

02

Social Landscape

Human development index



The Syrian Arab Republic's human development index (HDI) fell sharply from 0.64 in 2010 to 0.549 in 2018, downgrading its status from the medium human development countries umbrella to that of the low human development countries.



Source: Istockphoto, photo credit: cloverphoto

A. Introduction

The conflict continues to cause damage to social structures and the physical infrastructure, from disruptions in electricity or no safe water, to a lack of access to health care, education and decent employment. The country's social fabric has been shattered, destroying the livelihoods and capabilities of many civilians, straining social ties and invigorating community intolerance. Syrian civilians have suffered the most. The proportion of civilian deaths has been high and rising while the bulk of survivors have either been internally displaced or sought asylum in neighbouring countries where the suffering continues among refugee communities.

Even after the cessation of conflict and moderate stabilization, the Syrian Arab Republic's reconstruction is problematic. At this stage, the odds of overcoming the setbacks or reverses in social development and reaching development targets over the coming years are slim. The population may gradually increase to its pre-conflict levels as refugees and IDPs return to rebuild their communities, leading to a relatively rapid recovery and growth in the construction industry, but there are long-term social

repercussions and damage to infrastructure that may take years to restore. The loss of a generation is a worrisome trend that will continue as youth become increasingly deprived of basic needs, education and employment opportunities. These will likely create a vicious cycle where impoverished individuals, deteriorated livelihoods and a sluggish economy continuously intersect. Conflict-related trauma and mental health illnesses are also bound to affect the long-term well-being of Syrians, and their contribution to a productive workforce and community life.

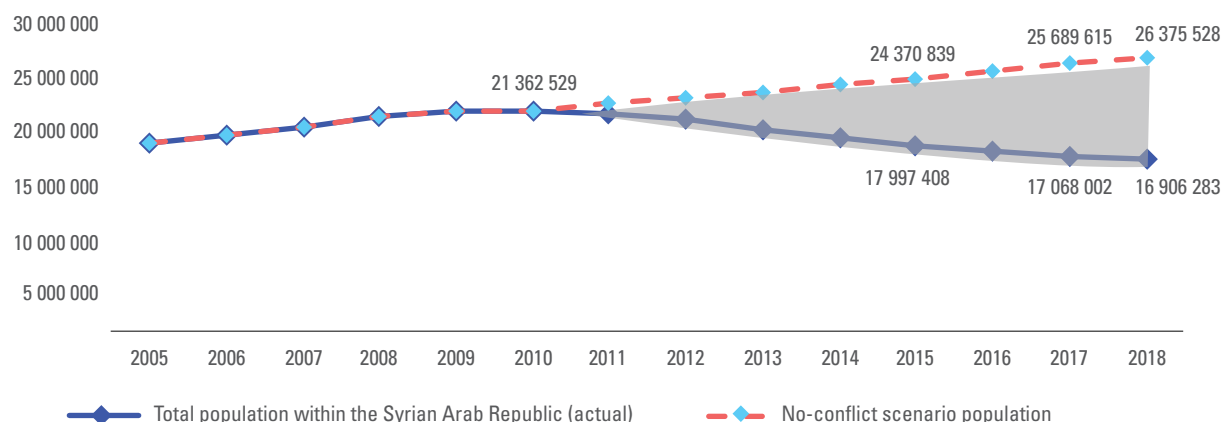
This analysis provides an in-depth picture of the social and developmental status quo in the Syrian Arab Republic, using the latest data available from sources including the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Systematic and current data for several indicators, such as the conflict-induced death toll and school enrolments, were limited. The results do not capture the full magnitude of social deprivation but are still indicative of the state of affairs.

B. Demographic outlook

Since the onset of the conflict, the Syrian Arab Republic's demographic outlook has been transformed, with an estimated average annual population growth rate of near -3 per cent (people inside the country).³⁵ The conflict has led to around 21 per cent decline in population, from 21 million to 16.9 million over the period 2010-2018 (figure 1). If the population had continued to rise annually at the pre-conflict average of near 2.67 per cent, it would have reached more than 26 million in 2018. The deviation from

the no-conflict projection mainly reflects: first, the rising number of Syrians fleeing the country, with more than 5.5 million officially registered as refugees in neighbouring countries in 2019 (figure 2), and second, the high number of conflict-induced deaths. The conflict has resulted in high non-combatants fatalities. The death toll is expected to have increased over the past few years as hostilities persisted, but updated data are not available.

Figure 1. The Syrian Arab Republic's population, 2005-2018



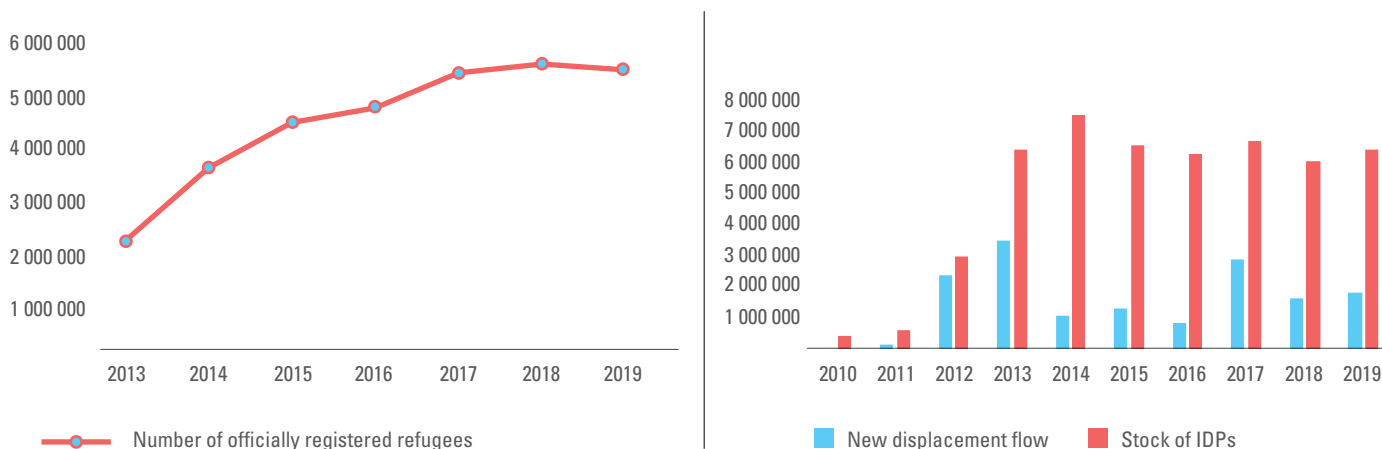
Source: Based on World Bank, "Population, total", DataBank. Available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL> (accessed on June 2020).

Note: Shaded area represents deviation away from the no-conflict projection.

Continuously shifting front lines have caused an increase in internal displacements.³⁶ Seeking physical safety and access to basic services top the list of reasons given for displacement. The de-escalation and truce agreements made in 2016 led to a partial restoration of basic services, including water and electricity, in many areas. This led to a decline in internal displacements in early 2017, and a wave of voluntary returns, estimated at 721,000, to communities of origin.³⁷ About 90 per cent were IDP returns, less than 10 per cent were refugees.³⁸ A similar pattern in return movement continued in 2018 as more areas regained relative stability. According to OCHA, 1.4 million spontaneous returns were reported in 2018,

56,047 of them refugees.³⁹ UNHCR emphasizes that going back to the Syrian Arab Republic is risky, especially as several areas, including those that are comparatively stable, remain susceptible to explosive hazards, such as landmines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and explosive remnants of wars (ERWs), as well as episodes of active violence.⁴⁰ Thus, residents, including returnees, are prone to repeated displacements and, in some cases, detention. Around 1.8 million people were displaced in 2019, marking an increase relative to 2018, mostly due to the escalation of hostilities in the north-east and north-west.⁴¹ By the end of 2019, the total number of IDPs exceeded 6.4 million.

Figure 2. Trend in registered refugee numbers, and the Syrian Arab Republic's internal displacement



Sources: UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response. Available at <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria> (accessed on June 2020); and Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Syria Country Profile. Available at <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/syria> (accessed on June 2020).

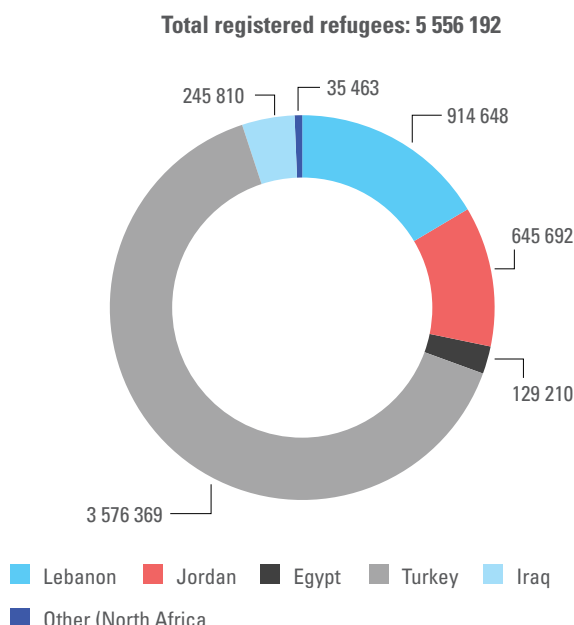
Note: The yearly figure for officially registered refugees reflects the number reported on 31 December of each year.

C. Refugees

The number of refugee migration has risen considerably since the onset of conflict (figure 2), an indication the country remains largely unsafe and insecure. In 2019, more than 5.5 million Syrians were registered as refugees (figure 3), dispersed predominately in five countries, namely Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.⁴² While Turkey hosts the largest absolute number of registered refugees, with 3,576,369 (figure 3), Lebanon and Jordan have the highest refugee-to-population ratio, with near 13.4 per cent and 6.5 per cent, respectively (figure 4). The numbers would be higher if asylum seekers and non-registered refugees were included, especially those in Lebanon and Jordan who have not yet been granted refugee status.

