



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



HOMS

Localized Needs Assessment

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Introduction

Perhaps no city in the Syrian Arab Republic suffered the negative effects of the Syrian conflict as much as Homs: the third largest city in the country. Devastating losses were registered by the city's physical infrastructure and more than 1 million civilians were either internally displaced to other areas of the country or forced to flee the country entirely.

This localized needs assessment (LNA) presents an in-depth study of return conditions in Homs city—including availability and accessibility of basic services, livelihoods and housing. The Homs LNA examines the multitude of challenges facing the city through the lens of historic, conflict-era, and current social, political, and economic dynamics. Current priorities for recovery programming have been identified through consultations with community members and sectoral experts, and the proposed recommendations offer ways to assist current and displaced residents in their safe, dignified and durable returns over the long-term.



Homs served as a
**major transit point
for domestic trade**

between Damascus
and Aleppo

as well as an

**important juncture for
international trade**

northwards to Turkey and Europe, and
eastwards to the Arabian Gulf

History and background

Founded in 2300 BCE, Homs (Hamath-Soba) first gained importance as the capital of the Aramean Kingdom. The city and its environs linked maritime trade from the Mediterranean and overland trade to Mesopotamia. The Arameans were succeeded by the Assyrians, Greeks, Romans, Ayyubids, Mamelukes, Crusaders and Ottomans.¹

Prior to 2011, Homs served as a major transit point for domestic trade between Damascus and Aleppo,² as well as an important juncture for international trade northwards to Turkey and Europe and eastwards to the Arabian Gulf. The city also hosted a major oil pipeline linked to Iraq, which was damaged during the conflict.

Historically, Homs was a Sunni-majority city, predominantly Arab, with a number of Kurds and Turkmen, in addition to a Christian minority, including Greek Orthodox, Catholics, Syriacs, Chaldeans and Armenians.

With rapid population growth, Homs expanded beyond the old city and became the third largest city in the Syrian Arab Republic, after Damascus and Aleppo. While the old city was historically mixed

(Christians and Sunnis), new neighbourhoods were segregated along socioeconomic lines.

In 2007, the Governor of Homs, launched the “Homs Dream” project, aimed at modernising the city and other urban centres in the Governorate.³ The project envisioned large-scale infrastructure works to improve public services and transportation.⁴ However, when residents learned of intended demolition of historic markets and shops in the old city and entire neighbourhoods, they took to referring to it as the “Homs Nightmare”.

Conflict dynamics

In April 2011, clashes occurred with protesters in Homs and the neighbouring town of Talbiseh. Violence escalated and led to a drastic shift in the rhetoric of the protesters, who began demanding resignation of the entire Government. In the months that followed, some residents began arming themselves in opposition to the security forces.

By late 2011, the conflict assumed increasingly sectarian overtones.⁵ As a result, displacement occurred along sectarian lines, with residents

relocating to neighbourhoods where members of their sect resided. Others fled Homs entirely, especially public employees. Significantly large groups, albeit smaller numbers, also fled to Lebanon and Turkey.

Later, in 2016-2017, the Russian Federation mediated a surrender agreement between the Government and opposition forces in al-Waer, leading to a series of population transfers to opposition-controlled areas in northern Homs and Aleppo Governorates. According to United Nations estimates, Homs currently hosts only 63 per cent of its pre-conflict population.⁶

Population dynamics

Since 2017, low rates of return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have cemented demographic changes generated by the conflict. Extensive damage and destruction left many potential returnees from these areas with no homes to return to. To rebuild, owners must obtain permits that are contingent upon security approval by the intelligence services.

In total, 1,700 hectares, constituting 18.5 per cent of city area, in which approximately one third of the population resided prior to the conflict, are slated for redevelopment. Both private and public rehabilitation activities have been concentrated in neighbourhoods that remained under Government control throughout.⁷ Moreover, many fear

that demographic changes will be permanently entrenched by recent municipal rezoning and reconstruction plans.

In 2018, Homs city witnessed returnees at the average of 500 per month. From 2019-2020, twice as many returned. Many IDPs who had fled to Government-controlled areas, such as Damascus, Hama and Tartous, returned to Homs due to lower rents and cost of living. Some also returned from Lebanon due to the deteriorating political and economic situation there. However, in 2021, numbers of returnees decreased again, averaging approximately 500 per month, largely due to economic and public-health (COVID-19) deterioration.⁸ Furthermore, many found housing and services to be inadequate and fled once again to the areas to which they were displaced originally.⁹

Of the current population of the city, 67 per cent reside in the neighbourhoods they lived in prior to the conflict; the rest are IDPs from the surrounding rural areas and other parts of the Syrian Arab Republic.^{10,11} The latter include Alawites who were displaced from Hama and other opposition-controlled areas, who have faced fewer barriers to settling in the city than most former residents.

