^[44] In addition to the impact of asylum laws in European countries on enhancing the independence of refugee women and young adults over 18, this shift in relations between family members, especially those having difficulty integrating, revealed a social and cultural imbalance arising from laws, cultures and values of host communities that differed from the customs and traditions they brought with them from their original environments.

4 Proliferation of Corruption and Organized Crime

Corruption in Syria has not only drained public funds and deprived society of investment returns, but it has also taken root as a structure obstructing development at all levels, with the lack of monitoring, transparency, and accountability. Current losses of the Syrian economy due to corruption far exceed declared figures, and are many times higher than pre-war corruption rates which were estimated at 30%^[45] of the national income. Its disastrous effect is that it targets a completely destroyed economy, with almost total absence of authorities and the law, and Syria has regressed to number 159 in the global ranking of corruption indicators.^[46] Corruption networks sponsored by the regime, whether from within or outside its institutions, cover large businesses and economic and financial activities, which flow into the pockets of the wealthy and of warlords. On the other hand, we find parallel networks operating in areas outside the regime's control that pour revenue into the pockets of the warlords who control those areas. There is a close interrelationship between corruption networks and the increase in organized crime, which clearly rose in Syria after 2011, and went from 31st place globally in 2016 to 16th place in the list of countries with the highest crime prevalence, according to 2019 indicators. Syria has become one of the countries in which the crime index is recorded at a high level, with 67.42 points out of 120, according to Numbeo.^[47]

During the war, we notice that profit-making took over all aspects of military and security activities, with the spread of arms trade, kidnapping for ransom, trafficking in people and human organs, prostitution networks, money laundering, drug manufacture and smuggling, forgery of official and real estate documents, electronic crimes, and other types of organized crime. The spread of these networks led to the absence of social security, decline of moral values, vulnerability of the poor, who are the majority in society, the weakening role of the law in restoring rights to their owners, and predominance of the logic of power, thuggery and dominance. This led to a severe disintegration of the social fabric.

[44] - bbc - Syria's Heavy Losses - <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/inthepress-47010740> - Last seen 26/2/2021

[45] - 30% of the average size of corruption in the Syrian economy - [Syria steps http://syriasteps.com/index.php?p=127&id=75827](http://syriasteps.com/index.php?p=127&id=75827) , Last seen 26/2/2021

[46] - 30% is the Average Rate of Corruption in the Syrian Economy - previous reference

[47] - A crime a day in Syria..Media investment that raises concerns, Nouredine Ramadan, Yamen Maghribi, Khawla Hefzy- 24/7/2020 <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/403648> Last seen 25/2/ 2021

Topic 3

Forced Displacement and “Reconciliation Deals” and their Relation to Demographic Change



Since the first months of the revolution, many Syrian regions have been subjected to severe military and security campaigns, which led to the displacement of thousands of people from those regions, as happened in the border town of Tal Kalakh in May 2011, in which a large part of the population was forced to flee and cross the border towards Lebanon. With the expansion of those campaigns aiming to quell the popular uprising that spread to various Syrian regions, displacements have been increasing, especially since mid-2011, as witnessed in the Syrian countryside near the Turkish border (Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, Latakia, Raqqa, Deir Al Zour).^[48]

While siege policies employed by the regime at an early date, since its first campaign against Daraa in April 2011, which extended on a larger scale since mid-2012, and systematically throughout 2013 and 2014, have affected large populations in Eastern Ghouta, Western Ghouta, southern Damascus countryside, old Homs, and northern Homs countryside.^[49] The tragedy of forced displacement escalated in Syria, compounded by the regime's targeting of civilians and perpetration of many grave violations, forcing millions of Syrians to leave their homes.

I: Forms of Methodological Eviction and Displacement

As an introduction, and to understand the extent to which displacement and "reconciliation" cases during the war fall under the legal definition of forced displacement, we must examine the criteria the Syrian regime uses to defend its actions and deny its responsibility for committing the crime of forced displacement. It claims there are "compelling" military reasons for this, and holds the opposition forces responsible.

Documented facts, however, refute these allegations, because operations targeted specific areas and one aim was to transfer the population by forced means to other areas in northern Syria, after civilians lost any real alternative that would render their displacement illegal. The Appeals Panel of the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia has previously clarified that the concept of 'forcible' should not be limited to the narrow definition of using direct physical force, but that forcible displacement may occur because of "the threat of use of force or persecution, such as that which occurs due to fear of violence, coercion, detention, psychological persecution, or the abuse of power against a particular person or group, or by taking advantage of coercive conditions" and all of these do not give individuals a real choice of whether to stay or flee, and therefore this type of displacement is considered involuntary.^[50] In its ruling, the Yugoslav court determines unequivocally that "military necessity" has certain conditions and criteria, and if the parties to the conflict do not abide by them, it is no longer permissible to use them to justify grave violations of the kind cited by the court.

[48] - Sasha Al-Alou - Syrians in Turkey - Arab Reform Initiative - December 11, 2018 - <https://bit.ly/2RE16GN> Last seen 26/2/2021

[49] - In the Absence of the Choice to Remain or Return - study by TDA (The Day After) - The Syrian Legal Development Program - Al-Sharq Center for Studies - <https://bit.ly/3hQpNdH> Last seen 27/2/2021

[50] - IN THE TRIAL CHAMBER - Committed in the Territory of Former Yugoslavia since 1991- August 2 2001 <http://www.icty.org/x/cases/krstic/tjug/en/krs-tj010802e.pdf> Last seen 27/2/2021

Accordingly, in the Syrian context, descriptions such as displacement and asylum do not negate the legal qualification of the crime of forced displacement, when there are criminal elements stipulated in international humanitarian law agreements, human rights laws, and the statute of the International Criminal Court.^[51] The conflict witnessed large waves of displacement, due to operations of intimidation and terror against civilians, primarily by the Syrian regime and its allies, but also by other parties that participated in the conflict in areas controlled by ISIS, the SDF, and opposition factions.^[52] Therefore, cases of forced displacement cannot be summarized in the number of civilians forced to leave in green buses under reconciliation agreements, which affected dozens of Syrian regions and took place intensively between 2016 and 2018.

1 Reconciliations Intended to Result in Eviction

As we shall see, the regime's methods in effecting reconciliation agreements reveal an integrated operation applied under conditions of submission and coercion, with a clear goal of displacing those who remained in opposition areas, contrary to what the concept of reconciliations suggests in international precedents, pursued by many countries as a way out of their crises by forming a new social environment and a radical and comprehensive reform of state institutions, not to mention prosecuting persons responsible for committing crimes and providing compensation and reparation to those affected.^[53] Whereas in the Syrian case, the regime would besiege civilians, with temporary local truces now and then, followed by military operations targeting besieged areas, and finally impose reconciliation agreements, most of them concluded with Russian arrangement and supervision, Iranian participation and Arab mediation in some cases as happened in the agreement of the four cities. In fact, they constitute a negotiation process with a demographic dimension, which ends in evacuating areas controlled by opposition factions and the regime taking over, displacing civilians and fighters.^[54] The reconciliation agreements in Daraa city that took place in 2018 are an exception with regard to evictions in other areas, but they reveal the tragic fate of large numbers of people who attempted to reach a settlement with the regime and were subjected to continuous arrests and assassinations.

Perhaps the clearest example of reconciliation agreements as a coercive tool for evacuating targeted areas, is that the number of besieged people in all Syrian regions, mainly civilians, was approximately 1,200,000 of whom no civilians remained after the mass evacuations that ended in reconciliation.^[55]

[51] - For more information, see - In the Absence of the Choice to Remain or Return - previous reference

[52] - Ayman Abu Hashem - Legal Responsibility for Crimes of Forced Displacement in Syria - Geroun Network - October 13, 2016 <https://www.geiroon.net/archives/66629> Last seen 27/2/2021

[53] - Ghazi Dahman - Reconciliations in Syria: Do they lead to peace? Or are they tools used to crush victims? - The World Institute for Studies - February 14, 2017 - <http://alaalam.org/ar/politics-ar/syria-ar/item/477-586140217.html> Last seen 28/2/2021

[54] - Local Negotiating Process in the Syrian Conflict - Nus'h Website - October 6, 2016 <https://bit.ly/3i-1hpl6> - Last seen 28/2/2021

[55] - In the Absence of the Choice to Remain or Return - previous reference

This confirms, with documented facts and irrefutable evidence, that what happened is actually forced displacement under the pretense of reconciliation. It is surprising that the United Nations participated in some of those agreements, especially the evacuation agreements. It is also noteworthy that truce and de-escalation documents between Turkey and Russia referred to reconciliation as one of the mechanisms for a solution.^[56] Exposing such agreements and rejecting them as illegal should be what governs the positions of the international community towards all actions that fall within the context of forced displacement.

As for the links between reconciliation agreements and demographic change, they are direct causal links: the evacuation of targeted areas was not a temporary war tactic, but part of a strategic plan which the regime put in motion following mass evictions, and one which is focused on densely populated strategic locations, such as the governorates of Damascus countryside, Homs and the eastern part of Aleppo governorate. The aim was to pave the way for plans to effect a new demographic structure that matches its perceptions and those of its allies, that of a "useful Syria", in so doing clearly employing a sectarian dimension. There are other examples where the systematic destruction and subsequent eviction of population was an end in itself. One local negotiator of a reconciliation agreement in southern Damascus reported in April 2018 that when Russian Colonel Alexander Zorin, who sponsored that agreement, was asked about the possibility of returning Yarmouk camp residents under the agreement, The Russian colonel replied: "The camp is finished and it will be turned into dust." The local negotiator adds: "After four days of meeting with the Russian colonel, the camp was subjected to intense air strikes, which led to the near complete destruction of the camp".^[57]

2 Iran's Role in Demographic Change

Through its militia, spread throughout Syrian territories, Iran worked to vacate entire population areas. Lebanese Hezbollah launched in cooperation with regime forces a military campaign on Al-Qusayr in April 2013, resulting in the displacement of residents towards the Bekaa town of Arsal and Akkar region in the north. Hezbollah secured passages for civilians to exit with the aim of vacating the town, and facilitated the settlement of Shiites of Imam al-Rida militia members with their families.^[58] This incident was not the only example of Iran's involvement in policies of demographic change on a sectarian basis, and in a systematic manner. Daraya was subjected to a suffocating siege for four years and successive military campaigns, which ended in 2016 with the evacuation of its entire population, 250,000 at the beginning of the revolution, and more than 300 Iraqi Shiite families affiliated with the Al-Nujaba movement were brought in, described by locals as 'settlers'.^[59]

[56] - Reconciliations in Syria: Do they lead to peace? Or are they tools used to crush victims? -previous reference.

[57] - Interview conducted by researcher with A. H., local negotiator in reconciliation agreement for southern Damascus - interview date 2/3/ 2021

[58] - Dr. Yasser Saad Eddin - Forced Displacement in Syria - Umayyah Center for Research and Strategic Studies - 20/1/2017- <http://www.umayya.org/studies-ar/11482> Last seen 1/3/2021

[59] - After it was emptied of its residents, Al-Nujaba send 300 Shiite families to Daraya - Enab Baladi - 6/9/2016 - <https://enabbaladi.net/archives/102003> Last seen 1/3/2021

The Four Cities Agreement, completed in March 2017, is a concrete example of the causal link between eviction and demographic change. It was an agreement that representatives of Ahrar al-Sham and Hay'atTahrir al-Sham reached with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Hezbollah, in Doha under Qatari sponsorship. As a result, 3,500 fighters with their families left Madaya, as well as 170 fighters from Zabadani and their families from Bludan, to the north of Syria, in exchange for the evacuation of Foua and Kefraya residents in Idlib countryside, completed in stages. Withthat, Zabadani has now been completely emptied of its people. ^[60]

Iranian methods aimed at changing the demographic structure in Syria are not limited to military participation of its militias in targeting populated areas with various weapons, including barrel bombs, chemical weapons and vacuum missiles, to push its people to migrate either internally or externally. There are other roles taken on by Iranian cultural and missionary institutions aiming to spread Shiism in Syria, as the number of Shiite seminaries built by Iran in Syria in the last decade reached 69, working to attract Shiite students of all nationalities to study for free, and encourage them to settle in Syria, obtain Syrian citizenship, and promote the Shiite sect. Note that Syria was completely devoid of any Shiite seminaries before 1979. It also established many commercial real estate companies, which work through intermediaries and brokers, in order to speed up the purchase of real estate and land, taking advantage of the absence of their owners, or the need of others who have fallen into poverty to sell their properties for small amounts. Buying and selling property is active in the governorates of Damascus, Damascus Countryside, Daraa, Homs, Aleppo, and Deir Ezzor. ^[61] Additionally, there is exploitation of the conditions of poverty in Syria: distributing funds and providing services to attract the poor to Shiism, targeting children specifically. All of these methods serve Iranian policies aimed at creating a local popular base loyal to it in Syria, similar to those in Lebanon and Yemen. This will ensure a geographical corridor extending from Tehran to the Mediterranean through Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, and ensure the control of a Shiite majority over this strategic corridor. Hence, the meaning of demographic change of the Syrian population map must be understood from the Iranian perspective. Iran's focus on the Shiites of the eastern regions in Deir Ezzor, Al-Bukamal, Al-Mayadin and others is to secure its control over land supply routes from Tehran to Beirut, and consolidate a demographic character under a sectarian cover that guarantees it long-term social and military bases.