It is important to acknowledge that many Syrian refugees are unaccounted for, remaining unregistered due to financial, political and legal constraints, such as not having civil documentation. They face even greater obstacles when it comes to securing humanitarian aid and decent livelihoods. An estimated 73 per cent of surveyed Syrian refugees aged 15 and older and living in Lebanon did not have legal residency, meaning their education and employment opportunities are limited and that settling for informal, underpaid and sometimes hazardous jobs becomes commonplace.⁴³

Figure 3. Number of officially registered refugees in neighbouring countries, 2019



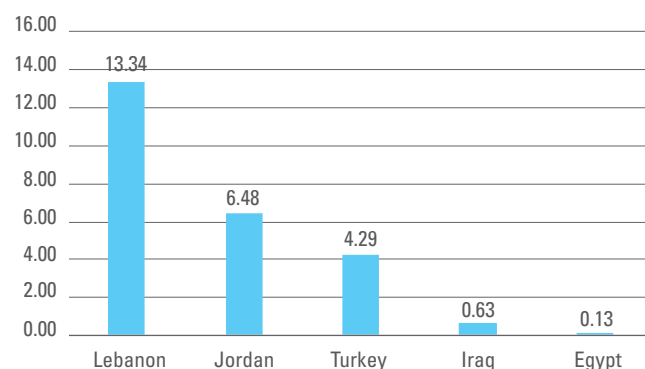
Source: UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response. Available at <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria> (accessed on June 2020).

Note: The yearly figure for officially registered refugees reflects the number reported on 31 December of each year. In Jordan, the number of refugees reflects that reported on January 5, 2020 since the number was not reported on 31 December 2019.

The majority of the Syrian refugees (about 94 per cent) live outside refugee camps. For instance, Lebanon, which holds about 1 million refugees, has no formal camps. In Jordan, three camps, Azraq, Emirati Jordanian Camp and Zaatari, have about 18 per cent of the refugees, leaving more than 80 per cent without a formal sanctuary.⁴⁴ Syrian refugees may have escaped widespread chaos at home but they continue to face daily obstacles and deprivations that prevent them from leading dignified lives. According to the World Food Programme (WFP),⁴⁵ 46 per cent of refugees in Turkey fall below the poverty line. The poverty rate increases to 73 per cent in Lebanon, and 78 per cent in Jordan.⁴⁶ In Egypt, the latest vulnerability assessment shows that 69 per cent of refugees fall below the poverty line.⁴⁷

The total number of in-camp Syrian refugees across the region was 286,342 by the end of 2019,⁴⁸ less than 6 per cent of the total Syrian refugee population. Camp conditions are deteriorating, especially during winter. Overcrowding is increasing and assistance shrinking.⁴⁹ Lack of access to basic sanitation, health services, clean water, food and medicine are commonly reported.⁵⁰ In-camp refugees, however, seem proportionately better off than those living in informal tented settlements (ITS). In Jordan, those in ITS households were deemed to be among the most vulnerable populations as they lack access to basic needs and services, live in inadequate and

Figure 4. Officially registered Syrian refugees, share of population in neighbouring countries, 2019 (percentage)



Sources: Computed using UN DESA Database, Total Population- Both sexes. Available at <https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/> (accessed on June 2020); and UNCHR, Syria Regional Refugee Response. Available at <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria> (accessed on June 2020).

squalid housing, and do not have the means to carry out a dignified life.⁵¹ Similarly, in Lebanon, in 2019, about 32 per cent of assessed Syrian refugees lived in overcrowded environments.⁵²

Poor living conditions, whether in camp or out, along with depleted savings and limited livelihood opportunities, are the foundation for harmful exploitation, such as gender-based violence, child abuse, child labour and early marriage. In Lebanon, 27 per cent of Syrian refugee girls aged 15 to 19 were married, yet this also varied across governorates, with the North governorate having the highest child marriage rate of 34 per cent. Households trying to close the income-expenditure gap also resorted to harmful or short-term coping mechanisms, including borrowing and relying on humanitarian assistance, and cutting down on essential needs, such as food rations and health care. In 2018, assessed Syrian refugee households living in Jordan continued to rely on one or more negative coping mechanism, including removing children from school, child labor, or marrying a daughter to close the income-expenditure gap.⁵⁴ In fact, children are the hardest hit by deprivation: of refugee communities assessed in Jordan, more than 81 per cent of Syrian children aged 0-5, and 50 per cent of those aged 6-17 are monetarily and multidimensionally poor, with high deprivations recorded in health, child protection and childhood education.⁵⁵

On a positive note, there has been improvements in some areas such as access to health-care services and education, though this varies by country and governorate. Even though conditions overall are deemed to be improving in certain regions, shortages in funding and assistance, and stricter border and registration policies, are bound to

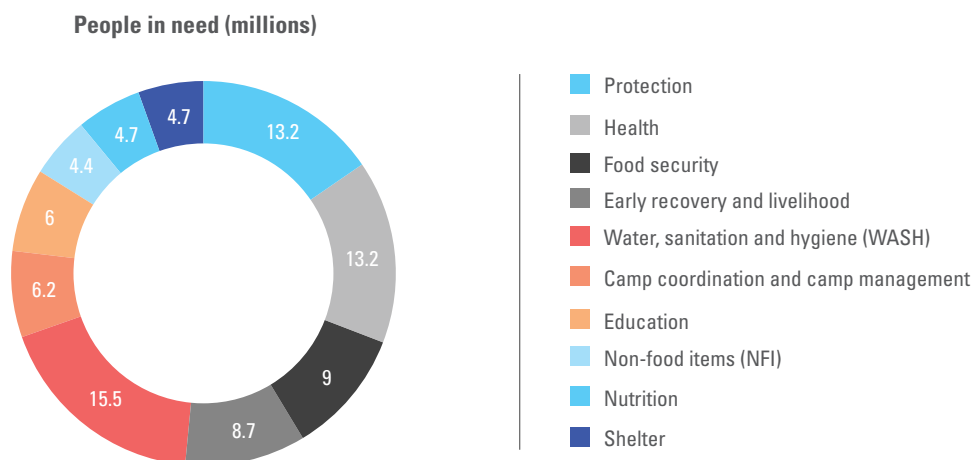
result in a deteriorating humanitarian situation, especially if no resolution to the conflict is reached. Besides, the increasing refugee toll exerts pressure on the economic and social infrastructure of host communities, which may trigger tensions and hostility towards refugees.

D. Population in need

The conflict has not only caused one of the largest human displacements that has left vast numbers homeless and unprotected, it has also ruthlessly compromised their remaining basic rights and survival needs. In 2019, more than 11.7 million people within the Syrian Arab Republic were in need of at least one form of humanitarian

assistance, with 5 million in acute need.⁵⁶ Moreover, children constitute about 42 per cent (5 million) of those in need. It should be noted that this is a substantial decrease on the 13.1 million people in need in 2017, and partly a result of the de-escalation of conflict in various areas.

Figure 5. Breakdown of people in need, 2019

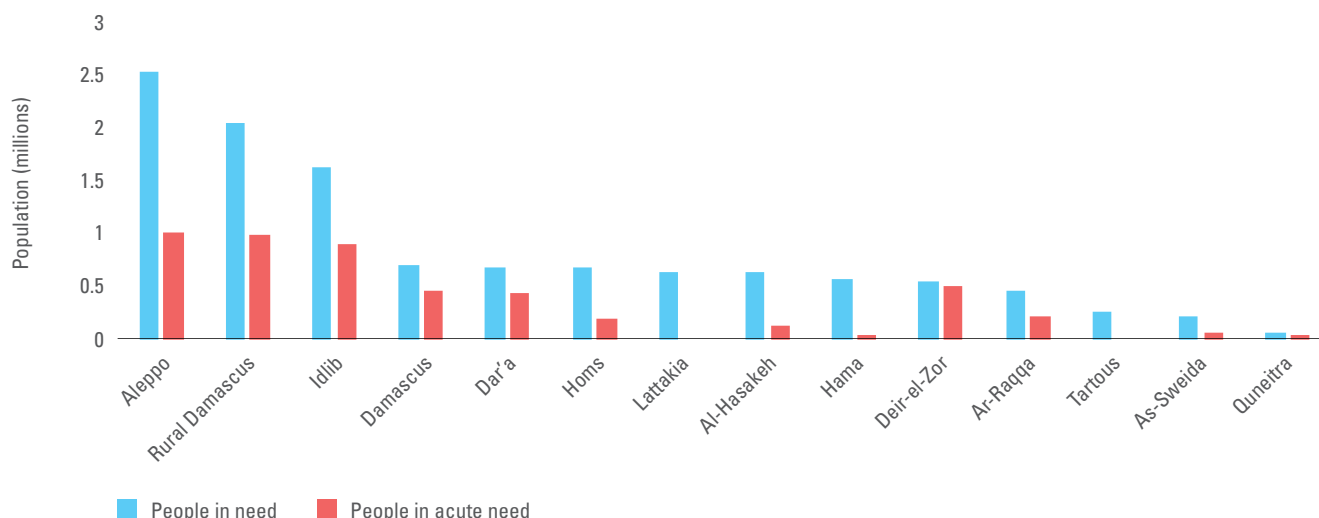


Source: OCHA, 2019.

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), protection and health are the three main categories in which need is pressing, with the number of vulnerable people exceeding 15.5, 13.2 and 13.2 million, respectively (figure 5). The assistance required across the remaining dimensions is also substantial, with 9 million having food security needs and another 6 million in need of educational support. More than 59 per cent of those in need are concentrated in the governorates that experienced intensified bloodshed and sustained sieges, particularly Aleppo, Damascus and Rural Damascus, and Idlib (figure 6).



Source: Istockphoto, photo credit: ridvan_celik

Figure 6. People in need by governorate, 2019

Source: OCHA, 2019.

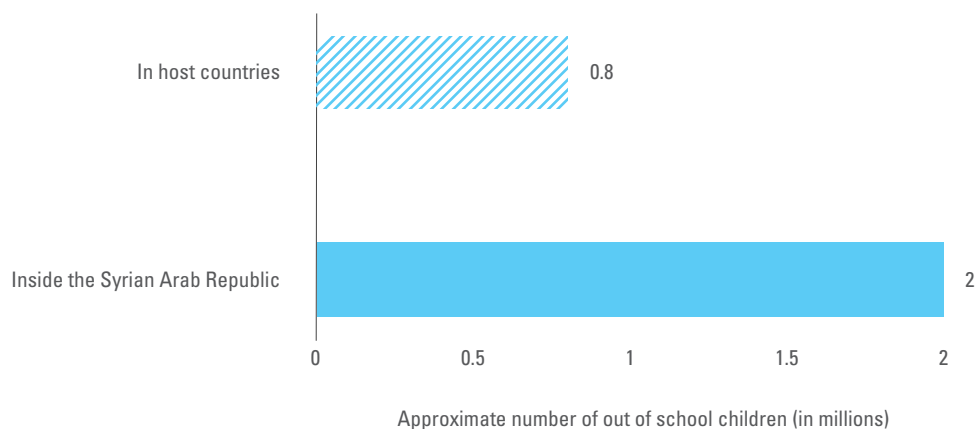
While United Nations-declared besieged locations were evacuated over the course of 2018, 76 per cent of those communities are still classified by the United Nations as hard to reach.⁵⁷ People in these areas are severely

vulnerable as the delivery of humanitarian assistance is generally obstructed. The disruption of civil documentation procedures is another impediment to providing aid.