Many residents limit their movements to their neighbourhoods out of fear of conscription or arbitrary arrest. This fear is also a primary barrier to the return of IDPs.¹² Fear of unexploded ammunition, especially in heavily damaged neighbourhoods, is yet another barrier to return.



**in
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**numbers of returnees
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public-health
(COVID-19)
deterioration**



Top 3 employment sectors

- construction
- agriculture
- technical fields
including industrial
and energy production



↓ agricultural production
has dropped by

45%

as a result of the conflict, with cultivated
land reduced by over

40,000 hectares



Economic impact of the conflict

Positioned at the crossroads of geography, culture, industry and economy, Homs has long been considered the capital of central Syrian Arab Republic. Much of its economic growth was fuelled by industry, and the primary economic sectors historically centred around agriculture, energy, trade and manufacturing. As a result of the conflict, the city has suffered devastating damage to its housing stock, basic infrastructure, and economic assets. Amidst the conflict-related desolation, ongoing devaluation of the national currency has also plagued all segments of economy. Purchasing power by everyday Syrians has been decimated.

Employment:

Employment in Homs City has historically centred around the services, the public sector, and industrial production. Agriculture, while employing many throughout the region, is primarily a rural activity. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the number of employed individuals, Governorate-wide, exceeded 375,000 in 2019. The top three employment sectors were construction, agriculture and technical fields, including

industrial and energy production.¹³ The latter accounted for 30 per cent of total employment, while agriculture accounted for 26 per cent.

Human capital has suffered drastically as a result of the conflict. The significant decrease in numbers of working-age individuals from urban areas has created a demographic 'gap' with severe implications for economic recovery in the near- to mid-term, since a shortage of labourers may delay reconstruction activities.

Public sector:

The public sector has been less affected by the conflict than other sectors of economy, likely due to continued Government investment in defence, health and education.

Agriculture:

Prior to the conflict, nearly 350,000 hectares of the countryside of the Governorate were devoted to farming. Agricultural production has dropped by 45 per cent as a result of the conflict, with a decrease of more than 40,000 hectares in cultivated land.¹⁴ Farming remains vulnerable

due to the large-scale damage sustained by the irrigation networks. In 2020, the Government reportedly planted over 17,000 hectares of wheat.¹⁵ However, even with some Government investment and sufficient rainfall, a variety of factors hamper productivity, including transportation and fuel costs, currency devaluation, and sanctions.

Industry:

Industry had benefited from the location of the city, as well as from strategic planning decisions by the State. At its peak prior to the conflict, the oil refinery is said to have employed over 4,000 people, with a daily production capacity of 110,000 barrels. However, its dependence upon crude from northeast Syria has reduced production output, and the plant now operates at less than full capacity. The Homs fertilizer plant is another significant employer.

Income:

In the aftermath of active fighting, incomes have not increased in line with the loss of purchasing power due to both currency devaluation and rising prices, and poverty was exacerbated by additional burdens such as the need to rebuild homes and businesses. Many civilians struggle to meet daily demands. Local sources report that the monthly income of public employees averages 60,000 SYP (\$17) per month, with teachers and nurses earning salaries of 80,000 (\$23) and Government-employed doctors earning up to 160,000 SYP (\$46), while a private-sector doctor may expect to earn double that amount.¹⁶

Unemployment:

Unemployment remains unprecedentedly high; local experts suggest that the unemployment rate is 40-55 per cent.¹⁷ Unlike in previous decades, those unemployed now also include individuals with higher-level degrees and specialists in various fields.¹⁸ To cope, remittances from abroad have become the primary source of income for many households.¹⁹

According to experts interviewed, 80 per cent of the population live in poverty.²⁰ Monthly household expenditure ranges from 100,000 to 600,000 SYP (\$28-172). The average salary of public employees is insufficient for meeting needs, and generally very few people can afford any non-essentials.