[60] - - Mazen Ezzi - Reconciliations in Damascus countryside: Is there any representation remaining for local communities? - - Middle East Directions 19 November 2020 - <https://medirections.com/index.php/2019-05-07-15-50-27/wartime/2020-11-19-12-26-59> Last seen 1/3/2021

[61] - Dr. Hassan Katrib - Demographic change in Syria is a strategic sectarian goal - Strategic Thinking Center - September 19, 2016 - <https://bit.ly/3hYySRB> Last seen 2/3/2021

II: The Impact of Different Forms of Governance on Demographics

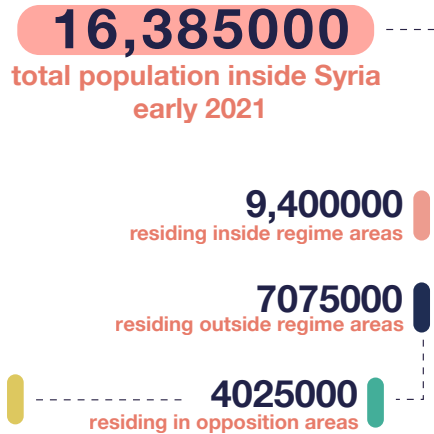
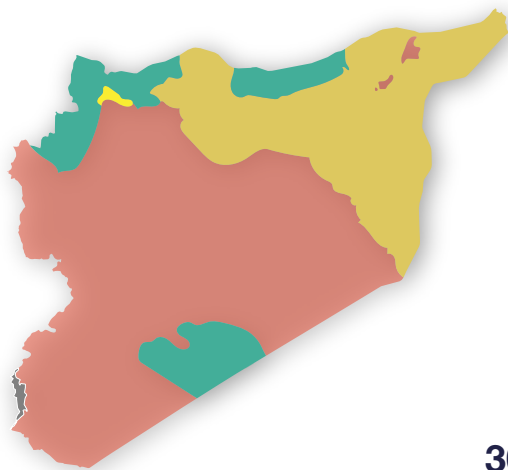
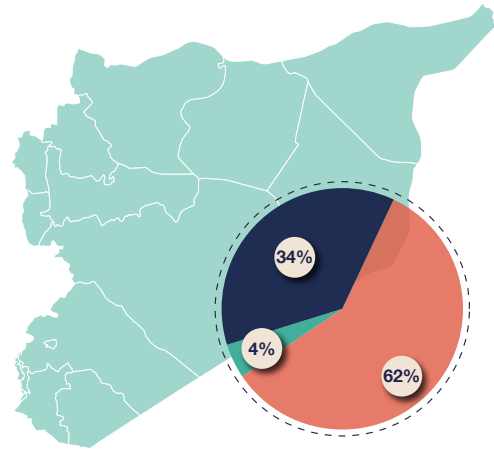
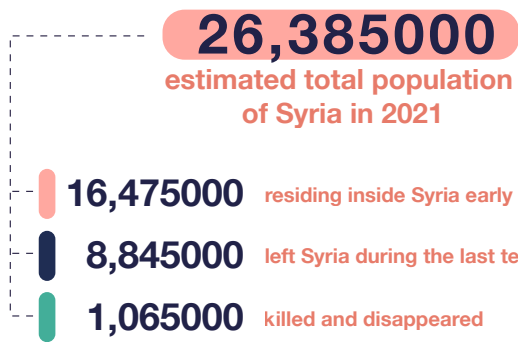
As a result of the armed conflict and multiplicity of parties involved, Syria has turned into areas of influence under the control of conflicting parties, each with different connections and policies:

- An area controlled by regime forces and under Iranian-Russian influence.
- An area controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces, under the influence of the international coalition led by the United States of America.
- An area controlled by opposition factions, and falling under Turkish influence.

Syrian society is distributed in these three areas of influence, separated by contact lines or buffer zones defined by successive periods of fighting, truces and reconciliations, based on de-escalation agreements between the countries involved in the Syrian conflict. According to international and local statistics, the total number of Syrians in 2021 displaced throughout Syria reached approximately 16,475,000 people, of whom 9,400,000 reside in regime areas, 4,025,000 are in opposition areas, and 3,050,000 in SDF areas. ^[62] There are different forms of administration in those areas, in terms of political, military, security, and civil aspects, depending on the differing vision and objectives of each party regarding its area of control, and structural transformations have occurred in the demographics of the various regions. They cannot be separated from the demographic variables that affected the Syrian society during the conflict - as we discussed earlier - and their effects are no longer limited to populations distributed over the three areas of influence, but have also affected their relationships with and views of each other. This can be determined by addressing existing forms of governance in the spheres of influence, and the quality of policies and programs in each of them.

[62] - Population transformation in Syria 2011/2021 - Jusoor Center - March 2021- https://www.jusoor.co/content_images/users/5/contents/1394.pdf Last seen 25/3/2021

Distribution of population inside and outside areas of control



Source: جسور للدراسات
JUSOOR FOR STUDIES

https://www.jusoor.co/content_images/users/5/contents/1394.pdf

Governance in Regime-Controlled Areas:

According to recent developments in the conflict, the Syrian regime militarily controls nearly 63% of the area of Syria. It is characterized by its control over the state (legally and institutionally), to the point that it uses the government as a supreme administrative authority over state institutions, to serve the survival of the regime and its authoritarian policies. Before the revolution, security and partisan institutions played a key role in managing and controlling state institutions in various fields. After the 2011 revolution, the regime's grip over state and society increased, and security services penetrated even further, by unprecedented suppression and intimidation of civilians, and increased cases of arrest, assassination and systematic torture.^[63] Meanwhile, the regime's fierce war to end the revolution led to widespread displacement and asylum, which contributed to the rupture of the social fabric. Furthermore, the regime imposed strict security measures on those who remained inside its areas and now live under repression and intimidation, in geographical and social separation from the rest of Syrians in areas outside regime control. Meanwhile, they suffer from the deterioration of civil and service institutions, which are now unable to secure the minimum basic necessities of life. High rates of corruption in state institutions have brought Syria to the top of the list of global corruption, and as a result of the spread of abject poverty 60% of Syrians are now at risk of starvation this year, according to recent statements by UN Secretary-General.^[64] These reasons have exacerbated crime rates, due to the pressure of living conditions, disintegration of the Syrian family, spread of indiscriminate weapons, absence of legal institutions that are supposed to protect citizens, and the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on living conditions and subsequent collapse in the value of the Syrian Pound which has reached rock bottom in recent months.^[65] All of these reasons, where security and living pressures overlap, together with moral and psychological problems, have revealed the catastrophic failure of state institutions and their inability to manage the affairs of society in all respects, and have resulted in the emergence of the following dangerous phenomena:

- **Imbalance:** The population structure in regime areas is exposed to coercion and submission to security services, militias, and military groups affiliated with the regime, Iran and Russia. This population is treated with discriminatory policies, based on regional and sectarian backgrounds, and is used to perpetuate the regime's policies in rehabilitating society under its control, integrating population groups that do not belong to Syrian society, such as families of Shiite militias brought in by Iran, and spreading Shiism among Syrians for ideological and political purposes.

- **Deepening the identity rifts within groups of society,** severing bonds between Syrians in regime areas and those in other areas, and criminalizing anyone who tries to contact relatives,

[63] - For more information, review reports of the International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic <https://www.ohchr.org/AR/HRBodies/HRC/IICISyria/Pages/AboutCol.aspx>

[64] - The scale of atrocities in Syria shocks to the core - Al-Araby TV website - March 11, 2021 - <https://beta.alaraby.com/news/%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-12267> Last seen 5/3/2021

[65] - Fouad Azzam - Poverty and starvation exacerbate the problems of society in the areas of the regime - Al-Araby newspaper – 14 October 2020- <https://bit.ly/2SnyykF> Last seen 6/3/2021

acquaintances or neighbors in those areas.^[66] This exacerbates the rupture of societal fabric amongst its members, and prevents their integration.

■ Spreading and strengthening the phenomena of looting, material and moral corruption, the destruction and depletion of society through poverty, deprivation and misery, the systematic violation of human rights, the weakening of judicial institutions, and destruction of community trust through the growing influence of informants and shabiha over society, pushing large numbers to emigrate as a result of losing security, safety and livelihood.

■ Exhausting resources and capabilities of state institutions, utilizing scarce resources to cover the costs of the regime's military wars, and spending on the army and security services, leading to the failure of development plans, and the state's inability to perform public services and decline of citizen's trust in the state. In fact, extorting citizens financially has become one of the regime's methods to supplement its bankrupt treasury.^[67]

■ Rehabilitation of the demographic structure, in parallel with dismantling components of state sovereignty and encroachment of Iranian and Russian influence within regime areas, while detracting from the state's sovereignty. Military and economic agreements concluded with the regime by both these parties indicate^[68] that the regime has let go of the components of national sovereignty and wasted national wealth and resources, for political goals to ensure its existence and survival.

The multiple agendas of influence in regime areas all have demographic identity change in common, as shown in the research - most serious of all, the Iranian role. These profound transformations have affected Syrian society, and can destroy characteristics of the demographic structure and produce an incompatible mixture of identities and classes that may obstruct restoring demographic structure, and can create a new demographic reality to suit conditions that threaten the unity of Syrian society at present and in the future.

Governance East of the Euphrates:

Areas north and east of the Euphrates constitute 41% of the area of Syria, and its population constitutes 18% of the population of Syria.^[69] It includes three main governorates (Deir Ezzor - Raqqa - Hasaka) and the proportion of Kurds is estimated at 12-15% of the total population east of the Euphrates, while Sunni Arabs constitute the majority of the population, and the rest are Turkmen, Syriac, Assyrian, Armenian, Chechnian.^[70]

[66] - The testimonies of several former detainees, who were criminalized for communicating with relatives and acquaintances in opposition areas, in accordance with counter-terrorism Law No. 19 of 2012.

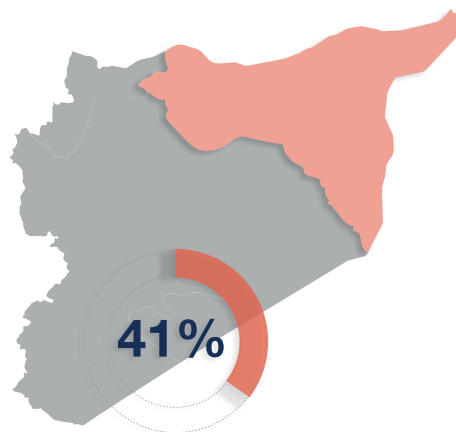
[67] - See: Legislative Decree No. 31 of 2020 amending some articles of the Military Service Law to include provisions and amounts of monetary compensation for those charged with compulsory service who it was decided should be placed in permanent service - see also the decision issued by the Syrian Council of Ministers to impose a fee of 100 dollars on Syrian citizens wishing to enter their country.

[68] - See dozens of military, economic, commercial, tourism, health and educational agreements between the regime government and the governments of Iran and Russia.

[69] - Abdel Nasser Al-Ayed - Map of Influence in Northeast Syria - Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies - January 2018 - <https://www.dohainstitute.org/ar/Lists/ACRPS-PDFDocumentLibrary/Northeast-Syria-Forces-on-the-Ground-the-Arab-Population.pdf> Last seen 5/3/2021

[70] - Muhannad al-Kati' - Fallacies of the "Kurdish Issue in Syria", al-Arabi al-Jadid - October 21, 2019 - <https://bit.ly/3oRV0hX> Last seen 5/3/2021

This region is Syria's food basket, as it produces most of the wheat, cotton, and barley, and most of the livestock in the country, and holds 80% of its oil and natural gas resources. The Syrian Democratic Forces control the north and east of Syria, and their military control reaches to 25% of the area of Syria. The Autonomous Administration governs that area, more so after it unilaterally announced the Federal Autonomous Administration on 17 March 2016 led by the PYD, which has organizational relations with PKK leadership in Qandil through the so-called KCK. Meanwhile, regime control in Hasaka governorate does not exceed 10% of its total area and are known as “regime-controlled areas”. The areas controlled by the Syrian regime in Hasaka and Qamishli are called “security squares” because they contain the headquarters of multiple security centers. ^[71]



Proportion of area east of the Euphrates to the area of Syria

After the international coalition led by the US adopted the SDF to confront ISIS, and after ISIS defeat in late 2017, large parts of the eastern Euphrates moved to AA control, and these included exclusively Arab areas such as Raqqa city and Deir Ezzor countryside. This put military, security, and civilian bodies in difficulty regarding managing this vast geographical area, and satisfactorily meeting its service needs for the population. It also led to Kurdish monopoly over military and civil authority, with a symbolic presence of Arabs, and resulted in an identity crisis in the Arab areas under its control. Kurdish presence in the SDF and its civil councils constitutes 70%. There is also mismanagement of relationships with the Arab clans, who are the most important force in the region. ^[72] This created a sense of discrimination among Arabs, due to Kurdish control over main positions in the AA, exacerbated by poor living and service conditions and the weakness of local councils established by Kurdish forces to serve the region in general. Additionally, gross violations were committed by the YPG and Internal Security Forces (Asayish) against local residents and left them with mutual hatred, most notably, according to international reports: displacement operations in some villages, looting and destruction of homes, burning of crops, and extrajudicial executions. ⁷²

[71] - Sinan Hatahet - The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of Northeast Syria - Middle East Directions 27 January 2020 - <https://bit.ly/3fnGVpo> Last seen 6/3/2021

[72] - Adnan Al-Hussein - Demonstrations expand against it.. Violations by Kurdish forces continue in eastern Syria - Al Jazeera Net - May 7, 2019- <https://bit.ly/36plc9c> Last seen 6/3/2021

Other measures taken by the Autonomous Administration raise serious concerns about “Kurdification” of the eastern Euphrates region; such as changes in education curricula to make Kurdish language teaching obligatory in its schools, institutes and universities; its interference to change the educational process to align with its ideologies; its rehabilitation of educational structures in order to control the sector’s main infrastructure (schools) and human resources (students and teaching staff). [73]

These concerns are reinforced by the “sponsor system” or what is known as a “residence permit” issued by the AA as a condition for any Syrian who wishes to settle in the eastern region, whether IDPs or locals. Many locals in particular, and Syrians in general, see it as a racist procedure, carried out under security pretexts, to constitute an obstacle to the return of displaced residents of the region to their homes. [74]

The policies through which the AA is attempting to impose a federal model of governance and administration based on a single ideological and political concept, and to impose over the entire population a social reality with a specific orientation, have seriously affected the pluralism that characterizes the population structure in this region; and its tendency is to manage identity clashes, evident during the war, in a way that destroys opportunities for building a Syrian society in which people of the region participate on an equal basis with other Syrian citizens. If this form of governance continues, it may lead to deeper demographic rifts between Syrian groups and pave the way for separatist solutions, the longer the conflict lasts and in the absence of a political solution that guarantees the rights and interests of all Syrians.

