

# policy gap analysis

EMERGENCY  
RESPONSE,  
RELIEF & HUMANITARIAN  
WORK  
BUILDING a Legal  
FRAMEWORK & INSTITUTIONAL  
REHABILITATION  
RECONCILIATION & SOCIAL  
COHESION  
REHABILITATION  
& SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Policy Gap Analysis:

An Examination of the Policy-based Gaps Hindering  
Syrian Arab Republic's Peacebuilding Process

Report Summary



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life





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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

## The National Agenda for the Future of Syria (NAFS) Programme

### Policy Gap Analysis:

An Examination of the Policy-based Gaps Hindering Syrian Arab Republic's  
Peacebuilding Process

### Report Summary



United Nations

Beirut, 2020

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### **Report Summary**

#### **Introduction**

Since the end of phase I of the National Agenda for the Future of Syria (NAFS) Programme, and the publication of the Strategic Policy Alternatives Framework (SPAF) document in 2016, the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic has undergone many structural changes. In addition to the loss of lives, which the United Nations stopped estimating in 2016 after the total exceeded 400,000 deaths, these changes have involved massive destruction in infrastructure and the services sector. The local and national economy is deteriorating, while the war economy keeps worsening. There is tremendous and continuous loss in human and developmental potential in terms of the number of people killed, maimed and displaced. While the rate of human capital rate has declined, the rate of child labour has increased. Inequality of opportunity and developmental disparity are both on the rise. Laws and decrees have been issued that are tantamount to eviction for Syrians who have been displaced or have sought refuge in other countries. Human rights violations and gender-based violence by all sides of the conflict have also increased. The economy of the country has suffered greatly.

The NAFS Programme was launched to aid in the establishment of a participatory framework for all Syrian stakeholders to discuss options and guideline scenarios for the difficult post-conflict period. During phase I of the Programme (2012-2016), a platform for dialogue was established, aimed at allowing Syrian experts and stakeholders to develop the basic principles of a future vision for the Syrian Arab Republic 2030, in addition to scenarios and policy options to prepare for the post-political agreement phase. Phase I also produced the SPAF document, which is considered its most comprehensive technical product. The document addresses post-conflict policies by examining the challenges and opportunities within the nine development nexuses adopted by the programme, which were organized to reflect the main priorities of the peacebuilding and State-building phases.

Launched in 2017, phase II of the NAFS Programme carries the dialogue forward with a broad cross-section of Syrian stakeholders, to ensure their ownership of the work done in phase I and make sure that the alternatives proposed in the SPAF document remain connected to the ever-changing reality on the ground. Certain tools can be used to achieve this, such as policy gap analysis.

Policy gap analysis is considered part of the programme's inclusive and sustainable methodology for peacebuilding and reconstruction, which also includes local needs assessment and initiatives that shore up stability. All of this documentation ultimately aims at updating the Syrian Arab Republic 2030 SPAF document. Within such a framework, the goals of the policy gap analysis are the following:

- (a) Identify policy gaps between an agreed-upon baseline year (2015) and the future vision for the Syrian Arab Republic 2030 outlined in the SPAF document, providing recommendations for addressing such gaps, and updating policy options connected to the peacebuilding phase, as per the principles of the future vision;
- (b) Ensure that the SPAF document, which was completed in 2016, remains up to date with developments on the ground in the country;
- (c) Provide policy recommendations for local needs assessment, which would closely examine specific priorities in selected issues and sectors, as per a specific geographical distribution;

- (d) Provide recommendations for the development of guidelines to create stability initiative models at the local level.

The report on Policy Gap Analysis: An Examination of the Policy-based Gaps Hindering Syria's Peacebuilding Process juxtaposes the 2030 vision brought forth in the SPAF document and the current status on the ground. In this context, it addresses the policy gaps that exist between vision and current status and makes policy recommendations aimed at closing said gaps. The report does this under the scope of four nexuses, which are as follows: emergency response, relief and humanitarian work nexus; building a legal framework and institutional rehabilitation nexus; reconciliation and social cohesion nexus; and physical and social infrastructure rehabilitation nexus.