E. Education

Schools have endeavoured to operate in conflict zones but deliberate attacks on educational institutions have not ceased, with 426 school bombardments officially verified since 2011.⁵⁸ More than 40 per cent of school infrastructure

is crippled, with one out of three schools either damaged or destroyed or used as a shelter.⁵⁹ The widespread use of schools as collective shelters for IDPs has increased pressure on the education infrastructure.

Figure 7. Children out of school, academic year 2017-2018

Source: No Lost Generation, "Investing in the Future: Protection and learning for all Syrian children and youth", Brussels III Conference pamphlet, March 2019.

Some 6 million people, 5.9 million of them children, need educational support.⁶⁰ Nearly 2 million school-aged children inside the Syrian Arab Republic were out of school during the 2017-2018 academic year (figure 7) and a further 1.3 million were at risk of dropping out.⁶¹ The total number would rise to around 2.8 million if the 800,000 Syrian children out of school but residing in the five major host communities were taken into account.⁶²

According to No Lost Generation (NLG), an initiative led jointly by UNICEF and World Vision, overall school enrolment increased in 2018 relative to 2017,⁶³ though it still did not reach pre-conflict levels. Based on United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) data, net and gross enrolment ratios have sharply decreased at primary and secondary levels during the conflict (figure 8). The higher gross ratios relative to their respective net ratios may also indicate worsening education quality due to factors such as grade retention and overage students.⁶⁴ Additionally, more than 140,000 teachers are no longer in their positions.⁶⁵ This staff scarcity contributes to the deterioration in quality as reflected in a higher pupil-to-teacher ratio. Unexpectedly, the tertiary gross enrolment ratio shows an increase in 2016,⁶⁶ though this should be treated with caution, given that for males it may reflect enrolment to evade mandatory military service.

Children face obstacles that put them at risk of dropping out of school. As family incomes become strained and standards of living deteriorate, the likelihood of participating in income-generating activities to support families increases. Of assessed communities within the Syrian Arab Republic, 81 per cent reported the occurrence of child labour as a barrier to school attendance. Moreover, 45 per cent reported child recruitment to fighting groups as a matter of concern.⁶⁷ Mainly adolescent boys aged under 15, and in some

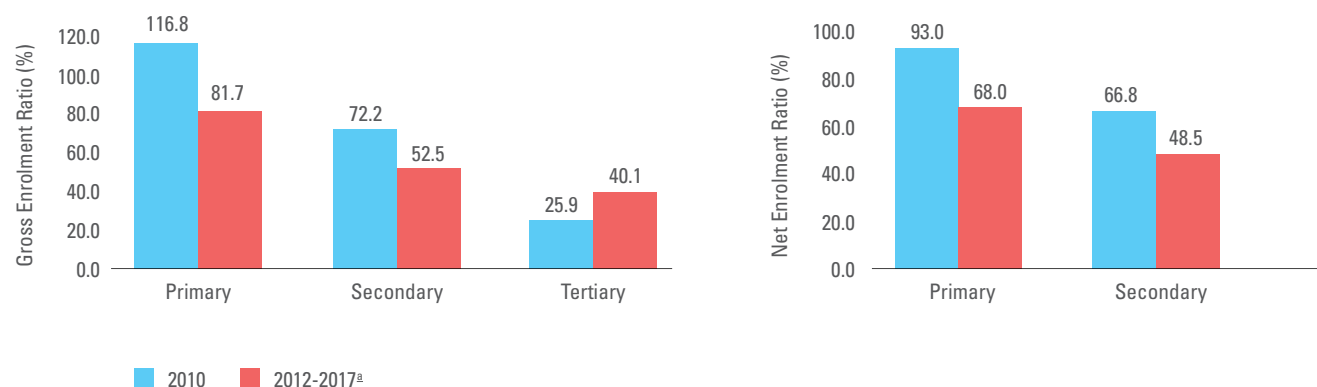
cases as young as 12, have been recruited,⁶⁸ which is alarming as it nurtures a culture of violence and renders their reintegration in mainstream schools and civil society highly challenging. Early marriage for girls as young as 10 was also reported by 45 per cent of assessed communities.⁶⁹ Such infringements of children's basic rights can aggravate impairments in mental and emotional health, leading to serious and in many cases irreversible psychological disorders. The loss of civil documentation is another barrier to school enrolment and grade completion, particularly when sitting official exams.

With these emerging social epidemics, the Syrian Arab Republic faces the acute challenge of having lost a generation. The detrimental outcomes of a rising generation of undereducated youth will likely unfold throughout the later stages of their lives, jeopardizing their future employment opportunities, mental health and lifetime well-being.



Source: Istockphoto, photo credit: ridvan_celik

Figure 8. Gross and net enrolment ratios



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) Database, Available at <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/sy> (accessed on June 2020).

^a Figures represent the latest available point in time: 2013 for primary and secondary, 2016 for tertiary.

F. Food insecurity and nutrition

Nutritional assistance remains substantial as the agriculture sector, which provides the main source of income for most Syrians, continues to suffer from losses in crucial infrastructure, crop production, livestock and human capital. Droughts in 2017-2018 furthered limited production capacity.

De-escalation of the conflict in the past few years has led to improvements in food security and market access, yet restrictions on delivering goods remain high. As of the end of 2016 and up to mid-2018, the price of an average food basket fell steadily across the Syrian Arab Republic, yet since then the food prices began to increase again.⁷⁰ Compared with pre-conflict levels, prices are much higher and purchasing power substantially lower due to various factors, including the limited production capacity described above, disrupted trade and the currency devaluation. In some 40 per cent of Syrian households, more than 65 per cent of expenditure is on food.⁷¹ This spending pattern has squeezed the middle-class budgets and is pushing more people into poverty.

About 6.5 million people were food insecure and a further 2.5 million were liable to becoming acutely insecure in 2019.⁷² Many families have adopted harmful mechanisms to cope with the emerging status quo, including poor consumption patterns. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) estimate that 46 per cent of households are cutting down on their daily food rations, and 38 per cent on adult consumption to ensure children have enough to eat.⁷³

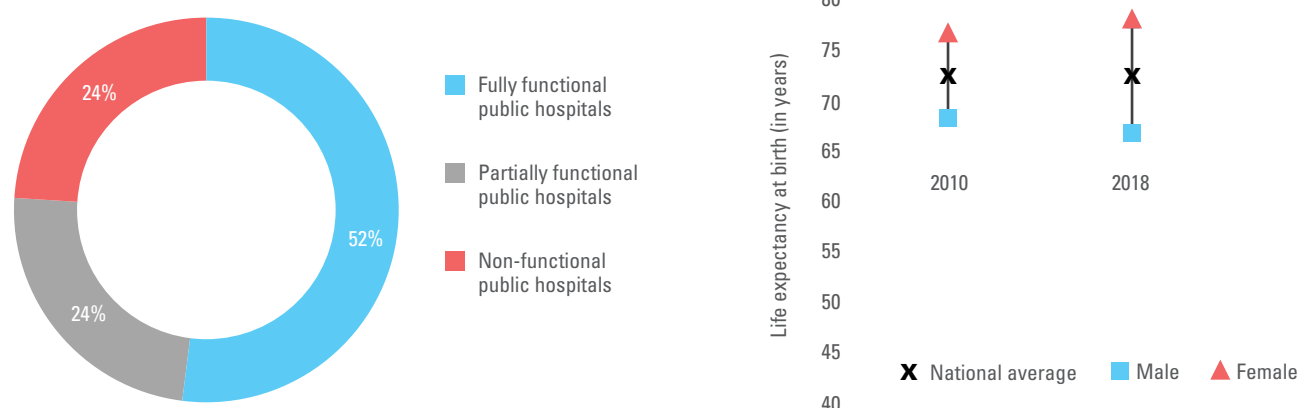
Chronic malnutrition has increased during the conflict, incurring relatively high stunting and mortality rates among children.⁷⁴ Trends in displacement, food prices, unemployment and access to health services and humanitarian aid are all factors that affect malnutrition. Unfortunately, systematic statistics on malnutrition remain largely unavailable.

G. Health

Health facilities and staff are indiscriminately targeted during attacks, with a detrimental impact on civilians. The availability of services in terms of quantity and quality has sharply declined. In 2018, health facilities and workers were attacked 142 times, a significant increase compared with 2017.⁷⁵ Some 48 per cent of total public health facilities are reported to be partially functional or non-functional by the end of 2018 (figure 9). Despite the de-escalation in several regions, attacks on health facilities were persistent in 2019. The number of people in need of care increased in 2019 to 13.2 million across the country compared with

11.3 million in 2018. Additionally, widespread displacement continues to put a strain on health infrastructure affecting those in need of urgent treatment. Electricity disruptions due to damaged infrastructure has also become an impediment.⁷⁶ Even though international efforts are directed at securing adequate aid, the situation remains dire. The delivery of basic life-saving medical supplies is obstructed, often affecting populations in acute need located in hard-to-reach areas. Hence, they have little – if any – chance of accessing treatment.⁷⁷

Figure 9. Public hospitals, 2018, and life expectancy at birth (years), by sex



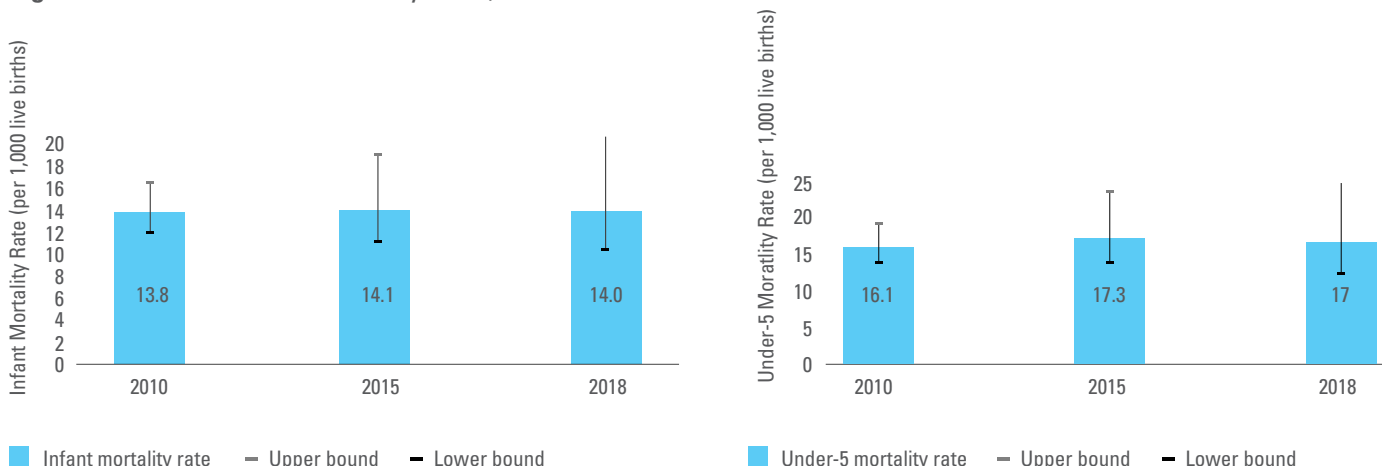
Source: WHO, HeRAMS Syria report, Snapshot for public hospitals, December 2018. Available at https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/SYR/COPub_SYR_Dec_2018_EN_22337.pdf?ua=1&ua=1; and UNDP, 2018.