Vulnerable groups:

Like elsewhere in the Syrian Arab Republic, many **young people** have been displaced or forced into military conscription; a loss that has had a remarkable impact since young people, as workers and consumers tend to be the most active economic agents. Moreover, the types of female employment have also changed; while pre-crises women worked predominantly in health and education, they are now increasingly employed in other sectors, such as in markets and restaurants. Jobs and salaries, however, are not commensurate with their skills and education. Some interviewees reported that a woman typically earned half the salary of a male counterpart, despite fulfilling an identical role.



Pre-conflict peak was daily production capacity of oil was **110,000** barrels

Monthly income of public employees averages **60,000 SYP** (\$17) per month

Unemployment rate is **40-55%**

80% of the population live in poverty

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Hassiya Industrial City
can generate



20,000-30,000
jobs



Development of economic sectors and livelihood opportunities

Agriculture:

Stakeholders argue that the Government has a responsibility to invest in agriculture, as the primary economic base of the region. They contend that the State, with its vast land holdings, has an obligation to develop (or redevelop) sufficient infrastructure to empower rural farmers, which should be in partnership with local agricultural organisations and NGOs and international agencies. In addition, if the city is to stem emigration and prepare for the return of IDPs, business environment needs to be improved. To increase employment, stakeholders have highlighted the roles of the Hassiya Industrial City and energy sectors, including the burgeoning role of alternative-energy production.

Hassiya Industrial City:

Local sources suggest the city has the capacity for more than 900 other sites, which can generate 20,000-30,000 jobs.²¹ A variety of major industrial and manufacturing activities are undertaken in Hassiya, including cooking

oil production, sugar refinement, plastic injection moulding, recycling, pharmaceuticals, chemical manufacturing, and electronics. Although Hassiya was not directly attacked, many factory owners, managers, and employees fled early in the conflict. Initially, business owners thought their departure would be temporary, but when the fighting escalated, some factories were shut down or relocated. However, local sources suggest that with security improvements and the reopening of the Homs-Aleppo Road, activity has improved in recent years.

Fuel refining industry in Homs Governorate:

Oil refining in Homs Governorate dates back to the 1960s, when a pipeline from the Karatchok oil field was completed and connected to the Homs refinery. The city is well known for its refinery that employed nearly 4,200 workers when it was fully operational. Prior to the conflict, the refinery had a production capacity of 110,000 barrels per day.²² Reports suggest that its capacity had by 2016 decreased by 50 per cent due to damage to the main oil pipeline, as well as to control over source wells by opposition groups.²³

Alternative energy:

With ongoing challenges in restoring the national electrical grid, private sector investors have begun developing plants for wind and solar power

generation. According to key informants, the national General Electricity Company has completed studies for five power production projects in Hassiya Industrial City, as well as in the Jindar region. One plant is projected to produce up to 10 MW of power²⁴ and a 2.5 MW plant is currently installed. However, the effort is yet to prove altogether successful, with little improvement in energy availability and little impact on the economy. Higher capacity of potential solar power generation is indicated in the southern part of the Governorate.

Economic development strategy to facilitate the return of IDPs

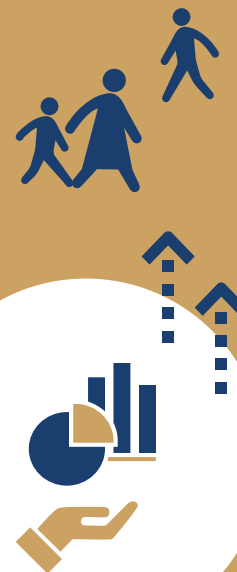
Economic, geographic, and political history of the city suggests that Homs can serve as a model for the broader recovery of the country. The massive scale of physical damage to neighbourhoods suggests a recovery timeline measured in decades, not years. Much of the trauma experienced by residents and the displaced has yet to be addressed.

Complexities of economic recovery notwithstanding, the city contains many of the natural and vital components required for economic growth. It is endowed with agricultural potential, natural resources and a supply of rural labour, while presence of State-supported enterprises and major Government institutions ensured national importance.

As political, supply chain, security, and currency factors improve, so will the economic prospects of the city and its ability to absorb returnees. A cycle of growth would then improve both its physical and social conditions.