The four nexuses are, for the most part, inherently interlinked; therefore, it is important to stress, for the purpose of the summary, that none of these nexuses, in addition to the policy gaps and recommendations made for each, are meant to be received independent of one another. The report also touches on some of the many ways in which these nexuses overlap wherever this is not obvious.

### **Nexus 1: Emergency response, relief and humanitarian work**

#### **Vision**

The preparation and coordination of the return of Syrian refugees should rely on comprehensive and fair social, economic, legal, and institutional strategies in order to ensure the safe, dignified and voluntary return of all those who wish to return to their home country.

The lives of those affected by the conflicted should be safeguarded and their survival should be ensured. Their rights should be granted and their needs should be met, which include the following:

- The right to life in dignity;
- The right to receive humanitarian assistance;
- The right to protection and security;
- The need for water and food;
- The need for poverty alleviation;
- The need for health care;
- The need for sustainable job opportunities and sources of income.

This process will include achieving food security, providing access to water and employment, alleviating poverty, seeking just and comprehensive socioeconomic development, resolving the issues connected to democratic representation and property rights, strengthening and ensuring the representation of women and young people in relevant governmental structures, upholding human rights, and enabling civil society organizations.

During the peacebuilding phase, a new social contract should be established and achieved. This would take place through a consensual process for restructuring governance and rehabilitating political institutions to ensure that everyone is represented. Such a process would also serve to eliminate the effects of the war economy and reform public administration.

#### **Current status**

Syrians have been the victims of systematic violence and mass displacement, both inside the Syrian Arab Republic and in neighbouring countries as refugees. 5.5 million persons have fled to neighbouring countries; 6.6 million have been displaced within the Syrian Arab Republic itself. While some have returned to their homes and villages since 2017, for every Syrian citizen who has returned home three remain displaced.

Despite encouragements by Syrian State officials, no tangible incentives have been issued for Syrian refugees to return. The State has offered neither a comprehensive amnesty law for those wanted by the authorities or those who left the country illegally nor guarantees that the property of people will be protected and the creation of job opportunities and other pull factors. Due to distrust in the State, many refugee men fear that returning to their home country would mean losing their refugee status and risk getting trapped under difficult economic and livelihood conditions.

In 2016, humanitarian groups adopted the Whole of Syria (WoS) coordination approach with the aim to lend a lifeline to millions of people, which included the following:

- Food aid was distributed to more than 6 million people every month;
- More than 4 million people collected basic household items;
- More than 10 million people received health care;
- Seven million people received medical treatment;
- More than 8 million people benefitted from water supply and sanitation services;
- One million children were given access to education.

In 2017, people receiving food aid decreased to around 5.3 million per month and fell further to 4.7 million in 2018. Similarly, people benefiting from water supply and sanitation services decreased to 5 million in 2017 and to 2.2 million in 2018. The number of children and young people benefiting from education reached 2.5 million in 2017, while 1.6 million children benefitted from educational services in 2018.

### **Policy gap analysis**

The areas from which most Syrians were displaced, namely, East Aleppo, Homs, Rif Dimashq, Daraa, and Raqqa, have become largely uninhabitable and unsuitable for return due to large-scale destruction of residential buildings, hospitals, schools, and water and sanitation infrastructure.

As a result of factories shutting down and being bombed, the industrial sector has been in decline, with the number of workers in the sector declining by an average of 7 per cent yearly since 2011.

The mass exodus of farmers has had a profound impact on the agricultural sector. At least 33 per cent of farmers have left, seeking stability and better infrastructure and opportunities. This has led to a sharp drop in agricultural and livestock production.

Mass displacement and demographic changes have also affected the non-material aspects of culture. Since living in displacement and asylum makes it very difficult to form local communities in foreign countries, the Syrian cultural heritage is at risk of disappearing.

Many areas in the Syrian Arab Republic have developed a sectarian, religious or political character which they did not have before the conflict. The drastic increase in crimes such as torture, killings, kidnappings, sex trafficking, and rape has created a fear among refugees that they could be persecuted, upon their return, due to their race, ethnicity or religion.

Seven years of conflict have greatly disrupted the civil documentation system in the country. Hundreds of thousands of citizens do not possess valid civil documentation, which prevents them from officially registering births, deaths, marriages, and divorces.