^a Figures represent the latest available point in time: 2013 for primary and secondary, 2016 for tertiary.

The health situation, already precarious, further deteriorated in 2019, with 15.5 million people lacking access to safe water sources, which inevitably creates breeding grounds for waterborne diseases. Only 13 per cent of people were receiving piped water in Idlib, and 16 per cent in Aleppo.⁷⁸ According to WHO, in the first quarter of 2018, of 300 monitored groundwater wells in Aleppo, more than 95 per cent were contaminated. WHO reported that acute diarrhea was among the top five health-related morbidities, alongside influenza-like illnesses, the parasitic disease leishmaniasis, chicken pox and lice.⁷⁹ Moreover, several infectious disease outbreaks were reported. Measles cases tripled in the first quarter of 2018 compared with 2017. Approximately 7,073 cases

were reported, with 684 confirmed, possibly due to a lack of consistent immunization; 33 per cent of infants did not receive vaccine, compared with 18 per cent pre-conflict.⁸⁰ Over the course of 2018, measles cases declined from 1,176 cases a week to 80.⁸¹ A further 2,800 cases of tuberculosis (TB) were reported in 2017, though actual numbers are estimated to be much higher.⁸² This sheds light on the direct toll on health of poor living conditions, since infectious diseases such as TB usually thrive in substandard and overcrowded environments. Any risk is amplified among young children, who are more likely to face the consequences of ill health due to their specific needs and vulnerability.

Figure 10. Infant and child mortality rates, modelled estimates



Source: UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME) 2019 data. Available at <https://data.unicef.org/resources/dataset/child-mortality/> (accessed on June 2020).

Notes: The 90 per cent confidence intervals are reported. For the Syrian Arab Republic the UN IGME holds the estimates constant since the start of the conflict while increasing uncertainty over time. See UN IGME, *Levels and Trends in Child Mortality* (2019).

The UN IGME consists of UNICEF, WHO, World Bank and UN DESA, Population Division.

Pre-conflict, the Syrian Arab Republic showed appreciable progress in attaining health development goals, particularly in reducing infant and child mortality rates. The growing scarcity in health-care provision, and rising food insecurity and environmental pollution amid persistent insecurity and conflict, have reversed the progress.

De-escalation agreements may have had a positive impact on the provision of care in several areas, facilitating humanitarian assistance, but the situation is still worse than before the conflict. Measuring health status and mortality rates during conflict is increasingly difficult and scarce. The modelled estimates indicate the higher probability of dying among children and infants in 2018 as compared with pre-conflict levels. Nevertheless, these figures must be treated with caution, as modelled estimates often do not incorporate the broader and direct impact of conflict on the health system and death toll. The widened confidence intervals over time reported with these estimates indicate the increased uncertainty and measurement difficulties during conflict. Syrian life expectancy at birth has declined, from 72.1 years in 2010

to 71.8 in 2018. It declined from 68.1 in 2010 to 66.6 in 2018 (figure 9) among males due to their inadequate access to humanitarian aid and health care – women and children are more likely to be prioritized – as well as the likelihood of them engaging in riskier activities, including armed recruitment.

WHO has adopted a comprehensive definition of health that encompasses physical and mental health, and social well-being. Unfortunately, in the Arab region mental health is often overlooked. WHO estimates that 1 in 30 people living in the Syrian Arab Republic is affected by a severe mental health disorder, such as extreme depression and psychosis, with one in five experiencing more moderate forms of mental distress, such as depression and anxiety.⁸³ More than two thirds of children require health services to treat physical and mental disabilities.⁸⁴ WHO estimates that one in four children is likely to develop a mental health disorder.⁸⁵ Many suffer various forms of mental distress, having witnessed extreme violence, lost one or more parent and seen their homes destroyed, and facing the daily reality of life in abysmal conditions.

UNICEF has reported that an estimated 50 per cent of children have trouble sleeping, and suffer from nightmares or bedwetting.⁸⁶ A previous assessment surveying Syrian refugees in urban areas of south and central Jordan, revealed the high levels of trauma experienced by boys and girls under the age of 15, manifested through behavioural changes, violent tendencies, withdrawal symptoms, suicidal thoughts and fear reactions, among others.⁸⁷ Such long-term trauma will have irreversible

consequences on their well-being, coping mechanisms and cognitive ability, especially when it comes to being reintegrated into society, either in the Syrian Arab Republic or as refugees abroad. Recent assessments are not available, but earlier figures suggest symptoms of mental distress are most likely to be intensified in certain parts of the country due to ongoing conflict and a shortage of psychological support outlets.

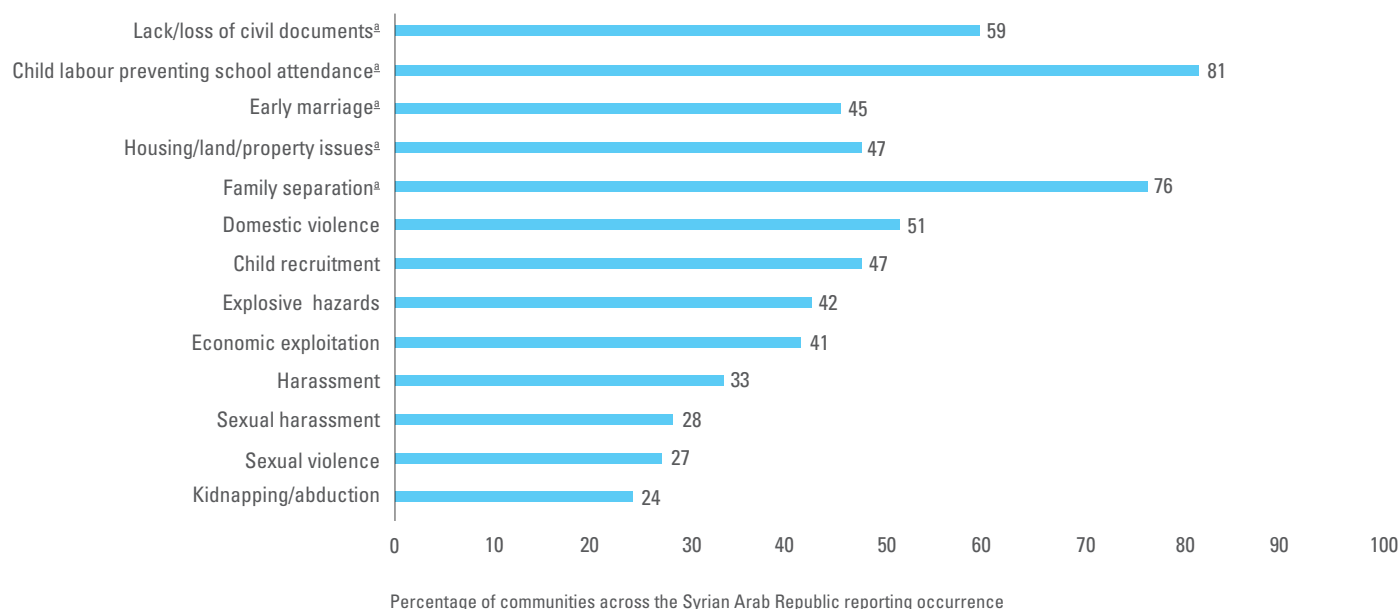
H. Other social implications

Exploitative practices have escalated during the conflict. Several groups, commonly children, youth, women and the elderly, have been left unprotected from various threats, including loss of civil documents, human trafficking, looting and other forms of exploitation (figure 11).

Among protection concerns, 59 per cent of assessed communities reported they had lost civil documentation.⁸⁸

Reasons are numerous, including leaving papers behind when fleeing gunfire, expiration and lack of legal services, and confiscation. A lack of identification documents, especially Syrian identity cards, poses a serious threat for civilians, entailing limited access to humanitarian aid and public services. More importantly, it puts a substantial fraction of them, especially newborns and children, at grave risk of statelessness and long-lasting social marginalization.

Figure 11. Protection concerns as reported by assessed communities, 2018-2019



Sources: OCHA, 2017, 2019.

^a Updated figures based on data from OCHA, 2019.

Protracted conflict has led to a significant rise in the number of jobs destroyed. Soaring unemployment, which prompted the initial upheaval, has intensified, with rates as of 2015 estimated to be near 55 per cent,⁸⁹ and 75 per cent among youth,⁹⁰ and affecting women more than men. Being without a job for prolonged periods engenders low self-esteem and increases the risk of skills becoming obsolete, decreasing the chance of future employment. The situation is exacerbated among youth by the loss of education infrastructure.

Further, limited socioeconomic opportunities for women have led to pervasive gender-based violence. Forced marriages for girls as young as 10, verbal harassment and sexual violence, including rape, are all reported as mounting concerns by assessed communities. As a result, girls and women continue to be exposed to rising nuisance and insecurity at a time when securing their livelihood chances and rights becomes more challenging. These have not obviated the increasingly key role Syrian women have to play in supporting the resilience of their families and communities.

Youth and children constitute another highly vulnerable group. Their childhoods and academic aspirations have been shattered as families resort to harmful coping strategies to relieve their financial burdens, such as participating in child exploitation, including early marriage and child recruitment to fighting groups. The loss of an entire generation may be irreversible given many have lost their formative childhood years, been deprived of an education and suffered traumatic experiences. Their ability to contribute to society, not only as individuals but also as part of a productive workforce, is at risk. The future of

the Syrian Arab Republic is contingent on reversing these losses, and on enabling women and young people to undertake their indispensable role in reconciliation and development.