Governance in Opposition-Controlled Areas

Opposition factions and Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham control the northwestern regions which in total constitute approximately 11% of the area of Syria. [75] These areas include the largest numbers of IDPs in Syria, and have become host to a mixed population. It is an environment of difficult and complex challenges, in military, humanitarian and developmental aspects. Governance forms in these areas indicate there is an authority crisis arising from the existence of multiple bodies, with different ideological and political backgrounds. The National Coalition constitutes the political and representative authority in parts of those areas, and the interim government is its executive administration; in reality, however, this is merely a formality, as the military factions affiliated with the Syrian National [76] Army is the actual authority on the ground - an authority it exercises through its security and police institutions with cover and support from Turkey.

[73] - See: Opening schools in the city of Qamishlo with a new Kurdish curriculum - ARAnews.com - 09/28/2015- <http://wp.me/p4OhLR-bvA>

[74] - Hussam Al-Omar - Syrians sponsored by Syrians in Autonomous Administration areas - Enab Baladi - 7/2/ 2021 -<https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/456171> Last seen 7/3/2021

[75] - Map of military influence in Syria 1-1-2021- Jusoor Center - <https://bit.ly/3oQLb3l> Last seen 8/3/2021

[76] - On December 30, 2019, the Ministry of Defense in the Syrian Interim Government announced the formation of the "Syrian National Army", in implementation of the agreement signed by the "Free Army" factions, and the announcement came after a meeting that gathered all the military leaders of factions in the north and east countryside of Aleppo

On the other hand, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham maintains control of all aspects of governance in the Idlib region, even though it is classified on international terrorist lists; its Salvation Government covers civil and administrative affairs. This multiplicity in forms of governance, and their different structures for control and administration, lead to conflict and disorder in managing the affairs of the residents of those areas. This compounds the instability, as the area is exposed to violent military operations by regime forces and Russian ally, which, between December 2019 and March 2020, led to the displacement of nearly one million people from Idlib and western Aleppo to the Turkish border. ^[77]

Challenges including instability, the spread of arms, security tensions, critical living conditions, and developmental issues, reflect on the lives of exhausted local residents, the groups most affected by the continuation of the Syrian war. Many local councils and civil institutions located in those areas cover basic services and relief aid. With the influx of IDPs, they also began to form civil and community links with regional backgrounds. Notably, the instability in those areas has affected the roles of these bodies and quality of their work. Local councils, despite the decline in their roles and influence, are still a “semi-governmental or mini-government body in the towns and cities that they manage.” They collect fees, provide some services such as hygiene, education and health, and sometimes intervene to organize relief campaigns, and their activities depend on the flow of aid and funding. ^[78] Meanwhile, we see an expansion in the roles of CSOs in those areas, which have become a major player in providing services, relief, development programs and community participation. The percentage of such organizations is estimated at about 44% of total organizations operating inside and outside Syria. ^[79] As for infrastructure and health, education, transport and communications facilities, these have been subjected to repeated targeting over the past years, which has resulted in significant damage, and funding has been cut off for rehabilitated facilities. These problems reflect more on the beneficiaries of such services. For instance, the EU stopped funding its grant to the education sector in Idlib, leading 220,000 children to drop out of schools. The grant had covered 65% of “manahil” schools, whereas total allocated for educational aid did not exceed more than a mere 2% of aid. ^[80]

The health care system in those areas has reached the brink of collapse; medical supplies and staff have dropped to the minimum, while health facilities have closed or stopped working after being subjected to systematic bombing campaigns. ^[81]

[77] - Northwest Syria: People need protection and aid - Report issued by Amnesty International <https://bit.ly/34i5yxl> Last seen 11/3/2021

[78] - The experience of local councils in opposition-controlled areas in Syria - group of researchers from Swiss Peace - Local Councils Unity - January 2, 2017 <https://bit.ly/3wAAziW> Last seen 9/3/2021

[79] - Syrian Civil Society Organizations / Reality and Challenges - Citizens for Syria 2017 - <https://bit.ly/3o-PnCIA> Last seen 10/3/2021

[80] - Manar Abdel-Razzaq - in numbers. Repercussions of ending European support for education in northern Syria - taken from statement by Education Deputy Official in Idlib - Syria TV website - <https://bit.ly/3bRF7mA> Last seen 3/10/2021

[81] - A Decade of War in Syria: The needs of millions have changed but not disappeared - MSF report - 4 March 2021 - <https://bit.ly/3oQ3FS5> Last seen 10/3/2021

There are many other examples of the challenges facing governance structures in those regions, especially relating to poor performance of the judicial institution, both civil and military, and the problems it suffers due to the varying legal references on which it is based, and the weakness of its administrative and professional independence. This has weakened citizens' confidence in the judiciary's role, as it is unable to prosecute and hold accountable those committing documented violations against civilians and military personnel. Judges are exposed to assassinations and threats for rejecting interference from influential parties, and do not enjoy the necessary protection. Not to mention a series of bombings and assassinations in those areas, which in turn increases the state of chaos and loss of security.^[82] As well as other problems relating to the civil status of IDPs: the civil registry reports to the local councils, but it is electronically linked to Turkey. The original domicile of the IDP is not mentioned in the cards granted by the Civil Registry Secretariat, it only mentions the region where he resides. With time, this may pose a real demographic danger.

As all these problems and difficulties prevent the construction of a governance system with unified and effective authority in areas run by multiple opposition parties, with essential supported from Turkey and based on her security and political requirements. They pose complex challenges related to the future of local residents of those areas, whether original inhabitants or displaced. The population explosion in a society of mixed backgrounds, and their existential concerns stemming from a fragile stability, constitutes one of the biggest challenges in light of deteriorating living conditions and the largest number of IDP camps. The ambiguity of how the political solution will look also raises the suspicions of the population regarding demographic change as a result of the conflict, and they fear they will pay the price for any solution that does not lead to regime change, or that pave the way for dividing Syria, at the expense of their return to their homes from their displacement locations.

[82] - North Syria Courts..Judiciary is victim of corruption and threats - Al-Arabi Al-Jadid - January 24, 2021 - <https://bit.ly/3yEBF8x> Last seen 11/3/2021

Topic 4

Role of Real Estate Policies in Changing Demographic Identity



Spatial and living environments constitute an essential element of demographic identity, because the identity of the place is the standard indicator for linking human needs, in terms of safety, security, protection and autonomy, to the forms and patterns of spatial and urban organization, and the resulting personal perceptions and material characteristics provided by structures in order to adequately meet those needs.^[83] This indicator, always present in urban philosophy and a basis for analyzing problems and challenges facing population environments, helps us read the profound changes that affected the identity of places in Syria during the war. It is undeniable that widespread destruction caused major distortions in that identity and that is the prominent feature of the problem. However, another feature, no less serious, becomes more apparent, the more we trace the impact of HLP policies and procedures followed by the regime in practical steps taken in many urban areas in Syria, which have changed fundamentally from what they were before the war, to what they have become due to destruction and displacement. Besides this, the entirety of HLP laws issued by the regime during the war contain much that requires challenging for legitimacy - and this has been covered by many studies. It is worth revealing their threat to the identity of those places, in the role of the regime's HLP laws and regulatory schemes in obliterating the original identity of the places and bringing about a radical change in the urban environment and social relations that they were built upon.

I: The Danger of HLP Laws on Property and Housing Rights

Since its inception in the mid-1940s, the modern Syrian state inherited the legislative and customary framework which, during the Ottoman era, regulated types of public and private land ownership, and property ownership documents (Tapu). After the establishment of the Civil Registry during the French Mandate (1923 - 1946), it was limited to transactions that take place within written legislation, and did not include customary and informal transactions. After the Civil Code was issued in 1949, this law played an important role in dividing the types and conditions of possession and ownership, and determining issues of sale, rent, use, easements, and other rights relating to real estate and movables.^[84] One of the most prominent challenges that successive Syrian governments faced after independence was finding mechanisms for a national response to housing problems, in light of growing population density and land redistribution and reclamation. Nationalization laws and agrarian reform were a reflection of the socialist trends that prevailed in the 50s and 60s, to bridge the disparities between landowners and capital owners on the one hand, and the rest of the people on the other hand, although the method of applying these trends raised many problems in their implementation.^[85]

[83] - Spatial identity of the housing environment in Iraqi architectural trends - group of researchers - Department of Architecture, University of Mosul - <https://www.iasj.net/iasj/download/d3f516353a2e00c3> Last seen 12/3/2021

[84] - Brief note: Housing, Land and Property in the Syrian Arab Republic July 2016 - HOUSING LAND AND PROPERTY / HLP / - <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/final-nrc-syria-hlp-briefing-note-arabic-may-2016.pdf> Last seen 13/3/2021

[85] - - For more information review: Peasants of Syria - 2014 - by Hanna Batatu, issued by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies

Hafez al-Assad assumed power in 1970, and problems of irregular housing increased throughout the years of his rule, with the absence of urban and real estate policies to address the worsening issue, due to the existence of multiple legal, judicial and administrative authorities which regulate issues of ownership, tenure and housing. HLP problems multiplied with the issuance of many legislations, laws and procedures, which failed to build a unified real estate system; rather, they often provoked real estate disputes and deprived large groups of official and decent housing. The threat of the HLP policies has become tangible during the conflict between the regime and the Syrian people. On the one hand, the regime used the methodology of destroying rebellious areas, vacating them of residents, targeting agricultural lands, and preventing farmers from working in them and benefiting from their crops. On the other hand, it issued a package of HLP laws, regulatory schemes, and judicial, security and administrative procedures, all of which constitute blatant violations of HLP rights. We will consider their grave effects on the rights of millions of IDPs and refugees, and everyone the regime considers beyond its control, as well as the serious repercussions that could face demographic identity in general.

1 Seizure and Confiscation Mechanisms

Under the cover of laws that violate Syrians' rights, such as anti-terrorism laws and the Terrorism Court, amendments to Military Service Law, and others, the regime is using them as tools to prevent large groups of Syrians from disposing of their rights to their property, through decisions to seize movable and immovable funds and confiscate them without any legal reason.

Anti-Terrorism Law No. (19) of 2012 is the most dangerous of those laws that provide "legal cover" for seizures and confiscations. The Anti-Terrorism Law defines confiscation in its 1st Article as: "the permanent deprivation of movable and immovable property, and the transfer of its ownership to the State by virtue of a court ruling." This definition is taken as general and comprehensive regarding all movable and immovable funds, whether they are used to commit a crime or not, which means the punishment is for the person and not the crime. Precautionary seizure is "placing the debtor's money with the judiciary, to prevent him carrying out any legal or material act that would distance him or his earnings from the general guarantee owed to the creditor." ^[86]

Human Rights Watch had documented the Syrian authorities' use of vague language in the anti-terror law to criminalize a large segment of the population, with pretexts such as: to provide humanitarian assistance, record human rights violations, and protest peacefully, even when they are not accused of any crime. In addition to fundamental flaws in this law, and its lack of respect for the right of the accused to a fair legal trial. Law No. 22 of 2012, applicable to the Terrorism Court, showed that the manner in which the provisions of the law are implemented

[86] - Salih Malas, Zainab Masri - A legal weapon for collective punishment.. Syrian laws violate the property of absentees - Enab Baladi - 31/1/ 2021 - <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/453998> Last seen 15/3/2021

of the law are implemented, including targeting the families of persons whose names are on the list, constitute collective punishment and violate property rights.^[87] Legislative Decree No.63 of 2012 gave judicial police, during investigations for crimes of internal and external state security as well as crimes under the “Anti-Terrorism Law”. the right to address the Ministry of Finance in writing and request that necessary precautionary measures be taken against movable and immovable funds of the accused, which is a clear violation of the principles of litigation and rights of the accused, Since the decree does not allow for appeal, and people are not notified that their names are on the list.^[88] The decree violates the right to property, which is protected under Article 15 of the Syrian constitution, by allowing the government to confiscate the properties of individuals without due process of law.