Seventy per cent of Syrian refugees do not possess national identity cards; and the Syrian Government does not recognize refugee registration documents issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Despite the fact that the security situation has stabilized and armed clashes have declined, humanitarian needs have remained high, and increased by 4.9 per cent in 2017 and by 0.03 per cent until August 2018, while funding provided by donors has declined.

Armed clashes and pollution from explosives have constrained the movement of local inhabitants, preventing them from accessing humanitarian aid. Administrative procedures have also considerably limited both the access to and the quality of the services provided. In 2017, only 27 per cent of recipients of joint caravan plans could be reached.

### **Policy recommendations**

Support should continue to be provided to Syrian refugees in asylum to ensure their safe and truly voluntary return. Once refugees start returning at a larger scale, agreements should be made between Governments, international organizations and civil society groups. The following are recommendations concerning this phase of the process.

#### **Meeting needs regarding social services, housing and infrastructure, as follows:**

- Providing refugees with integrated psychological and social support programmes;
- Confronting the issue of sexual violence and support programmes that boost women's resilience;
- Protecting young girls from forced and child marriage;
- Ensuring that children continue to receive a good education through increased funding for education;
- Acknowledging and identifying institutional weaknesses in health care;
- Creating safe databases for the personal data of displaced persons;
- Assessing the extent of the damage and need to rebuild homes, schools and hospitals in the hometowns of those displaced within the Syrian Arab Republic.

#### **Strengthening economic activity, livelihood and professional training, as follows:**

- Giving priority to the collection of data and statistics;
- Achieving benchmarks for decent working conditions, in terms of workers' income, (minimum) wages, gender equality, social and health insurance coverage, work injury compensation, and others;
- Working on long-term reintegration policies for people who were forcibly expelled;
- Reforming the job market;
- Creating insurance institutions;
- Ensuring that none of the companies participating in such economic activities have contributed to, supported or covered up human rights violations.

#### **Strengthening security and social integration, as follows:**

- Protecting those who return;
- Developing mechanisms to prevent any relapse into conflict;
- Providing compensation programmes for those returning;
- Ascertaining the fate of those who were abducted or disappeared forcibly;
- Ensuring the participation of all Syrians in any kind of reform process.

#### **Meeting the needs for water, sanitation and hygiene, as follows:**

- Supplying purified water to damaged neighbourhoods;
- Digging and expanding (non-invasive) water wells in water-poor areas;
- Rehabilitating drinking water infrastructure and sanitation networks;
- Addressing the growing needs of the influx of internally displaced migrants to the north-western part of the Syrian Arab Republic in order to avoid a humanitarian disaster.

### **Meeting needs for food security and shelter, as follows:**

- Meeting the food needs of local inhabitants;
- Addressing the nutrition of young children and infants;
- Ensuring the continued provision of shelter-related support;
- Removing administrative and judicial obstacles that could prevent ensuring the home ownership rights of citizens;
- Reassessing laws and legislation addressing property rights issues;
- Increasing support for projects to restore and rehabilitate partially destroyed homes.

### **Meeting needs for health care, as follows:**

- Increasing primary health-care coverage in communities affected by the conflict;
- Providing health care to people with special needs, especially those with physical disabilities or mental health issues;
- Developing programmes that clearly and specifically care for infants and young children;
- Removing obstacles that hinder the work of Syrian non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

## **Nexus 2: Building a legal framework and institutional rehabilitation**

### **Vision**

The nature of political life must be transformed during the peacebuilding phase. Acceptance of the other should go beyond the practical aspect and be explicitly expressed in the political discourse. Political disagreements represent a natural feature found in all societies, and the role of the peacebuilding phase in the Syrian Arab Republic is to move disagreement from violent conflict to non-violent and productive discourse. The groundwork must be laid for the fundamental rules of the political game on the basis of critical mass consensus within the Syrian society.

A culture of democracy must be developed, political and civil rights upheld, mutual trust between the major political groups renewed, the rule of law re-established, and equality on the basis of citizenship asserted. History reveals a high risk of renewed conflict in countries that have just emerged from one, which is why it is so important to develop policies and practices aimed at bolstering and safeguarding peace and strengthening the legitimacy of the State.