A variety of initiatives have been identified by stakeholders and local experts, highlighting the need for broad-based policies and programming. The recommendations below could serve as an entry point:

- Labour force development and training to enhance workers' skills and abilities, covering emerging technologies, construction trades and engineering for reconstruction.
- Additional livelihood support needs to target women, youth, and other marginalised groups.²⁵
- Improvement of social cohesion through reconciliation initiatives, with programmes led by business associations to combat favouritism and sectarianism empowering all neighbourhoods and communities.
- Reconnection of local producers to regional and international export markets to stimulate additional demand for products.
- Given predominance of energy intensive industries, the city and its industrial areas require extensive investment in energy production. While renewable energy may not currently be able to replace carbon-based energy at the magnitude required for industrial growth, it can, however, play a supplementary role in meeting energy needs.
- Rehabilitation of old-city markets.
- Improvement of transportation networks and public transit systems.





Only

2 women

sit on the executive office of the
Governorate Council and only one
on that of the City Council

Local capacity to facilitate return of IDPs and absorb returnees

Homs Governorate Council and its directorates are responsible for service provision across the Governorate, in coordination with Damascus-based ministries and corporations. Comprised of 50 council members, Homs City Council is responsible within city boundaries for rubble removal, litter collection, road pavement, fire services, and issuance of building permits, in addition to coordinating with Governorate-level directorates the provision by the latter of public utilities, such as electricity, solid waste collection, water, and telecommunications.

Community representation:

None of the current local council members has experience working for the city council.²⁶ Unofficially, the Government consistently appoints a Sunni as president of the executive office of the local council, an Alawite as vice president, and at least one Christian as a member.²⁷ In Homs city, Alawites are overrepresented in Government and security institutions, especially in high-ranking positions.²⁸ For example, three

members of the executive office of the Homs Governorate Council, nearly a quarter, are Alawites, even though Alawites are a small minority in the governorate. Moreover, political representation is largely limited to the ruling Ba'ath Party; all members of the executive office of Homs Governorate Council and all but two members of that of Homs City Council belong to it. Also worthy of note is the fact that only two women sit on the executive office of the Governorate Council and only one on that of the City Council.

Technical capacity:

According to former Government officials, prior to the conflict, local government lacked both human and financial resources. Lack of technical capacity resulted from pervasive nepotism, as well as from low salaries failing to attract higher-skill workers. Since 2011, the lack of qualified personnel has been further exacerbated by mass displacement and by hyperinflation, which has drastically diminished the purchasing power of public salaries.²⁹ Moreover, most qualified local workers have been recruited by INGOs and United Nations agencies, which pay significantly higher salaries. For example, remuneration for a single day of work with an NGO may exceed the monthly salary of a local-council official.

Financial capacity:

Prior to the conflict, Homs City Council received from the Ministry of Local Administration 4 SYP for every registered resident. In 2011, 1.6 billion SYP were allocated, although only 5 million were ultimately received,³⁰ which accounted for approximately 40 per cent of the council budget. Due to the decline of the State treasury, Homs Governorate receives significantly less funding than prior to the conflict. What little resources central Government possess are prioritised for Damascus and other loyalist areas. All gas and oil revenues from Homs Refinery bypass Homs City and Governorate Councils and go directly to the Ministry of Oil and Natural Resources in Damascus.

Service Provision:

Discrepancies persist in levels of service provision. Western neighbourhoods enjoy services that nearly reach pre-conflict levels in both quality and availability, while destroyed central and north-eastern neighbourhoods receive little or no public services or investment. Older neighbourhoods in central Homs, including Khalidiyah, al-Qarabis, Jouret ash-Shayyah, and Qosour have suffered most, with destruction of housing and electricity, water, and sewage infrastructure rendering them uninhabitable.

- **Electricity supply:** Adequate electricity supplies are vital and integral to continuity of delivery of services.³¹ Prior to the outbreak of conflict in 2011, the national grid

provided Homs with electricity 24 hours a day. Currently, generation is inadequate, since extensive fuel shortages have forced the shutdown of several power plants and illegal network connections diminished overall system efficiency. On average, residents receive around 5 hours/day, while neighbourhoods where damage is limited receive electricity on a two-hours-on, two-hours-off basis. In the cold winter months, when the need for heating arises, electricity supplies generally deteriorate. As of October 2021, the city was unable to meet wintertime demand.³²