As highlighted by the Syrian Center for Policy Research (SCPR), the impact of the conflict on the country's social capital has been extensive. Social capital, which sustains the social fabric, can be defined as the social values, bonds and networks adopted by a society that serve as the foundation for cohesion and integration.⁹¹ The ongoing hostilities have resulted in a loss of social capital, precipitating social fragmentation and exclusion.⁹² The Syrian Arab Republic's culture was often characterized as a multicultural mix of traditional and modern, inheriting traits from the civilizations that prospered throughout its history. However, conflict has lessened tolerance and heightened the oppression of multiple identities, ideologies, religions and ethnicities that were part of the social fabric pre-conflict. Even though society was going through a transition, caught between conservative and traditional ideologies and modern ones, the conflict has forced these further apart. Oppressive forces have incited the divide, and coerced individuals into picking sides.⁹³ Intolerance of all kinds has become deeply enshrined in certain regions, its followers continuously propagating hate messages, and governing using fear and subjugation.

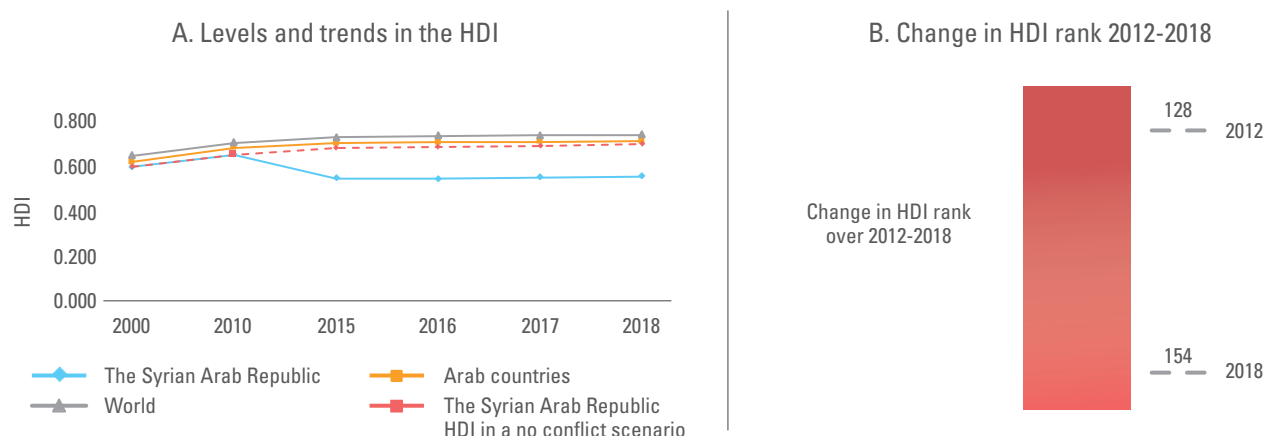
These social capital indicators pose a troubling question for future reconstruction, particularly the dignified return of displaced persons and Syrian refugees from abroad, who will no longer return to the communities they once knew, whose incentive to do so might be weakened, and who will most definitely encounter tension when adapting to their new environments.

I. Human development

Development has been in a downward spiral since the crisis erupted, a deviation from the regional and global upward course. The Syrian Arab Republic's human development index (HDI) fell sharply, from 0.64 in 2010 to 0.549 in 2018, thus downgrading its status from the medium human development group of countries to the low. As depicted in figure 12, the protracted conflict has wiped out gains accumulated throughout the early 2000s, leading to the gradual downgrading of its HDI rank, from 128 to 154 out of 189 countries over the period 2012-2018. Had it remained on its pre-conflict development path, with HDI growing at the same annual rate of 0.88 per cent as in the period 2000-2010, the Syrian Arab Republic would have had a present-day HDI value of 0.691, equivalent to an upper medium human development country. The accumulated cost of conflict in terms of development is about a 21 per cent loss in its HDI value relative to a no-conflict scenario.



Source: Istockphoto, photo credit: HAYKIRDI

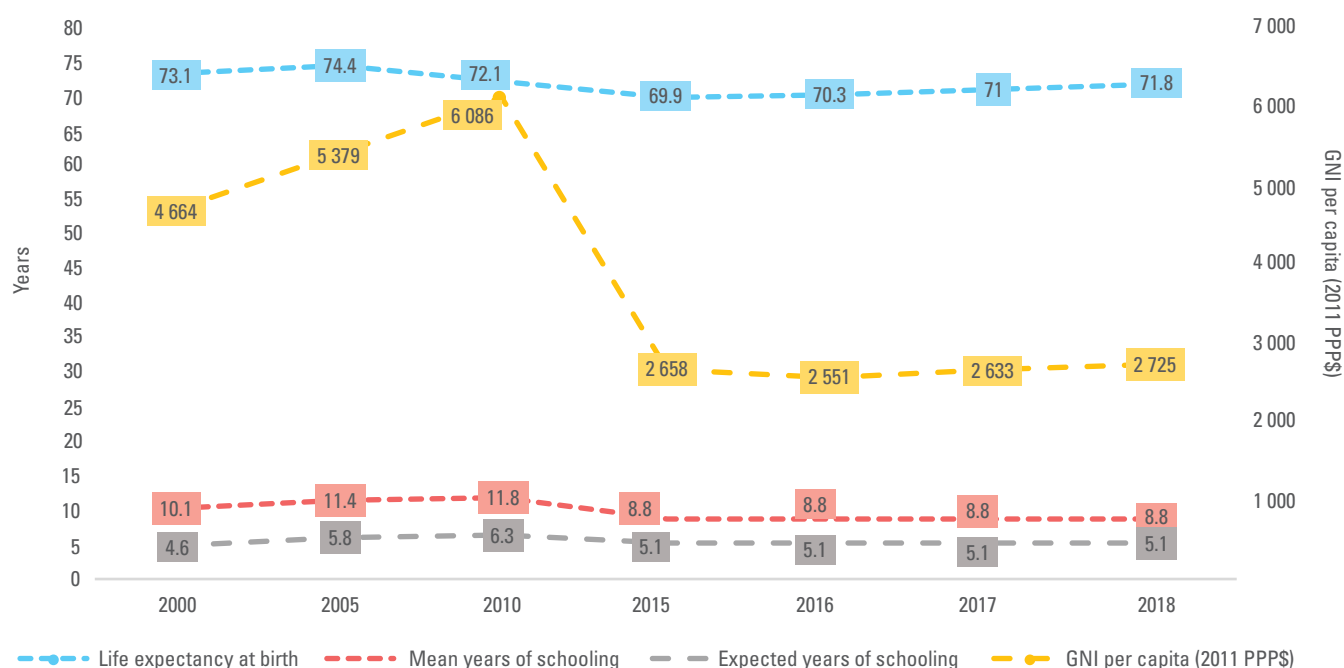
Figure 12. HDI, value and rank

Source: Based on UNDP, 2018.

Conflict detrimentally impacted all three dimensions of HDI (health, knowledge and living standards) as the shelling indiscriminately targeted hospitals, schools and civilians. Examining the trends in the HDI components presents a more complete picture of the development status quo, as well as assessing the development gap between the Syrian Arab Republic, the Arab region and the world.

Caught in the crossfire, civilians suffered from the direct and indirect consequences of conflict. The rising death toll of non-combatants, due to either direct assaults or as a by-product of increasingly scarce health services resulting from impaired facilities and restrictions on

dispatching humanitarian assistance, together with the outbreak of communicable diseases, is reflected in lower life expectancy, which in 2018 was marked at 71.8 years. Average life expectancy for men is even lower, marked at 66.6, especially as women are at an advantage when accessing humanitarian aid. Men are also more likely to engage in armed violence. It is important to note, however, that 2017 and 2018 generally show a fair improvement over the previous two years in health indicators. This can be largely attributed to de-escalation accelerating the delivery of basic health aid and the evacuation of some besieged areas. The Syrian Arab Republic came closer to the regional life expectancy of 71.9 years in 2018, yet it still fell below the world average by almost a year (figure 14).

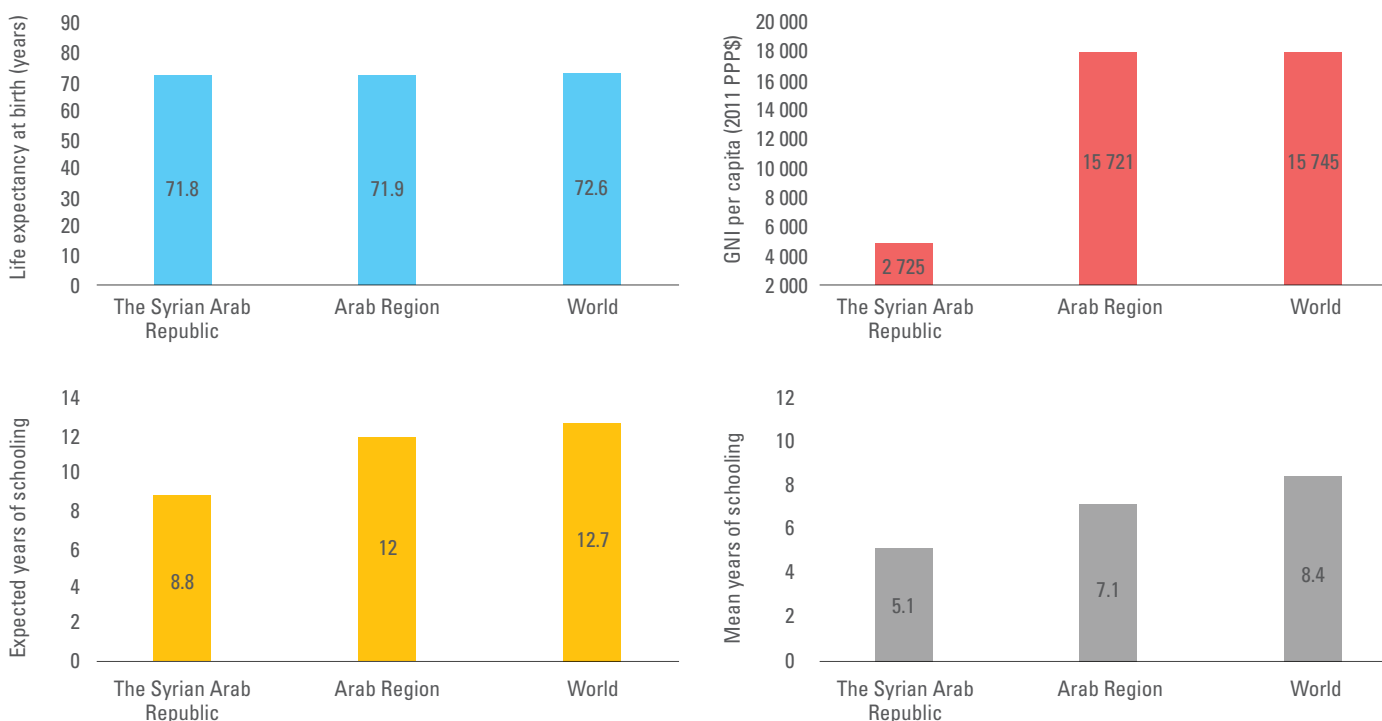
Figure 13. HDI, levels and trends in components

Source: Based on UNDP, 2018.