### **Current status**

The internationalization of the Syrian conflict has only intensified it. It turned from a civil and proxy conflict into one of increasingly direct confrontation between international actors. Aside from the countries that have become involved in the conflict through direct military action, namely, the United States of America, Russia and Iran, others also participated by supporting the different sides politically, diplomatically and financially, including European Union and Arab Gulf countries.

The conflict has also led to an increased dependence of Syrians on international organizations and NGOs for economic subsistence and livelihood, which is yet another manifestation of the internationalization of the crisis.

Despite the widespread impression that it is unable to move on this issue, the United Nations Security Council has issued 23 resolutions concerning the Syrian Arab Republic since 2012. With regard to this nexus, the most important one is Resolution 2254, unanimously adopted on December 18, 2015, which was the first to focus exclusively on reaching a political solution and still forms the basis for the United Nations' approach to ending the Syrian conflict. It asserts that the only sustainable solution to the conflict would come from a comprehensive political process led by Syrians themselves. It also calls for the following:

- Writing a new constitution followed by free and fair elections;
- Establishing a unified transitional governing body with full executive powers;
- Ensuring the continuity of Government institutions;
- Guaranteeing equality on the basis of nationality;
- Committing to unimpeded humanitarian access;
- Putting a stop to violence, including arrests, enforced disappearances, torture, and sexual and gender-based attacks, against civilians and civilian infrastructure;
- Ensuring the full participation of women in the political process.

There are a number of countries, the United States and members of the European Union in particular, that continue to impose sanctions on Syrian Government institutions and on individuals connected to them.

### **Policy gap analysis**

The first group of relevant policy gaps for this nexus concerns political governance. Since 2011, the Syrian Government has, in fact, issued or begun to issue a series of laws and reforms meant to organize all aspects of political governance and political life in the Syrian Arab Republic. Since 2015, however, such laws have dwindled in number or stopped being issued completely. This not only reflects the heightened intensity of the military conflict, but also the scarcity of internal political deliberations aimed at resolving the root causes of governance problems.

The second group of policy gaps concerns war and the war economy, in which violent conflict becomes the main source of employment and which funds and benefits from the conflict, further aggravating and perpetuating the conflict in a continuous snowball effect. The amount of destruction that has occurred has also resulted in the emergence of a large number of new practices and laws issued to regulate and guide the reconstruction process. These laws, however, which either directly or indirectly affect almost all Syrians, have been ratified with minimal contribution by the Syrian society, and have raised legitimate fears about the possibility that land could be unfairly seized and Syrians could be deprived of their fundamental rights. In addition, many of these laws often undermine each other, leading to the emergence of a confusing legal apparatus.

The war economy has grown side by side with a number of war-related crimes that must also be addressed, which include the following:

- Human trafficking;
- Smuggling of refugees;
- Kidnapping;
- Recruitment of child soldiers;
- Drug-related crimes;
- Arms trafficking;
- Archaeology-related crimes.

Finally, there is a set of policy gaps concerning administrative governance which are rooted in long-standing issues regarding the State, public administration, public institutions and civil service, the relationship between the central Government and its periphery, and the unequal treatment of different governorates. These issues have been exacerbated by the conflict, which has brought changes to many aspects of administrative governance and the provision of services, with the emergence of local councils, NGOs and foreign donors. Issues regarding centralization and decentralization, and their relation to administrative governance, are at the core of the governance issue in the Syrian Arab Republic, where the administrative structure has always been extremely centralized.

The peacebuilding phase should be used to reform public administration, aimed at enabling it to meet urgent needs.



Public revenue and expenditure systems should be efficient, transparent and predictable.