- **Transportation:** Currently, the city experiences several transportation challenges, including traffic congestion, insufficient fuel allocations, and rising public-transportation fares. The public transport network would not be able to accommodate a larger population without improvements to the transit infrastructure and the fleet. One proposal is to increase the number of vehicles operating within the city, as well as between the city and the countryside. Fuel shortages are also a constant concern, even though the current population of the city is only half that prior to the conflict.
- **Solid waste services:** Generally, solid-waste disposal services meet current needs overall, but service levels vary among neighbourhoods depending on extent of destruction. Accommodation of returnees on a large scale would require removal of rubble from severely damaged and destroyed parts of the city, which is currently beyond capacity, posing a significant barrier to return of IDPs.³³



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- **Health:** Even though hostilities ceased nearly five years ago, the National Hospital (the most important health centre in the city) remains out of service. People seek free medical services at al-Waleed Children Hospital, the Comprehensive Health Centre, and al-Basel Hospital. Overall, health services are insufficient for current needs and the additional demand that would be created by return of IDPs on a large scale would put further strain on the healthcare system.
- **Education:** Infrastructure in numerous schools is unfunctional and numbers of teachers and administrative staff are insufficient. Teachers also lament the lack of a good curriculum and educational materials. Not unlike other vital sectors in the city, education suffers Government neglect that some residents believe to be deliberate.³⁴
- **Housing:** Low levels of construction have persisted and very little work has been done to rehabilitate and rebuild housing. All construction activities are closely controlled by the Government and security forces. Very few recovery activities are focused on housing rehabilitation and external funding has been minimal. Moreover, local experts suggest that project programming by Government has deliberately favoured certain groups to entrench patronage and shore up support among perceived loyalist communities.

Housing, land and property (HLP) challenges

Listed as a major barrier to return of IDPs, the physical destruction of neighbourhoods is a primary reason for pessimism. In addition, as in other cities controlled by the Government, several other HLP challenges are evident and pose a significant risk to such return, as well as to overall recovery. It is vital to acknowledge and address them all.

Property records:

Land tenure issues that existed prior to 2011 have been severely exacerbated by the conflict. The Land Registry Office in Homs was partially burnt during heavy bombardment. As a result, many physical property records were destroyed, in what many residents perceived to be a deliberate act. Lack of property records has prevented people from reclaiming their properties.

A record digitisation process that started in late 2016 is widely seen as an attempt to formalise illegal property transfers. The process allowed

only a four-month window for property owners to dispute errors in the updated property ownership registry in person, denying many IDPs the opportunity to secure their property rights.

Even though most cadastres and property ownership records do exist, access to them remains a challenge for residents and IDPs alike, while presenting such documents is a Government requirement for initiating any rehabilitation or construction work. Often, they need to be procured from owners who have fled or from heirs of those who died. Making matters worse, land registry offices are short staffed and unable to cope with the demand for approvals; a challenge that will certainly grow as more families return.

Land readjustment:

According to a statement made by a Homs Governorate official in 2018, the Homs Dream project, initiated before the conflict, would be expanded to cater for more comprehensive reconstruction planning of the city. The details and progress of the plan remain unclear, but judging by other notable instances of Law 10 implementation, readjustment under is highly likely to impact ownership rights and further entrench displacement of vulnerable residents.

Looting and secondary occupation:

In the wake of conflict and population displacement, looting of homes was widespread, systematic, and severe.

Throughout the city houses were stripped of their contents and building materials, which were then sold in markets in other areas. While structurally intact, homes that were stripped in this fashion remain uninhabitable and prevent people from returning.

Infrastructure rehabilitation projects:

Technical challenges

- Population numbers in the extensively damaged neighbourhoods in Old Homs are yet to reach 20 per cent of their pre-conflict levels.
- Sectarian discrimination continues to be an issue.
- Continuing fuel shortages and electricity cuts also impede reconstruction, since both fuel and electricity are essential for operating machinery and heavy equipment.
- Moreover, there are also the institutional challenges of inadequate project management skills and corruption. Indeed, it is thought that as much as 80 per cent of reconstruction budgets are siphoned off by officials and bidding contractors.
- Without a political settlement, major donors refrain from engaging in funding reconstruction,³⁵ with both the European Union³⁶ and the United States having made



Qotniyeh Lake is

polluted

mainly by chemicals
discharged from a
fertilizer factory



declarations to that effect,³⁷ while the key allies of Government, Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran, lack the resources for supporting large-scale reconstruction efforts.

Environmental challenges

Residents of Homs countryside, particularly Qotniyeh, but also Zarzuriyeh, Shalluh, and Aziziyeh, suffer from environmental pollution caused by a fertilizer plant that discharges untreated emissions and fumes into the air.