The gross national income (GNI) per capita, the dollar value of a country's final income in a year, divided by its population, and a proxy for a decent standard of living, has more than halved since the onset of conflict, to reach a little more than \$2,700 (2011 purchasing power parity (PPP) \$) in 2018. As the conflict extended and socioeconomic

conditions worsened, the development gap between the Syrian Arab Republic and the Arab region, as well as the world, widened considerably. On average in 2018, the regional and world GNI per capita – or the average income of a country's citizens – was more than 5.7 times that of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Figure 14. 2018 values of HDI components, the Syrian Arab Republic relative to Arab region and world



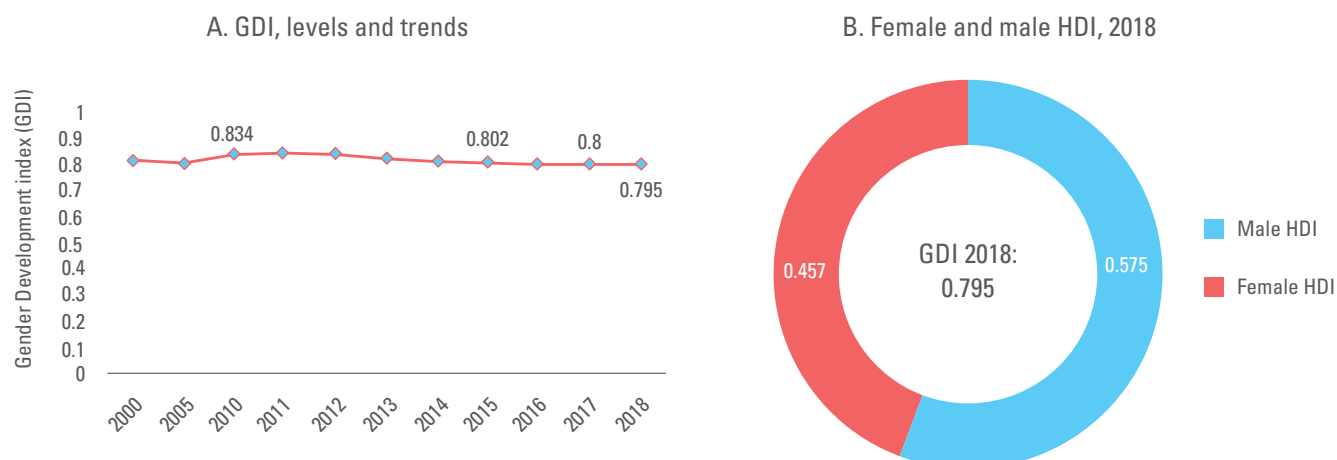
Source: Based on UNDP, "Human Development Data (1990-2018)", Database.

Presumably, inequality has deepened during the conflict, which would further decelerate development progress. The unavailability of data in recent years, however, has meant the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI) could not be computed for the Syrian Arab Republic.

Gender inequality has been prevalent in the Syrian Arab Republic for a long time, yet the pre-conflict period witnessed appreciable progress in promoting parity, as reflected in the improved Gender Development Index (GDI).⁹⁴ The conflict has reversed the trend, particularly in reinforcing the correlation between gender inequality and women's exploitation, and especially within patriarchal societies. The GDI fell to 0.795 in 2018, female HDI being at 0.457, male at 0.575. The gender gap is almost entirely due to inequalities in living standards and education (figure 16). Only in the health indicator do women fare better than men.



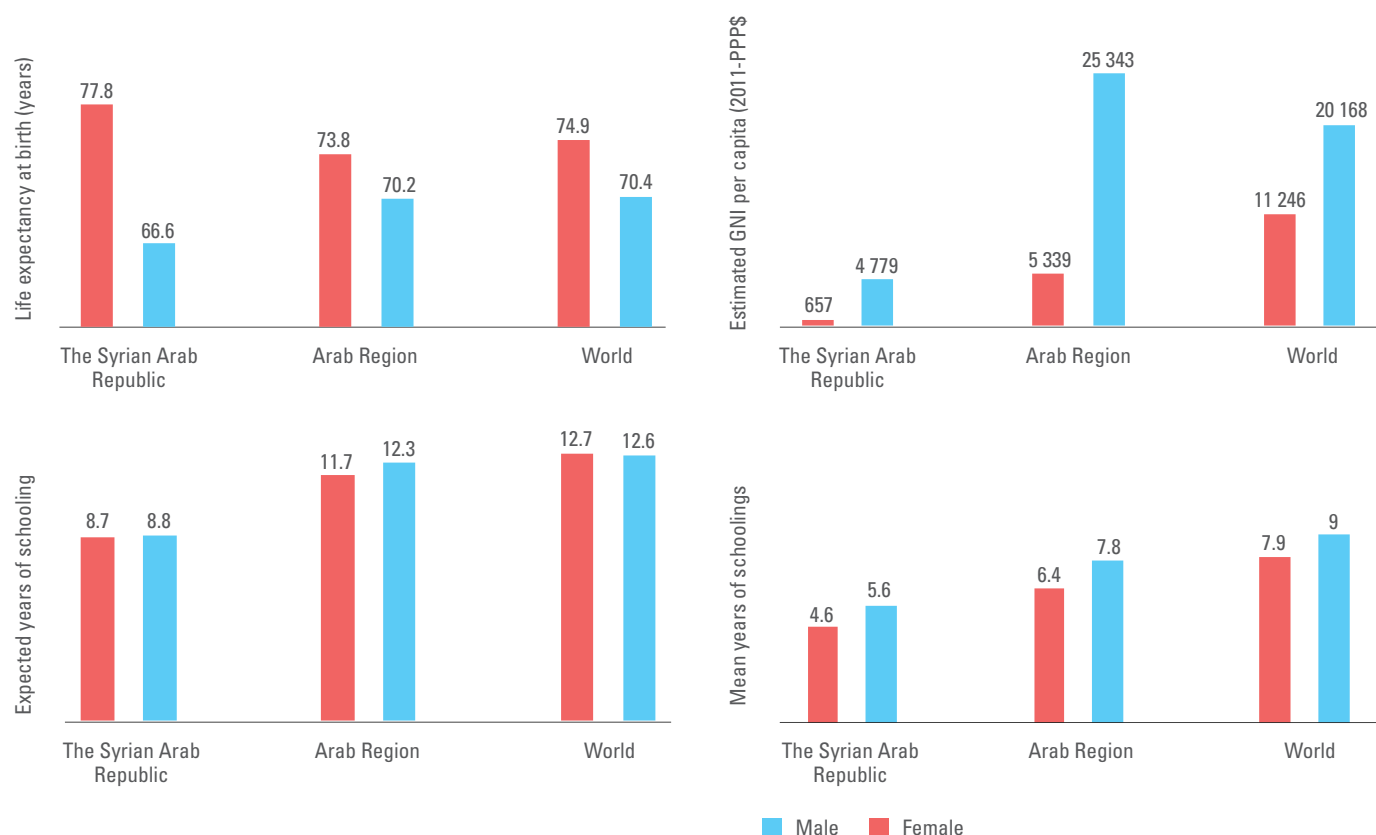
Source: Istockphoto, photo credit: serkansenturk

Figure 15. The Syrian Arab Republic GDI

Source: Based on UNDP, "Human Development Data (1990-2018)", Database.

The conflict has had a devastating impact on education, with educational deprivation a rising threat for all children, regardless of their sex. Nevertheless, girls face a higher risk, especially as many families resort to negative means, such as early marriage, to alleviate financial burdens. On

average, girls in the Syrian Arab Republic have access to just four years of schooling. Hence, their educational outlook fares badly relative to the Arab region, and the world, where females on average tend to complete the equivalent of primary and lower secondary education.

Figure 16. Comparing HDI components by sex, the Syrian Arab Republic relative to Arab region and world in 2018

Source: Based on UNDP, "Human Development Data (1990-2018)", Database.

The widest disparity between men and women is marked at the living standards dimension across all three sets. In 2018, across the world, the GNI per capita for men was more than 1.78 times that of women, and the ratio increases to 4.7 in the Arab region. In the Syrian Arab Republic it is doubly alarming as, first, the male-to-female GNI per capita ratio exceeds 7, and second, the estimated value of the female GNI per capita is extremely low, barely exceeding \$600 dollars (measured in 2011 PPP \$).

The female-to-male unemployment ratio re-emphasizes the constrained socioeconomic opportunities for women. They are 3.4 times more likely than men to be unemployed, with young females 2.5 times more likely than young men to be unemployed.⁹⁵ The socioeconomic exclusion of women deepens their exploitation and abuse, from child marriage to verbal and sexual harassment, which further restrains their socioeconomic and development opportunities.