### **Policy recommendations**

- Developing a comprehensive legal framework for all, which would mean rejecting the zero-sum game mentality of the military conflict (victory or defeat), and working towards a comprehensive process which relies on the consensus of opinions, recognizes the rights of all Syrians of all backgrounds, upholds human rights, and works to empower women;
- Preparing a comprehensive transitional legal framework, as per Security Council Resolution 2254;
- Paying particular attention to the role played by women both as victims of the conflict and as leaders in the peacebuilding process;
- Reviewing and assessing the current situation of the judicial sector, including new judicial institutions that were created as a result of the conflict;
- Repealing laws that undermine the equality of all citizens before the law and encroach on freedom of speech, assembly and political association;
- Addressing the destructive and theft-based war economy;
- Reviewing and assessing the current situation of the security sector, including new security institutions that were created as a result of the conflict;
- Ensuring that security organizations are subject to accountability by civilian authorities and oversight agencies;
- Reviewing and assessing the current situation of the media sector, including new media outlets and organizations that were established during the conflict;
- Re-establishing the National Media Council, ensuring its independence from the executive branch and empowering it to carry out oversight duties in the media sector;
- Determining and organizing priorities connected to social and economic challenges, to urgent needs for goods and services and to infrastructure needs at every level;
- Determining and assessing the capabilities of existing non-State bodies that constitute de facto local administrative units all over the country and developing relationships between such units, the State and major donors;
- Reviewing the administrative arrangements made by public sector entities at every level, including ministries, agencies and institutions; developing a clear and specific plan that describes, in detail, the connections, roles and responsibilities of these entities and the central Government; and appropriately reforming internal governance structures;
- Repealing laws connected to housing, land and property, such as Law No.10 of 2018, which represents a threat to property rights, and replacing them with a national framework that would recognize the rights of all Syrians and address property disputes;
- Reviewing and assessing legal administrative structures in light of the impact of the conflict at every level, namely, governorate, city, town, village, municipality, district and subdistrict;
- Reviewing and assessing de facto administrative units, defined as Syrian non-State organizations responsible for providing goods and services;
- Assessing Legislative Decree No.107 of 2011 as a starting point for decentralization and local administration policies and amending it as necessary to ensure the success of fiscal and administrative decentralization policies.

### **Nexus 3: Reconciliation and social cohesion**

#### **Vision**

The rationale of this nexus overlaps with all of the other nexuses. Social and national reconciliation can only occur once the conflict has ceased and a peaceful political solution that includes and represents all Syrians has been adopted.

National reconciliation is a continuous process that begins with peaceful and democratic national consensus, within the framework of transitional justice, and ends with peace and renewed State-building. The warring parties must take responsibility for the damage that has occurred and fully recognize the rights of those who have been harmed. They must work to mend fences and lay the foundations for a new social contract: one based on justice, equality, citizenship, and a Government of institutions. All Syrians should contribute to reconciliation and to safeguarding peace at every level, with the awareness that, despite the years of tragic conflict, the only opportunity for Syrians to lead a decent life is in moving forward and accepting those on the opposite side.

The reconciliation process will require a great deal of effort and coordination from almost all Syrian organizations and individuals. It will require a foundation of legal procedures, transitional justice, reconstruction, governance restructuring, and security sector reforms. It will also rely on the deep-seated economic, social and historical ties that bind members of the same society to one another. It will also rely on the social contract between citizens and their State, and the role played by State institutions to foster a sense of belonging among citizens. Indeed, the structural and symbolic violence of the conflict has affected levels of social trust, solidarity and cooperation, and has threatened the cultural diversity in many parts of the country.

### **Current status**

Hundreds of thousands of Syrians, especially male breadwinners, have been killed, wounded, imprisoned, and kidnapped, which has left many families without a main breadwinner, amid difficult living conditions and diminishing job opportunities.

Those shocking numbers reflect not only the tremendous loss of human lives, but also the impact all this has had on the country's social fabric. Perhaps one of the most horrific consequences of this silent catastrophe is that it has inflicted lasting damage on the natural societal equilibrium, and created an imbalance in the numbers of men, women and children. It has led to a 20-year drop in average life expectancy, from 75.9 years in 2010 to 55.7 years in 2014, in addition to the issues connected to displacement described in the first section of this chapter.

Human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, and the Syrian Network for Human Rights, have documented the arrest or disappearance of more than 95,000 people since 2011. The Syrian army and State security services are considered responsible for approximately 85.9 per cent of these violations, with no less than 81,652 cases of enforced disappearance at their hands since 2011, including 4,387 adult women and 1,546 children (no information is available on the children who were born in detention centres). Armed opposition groups and terrorist organizations, particularly the so-called Islamic State of Syria and the Levant (ISIL) and Al-Qaida, bear responsibility for the remainder of these violations. Not one step can be taken towards reconciliation as long as the issue of detainees and the forcibly disappeared remains unresolved.