The sewage and water networks have been destroyed and reconstruction of infrastructure, especially in the old neighbourhoods, was carried out hastily and poorly, causing water contamination due to seepage.

Waters of the Qotniyeh Lake are polluted mainly by chemicals discharged from a fertilizer factory, including nitrates, phosphates, and heavy metals.

Role of non-governmental actors

- Hundreds of organisations in loose networks, mainly led by young activists with no previous organising experience, appeared during the 2011 protests and the period of active hostilities. Across neighbourhoods in Homs, whether in areas under Government or opposition control, independent civil-society actors, in the form of NGOs, became service providers. Many of these NGOs are funded by foreign countries; their activities are hence constrained by short-term funding and donor agendas.
- It is not only local civil society organisations that fail to coordinate activities on the ground. International NGOs also lack coordination mechanisms with local partners. This lack of cooperation is usually coupled with paternalistic approaches towards local response actors, which translates to top-down programming without prior or adequate local needs assessments.
- Many civil society actors voice concerns with the preoccupation of donors with finding “quick fixes”, instead of focusing on projects that are sustainable over the long run.

- Response programming does not cover the most immediate of community needs, such as those related to housing, land, and property issues. Though there are several small-scale initiatives, such as joint projects to remove rubble in coordination with Homs City Council, these are inadequate, given the huge extent of damage and do not address the pervasive need for safe, decent accommodation.
- While women, children and youth are targeted by response programming, projects aimed at males

above a certain age (adolescents and over) seem to be very limited.

- Due to the strategic importance of the city, obtaining security approvals is one of the major obstacles faced by civil society organisations. Not only are they subjected to the tight security grip of the Government, but they also need to secure funding from international donors. Always having to manoeuvre within these constraints, they usually use neutral language that does not offend any of the parties involved.³⁸

Key recommendations

The following key recommendations have been developed following consultations with local stakeholders including community members, former local authority officers, NGO representatives, and policymakers. Proposed actions seek to address underlying challenges faced by residents, returnees and IDPs. Responses to cross-cutting issues and contextual dynamics are drawn together and positioned along a time-based **recovery ladder**, ranging from short-term **absorptive measures** through medium-term **adaptive measures** to longer-term **transformative measures**.



Economic growth and revitalisation

1 Design livelihood programming within the economic context. Labour-force development programmes and intensive training courses are needed to redeploy labour quickly into sectors of high market needs. Such training is needed to boost livelihoods and help repair imbalances between labour supply and demand. International agencies and private businesses need to partner with local trade unions to determine the sectors with greatest skilled labour deficiencies.

2 Invest broadly in agriculture to support farmers and the agricultural value chain. Developing crop storage and transfer facilities and subsidising fuel for irrigation and transportation are needed.

3 Establish safe and secure access to financing for micro, small and medium economic enterprises.

4 Re-invest in the industrial zone to serve local needs and export oriented economic development. Encouraging re-establishment of the industrial zone as an important driver of local economy, by securing residential areas nearby and improving local facilities, such as schools, and essential services, is of vital importance.

5 Implement a recovery plan for future local economic development aimed at encouraging and facilitating return of IDPs. Local and international policy makers need to establish a recovery plan that focuses on supporting the return of IDPs to the city, includes programmes for their economic reintegration. Policies should be heavily centered upon expanding the capacity of local public services and facilities to enable them to welcome returnees; for example, restoring schools and hospitals, building roads and rehabilitating destroyed areas).

6 Reconnect neighbourhoods through participatory planning processes to restore economic and social cohesion. Economic recovery is preconditioned upon revival of social connections, which can be achieved by creating spaces and mechanisms of effective communication between citizens and the city council.

7 Reform existing economic policies that impede broad and equitable access to economic opportunity. National laws that have had a detrimental effect on the national economy and hindered

growth at the local level, such as the Minerals Act and the Tariff Act, should be reviewed and reformed in the light of current economic and political conditions.



Role of local government

1 Provide credible security guarantees for the safe and dignified return of IDPs.

Institutionalise community participation and feedback mechanisms in municipal and urban planning processes.

The involvement of residents would ensure that municipal rehabilitation and recovery projects are responsive to local needs. The City Council should also reach out to the displaced communities to ensure that urban recovery, particularly master planning, is conducive to their return. This could take the form of an electronic platform for the city council to announce decisions and solicit feedback from residents, IDPs, and refugees. Moreover, the Council should clarify and publicise the basis for accepting or rejecting objections to enhance transparency.