Furthermore, Legislative Decree No. 31 of 2020, regarding provisions for exemption from military service and settlement fees, falls within the mechanisms of seizure and confiscation adopted by the regime. According to this decree, the Directorate for Recruitment, as stated by the head of the Exemption Branch in early February 2021, can confiscate the funds and properties of anyone who reaches the age of 42, whether inside or outside Syria, if he does not perform military service or pay settlement fees. If he has no property, the property of his family and relatives will be seized, even though this violates the Syrian constitution which provides for the protection of property rights. The previous Military Service Law of 2007 required conditional confiscation of properties of those who had not paid settlement, and it was subject to a court decision. The decree also allows the Ministry of Finance to immediately confiscate the properties of individuals and sell them without notice or the opportunity to object to the decision.^[89] We can estimate the large numbers of those fleeing military service, who are included with their families to have their properties confiscated; they are estimated at about half a million, according to leaks by the Syrian website Zaman al-Wasl, which published lists of deserters. Implementing the many property laws issued after 2011, the regime has seized thousands of lands and properties belonging to Syrians. One example was in November 2019 when they confiscated 10,000 properties, mostly in Damascus countryside governorate, based on Circular No. 346 issued by the Ministry of Local Administration, in which it instructed to expedite the confiscation and transfer of property for the benefit of the state.^[90] This increases the numbers of those listed for precautionary seizure and confiscation decisions, as the regime claims most of them were involved in “terrorist acts”. Not to mention deserters, who are estimated at tens of thousands every year; Deputy Minister of Finance Bassam Abdel Nabi announced in September 2019 the precautionary seizure of movable and immovable funds against 10,315 people, for that year only. ^[91]

[87] - Syria: Confiscation of Suspects’ Family Assets – Report by an NGO Human Rights Wach 16 July 2019 <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2019/07/16/332103> Last seen 14/3/2021

[88] - Syria: Confiscation of Suspects’ Family Assets – Report by an NGO Human Rights Wach Previous reference.

[89] - Sara Kayali - Syrians evading military service face illegal seizure of their money and property – February 9, 2021 – website, Human Rights Wach <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2021/02/09/377818> Last seen 15/3/2021

[90] - Fadi Shabat - Property laws issued by the Assad regime to serve the Iranian project - Iqtisad Magazine - Date: November 28, 2020 - <https://www.eqtisad.net/news/article/32148/> Last seen 16/3/2021

[91] - - Salih Malas, Zainab Masri - A legal weapon for collective punishment.. ..Syrian laws violate the property of absentees - previous reference

Another measure restricting property owners from disposing of their properties is Circular No. 4554 of 2015 issued by the Prime Minister, which includes cases that require prior security approval, namely: Selling real estate or space (houses - shops) in regulated or unregulated areas, which means that the property cannot be disposed of without prior security approval. ^[92]

2 Mechanisms for Dispossession of Property

During the last decade, the Syrian regime issued many real estate laws and decrees, whether related to HLP rights, urban planning and regulation, or to the civil registry and real estate sales. All of them are employed to complement seizure and confiscation mechanisms, to persist in actions of dispossession and theft of property, which directly affect the rights of millions of displaced persons, refugees, detainees and forcibly disappeared persons. These laws and decrees reveal the regime's use of policies to reorganize irregular housing areas, almost an expropriation of these areas by administrative authorities, to change the demographic identity of their residents. This is clear from the following indicators:

■ Employing property laws and decrees to dispossess millions of displaced Syrians and refugees of their properties: Legislative Decree No. 66 of 2012, Law No. 23 of 2015, Law No. 1 of 2018, and Law No. 10 of 2018. We find that these laws, especially the latter, pose great complications and difficulties in proving ownership for those owners in the regulatory areas to be created with these decrees and laws, issued while half of the Syrian people were displaced abroad. Not to mention a significant portion of them lost their deeds during the war, as well as another significant portion, especially those who are wanted, in the hundreds of thousands, afraid to appoint relatives or lawyers to represent them in procedures to prove ownership. These laws also circumvent property owners' right to legal objection according to fair and just procedures, because the time limits and the method of forming objection committees are nothing more than a mere sham with no guarantees for objectors to defend their rights. Additionally, these laws raise the ceiling for free deductions, which are determined by administrative units to provide basic services (roads, parks, commercial markets, car parks...) in return for the material and moral benefit that the property owner obtains when his property falls within regulatory areas. ^[94]

■ Exploiting laws to remove all new and old irregular buildings, in the absence of owners of irregular homes and properties: This is the purpose of Legislative Decree No. (40) of 2012. The danger of Law No. 3 of 2018, concerned with removing ruins of damaged buildings, resulting from natural disasters or other, is that it permits the demolition of entire,

[92] - See official website of the Prime Minister - <http://www.pministry.gov.sy/> Last seen 17/3/2021

[93] - Real Estate Ownership and the Constitution (research paper for the Syrian Lawyers Association in cooperation with the Legal Experts Team) Syrian Lawyers Association - 10 April 2020 - <https://bit.ly/3yEln-LS> Last seen 17/3/2021

[94] - Decrees and laws affecting property rights in Syria. Get to know them - Enab Baladi 16/6/ 2020 <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/393648> - Last seen 17/3/2021

intact and undamaged property areas, because they are subject to the law; as well as the short deadlines given to remove rubble and start demolition procedure: 30 days. The rights of irregular property owners who built on public or private lands is limited to taking the ruins of their homes, and the value of these irregular buildings and facilities is not included within the owners' rights. ^[95]

■ Depriving owners of their properties and homes, by expanding acquisition operations: Law No. 23 of 2015 granted administrative authorities the right to apply Investment and Real Estate Development Law No. 15 of 2008 to irregular areas, as well as the right of expropriation when the irregular property is collective. It also stipulated for free deduction for "public benefit", just like other real estate laws that preceded it. This is similar to Acquisition Law No. 20 of 1983, which granted the right to all state public authorities, including the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, to forcibly own any property under the pretext of public interest. ^[96]

■ Depriving property owners of fair compensation for their properties that have fallen, or will fall, under regulatory areas: This is evident in the different forms of compensation and how standards are applied in accordance with real estate laws and decrees. We find that Legislative Decree No. 66 of 2012 provides for unfair compulsory distribution, and gives property owners three options: to allocate sections, or to contribute to the establishment of a joint stock company in accordance with the Companies Law, or to sell in public auction. According to Paragraph B, Article 28, Law No. 10 of 2018, in the event that owners of regulatory sections make any gains from modifications to the plans of their sections under the provisions of Legislative Decree No. 5 of 1982 and its amendments, and if this results in an increase in the section's area, then the administrative unit is entitled to collect the equivalent of 50% of the interest earned as a result of the increase, in accordance with provisions of Legislative Decree No. 98 of 1965. ^[97]

Many property owners believe that the actual compensation they may receive via assessment committees may not exceed at best 20% of the actual value of their real estate, taking into account the inflation of the Syrian Pound. Even those granted alternative housing under Paragraph A, Article 45 of Legislative Decree No. 66 of 2012, which stipulates that alternative housing shall be secured within a period not exceeding four years, as in the case of Basateen Al-Mazzeah and Kafr Sousa residents, have not received this alternative housing despite nine years passing since their properties entered regulatory areas. ^[98]

■ Facilitating ownership and housing procedures for foreigners in various Syrian regions: The amendments approved by the People's Assembly in February 2021, regarding the

[95] - Real Estate Ownership and the Constitution (research paper for the Syrian Lawyers Association in cooperation with the Legal Experts Team) Syrian Lawyers Association - April 10, 2020 - previous reference

[96] - See Expropriation Law No. 20 of 1983 - published on the website of the Syrian Prime Minister

[97] - See details of Law No. 10 of 2018 - published on the website of the Syrian Prime Minister

[98] - Habib Shehadeh - "Houses of Illusion": Decree 66 reneges on its promises and displaces Syrian families - Daraj Website - March 11, 2020 - <https://daraj.com/40886/> Last seen 18/3/2021

amendment of Foreign Ownership Law No. 11 of 2011, led to a lifting of restrictions that prevented foreigners from owning more than one apartment per family, and gave foreign owners the freedom to dispose of their property before two years had passed since acquisition of ownership, without referring to the Ministry of Interior, in addition to other amendments. While some see that these amendments aim to encourage real estate investment in Syria to supplement the bankrupt state treasury, others suspect that they serve Iranian, Afghani and Lebanese militias, and complete the plans for demographic change in Syria. Among recently issued laws through which the regime is trying to provide new resources, is the Property Sales Tax Law No. 15 of 2021 which provides for amending tax based on what it calls the “current value of real estate” via specialized committees, rather than approving the price that the seller sets or as estimated by specialized real estate offices. ^[99]

In addition to all of the above, properties were robbed and seized by security branches, army units affiliated with the regime, supporting militias, and the so-called shabiha. These crimes were not only committed by the Syrian regime, but the vast majority of military factions and militias fighting in Syria adopted this approach to varying degrees. There were also many property sales and purchases with forged sales contracts, exploitation of the absence of an owner, and loss or damage of title deeds, as according to research conducted by the Norwegian Refugee Council, only one out of five Syrian refugees is still in possession of title deeds.

Thus, between the hammer of seizure and confiscation laws, and the anvil of laws negatively affecting HLP rights, the regime continues to strip millions of absent Syrians (refugees, IDPs, detained or forcibly disappeared) of their property rights, whether by preventing their disposal or by confiscating them.

II: Role of Regulatory Schemes (Yarmouk Camp as a case study)

Regulatory schemes issued by the administrative authorities, based on real estate laws and decrees which are mostly an expanded version of Decree No. 23 of 2015, show that they are not merely regulatory, engineering and technical operations within the scope of reconstruction, but are more a practical application of the regime’s efforts to change the original identity of dozens of residential areas affected by these schemes. This is especially the case in areas that played a prominent role during the revolution in fighting the regime. A report issued by the Real Estate Investment Authority in 2018, (one of several bodies, institutions and companies specialized in the real estate system), announced the creation of 25 property development areas, distributed mainly in the governorates of Aleppo, Hama and Homs.

[99] - - For details of property sales tax law: published on the website of the Syrian Arab News Agency SA-NA - <http://www.sana.sy/?p=1347631> Last seen 18/3/2021

Additionally, the report continues, the Authority is studying 20 new property development areas, and looking into 23 irregular housing areas. We found that all of these areas were rebellious communities outside the regime's control. ^[100]

This research takes the regulatory scheme for Yarmouk camp as a standard case for comparison, in order to shed light on the roles of many regulatory schemes issued by regional and local administrative authorities in other Syrian areas covered by regulatory and re-organization schemes.

HLP Rights Violations under Regulatory Schemes

Yarmouk camp is located south of Damascus and is the largest Palestinian camp in Syria, established in the mid-1950s on land belonging to the city of Damascus. At that time, the Syrian government leased it to the General Authority of the Palestinian Refugee Foundation, its affiliated official body, who in turn distributed this land in "numbers" designated for housing refugee families. Because of the camp's increasing population, further increased by Syrian families going to live there, the camp expanded over the following decades to its west and south. Its population in 2011, according to local statistical estimates, was nearly 300,000 people, of whom Palestinian refugees constituted 75-80%. ^[101] During the conflict in Syria, the camp was bombed by regime warplanes at the end of 2012, causing the displacement of a large proportion of its residents, while thousands more who did not leave their homes were subjected to a cruel siege by regime forces with the cooperation of affiliated Palestinian militias. This continued from mid-2013 until the regime and its Russian ally, in April and May 2018, launched a major military attack on the camp under the pretext of fighting ISIS. It turned out that the aim of that attack was to destroy large parts of the camp, which ISIS had already left in agreement with the regime to the outskirts of Suwayda Governorate, and the displacement of the rest of the civilian population to northern Syria. ^[102]

On June 29, 2020, Damascus Governorate issued its "general regulatory scheme for the Yarmouk district" No. 3/298, in conjunction with a new regulatory scheme for the Damascus neighborhood of Qaboun. Both areas were previously included in reorganization projects based on Law No. 23 of 2015, which stipulates for "regulating preparation of land for construction, in accordance with the general regulatory scheme and the detailed regulatory scheme, which come under regulatory schemes approved for one of two methods: division by the owner, or regulation by the administrative authority". ^[103]

[100] - - See report of the General Authority for Investment and Real Estate Development, 2018, available at: <https://bit.ly/3aFnE0T> Last seen 18/3/2021

[101] - Statistics by civil organizations and charities active in the camp in 2011, contradicting many official statistics that included camp residents with residents of surrounding neighborhoods.