Since the beginning of the conflict, sexual violence has grown to become one of its most destructive features and a systematic method of warfare and spreading terror. In March 2018, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic reported documented cases of sexual assault, rape and torture in nearly all Syrian governorates. And although rape has also been used against men (in round-ups, ground sweeps and arrest campaigns), women and girls have been those most exposed to sexual violence, often being sold as sex slaves. All of this is taking place amid the near-complete absence of accountability.

Apart from women, children have suffered a great deal from the horrors of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. Large numbers of them have been killed or detained, and many have been displaced or have become refugees. And although many of them have fled the battlefields, they have been destined to a life filled with memories of destruction, death, exile, and the loss of family members and friends. This has made them vulnerable to mental illness, most prominently in the form of recurrent nightmares, aggressive behaviour and

loss of the ability to speak. The psychological impact of the conflict on Syrian children has been so severe that it raises fears of renewed conflict in the future.

Child marriage is another challenge faced by young girls in the Syrian Arab Republic, which is especially true today when this practice is being used as a mechanism to adapt to new circumstances among the displaced, both in the Syrian Arab Republic and abroad. The number of Syrian girls registered with UNHCR who are considered in danger of child marriage amounts to 26.3 per cent.

### **Policy gaps**

For the governance sector, the main policy gap is not only connected to issues of security sector restructuring, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. It also includes ways to absorb those local governance structures that have become more deeply rooted and influential as a result of working directly with the local population.

The massive displacement of populations and the vast number of deaths caused by the conflict have led to numerous cities and regions becoming completely deserted, while others have become overcrowded. This has caused changes in the demographic makeup of both, areas controlled by the opposition and areas controlled by the Government.

At the present time, the direct impact of these changes can neither be estimated nor can it be determined whether they are to be temporary or permanent, in the absence of a comprehensive political agreement and with the ongoing violence. Still, they will represent an essential policy gap and an example of mismanagement of cultural diversity during the conflict, with a model that has been instrumentalized to distort the principle of reconciliation since 2015. Indeed, ceasefires do not guarantee that the affected areas will see their social fabric restored.

True and lasting reconciliation needs to be done at the following three levels:

- The lower, individual and local community, level, in which societal reconciliation takes shape;
- The middle level, in which reconciliations take place among society's traditional leaders, opinion leaders, economic and social elites, in addition to organizations, labour unions and syndicates;
- The upper, political, level, which reflects the reconciliation of political and military parties to the conflict, in the form of political agreements and new forms of government.

### **Policy recommendations**

The reconciliation and social cohesion nexus is comprised of two successive and interconnected aspects. The first concerns reconciliation between opposition and Government, through a political transition mechanism with regional and international sponsorship. This process would be aimed at ending military operations and restoring security and stability. It would be followed by a process of rebuilding the State according to a new social contract. The second aspect concerns bridging the social gap between the native inhabitants of areas in which stability has been restored. This social aspect of reconciliation is considered the more complex process and the one with the most profound impact, which is why multiple methods should be used to approach it. While the legal aspect of reconciliation can be subject to institutionalization and monitoring, its social aspect can be fragile, multifaceted and impossible to frame, especially during the early post-conflict stages. It would also require a variety of appropriate mechanisms, able to acknowledge and absorb the magnitude of the pain felt by all Syrians affected by the conflict. Such a process must include, but will not be limited to, the following:

- Removing all manifestations of military presence and all sectarian and racist slogans;
- Raising awareness among the local population about the rights of returning refugees and migrants;
- Creating psychological rehabilitation centres for the survivors of human rights violations, especially children and victims of sexual and gender-based violence;

- Creating local reparation centres tasked with seeking justice for victims, both symbolically and materially;
- Forming a consultative committee on education to represent the social, religious and cultural diversity of the Syrian Arab Republic. This committee would analyse problematic school subjects, such as history, civic education, religious education, and Arabic, and create new ones that would reinforce the culture of civil peace and the values of equal citizenship;
- Creating research centres to have the Syrian experience recorded by Syrians and gathering experts from countries devastated by armed conflict to share their experiences of reconstruction and national reconciliation;
- Stressing the importance of the local nature of societal and national reconciliation since the tools that can be used to achieve reconciliation in one area will not necessarily prove successful in all other areas.