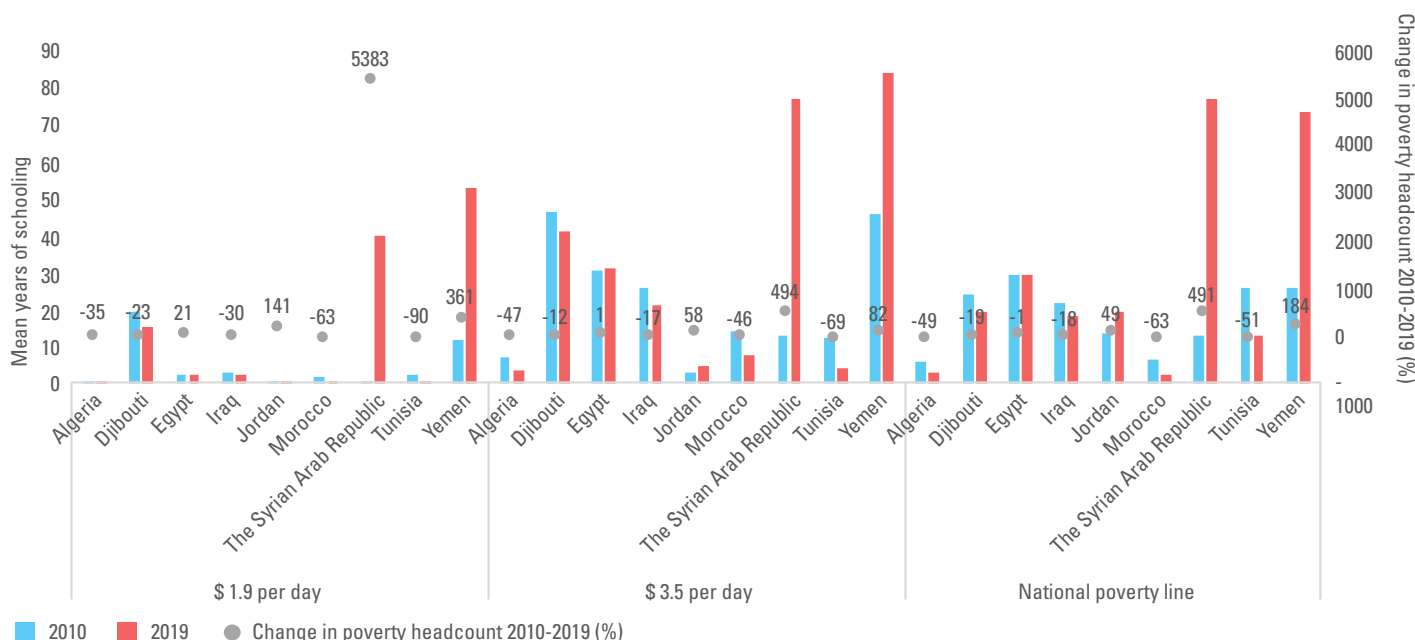
J. Poverty

1. Money metric poverty

Household income and expenditure surveys to estimate the impact of money metric poverty are not available but it is possible to make inferences based on the projected impact of income per capita losses. Figure 17, based on the most recent Household Income and Expenditure Survey for Syria available on the World Bank PovcalNet data portal, presents the results of such an exercise in comparison with other Arab countries based on a recent ESCWA paper.⁹⁶ The paper projects headcount poverty ratios for the Syrian Arab Republic and other Arab countries, according to (1) the international extreme poverty line of \$1.90 per day, (2) \$3.50 per day which is population weighted average of the national poverty lines in the region, and (3) the PPP equivalent of the most recent national poverty line based on national poverty rates published in World Development Indicators (WDI).⁹⁷

“Extreme poverty is projected to have increased during the conflict, with an estimated **40 per cent** of the population living under **\$1.90 per day** in 2019.”

Figure 17. Headcount poverty ratio \$1.90, \$3.50 and national poverty lines (in 2011 purchasing power parity dollars) and percentage change for selected Arab countries, 2010 and projected 2019 values



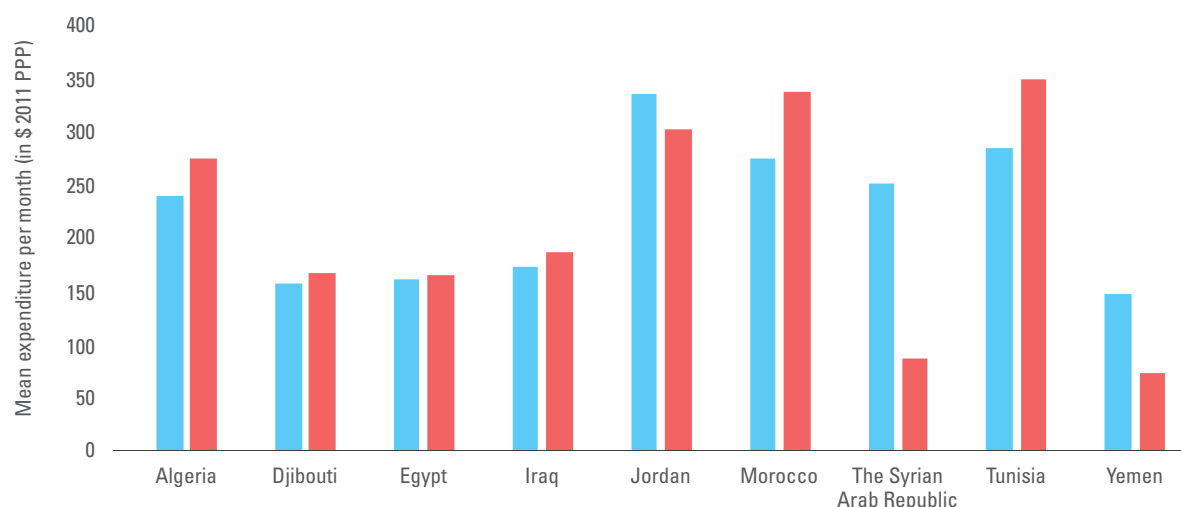
Source: Based on World Bank, PovcalNet datasets. Available at <http://iresearch.worldbank.org/PovcalNet/povOnDemand.aspx> (accessed on June 2020) and ESCWA, 2020.

The results are not surprising in the Syrian Arab Republic as extreme poverty is projected to have increased during the conflict, with an estimated 40 per cent of the population living under \$1.90 per day in 2019. This marks a very steep rise in extreme poverty relative to levels in 2010, during which extreme poverty was estimated at less than 1 per cent. For the \$3.50 line, which is more consistent with the pre-conflict value for the Syrian Arab Republic, the corresponding rate of increase was more than 400 per cent relative to 2010 levels, with near 77 per cent of the population living under that line in 2019. A very similar picture emerges when poverty headcounts at national poverty lines are considered. This renders the country the second poorest country, after Yemen, among the group of 10 countries in 2019.

Figure 18 shows the mean expenditures per month in 2010 and the projected values for 2019. The Syrian Arab Republic is estimated to have had a reduction in per capita expenditure from \$250.2 per month (2011 PPP \$) in 2010 to \$86.59 in 2019. The poverty situation today, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, may have further deteriorated due the further declines in income per capita and is expected, according to a recent ESCWA study to further deteriorate by 2021 (ESCWA, 2020).

It would appear safe to conclude therefore that the Syrian Arab Republic's poverty profile is closer to that of a least developed country than a middle income one, with major policy implications for post-conflict social and economic policy.

Figure 18. Mean per capita expenditure (in 2011 purchasing power parity dollars) for the Syrian Arab Republic and selected Arab countries, 2010 and projected 2019 values



Source: Based on World Bank, PovcalNet datasets. Available at <http://iresearch.worldbank.org/PovcalNet/povOnDemand.aspx> (accessed on June 2020) and ESCWA, 2020.

2. Multidimensional poverty

The evidence presented thus far captures aspects of human capital loss and the state of poverty and destitution endured by Syrians. This section synthesizes the evidence and presents the status of multidimensional poverty and its change over the period 2006-2017. Data on the Syrian Arab Republic's poverty outlook are largely unavailable, even for the pre-conflict period. This is overcome by first establishing 2006 as the pre-conflict baseline year, and second, using this benchmark to project the poverty profile in 2017.

Multidimensional poverty indices are gaining traction among policymakers globally as a tool to monitor poverty

alongside traditional money metric indices. Anchored in Sen's writings⁹⁸ on development as a process of expanding capability, basic rights and freedoms, multidimensional poverty analysis focuses on non-monetary deprivations across various dimensions, such as education, health and living standards to have a more holistic understanding of poverty and the deprivations experienced by the poor.

For the Syrian Arab Republic, the Arab Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) methodology⁹⁹ was used to examine the prevalence and characteristics of multidimensional poverty in 2006,¹⁰⁰ using Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) data.¹⁰¹

The prevalence for 2017 is estimated by extrapolating the 2006 index, using and contrasting two approaches: one using recent available data on the Arab MPI's constituent indicators and the rate of change between 2006 and 2017, the other a regression-based estimate using information for 106 countries and the recent global MPI and selected variables. The advantage of using Arab MPI data is that it takes account of the specificities of middle-income Arab countries. Estimated figures for the Syrian Arab Republic are thus comparable with other countries.

The Arab MPI uses the global MPI, adapting the indicators and deprivation thresholds to the region and proposing two poverty levels, for acute and for moderate poverty. As shown in figure 19, the Arab MPI includes the three dimensions of education, health and living standards, and 12 indicators. Dimensions are weighted one third each, with the weight distributed equally among the dimension's indicators. To identify who is poor, a deprivation score for each household is calculated as the sum of the weights of the dimensions in which the household is deprived. The poverty identification cut-off in the Arab MPI—threshold used to identify the multidimensionally poor is set at one

third of all weighted indicators at both acute and moderate poverty levels. A household is therefore considered poor if its deprivation score is 33.3 per cent or more of the total weighted sum for all indicators. Table 1 provides details on the Arab MPI framework at both poverty levels.



Source: Istockphoto, photo credit: mrtaytas

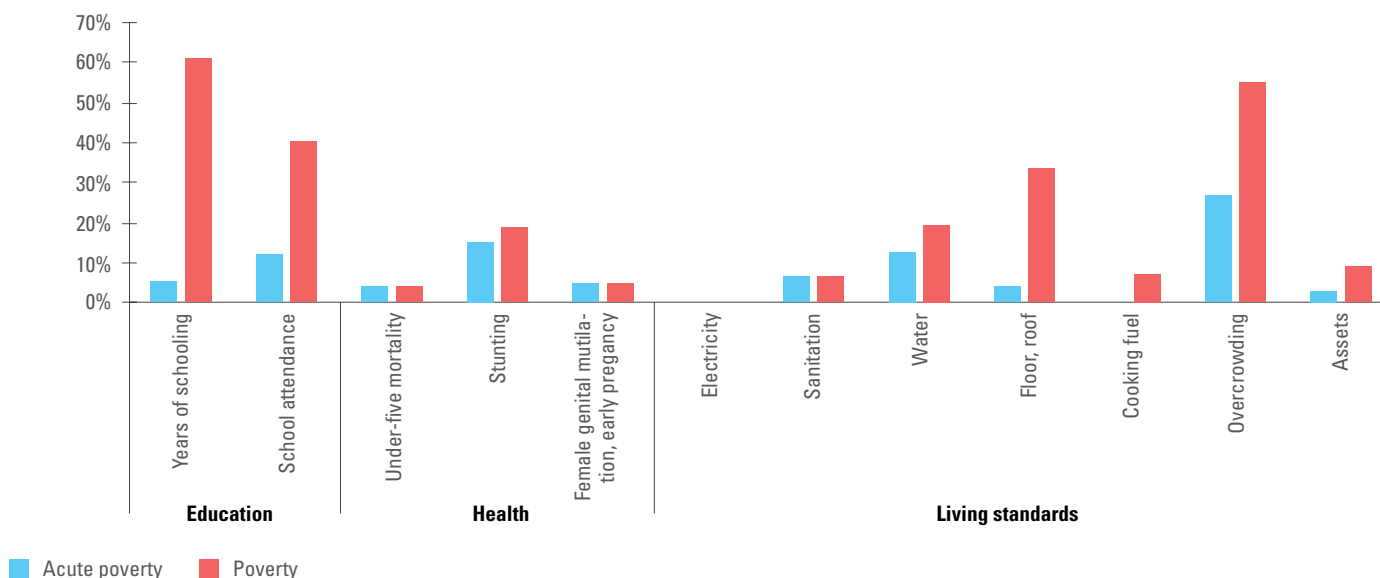
Table 1. Deprivation definitions and weights in the Arab MPI framework