[102] - - Mahmoud Zaghmout - What is the fate of Yarmouk camp after a year of regime control - Action Group for Palestinian Syrians - May 23, 2019 - <https://bit.ly/34hvF7w> Last seen 19/3/2021

[103] - Memorandum issued by group meeting on HLP at the invitation of TDA, around the danger of Yarmouk camp regulatory scheme - July 21, 2020

The seriousness of the new regulatory scheme for Yarmouk camp lies in the extent of explicit legal violations of in rem and acquired property rights, and the grave effects on the geography and identity of the camp and rights of its residents, by highlighting the violations involved in the scheme, which appear in the following aspects:

■ Fragmentation of the camp's HLP unit

The General Company for Engineering Studies, a "governmental entity" which studied and prepared the scheme after the approval of the Technical Committee in the Governorate of Damascus and the Regional Committee, ignores an established fact: Yarmouk camp, since its beginnings in the mid-50s and during its urban expansion since, has been one property unit belonging to the city of Damascus, confirmed by the camp's regulatory plan issued in 2004 and duly certified, which defines the old camp and areas of expansion to the west and south as a single property area which includes all neighborhoods and streets of the camp, named in the 2004 plan. The new plan denies these existing realities, and instead of working to consolidate them in a way that preserves the identity of the camp, it attempts to erase them in an unfair and arbitrary manner, by reclassifying property in the camp and dividing it into three areas because of the damage it suffered in the war. This effectively fragments the camp's property unit in order to prevent its reconstruction according to its old plans, which shows precisely the plan for camp in the form of regulatory maps and regulation of all construction and permits from the municipality. ^[104]

■ Changing the Spatial and Urban Identity of the Camp

This can be seen in changing the name of Yarmouk camp to Yarmouk "area" as it appears in the scheme, and dividing the entire area of the camp spread over 220 hectares into three areas (significant damage 93 hectares - medium damage 48 hectares - minor damage 79 hectares) and including the significant and medium damage areas under the reorganization. This necessitates the elimination of more than 60% of the camp's land to be transformed into residential towers, commercial markets and public parks. Meanwhile, we notice the plan is misleading with regard to securing the return of 40% of camp residents to their homes located in the minor-damage area. ^[105] Allocation of this area for implementation under the scheme's third phase, which will likely exceed 15 years for all three phases, is a veiled message to camp residents still inside Syria to search for alternative permanent housing outside the camp and perhaps outside Syria, considering that a large proportion of minor-damage area residents have already left Syria in the displacement operations. Therefore, the return of even 40% of camp residents is practically unattainable.

[104] - From issues raised in a statement by the General Union of Palestinian Engineers concerning the regulatory scheme for Yarmouk camp

[105] - Ayman Abu Hashem - The danger of Yarmouk camp regulatory scheme in violating property rights of its residents and changing its demographic identity - Syrian Lawyers Association - 15 July 2020 - <https://bit.ly/3umcPHg> Last seen 19/3/2021

■ Violating Rights of Housing and Property Owners

The new regulatory scheme considers residences registered with the General Authority for the Refugee Foundation with a residence permit are structures and debris not covered by property ownership laws, because they were built on lands leased from the state to a state-affiliated entity, i.e. the refugee foundation. With this approach adopted by the scheme, every refugee with a residence permit whose house is partially or completely destroyed is not entitled to claim alternative housing, despite the fact that the number of houses registered in the foundation's records is the highest of the camp's total housing units. In fact, this perception applies to the rest of the housing units, with multiple means of proving ownership in the camp (judicial rulings - judicial agency - title deed - sales and purchase contracts certified by Ministry of Finance). There is also no clarity in the scheme regarding how to treat neighborhoods which do not fall under reorganization, especially those that have suffered great damage, if we even assume there is a plan to restore or rebuild those houses.^[106] The scheme also violates rights of shop owners on the west side of Yarmouk Street, under the pretext of expanding the street for 40 meters, to establish new commercial markets and remove existing shops which had a great financial and economic value for the camp and on a wider scale for the city of Damascus.

■ Compensation which is more of an acquisition

With regard to compensation for property owners included in the reorganization, the regulatory scheme is based on Decree No. 5 of 1982, which limits compensation depending on the area of construction site, not the areas of the buildings built on the site, and distributes them in shares among the owners. Director of Technical Services in Damascus Governorate stated that "based on Legislative Decree No. 5 of 1982, Yarmouk camp and Qaboun residents will not get alternative housing under regulatory plans for the two areas, but regulation shares."^[107] This is remarkably unjust to owners in the areas subject to reorganization, as the rate of compensation will not exceed a quarter of the property's value. Indeed, with price differences and severe inflation of the Syrian Lira, and calculating compensation according to rates much lower than actual property value, this compensation may not even exceed 10 % in the best of cases. Additionally, there is a requirement to buy shares covering the value of the property, up to three times the amount of the specified compensation, if the person entitled to compensation considers buying a house in the same property where he lived before regulation. There are also the high costs of securing building permits, the financial burden of which is beyond the means of the camp's poorer families, presenting an opportunity for real estate companies, major speculators, and brokers to control prices and reap huge profits.

[106] - Previous reference.

[107] - Memorandum issued by group meeting on HLP at the invitation of TDA, around the danger of Yarmouk camp regulatory scheme

■ Difficulties in Proving Ownership

There is a close connection between restrictions imposed by Urban Planning Law No. 10 of 2018 on property ownership verification procedures, and the new scheme for Yarmouk camp. This connection is evident in depriving large groups of Palestinians and Syrians displaced from Yarmouk camp of the possibility to prove ownership in light of security requirements set by Law No. 10 and the impossibility of safe return for those the regime considers opposition,^[108] especially since nearly half the camp's residents are outside Syria. Security restrictions on those remaining in Yalda, Babila and Beit Sahem neighborhoods adjacent to the camp, reveal the extent of pressures and obstacles intending to vacate the camp of its residents and not, as the regulatory scheme claims, to provide conditions for residents' return.

Due to reactions from camp residents, who strongly rejected the new scheme when the threat to their properties was exposed, and due to the huge number of protests, over 12,000, submitted by the deadline for objection, Resolution No. 344 was issued on 27/7/2020 ^[109] delaying implementation of the scheme and forming a quartet committee to discuss the Yarmouk camp file. Meanwhile, Samir Jazaerli, member of the Executive Office of Damascus Governorate, confirmed that "the regulatory scheme for Yarmouk camp has not been canceled and is still being studied by the Council of Ministers, and no instructions have been issued." He added that "the quartet committee formed for this had taken upon itself the return of Yarmouk residents and set three conditions for their return to habitable homes: that the building is intact, that property ownership is proved, and the necessary approvals are obtained."^[110] In reality, however, people still greatly fear the regime intends to continue implementing the scheme; legitimate fears reinforced by the fact that people have not been allowed to return to their habitable homes despite 3 years having passed since the regime regained control over the camp. Security approval is also used as an obstacle facing return to the camp. This reduces the chance the camp will survive the regulatory schemes that have affected several Syrian regions.

[108] - previous reference.

[109] - Fathi Abu Suhail - Why did Damascus Governorate wait to implement the Yarmouk regulatory plan? - 2/9/2020 - <https://bit.ly/2RD98Q9> Last seen 20/3/2021

[110] - The regime confirms the regulatory scheme of Yarmouk camp was not canceled - Zaman Al Wasl - March 29, 2021 -

<https://www.zamanalwsl.net/news/article/135918/> Last seen 20/3/2021

Topic 5

The Effects of Demographic Variables on Refugee Return



This research takes Syrian refugees as part of a human and sociological tragedy caused by war, with refugees forced to leave their homes and deprived of the right to return to their country. It also investigates transformations caused by Syrian displacement and dangerous future effects on the Syrian demographic identity. The issue of Syrian displacement has, according to reports by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, become the main indicator in recent years of the sharp increase in the number of refugees worldwide.^[111] At the national level, it is the most significant problem in addressing the profound disruption in the social structure, and a major challenge when considering Syrian requirements, and considerations of host countries. More issues appear the longer displacement continues, and it affects the lives of refugees in relative and varying forms. The research attempts to examine its dimensions and the complications arising from it, such as the nature of Syrian asylum, contexts affecting the relationship of refugees to their homeland, and challenges of return from the perspective of realistic and alternative options.

I: The Specific Nature of Asylum in the Syrian Case

A refugee as defined in Article 1 of the 1951 International Refugee Convention is: “a person who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality or former habitual residence and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country or is unwilling to return to it for fear of persecution”.^[112]

The description of refugee applies to approximately 6.6 million Syrian refugees, distributed according to the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees among 126 countries. Syrian refugees constitute 8.25% of the global refugee population,^[113] and 83% of Syrian refugees are concentrated in Arab countries neighboring Syria. Turkey hosts 3,600,000 Syrian refugees, followed by Lebanon 910,600, Jordan 654,700, Iraq 245,800, and Egypt 129,200 refugees. The rest of the refugees are spread over different parts of the world.^[114] Germany, which has received the largest number of Syrian refugees in Europe, registered more than 740,000 asylum applications by 2019. Other estimates note that the actual number of Syrian refugees exceeds those registered with the UNHCR, and is closer to 9 million, as indicated by the presence of a significant part of them in countries where the international protection system does not apply, and where they live under residency systems.

[111] - The political repercussions of Syrians migrating to Europe - Arab Democratic Center for Strategic, Economic, and Political Studies - July 18, 2018 - <https://democraticac.de/?p=5528> Last seen 21/3/2021

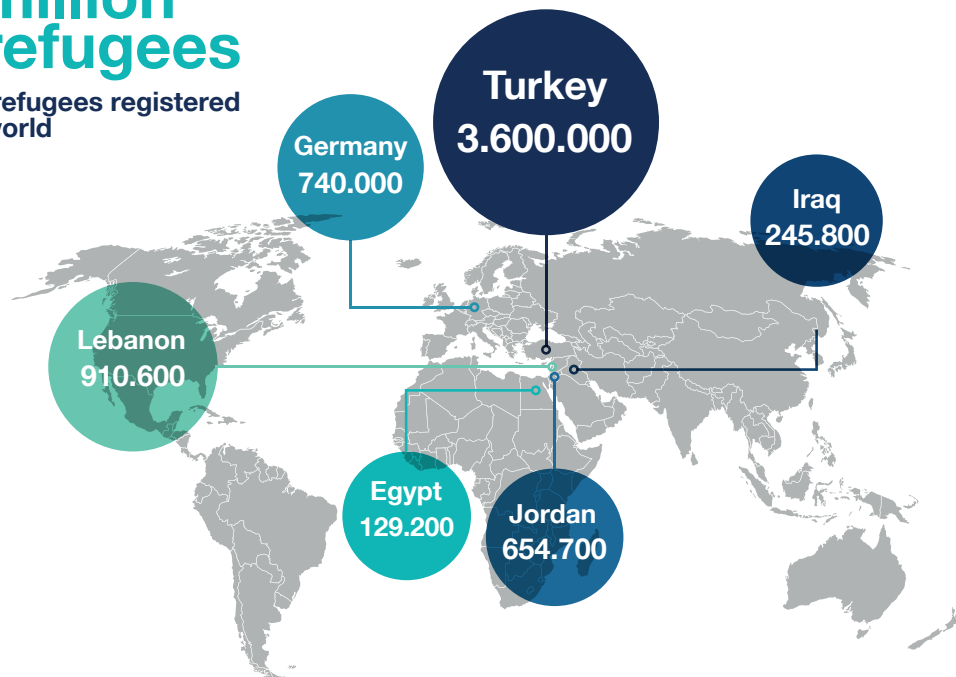
[112] - See 1951 International Refugee Convention - UNHCR website - <https://www.unhcr.org/ar/4be7cc27201.html> Last seen 22/3/2021

[113] - Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees - June 18, 2021 - <https://www.unhcr.org/5ee200e37.pdf> Last seen 22/3/2021

[114] - For more information, see numbers recorded in reports by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

6,6 million refugees

Total Syrian refugees registered around the world



Syrian refugees constitute 8.25% of the global refugee population

8,25%

83% of Syrian refugees are concentrated in Arab countries neighboring Syria.

83%

The nature of Syrian asylum stems from the nature of a bloody and violent conflict which has forced millions of Syrians to leave their country on the one hand, and from international response mechanisms with problems and complications on the other hand. This has made the issue of Syrian refugees, in terms of number of victims and major challenges in dealing with it, the worst refugee crisis the world has witnessed since World War II. Which leads us to address its most prominent features, identified through the following data and facts:

1 Long-Term Asylum Problems

The waves of Syrian refugees began when the regime adopted a security and military approach in dealing with the popular movement since its beginnings in 2011, and the intensification and spread of the conflict to most of the Syrian territories. As the war continued over ten years, the number of refugees was increasing in an unprecedented manner in Syrian history. In contrast to precedents of asylum which arose from conflicts or wars during a short or specific period of time, the mass displacement of huge numbers of Syrians occurred over a long period of time, during which all factors of survival and social resilience were gradually destroyed.