#### **Nexus 4: Rehabilitation of the physical and social infrastructure**

##### **Vision**

By definition, infrastructure plays a critical role, at many levels and a broad scope, in ensuring a country's safe emergence from conflict and return to stability. Infrastructure provides the conditions needed for the successful revival of economic activity and the reengineering of some essential systems.

The Syrian Arab Republic is currently going through a multifaceted transitional phase, which requires shaping the developmental role of infrastructure in such a way as to boost peace and stability. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Moving from partial or immediate emergency solutions to laying the cornerstones of sustainability;
- Moving faster in meeting both urgent and long-term needs;
- Rehabilitating by correcting past and present imbalances and moving towards the future;
- Reforming and improving old institutions and developing new ones.

Achieving national ownership of projects to rehabilitate and improve the physical and social infrastructure is considered a goal of highest importance. Indeed, the reconstruction of infrastructure systems will represent the cornerstone of progress towards stability and recovery for the country, as envisioned by all Syrians. Their vision for their country is one of cultural heritage, of rich and diverse traditions, and of shared cultural values, within a perspective of spatial development and economic growth.

##### **Current situation**

Both the violent conflict and repercussions from the sanctions have had a considerable impact on physical infrastructure. The effects of this have varied, depending on the sector and the economic role it plays. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Slowing down of technological development processes and the switch to modern production techniques; shutting down of several vital projects; difficulties securing and maintaining equipment; restrictions on imports, credit lines and money transfers to import generic medicine, surgery supplies, irrigation equipment, agricultural machinery, and telecommunication technology; scarcity of export outlets; and the withdrawal of international corporations from the Syrian Arab Republic;
- Partial or complete destruction of infrastructure (depending on the area), such as electrical networks, telephone networks (both landlines and mobiles), telecommunication centres, oil and natural gas fields, industrial cities and areas, such as Deir el-Zor or Sheikh Najjar, and power plants such as the one in Jibrin. Some dams have been rendered inoperative, and there has been substantial destruction of the agricultural and service infrastructure, not least of which have been irrigation networks and grain silos, in addition to the International Centre for Agriculture Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA). Several factories and industrial facilities have stopped working due to the numerous instances of destruction and looting of both facilities and warehouses (with stolen goods being sold abroad) and to difficulties in securing equipment

and application programmes. Similar destruction has been inflicted on pharmaceutical manufacturing plants, hospitals, health-care centres, and cultural centres;

- Erosion of the role of numerous sectors in providing for people's needs for food and water and achieving the socioeconomic balance which food security used to provide;
- Deterioration of the quality of health-care and educational services due to the destruction and damage inflicted on thousands of schools;
- Decreased levels of spending and investment;
- Drop in production due to the embargo, the closure of a number of border crossings, the high cost of transportation, the difficulty of securing the means of production (raw materials and energy carriers), and the decrease in transit and free-trade zone transactions;
- Impact of displacement on infrastructure systems, such as the exodus of skilled personnel, especially in education, health care, administration, and technical capabilities.

### **Policy gaps**

Most infrastructure services have been available since the current equilibrium was achieved in early 2017, but this new situation is considered fragile and partial for two main reasons. The first is the lack of universal access to the entire infrastructure system due to geographical obstacles, its absence in certain areas and its availability in an inferior quality or at a higher cost in others, which prevents its benefits from reaching those segments of society which are already downtrodden. The second reason is that this fragile balance could vanish in the near future since supply will struggle to keep up with the increase in demand that is expected with the return of refugees and renewed stability. This could lead to bottlenecks in the infrastructure system, including health care and education, or in the physical structures supporting economic activity.

Despite the relative cohesion of economic sectors in the Syrian Arab Republic, numerous policy gaps must be addressed when it comes to supporting the reconstruction of infrastructure, including the following:

- The severe brain drain from the Syrian Arab Republic, which includes intellectuals, technicians, students, office workers, industrialists, businessmen, and others;
- The severe damage suffered by the housing sector due to destruction, which will require strategic and qualitative efforts and a long-term time frame to rebuild, not just the rehabilitation of a few buildings here and there;
- The delayed and suspended implementation of a number of vital and qualitative projects, such as modern irrigation projects and the e-government initiative;
- The drop in water quality of products and services connected to water, health care, social welfare, and culture. Some of these products and services are no longer provided, particularly in so-called hot zones, as a result of the immense pressure and rising demand in cities where the population has increased due to mass displacement;
- The displacement of numerous leading figures from many areas;
- The high cost of telecommunications and Internet services and the complete loss of service in some areas due to the destruction of telecommunication networks and exchanges.