3 Support CSOs involved in raising community awareness and enhancing engagement in local government, notably redevelopment plans.

- a. Facilitate workshops to train those running in municipal elections and equip them with campaigning and technical skills.

- b. Organise awareness-raising campaigns to increase community involvement and advocacy.
- c. Provide technical assistance to current and displaced residents in interpreting urban plans.

Enhance coordination between the City Council and various national and international actors to strengthen local government.

International organisations tend to undermine local government by failing to coordinate with the local council, and highly centralised Government structures leave little room for local decision making.

4

- a. International organisations should enhance coordination of service projects with the city council, while setting clear standards of conduct. This represents an opportunity to both boost municipal capacity and institutionalise participatory planning processes that involve community members.
- b. Promote workshops involving Damascus-based ministries, the Governorate Council, and the City Council to streamline municipal approval processes in line with Law 107.
- c. Simplify and streamline procedures for approvals involving the local council, the governorate council, and Damascus-based ministries, for example through an electronic platform.

5

Simplify and streamline approval processes for humanitarian actors.

6

Enhance local-council technical capacity by raising salaries, implementing rigorous hiring processes, and capacity building.

Due to low salaries and currency devaluation, the local council is unable to attract highly skilled workers. Moreover, staff are often recruited based on personal connections rather than qualifications. Training programmes should aim to enhance technical capacity, be tailored to each department, and include instruction on key concepts, such as local government and community participation with a discussion of relevant success stories.

Increase local-council revenues to fund large-scale rehabilitation projects.

- a. Increase transparency of spending and explicitly link local-council projects to tax revenues to build and consolidate the tax base.
- 7 b. Finance social enterprises to increase local-council revenues and improve employment opportunities.
- c. Establish public markets to provide livelihood opportunities for residents and returnees.
- d. Support rehabilitation of cultural heritage sites, restaurants, and hotels to restore revenues from tourism.



Infrastructure and service networks

- 1 **Prioritise funding for and rehabilitation of key infrastructure needed for economic recovery and returning IDPs.**

2

Rehabilitate the electricity sector to catalyse and stimulate recovery of other sectors. Urban recovery is hindered by the lack of electricity and fuel. Addressing these challenges would improve recovery capacities in other areas, especially economic activity and critical services like the water supply. Implementation of renewable energy projects, including solar and wind energy, would support solving electricity issues sustainably.

3

Address the challenges faced by the education sector is a crucial step towards providing conditions for the return of IDPs. Key stabilisation initiatives must include rehabilitation of the extensively damaged education infrastructure as education is perceived by returnees to be a particularly crucial service.

4

Conduct assessments of environmental impacts and develop action plans to address them. Industrialisation has created unmitigated exposure to air pollution. Moreover, chemical effluents from the Homs refinery, fertilizer plants, and the sugar factory have polluted the natural water systems, and untreated sewage and deferred maintenance of the sanitation network have led to contamination of the water supply.



Housing, land and property

1

Rehabilitate and rebuild housing with an -in-depth, holistic, and contextual understanding at neighbourhood level. Without deep local understanding and involvement of

residents and returnees, existing social frictions would persist and worsen. It is important to promote citizenship, consolidate a culture of joint action at the local level, and involve communities in planning and redeveloping.

2 **Formulate an equitable process for assessing property ownership, taking into consideration the variable nature of property records and the extensive damage and loss they sustained. Dispute resolution mechanisms must be broadly agreed upon and formalised to aid recognition of ownership.**
To resolve disputes, special judicial mechanisms for proving real estate ownership need to be developed, along with enhancing processes of evaluating and reviewing compatibility of new records with reality.

3 **Investigate innovative financing solutions to facilitate return of IDPs to return and their participation in rebuilding their homes and communities.**



Role of non-governmental actors

1 **Guarantee transparency and accountability of national and international civil-society organizations.** Establish clear decision-making procedures and open channels of communication and inquiry between stakeholders and civil society officers.

2 **Distribute humanitarian assistance based on need to selected target groups.** The distribution of aid geographically must be avoided to guard against further exacerbation of sectarian tensions.

3 **Aim to include individuals from all backgrounds in humanitarian assistance.**

4 **Frame programmes in neutral language, concentrating on cultural, sports or environmental activities.**
International actors need to take into consideration the limitations of the civic space in the city, including heavy censorship and local sensibilities.