This situation, according to the UNHCR definition, is called protracted asylum: “a situation in which 25,000 or more refugees of the same nationality live in exile for five or more consecutive years in a particular country of asylum.” [115]

Most studies and questionnaires that examined causes and motives for Syrian asylum emphasize that the majority of refugees fled the dangers of war; death, arrest, siege, poverty, hunger, deprivation, and all forms of persecution were the main reasons and motives that pushed them to seek refuge, via illegal escape routes and dangerous crossings. These causes and mechanisms of mass escape also reveal levels of profound change that asylum has caused in the multifaceted structure of Syrian society, and the extent of structural imbalance that has affected demographic identity - as previously indicated in Topic 2 of this research. [116]

On the other hand, the long-term refugee situation carries collective fears of weakening relations between refugees and their areas of origin, and of what physical and spiritual separation can cause them: growing feelings of loss, a conflict between nostalgia for a place and its lingering memories, and the requirements to adapt to countries of asylum. These concerns and problems pose social, cultural and psychological challenges whose effects vary among generations of refugees, and their impact is compounded by lack of a Syrian national reference that organizes ranks of refugees within communities and civil institutional frameworks that work in unison. Despite long years, the refugees still lack a representative body that unifies their voice and demands, and unites them on clear and specific vision and programmes. Most affected by this problem is the Syrian generation that was born and raised outside its homeland, dispersed among miserable and isolated camps in neighboring countries, or in other countries learning their languages, customs and lifestyles. If the asylum continues for longer, it is highly expected that their bonds with their motherland will weaken further. It is a challenge that relates to this generation's awareness of its original identity, or the identities it acquires from the environments in which it lived.

2 Different Methods of Dealing with Refugees

greatly affected by the positions of those countries towards the Syrian issue. Also directly reflecting their lives are economic and living standards, and the level of civil liberties in host societies. The general view by those countries and societies of refugees was they are an economic, security and social burden, which almost overshadowed their tragedy, and in many cases this was exploited by some governments for domestic or foreign political reasons.

[115] - - Megan Hindu - International Center For Migration Policy Development (ICMPO) - Linking refugee protection and development - January 2019 - https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/AR_Bridging_Refugee_Protection_and_Development_AR_WEB_FINAL.pdf Last seen 23/3/2021

[116] - For more information, see results of survey in the study: - In the Absence of the Choice to Remain or Return - previous reference

There are many examples that reveal major flaws in bodies supposed to protect the rights of Syrian refugees. Lebanon is one such example of the wide range of violations against refugees, most notably: attacks on camps, in some of which tents were burned, as well as arbitrary arrests and detentions by state agencies which a number of refugees were subjected to, in addition to Lebanese authorities forcibly returning some refugees to Syria, even though this is a clear violation of international humanitarian law which prohibits refoulement.^[117] In other cases, refugees have seen negative impacts on their legal and living conditions when there is a change in the political system in the host country. In the period following the coup against Morsi in Egypt in mid-2013, entry procedures for Syrians to Egypt were restricted, and official media launched campaigns inciting against Syrian refugees, which resulted in some of them being subjected to physical and verbal attacks, and others to arbitrary detention.^[118]

Turkey, which receives the largest number of refugees, has applied the temporary protection system since 2014, and is considered the best relatively in terms of education, health and service rights, compared to other countries neighboring Syria. However, using Syrian refugees has turned into a polarizing card played by both the ruling and opposition parties, especially during elections in Turkey during the past years, and as a pressure card in Turkish-European relations, which indicates politicization of the refugee file based on political considerations and interests.^[119] Other countries dealt with Syrian refugees as foreigners based on their residency laws, not applying due protection systems as refugees in accordance with refugee rights enshrined in international laws. Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Thailand were subjected to campaigns of persecution and detention in immigration prison centers (LSD) under pretexts of their visas expiring and residency conditions violated.^[120]

In European countries where Syrian refugees arrived, they enjoy legal and civil protection systems better than the rest of the host countries. However, they faced problems of another kind: difficulties of integrating into environments different from their own customs and culture. Recently, there have been decisions demanding the return of refugees to their areas; Denmark, for example, has deprived Syrian refugees of residence permits, considering the situation in Damascus to have become "safe".^[121]

[117] - A number of Amnesty International reports, the latest of which is - Lebanon: Torture of Syrian refugees arbitrarily detained on terrorism-related charges - March 23, 2021 <https://bit.ly/34kKsOQ> Last seen 26/3/2021

[118] - Report issued by Syrian Human Rights Committee on conditions of Syrian refugees in Egypt - August 13, 2013 - <https://www.shrc.org/?p=16659> Last seen 29/3/2021

[119] - - Adnan Abdul Razzaq - Syrians in Turkey: Firewood to an Election Fire - May 17, 2018 - <https://bit.ly/3volKcs> Last seen 2/4/2021

[120] - Madarnews - On Charges of "Asylum" .. Syrians and Palestinians detained in Thai prisons - October 28, 2018 - <https://bit.ly/3bTOWAI> Last seen 2/4/2021

[121]- - - Made For Minds UNHCR: Denmark's attempt to deport Syrian refugees is unjustified 9/4/ 2021 <https://bit.ly/3umxKty> Last seen 10/4/2021

Such examples reveal non-compliance of many host countries in implementing protection of Syrian and Palestinian-Syrian refugee rights, in contravention of protection mechanisms stipulated in the Refugee Convention and human rights laws. Certain considerations in some countries, and their domestic and foreign policies, have had a clear impact on the methods of dealing with this humanitarian issue of vulnerable and marginalized groups who lack adequate legal and civil guarantees.

3 Loss of Skills and of Workforce

The Syrian refugee community is full qualified, energetic and experienced people in various scientific, professional, economic and creative fields; one of the advantages recognized by host countries, especially those whose laws and policies help them benefit from accepting and nurturing these abilities and from their positive addition. ^[122] There are many success stories of refugees who have offered distinguished ideas, projects and contributions in countries where they sought refuge. On the other hand, it is difficult to estimate the loss of their Syrian homeland as a result of the vacuum caused by the departure of the most educated, qualified, experienced and vital Syrian groups, as well as nearly half of Syrian workers, who represent the main workforce. In Turkey alone, there are about 750,000 Syrian workers among the 3.6 million refugees, and although only 35,000 of them work legally, they have become a significant productive force in the Turkish economy. This prompted parliamentarian Ahmet Sorgun to say: "Without the presence of the Syrians, industry in Turkey would have ended." ^[123] The gravity of this phenomenon does not end at the collapse of the Syrian economy during the war, but also poses the greatest challenges to economic reconstruction and early recovery after the end of the war. It is remarkable that despite military operations having ended in the largest Syrian cities such as Damascus and Aleppo for the last three years, this has not stopped large numbers of youth escaping and seeking opportunities in other countries amid continued security concerns, escaping military service, unemployment, inflation, corruption, poverty and destitution which have risen to their highest levels. ^[124] This will have repercussions on Syrian society in general, both short and long term, especially to hinder rebuilding human resources, in the event stability is restored and development launched.

[122]- - Germany - Five years later.. Where has integration of refugees into the labor market come to - Mohajer News - 3/7/2020 - <https://bit.ly/2RLdqox> Last seen 11/4/2021

- Turkey: Syrians take the lead in establishing 10,000 companies – Al-Arabi Al-Jadid – December 13, 2018 - <https://bit.ly/34pKfdb> Last seen 11/4/2021

[123] - Syrian labor in Turkey - Turkey in Arabic - December 13, 2013 - <https://bit.ly/3bW9ZIL> Last seen 12/4/2021

[124] - For more information: Ziyad Al-Mubarak - Migration of Syrian Youth - A field study in the city of Damascus - Harmoon Center - January 15, 2019 - <https://www.harmoon.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Syrian-Immigration-Youth.pdf> Last seen 13/4/2021

4 The Ordeal for Refugees and Types of Responses

Arab, regional and international responses have not lived up to the magnitude and enormity of the Syrian refugees' tragedy, whether in terms of humanitarian aid, securing the most basic necessities of a decent life, or in taking serious political steps to address their ongoing tragedy. The suffering is not limited to the millions of refugees crowded into camps scattered in neighboring countries, but also millions more who suffer humanitarian and life problems in countries that are already facing economic and living crises. Local and international reports which monitor the situation of refugees in the most miserable host countries such as Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan and Sudan, indicate a steady decline in various aspects of living, education, health and services, which have pushed refugees to the brink of collapse after the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.^[125] Nevertheless, the ability of international institutions to cover necessary needs is still far below the required level. In light of these facts, it is no longer easy to talk of the resilience of the Syrian family/clan. Topic 2 has already discussed "Repercussions of Displacement and Asylum on Community Ties".^[126]

This sounds alarm bells regarding continued international failure to deal with this great plight and the accumulation of social and psychological problems and diseases, the effects of which will extend for decades, and will affect the most marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as women and children. It is no secret that the Syrian refugee crisis is not the first time the international system has failed in addressing refugee issues in the region, the Palestinian refugee issue is a clear example of this; however, the latter occurred in different Arab and regional circumstances which exacerbated its complexities and obscured its humanitarian dimensions, due to purely political considerations. This imposes a legal and moral responsibility on all parties concerned with the Syrian refugee crisis to uphold the principle of human solidarity over everything else, and to find just and equitable solutions to their cause, that harmonize between improving their humanitarian conditions and their safe and voluntary return to their country as soon as possible.

Based on this specificity that characterizes Syrian asylum, we can determine the dangers to the demographic issue, as refugee communities and their cause are a key indicator in formulating the features of future society, which will reshape the Syrian identity in the period following the end of the conflict.

[125] - Syrian refugees hard hit as a result of the economic downturn caused by the coronavirus - UNHCR - 16 June 2020 - <https://www.unhcr.org/ar/news/briefing/2020/6/5ee8baa34.html> Last seen 14/4/2021

[126] - See, Diagnosing Social Destruction - previous reference

II: Difficulties and Challenges Facing the Return of Refugees

Several international resolutions issued regarding the Syrian issue emphasize the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their areas of origin, most notably the Geneva Communiqué issued by the United Nations on 30/6/2012, which included the establishment of a transitional governing body, which could create a neutral environment in which the transitional process would move forward, and Resolution 2254 of 2015, Paragraph 14, which “emphasizes the urgent need for creating conditions conducive to the safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their areas of origin, and rehabilitation of affected areas, in accordance with international law, including applicable provisions of the Convention and Protocol on the status of refugees, taking into account the interests of countries hosting refugees”.^[127] Without a doubt: closing return routes to refugees and IDPs is an unchanging reality, in parallel with a block in the horizon for political solutions. The painful irony is that the obstacles that prevent doors opening to the return of refugees have become more rigid and complex the longer the asylum process continues. This is what we will discuss regarding difficulties and challenges that have accumulated during years of asylum, and the impact of occurring transformations on the refugees’ relationship with their homeland, while the conflict continues in multiple forms and fronts, as follows:

1 Lack of a Safe and Neutral Environment

Several political and legal opinions have clarified the concept of a safe and neutral environment, which narrows and expands depending on the nature of the experiences. In my opinion, the clearest and most accurate is the opinion that links the presence of a safe, calm and neutral environment with all the legal, security and political conditions that must be met in a state so that people can achieve their will, which should be the state’s reference and source of authority.^[128] Unsurprisingly, in the Syrian experience the unmet conditions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of refugees is just one of the many obstacles to a safe and neutral environment. The policies of the Syrian regime, in all military, security, governmental and developmental aspects, experienced by Syrian society during the revolution, have generated causes and motives for individuals and groups to flee, spurred on by proxy wars in which Syria has become a playground. The lack of security, a basic need of life, has led millions of refugees to flee their homeland, and international estimates warn that the refugee crisis will continue in the coming years. This, in turn, is reflected in a weakened desire on the part of refugees to return, according to results of a survey conducted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan in July 2018. Although 76% of people included in the survey hoped to return to their homeland one day, 85% of them stated they did not want to return in the next 12 months, 11% were hesitant and 4% would like to return.^[129]

[127] - See the United Nations Security Council website. <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ar/content/resolutions-adopted-security-council-2015> Last seen 15/4/2021

[128] - Abdul Razzaq Al-Hussein - Safe, Quiet and Neutral Environment in Syria: Concept and Obstacles - Harmoon Center - March 17, 2019 - <https://www.harmoon.org/reports/archives-15679/> Last seen 16/4/2021

[129] - See, 4th Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees Perceptions and their Desire to Return to Syria - July 2018 - <https://www.unhcr.org/ar/5c4435a04.pdf> Last seen 16/ 4/ 2012

In the latest UNHCR survey in 2020, the percentage of those unwilling to return rose to 89%, and a study prepared with the support of the UNHCR in Turkey showed an increase in the number of Syrian refugees unwilling to return. According to the study, 16.7% of refugees in Turkey said in 2017 they would not consider returning home at all, and in 2019 this percentage rose to 51.8%, which is a very significant increase. ^[130] I have the responses of a wide sample of refugees in four European countries, as part of a survey conducted by TDA on the thorny question of return, as follows: Do you seriously consider returning to live in Syria if the situation becomes stable?