### **Policy recommendations**

Improving the infrastructure to boost development will require the immediate resolution of three complementary and overlapping gaps or nexuses: first, correcting the imbalances that were prevalent before the start of the crisis, including lagging institutional development, failure to keep up with technological progress, regional inequality, persistent rentier mentality, and others; second, facing the consequences of the conflict and the breakdown of the development model, while meeting people's urgent needs and the requirements of recovery; and third, looking to the future in terms of the choice and nature of projects, from both a technological and an institutional perspective, as supporting and regulating structures, to ensure their competent management and sustain their benefit to all of society. With this in mind, the essential steps towards the rebuilding of the infrastructure include the following:

- Reorienting international sanctions;
- Orienting available production to meet basic needs before development needs;
- Identifying damaged infrastructure components and production and service facilities and determining those suitable for reinvestment;
- Developing and expanding existing factories and diversifying their production to meet the needs of the market, instead of importing goods;
- Rehabilitating integrated and auxiliary infrastructure, such as irrigation facilities, extension units, logistics centres, cooperative financing, communication services, and energy carriers;
- Reinforcing measures to confront the impact of increased dryness and climate change;
- Updating legislation and creating an enabling environment for investment in information and communications technology;
- Networking with labour unions and syndicates;
- Developing legislation that would deter from the misuse of national and local infrastructure facilities;
- Making use of the competences of Syrians in the diaspora to contribute to reconstruction.

### **General considerations on nexus intersections**

**Political solution and legitimacy:** In the Syrian Arab Republic, reaching a comprehensive and inclusive political solution is very closely connected to the four nexuses. Efforts to rebuild the country – whether in governance, culture, physical infrastructure, social cohesion, or economically – cannot be insured and are at risk of failure without a political solution that takes all Syrians into consideration.

**Syrian ownership:** Since its creation, the NAFS Programme has always stressed the fact that reconstruction should be an inclusive and reconciliatory Syrian process, and that every Syrian in the country or abroad should have ownership of this process. This does not mean that the Syrian Arab Republic and its citizens must be isolated from their region and the international community, but the balance must be struck between, on the one hand, benefiting from international support, and the right of the Syrian Arab Republic to decide its own fate, on the other. Without this balance, the country’s reconstruction would be vulnerable to the unpredictable forces of international politics, which has a record of acting against the country’s best interest.

**Gender:** Syrian women are not only victims of the conflict. They are opinion leaders, politicians, activists, heads of households, breadwinners, peacebuilders, agents of change and reconciliation, and essential contributors to rebuilding their country and restoring its future. The issue of gender is closely aligned to the four nexuses, and gender considerations are essential in discussing the country’s reconstruction.

**Environment and Syrian territory:** The Syrian Arab Republic is home to a considerable diversity of ecosystems. They represent an important source of biodiversity at both the regional and global levels. This environmental diversity is considered integral to the unity of Syrian territory, which includes four natural regions: the coastal region; the mountainous region; the interior or plains region; and the desert area, also known as the Syrian Desert. As consistent with this environmental distribution, natural resources are unequally distributed across its territory, whether they are water resources, arable lands or fossil fuels such as oil and natural gas. Taken together as a single unit, the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic provides a comprehensive range of resources, sufficient to achieve prosperity for its citizens and State. The unity of the Syrian territory is, therefore, vital for the country’s sustainability.

### **Suggested reading**

As observed throughout the summary, the Policy Gap Analysis report highlights the fact that peacebuilding and State-building in the Syrian Arab Republic relies on the contribution and cohesive collaboration of a vast number of players, namely, the central government, military groups, political groups, local communities, civil organizations, returning refugees, foreign countries in the region, United Nations agencies, international organizations, and the media. More information on their specific roles and how they contribute to the policy

gaps between the current status of the Syrian Arab Republic and the vision for 2030 under each nexus is available in chapter VI of the full report.