5 **Support local charities and civilian-led organizations in addressing the most pressing community needs.**

6 **Increase meaningful cooperation between national and international non-governmental organisations.** Cooperation amongst international and local organisations needs to be translated into strong and inclusive partnerships, steering clear of top-down approaches that are emblematic of donor-recipient relations.

7 **Invest in needs-based assessment prior to considering interventions.** Local CSOs should be consulted before programme development is conducted by international response actors, ensuring that needs are calibrated, and a nuanced

understanding of context is achieved, thereby mitigating risks of unintended consequences.

8

Invest in long-term sustainable projects that would facilitate return of IDPs. Short-term relief projects should be considered when necessary, but sustainable projects with long-term funding are equally vital.

9

Develop women empowerment programmes that take into account the local context and specific community needs, while avoiding “one-size-fits-all” programming.



Endnotes

- 1 M. al-Dbiyat, Homs et Hama en Syria Centrale, Institut Français de Damas, 1995.
- 2 Local Community Assessment: Homs, Nov. 2021.
- 3 Besides Homs city, the Homs Dream project included Palmyra, ar-Rastan, Houla, al-Qusayr, al-Mukharrem, among other areas in Homs Governorate.
- 4 Contextual Research.
- 5 J. Qaddour, Homs, a Divided Incarnation of Syria's Unresolved Conflict, Carnegie Middle East Center, 15 May 2020.
- 6 Population figures for 2011 are derived from the 2004 census data collected by the Central Bureau of Statistics; population figures for 2021 were collected by the Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme (HNAP).
- 7 J. Daher, op. cit.
- 8 Returnee figures from HNAP for April 2018 - May 2021; Contextual Research; Local Community Assessment: Homs, op. cit.
- 9 Local Community Assessment: Homs, op. cit.
- 10 HNAP, May 2021.
- 11 Contextual Research; Interview with local governance expert #4; Interview with local governance expert #6.
- 12 Contextual Research.
- 13 According to CBS, the number of those at work at the governorate level was 378,348 workers in 2019, while the number of unemployed over the age of 15 was 45,507; an unemployment rate of 10.6 per cent. Source: Local Community Assessment: Homs, op. cit.
- 14 ESCWA, Livelihoods Solutions for Protracted Regional Crises: Post-Conflict Agriculture Livelihoods Recovery Strategy in Homs Governorate and Livelihoods Programming for Homs' Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. 2021.
- 15 iMMAP, Central Syria Return and Reintegration Area Profiles - Damascus, Homs, Harasta, and Douma, April 2021.
- 16 Contextual Research.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Community Consultation Meeting.
- 19 According to stakeholders, it is impossible to live off current monthly wages in Government held areas more than a couple of days. Source: Local Community Assessment: Homs, op. cit.
- 20 Contextual Research.
- 21 Contextual Research.
- 22 Contextual Research.
- 23 H. AL Mohamad, Oil in Syria between Terrorism and Dictatorship, Department of Geography, Justus Liebig University of Giessen, Germany, May 2016
- 24 Contextual Research.
- 25 Interview with civil-society expert #4.

- 26 Contextual Research.
- 27 Interview with local governance expert #6.
- 28 Contextual Research.
- 29 Local Community Assessment: Homs, op. cit.
- 30 Interview with local governance expert #6.
- 31 Community Consultation Meeting.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 (Education in Countryside), op. cit.
- 35 Contextual Research.
- 36 European Council, [Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on Syria](#), 26 Sept. 2019.
- 37 H. Pamuk, [Blinken says U.S. does not support normalisation efforts with Syria's Assad](#), Reuters, 13 Oct. 20221.
- 38 Ibid.



Perhaps no city in the Syrian Arab Republic suffered the negative effects of the Syrian conflict as much as Homs: the third largest city in the country. Devastating losses were registered by the city's physical infrastructure and more than 1 million civilians were either internally displaced to other areas of the country or forced to flee the country entirely.

This localized needs assessment (LNA) presents an in-depth study of return conditions in Homs city—including availability and accessibility of basic services, livelihoods and housing. The Homs LNA examines the multitude of challenges facing the city through the lens of historic, conflict-era, and current social, political, and economic dynamics. Current priorities for recovery programming have been identified through consultations with community members and sectoral experts, and the proposed recommendations offer ways to assist current and displaced residents in their safe, dignified and durable returns over the long-term.