66.1% said no, 33.9% said yes, and 56.6% of those who said yes said that the basic condition for their return is a process of political change in the country which includes changing parts of the authority. The second largest of those willing, 34.5%, chose another option which is to "stop military operations."^[131]

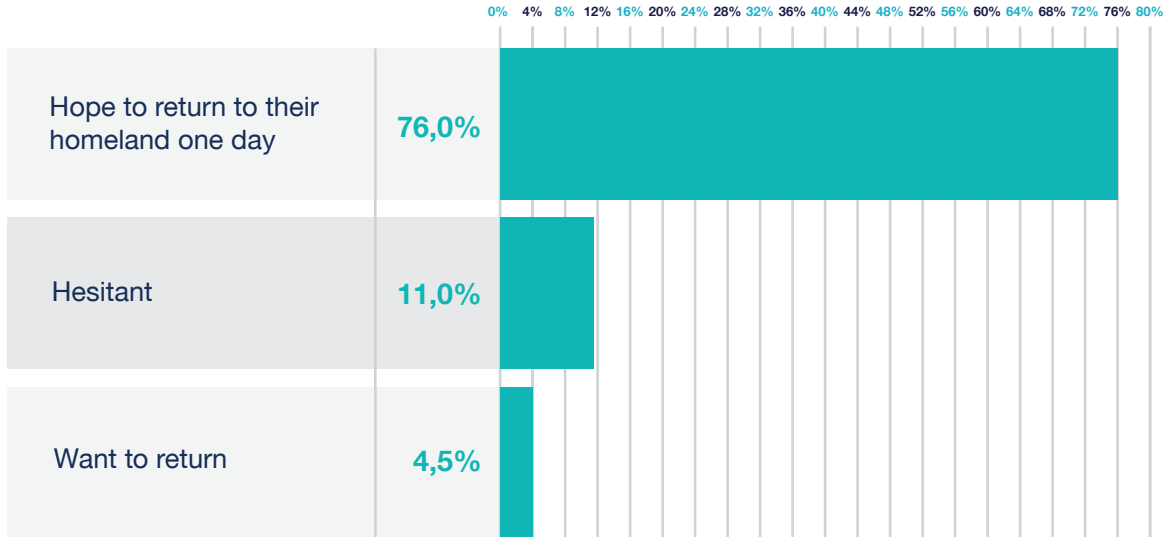
These research results indicate that the voluntary and safe return of refugees remains dependent on a condition; as long as the image embedded in the minds of the majority of refugees is one of a destroyed, stricken homeland, which lacks the minimum necessities of life, plagued by corruption and chaos, a hotbed of human rights violations, arrests and enforced disappearances, stripping millions of their civil and political rights, robbing their property and lands, and changing the identity of their original places of residence. The regime's structure and repressive policies constitute an environment that repels remaining Syrians, and not an environment that attracts the return of refugees. The angry reactions of refugees to the "Return of Refugees" conference sponsored by the regime and Russia in November 2020 in Damascus, ^[132] and their confirmation through popular campaigns under the slogan "Return begins with the Departure of Assad," are a clear expression of the absence of a safe and neutral environment for them to return to.

[130] - Study: 51% of Syrians in Turkey do not want to return to their country - TurkPress website - September 11, 2020 - <https://www.turkpress.co/node/74046> - Last seen 17/4/2021

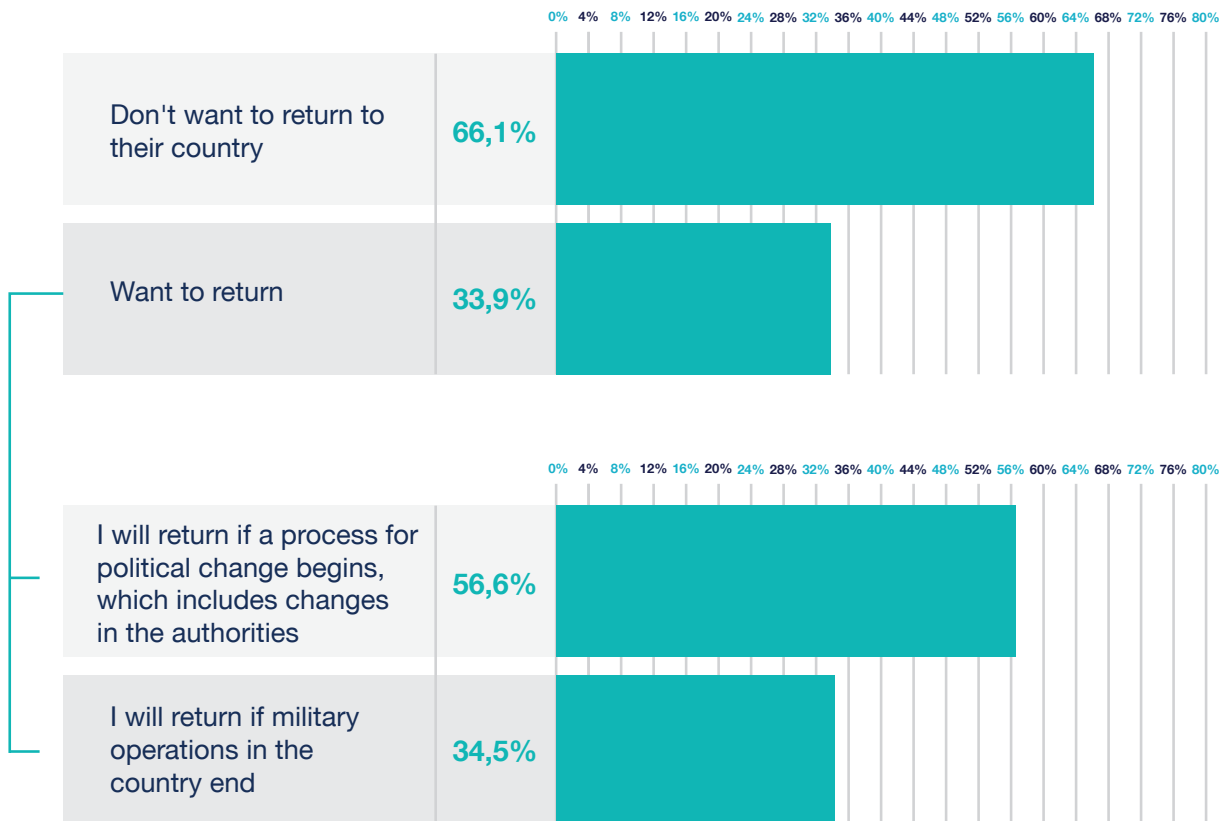
[131] - Between Integration and Return: The Reality of New Syrian Refugees in Europe: A survey of refugees in Germany, France, the Netherlands and Sweden - TDA - January 2021 - <https://tda-sy.org/publications/?lang=ar> Last seen 17/4/2021

[132] - See dozens of civil campaigns in refugee locations under the slogan "Return begins with the departure of Assad."

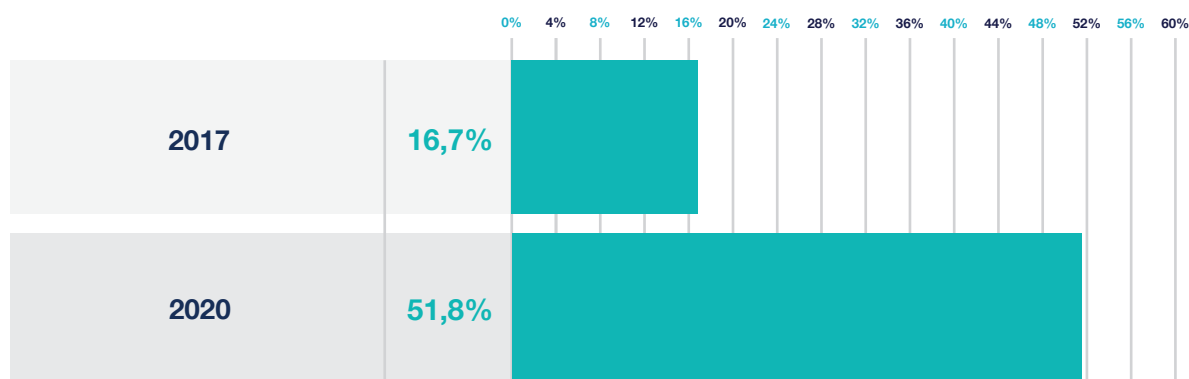
Do you think seriously of returning to live in Syria?



Results of survey conducted in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan by UN High Commissioner for Refugees



Results of an investigative research conducted by TDA with a large sample in four European countries



Percentage of refugees in Turkey who do not think of returning at all

2 Challenges to a Political Solution and Transitional Justice

Several international resolutions have presented a road map for a political solution in Syria, but the faltering political process over the past years has caused much disappointment and despair among refugees. These resolutions, most notably Geneva 1 and others based upon it, state that a political transition must be achieved through a transitional governing body with full executive powers, which creates a new political climate that is conducive to and appropriate for the voluntary and safe return of refugees.^[133] The regime's refusal, together with its allies, to reach a political solution according to international reference, as well as continued regionalization and internationalization of the conflict, were among the biggest obstacles that prevented the path of real change in Syria. The intractability of solutions directly reflected on refugees, and the biggest price they paid for this was the continuation of their ordeal amid waning hopes of returning soon to their homes. For millions of refugees in neighboring countries this shaped additional motivation to search for durable options and solutions that would provide them with the conditions for a decent life outside their homeland.

In other words, the longer the prospect of a political solution is blocked, the more difficult the challenge of return, especially since transitional justice, whose requirements can only be met through a comprehensive political transition process, is in itself one of the most important legal, moral and societal criteria for Syrian refugees to judge the success or failure of a political solution. If we look at precedents of transitional justice and its impact on refugees, we find it is the paradigm on which the level of political transition is measured.^[134]

[133] - For more information, see Geneva Communiqué 1 of 2012, Resolution 2118 of 2013, and Resolution 2254 of 2015

[134] - Juan Pablo Terminillo - Dictatorships, Refugees, and Reparations in the Southern Cone of Latin America - Bulletin on Forced Migration - March 2014 - <https://www.fmreview.org/ar/crisis/terminiello> Last seen 20/4/2021

Therefore, given the large-scale violations in the Syrian case, with large numbers of refugees as victims of these violations, and the deep societal divisions that the war has caused, even assuming that the political process does move forward and steps for political change do begin, it is not possible to regain refugees' confidence in returning to the country as a prioritized option, unless a credible judicial context emerges that works to achieve justice and equity, reparation for the damage they have suffered, and restoration of their property rights, after all the property laws and procedures the regime has taken in order to seize them, as well as the extent of progress in achieving national reconciliation, and their level of satisfaction with compensation if it proves impossible to restore those properties as they were. Also related is the level of seriousness in restructuring government institutions to ensure the establishment of a democratic system that guarantees their rights and interests. All of these mechanisms and others within the concept of transitional justice will remain the main challenges facing the return of refugees.

3 The Challenge of Stability and Early Recovery

Conflicts in general reveal gaps in governance systems, and there is no doubt that Syria is one of those countries that have suffered the most from bad governance, in which the regime had a monopoly in every way, one of the main reasons for the outbreak of the popular movement. Since early recovery is linked to promoting quality and accountability in humanitarian response operations, the Spher project on humanitarian partnership during and after conflict has identified a set of standards required to provide shelter and stability, and enhance ways to provide water and sanitation, personal hygiene, child protection, food security and nutrition, health and education; economic recovery, and market analysis.^[135] In light of this, it is the responsibility of governance institutions in the transitional period to work in a manner that meets the needs of Syrians, and to provide stability and early recovery indicators determined by those standards. For refugees, such a challenge is not met with promises or optimistic announcements, but with facts and data, which meet criteria for stability and recovery.

For example, many refugees no longer have homes to return to, due to destruction and seizures by various methods, as we discussed in the previous topic, making them hesitant even if conditions for safe and voluntary return are met, while they wait for confirmation of rehabilitation and reconstruction projects that might provide them with shelter and adequate housing. This challenge is part and parcel of social development, which is correlated in the sense that social development increases as security and stability increase.^[136] Time is important in shaping refugees' convictions that the path to stability and recovery is proceeding at a steady pace; on the other hand, whenever the pace of change slows, refugees who wish to return remain hesitant.

[135] - Juan Pablo Terminillo - Dictatorships, Refugees, and Reparations in the Southern Cone of Latin America - Bulletin on Forced Migration - March 2014 - <https://www.fmreview.org/ar/crisis/terminiello> Last seen 20/4/2021

[136] - Muhammad Haj Bakri - A study on Safe Environments - Syria Hope website - February 15, 2021 - <https://bit.ly/2TaPZFq> Last seen 17/4/2021

4 Consolidation of Alternative Options

Many international precedents of asylum, in particular the tragedy of Palestinian refugees for the similarities between both refugee communities, present overlapping challenges dictated by the transformations that occur in the lives of refugees when time goes on and the possibilities of return become bleak. What has the most influence on the refugees' relationship with their country is a national, educational, cultural and social system that affects the strength of their sense of belonging and preserves the national and human identity of the refugee. Such a system contributed to the Palestinian refugees' connection to their historical narrative and commitment to their right to return to their homes, for generation after generation. The presence of an international agency specialized in providing them with relief and assistance, UNRWA, played an important role as an international witness to their plight.^[137] In the Syrian case, there is a fear that the relationship of Syrian refugees with their motherland will weaken as there is no such system, and the bodies that claim to represent their cause are dispersed and weak. This raises fears and concerns that the younger generations of refugees will disconnect from their homeland, especially those born and raised under the laws and cultures of their host countries. This in turn leads to consolidate the alternatives for their return, i.e. full integration into host communities that encourage it, or refugees searching for permanent stable environments in other countries.

There is also the human security of refugees and availability of seven determinants that it exists, as per human development reports, as follows: "Economic, environmental, personal, social, political, food, and health security" play an increasing role in determining the choices before refugees, as humans entitled to enjoy them in the quest for a safe and dignified life.^[138] It does not seem that Syria is capable, in the foreseeable future, of ensuring human security for those living in the country, or for the refugees displaced from it. This suggests that more refugees will flow to escape the misery and suffering in their homeland. It is a well-known fact that challenges of an existential nature, as in the Syrian case, leave refugees with nothing but the priority to survive, and wait for conditions to change and provide opportunities for a free choice.

The most serious of those difficulties and challenges facing over half the Syrian people, now refugees and IDPs, is that they could be unable to return to their homes with the aforementioned property laws and procedures being an obstacles to their return, pushing them to search for alternatives and settling in their countries of asylum and areas of displacement. This will have major repercussions on the demographic identity of the Syrian society, which is under unprecedented human, societal and identity attrition in Syrian history.

[137] - Researcher's contribution to a workshop on the importance of institutional organization in the Palestinian refugee experience - organized by TDA on 4 and 5 June 2020

[138] - Refugees in the Middle East - Center for the Study of Refugees, Displaced Persons and Forced Migration / Yarmouk University - 2017 -

http://rdfm.sc.yu.edu.jo/images/Publications/proceeding%2023-8-2017_0.pdf Last seen 18/4/2021

Conclusions of the Research

■ Topic 1, on the variables of demographic identity in Syria before the outbreak of the revolution, showed there is research importance in focusing on demographic shifts in order to understand imbalances and distortions affecting the demographic structure, and the role and focus of the Syrian regime, throughout both Assad rules, to consolidate its foundations of authority both internally and externally, at the expense of its responsibilities to achieve comprehensive and balanced development, on top of its failure to manage the characteristics of Syrian diversity. These factors have weakened the complex Syrian identity and prevented the formation of a collective one. This explains the climate that led to the outbreak of the Syrian revolution in 2011, a population explosion with developmental, economic and social dimensions, completely inseparable from the political, human rights and civil demands that characterized the revolution from the outset.

■ The study sheds light on the factors and reasons that led to the decline of many vital indicators showing the low levels of human development in Syria, the exacerbation of structural imbalance in the relationship between growth and development, and deterioration of the living conditions of the middle class of whom large groups moved to join the impoverished groups of society. The regime's neglect by successive governments of irregular housing in major cities, expanding along with the expansion of urbanization, turned these housing areas into isolated population islands that bear the identities and characteristics of their original communities, in turn consolidating social and population isolation within their new surroundings. Before the revolution, the regime used irregular housing for its goals of militarizing and securitizing society, as part of its plans to re-engineer the demographic structure for purely authoritarian purposes.

■ The repercussions of displacement on the social fabric, in Topic 2, revealed the levels of social disintegration in social units (immediate and extended family/clan) throughout the conflict. Qualitative samples of respondents, both IDPs and refugees, showed the complex type of suffering they experienced in displacement and asylum, and how loss of home and social environment has affected their sense of geographical dispersal and instability. Not to mention harsh living conditions in the areas where they were displaced to or sought refuge in.

■ The samples also indicated changes in family roles, divisions in family and clan authority, difficulties facing refugee families, and the emergence of social and cultural confusion amid differing laws, culture and values in their host communities from the norms and customs they carried with them from their original environments. We also notice the effects of displacement and asylum on communication between social units, as their members are dispersed over multiple geographical areas, and how division in political positions have impacted social relations, and how continuous waves of displacement and asylum have caused massive population displacement, resulting in a disruption in demographics.

■ The study also looked at general indicators of destroyed structures and the severe effects on societal fabric, most importantly multi-faceted poverty, as poverty in Syria has progressed during the war from general poverty to extreme poverty to absolute poverty, reflecting extreme deprivation and the inability to meet basic needs. This, in turn, compounded chronic social problems from which Syrian families of all classes have suffered, especially women, children and the elderly.

■ General indicators discussed in the study also showed the serious effects of flourishing corruption, crime and organized networks. During the war, attempts at profit-making have been present in all military and security activities: spread of arms trade, kidnapping for ransom, trafficking in people and human organs, prostitution networks, money laundering, drug manufacture and smuggling, forgery of official and real estate documents, electronic crimes, and other types of organized crime. The spread of these networks has been detrimental to social security, and has deepened the disintegration in societal fabric.

■ Topic 3, on the links between reconciliation agreements and demographic change, showed that there are direct causal links between them, as the evacuation of targeted areas was not used solely as a temporary war tactic, but rather with the aim of implementing the regime's plans to impose a new demographic composition that matches its perceptions of a "useful Syria", while using sectarianism blatantly. This is in addition to Iran's efforts, through its militias deployed in Syria, to empty entire population areas, to secure its control over land supply routes from Tehran to Baghdad, and consolidate a demographic character under a sectarian cover that guarantees it long-term social and military bases.

■ The comparison between existing forms of governance in spheres of influence inside Syria, and the quality of policies and programs in each of them, has illuminated the different forms of administration in these areas, from the political, military, security and civil aspects, based on the different vision and objectives of each party regarding the area under its influence. Its effects are no longer confined to population groups distributed over the three areas of influence, but have also affected their relationships with and views of each other. Its danger is that it paves the way for separating Syrian groups from each other.

■ Governance policies followed by the regime in areas under its control have resulted in deepening identity rifts within these segments of society, and severing bonds between Syrians in its own areas of influence as well as those in other areas. This exacerbates the rupture of societal fabric among its members. This destroys characteristics of the demographics and produces a dissonant mixture of identities and classes, which will hinder the reparation of structural problems facing demographics.

■ The policies through which the Autonomous Administration is trying to impose a federal model of governance and administration, based on a monolithic ideological and political concept, and to impose a social reality of a specific orientation over the entire population, have revealed the effects of these policies on the pluralism that characterizes population structure in the eastern Euphrates region, in terms of managing contradictions in identity, deepening demographic separation between Syrian groups, and preparing to unilaterally impose separatist options.

■ The governance in opposition areas indicates the nature of a crisis in authority that comes from multiple existing forms, and the resulting conflict and disorder in managing the affairs of residents of those areas. Population explosion in a society with mixed environments, and existential fears resulting from a fragile stability, constitute the biggest challenges in light of deteriorating living conditions and the huge number of IDP camps in these areas. The ambiguity of the scene regarding a political solution also raises the suspicions and fears of this population that they will pay the price for any solution that does not lead to regime change, or that divides Syria at the expense of their return to their homes and the areas from which they were displaced.

■ Topic 4, on the role of real estate policies in changing the demographic identity, explained the package of real estate laws and regulatory schemes adopted by the regime, and their inherent danger in erasing and obliterating the identity of the original places, and bringing about a radical change in the urban environment and social relations upon which the characteristics of that identity are built. By investigating the connection between these property laws and the practical impact of the regulatory schemes on which they are based, it is possible to anticipate what effects and repercussions they will have on the future of demographic identity in Syria.

■ The laws issued by the regime during the war constituted flagrant violations of property and housing rights, used as mechanisms of seizure and confiscation, dispossession and robbery. Between the hammer of confiscation laws, and the anvil of laws negatively affecting HLP rights, the regime continues to strip millions of Syrian absentees (refugees and IDPs) and disappeared persons (detainees and forcibly disappeared) of their property rights, whether by seizing them and preventing disposal, or by confiscating them.

■ On the other hand, regulatory schemes issued by the administrative authorities, based on a number of property laws and decrees, show these are not merely regulation, engineering and technical operations that fall within the scope of reconstruction, but a practical translation of the regime's efforts to change the identity of original residences in dozens of regions affected by these schemes. This is especially the case in areas that played a prominent role during the revolution in fighting the regime. The study takes the regulatory scheme in Yarmouk camp as a case study to show the seriousness of the new regulatory scheme of this camp, examining its explicit legal property violations and considering its grave effects on the geography and identity of the camp and rights of its residents.

■ Topic 5 on the effects of demographic variables on the return of refugees, focuses on the nature of Syrian asylum, most prominently: It is classified as a long-term asylum, according to criteria of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The different ways in dealing with refugees by host countries also indicate the failure of many of these countries to implement a system of protecting the rights of Syrian refugees, in contravention of protection mechanisms stipulated in the Refugee Convention and human rights laws. Certain considerations in some countries, and their domestic and foreign policies, have had a clear impact on their methods of dealing with the humanitarian cause of vulnerable and marginalized groups who lack adequate legal and civil guarantees.

■ The impact of the loss of skills and manpower as a result of asylum is also evident, as well as its short and long-term effects, especially when it impedes rebuilding of human resources for Syrian society. The study also described the characteristics of Syrian asylum, manifested in the disproportion between the enormity of the refugee tragedy and the extent of Arab, regional and international responses, which did not live up to the scale of the tragedy. Based on that specificity that characterizes Syrian asylum, we can determine its danger on demographic transformations, with refugee communities a key indicator for the future of the Syrian identity, in the period following the end of the conflict.

■ The difficulties and challenges for return of refugees are lack of a safe and neutral environment. This study was based on the conclusions of several local and international research and opinion polls, which confirm a steady decline in the percentage of refugees wishing to return, according to the positions of refugees regarding voluntary and safe return, as Syria has become an environment that repels those Syrians who remained, and not an attractive environment for return and stability. Also among the most prominent challenges are political transition and transitional justice; as the study shows, the more the prospect of a political solution continues to falter, the more difficult returning becomes, especially since transitional justice can only be met through a comprehensive political transition process. It remains contingent on refugees regaining their confidence in the possibility of returning to their country, if transitional justice mechanisms are implemented in a satisfactory and constructive manner.

■ The challenge of stability and early recovery is inseparable from social development, which increases the more security and stability increases. All of this remains dependent on the end of the war and a start towards a political solution in earnest. The narrowing options for refugees' return, with more doors closing and a prolonged period of asylum, is worsened by a weakening relationship between Syrian refugees and their motherland. This is due to the weakness of the bodies that claim to represent their cause, and their lack of a unified national reference that defends their interests and rights and strengthens their sense of belonging to their homeland. This, in turn, makes alternative options more viable, such as full integration into host communities that encourage it, or the search for permanent stable environments in other countries, or a prolonged wait with a sense of anxiety and loss that consumes their lives.

Recommendations

- Attention: As the Syrian demographic identity has undergone profound changes and transformations during the conflict, it would not be possible to discuss building a new Syria without finding effective national and international integrated policies and mechanisms that address the divisions afflicting demographic and social structure in Syria, as a result of demographic change operations which have impacted large population blocks.
- It is imperative to draw the attention of the international community to the danger of societal collapse in Syria, with the continuing war and a just political solution out of reach, as well as escalating destruction of living conditions for millions of Syrian IDPs and refugees.
- To form a clear Syrian vision of how to stop the dangerous repercussions resulting from differing multiple forms of governance in areas of influence, and to highlight the demands and rights of Syrians in those areas, and applying pressure to end violations against civilians by military and security forces in control.
- To apply political and legal pressure to stop the policies of the regime and its allies behind property laws and regulatory schemes, used as methods to dispossess and rob millions of absentee Syrians of their properties and homes. These are war crimes because they are linked to forced displacement and demographic change, and this also calls for international criminal prosecution of all regime officials involved in issuing and implementing those laws, plans and related procedures.
- To activate the role of Syrian civil society in defending the rights of property owners, IDPs and refugees, by building a Syrian center that collects documents and deeds proving ownership, and documents them in a unified national registry, and includes people who have lost papers that prove and preserve their property rights by mapping their homes into their original neighborhoods and areas.
- Improving the forms and levels of humanitarian response, in a way that contributes constructively to stability and early recovery. It is important that Syrian civil society organizations work in a coordinated manner to request from all international institutions active in humanitarian response to prioritize projects needed to support the humanitarian and social resilience of refugees and IDPs.
- To fill the void created by the absence of a Syrian national authority that can bring together the Syrian diaspora, by working to build such an authority, based on a national strategy; so that it expresses the rights, interests and aspirations of refugees, and plays a key role in mobilizing their efforts and developing a culture of belonging and an insistence on their right to return to their homes whenever the conditions for a safe and voluntary return are met.

- To enhance a civil and human rights culture among refugees which enables them to organize their demands in their host countries, so that they are not dealt with as vulnerable and marginalized groups but in accordance with their rights guaranteed in international laws, and to coordinate with humanitarian and human rights institutions in those countries to create an effective safety net that defends their rights.
- To establish a Syrian observatory for oral histories, in order to document and record refugees' memories of their homeland and experiences in their countries of asylum, in order to preserve their identity from being lost with time, and for the younger generations to inherit the stories of their elders about their homeland, so they are not lost with the passing of the old generation.
- The importance of stressing that political transition is correlated with transitional justice, especially as restoring refugees' confidence in a return to Syria will depend to a large extent on the success of criminal trials against perpetrators, and on restoring their property or obtaining fair and appropriate compensation if destroyed beyond recognition.

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