Dimension and weight assigned	Indicator and weight assigned	Deprived if	
		Acute poverty	Moderate poverty
Education (weight=1/3)	Years of schooling (weight=1/6)	No household member has completed primary schooling.	No household member has completed secondary schooling.
	School attendance (weight=1/6)	Any child of primary school age is not attending school.	Any school-age child is not attending school or is 2 years or more behind the right school grade.
	Child mortality (weight=1/9)	Any child less than 60 months has died in the family during the 59 months prior to the survey.	Same as acute poverty.
Health (weight =1/3)	Child nutrition (weight=1/9)	Any child (0-59 months) is stunted (height for age < -2) or any adult is undernourished (BMI < 18.5)	Any child (0-59 months) is stunted (height for age < -2) or any child is wasted (weight for height < -2) or any adult is malnourished (BMI < 18.5).
	Female genital mutilation, early pregnancy (weight=1/9)	Any woman under 28 years got her first pregnancy while under 18 years old and has undergone a female genital mutilation (FGM)	A woman less than 28 years old got her first pregnancy before 18 years old or has undergone a female genital mutilation (FGM).

Living standards (weight=1/3)	Electricity (weight=1/21)	Household has no electricity.	Same as acute poverty.
	Sanitation (weight=1/21)	Household sanitation is not improved, according to MDG guidelines, or it is improved but shared with other household.	Same as acute poverty.
	Water (weight=1/21)	Household does not have access to safe drinking water, according to SDG guidelines, or safe drinking water is 30-minutes roundtrip walk or more away from home	Household does not have piped water into dwelling or yard.
	Floor, roof (weight=1/21)	Floor is earth, sand, dung or roof is not available or made of thatch, palm leaf or sod	Floor is earth, sand, dung, rudimentary (wood planks/ bamboo/reeds/grass/canes), cement floor (not slab or tiles/asphalt strips) or roof is not available or made of thatch, palm leaf, sod, rustic mat, palm, bamboo, wood plank, cardboard.
	Cooking fuel (weight=1/21)	Household cooks with solid fuels: wood, charcoal, crop residues or dung or no food is cooked in the household	Household cooks with solid fuels: wood, charcoal, crop residues or dung or no food is cooked in the household or does not have a separate room for cooking.
	Overcrowding (weight=1/21)	Household has 4 or more people per sleeping room	Household has 3 or more people per sleeping room.
	Assets (weight=1/21)	Household has either no access to information or households with no access to easy mobility and livelihood assets	Household has less than two assets for accessing information, or there is more than one information asset and less than two mobility assets and less than two livelihood assets.

Source: League of Arab States' Council of Arab Ministers for Social Affairs, ESCWA, UNICEF and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (2017). Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report. E/ESCWA/EDID/2017/2. Beirut.

Figure 19. Incidence of deprivation in Arab MPI indicators using acute poverty and poverty cut-offs, 2006

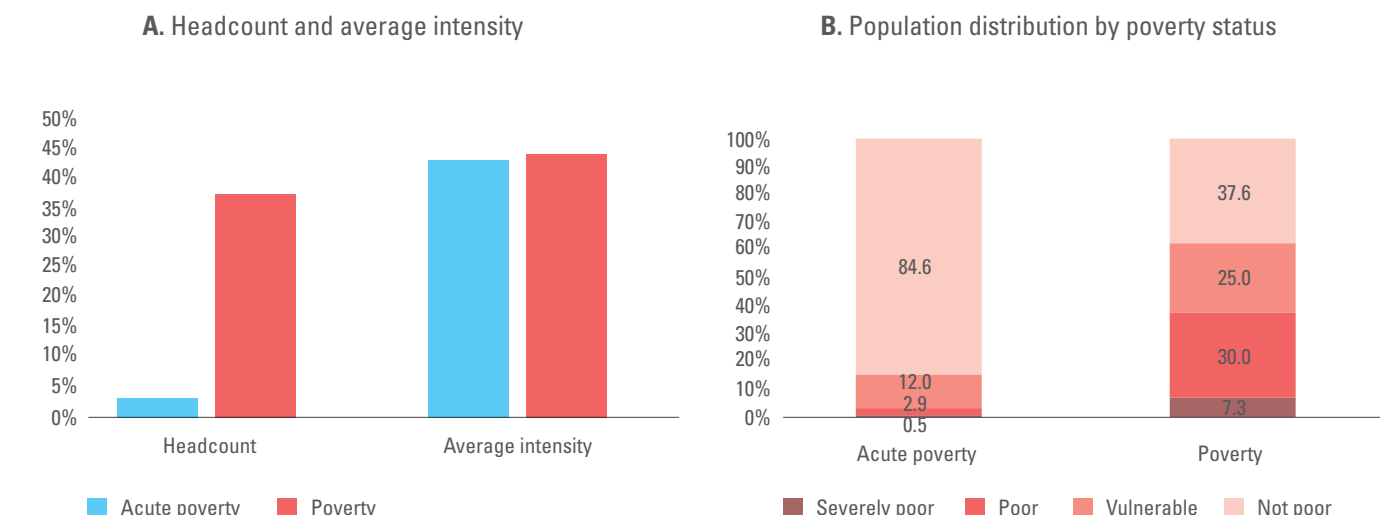


Source: Authors' projections based on the Syrian Arab Republic, Central Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF and PAPFAM, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2006.

Despite a general low prevalence of acute deprivation in 2006 (base year) in the Syrian Arab Republic, there is a sharp rise across all indicators, particularly education and housing, at the poverty cut-off. For instance, deprivation in years of schooling – that reflects primary completion at acute poverty and secondary completion at the moderate poverty level – increases more than eleven fold at the moderate poverty level, relative to the acute one. A significant share of households did not have full access to secondary education. Similarly, overcrowding more than doubles as the poverty score shifts from acute poverty to moderate poverty. Hence, moderate deprivations were not quite as low as acute deprivations in 2006.

The poverty headcount ratios (figure 20) emphasize the actual depth and breadth of poverty in the 2000s. While less than 4 per cent of the Syrian population was regarded as acutely poor, more than 37 per cent was regarded as poor, with multidimensional poverty intensity exceeding 40 per cent. In the context of poverty analysis, it is crucial to draw attention to the vulnerability rate, which focuses on prospects rather than the present situation. In 2006, the country was highly vulnerable to acute and moderate poverty, with an estimated 12 per cent and 25 per cent of the population at risk, respectively, indicating the adverse socioeconomic conditions facing many Syrians even before the uprising.

Figure 20. Multidimensional poverty, for acute poverty and poverty, 2006

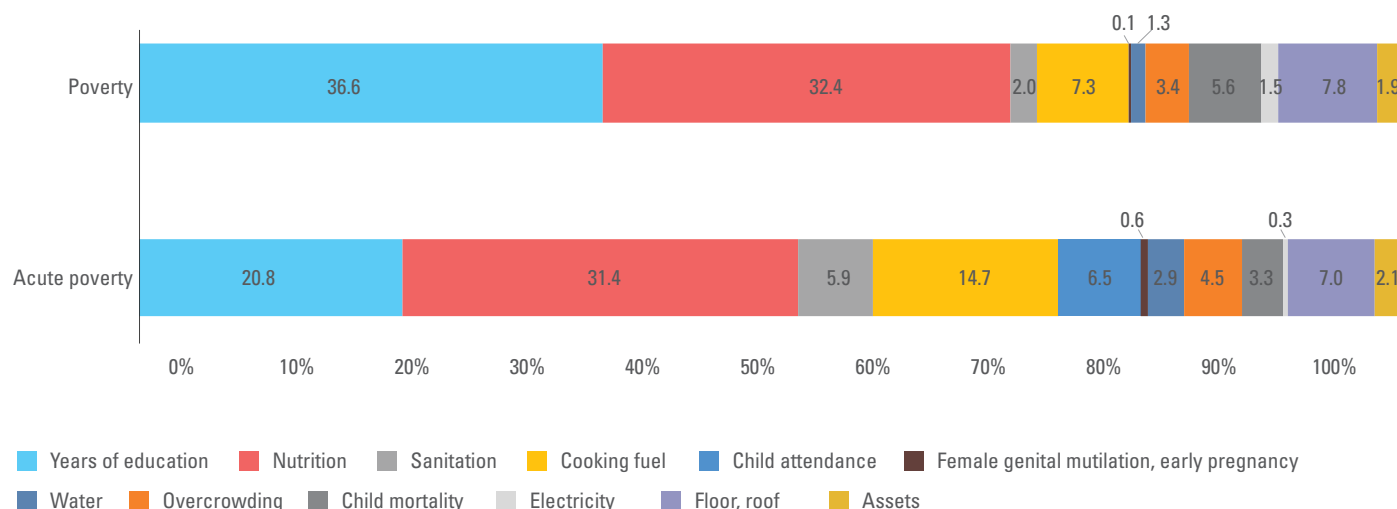


Source: Authors' projections based on the Syrian Arab Republic, Central Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF and PAPFAM, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2006.

Education indicators are the most significant contributors to both poverty levels (figure 21). The association with lifetime outcomes intensifies over time as education shapes future employment opportunities and overall well-being. The contribution of health indicators, particularly

nutrition, doubles at acute poverty level. Despite the relatively lower contributions of health and living standards indicators to poverty levels, they still account for a considerable percentage of the measure.

Figure 21. Contribution of indicators to MPI, 2006 (percentage)



Source: Authors' projections based on the Syrian Arab Republic, Central Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF and PAPFAM, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2006.

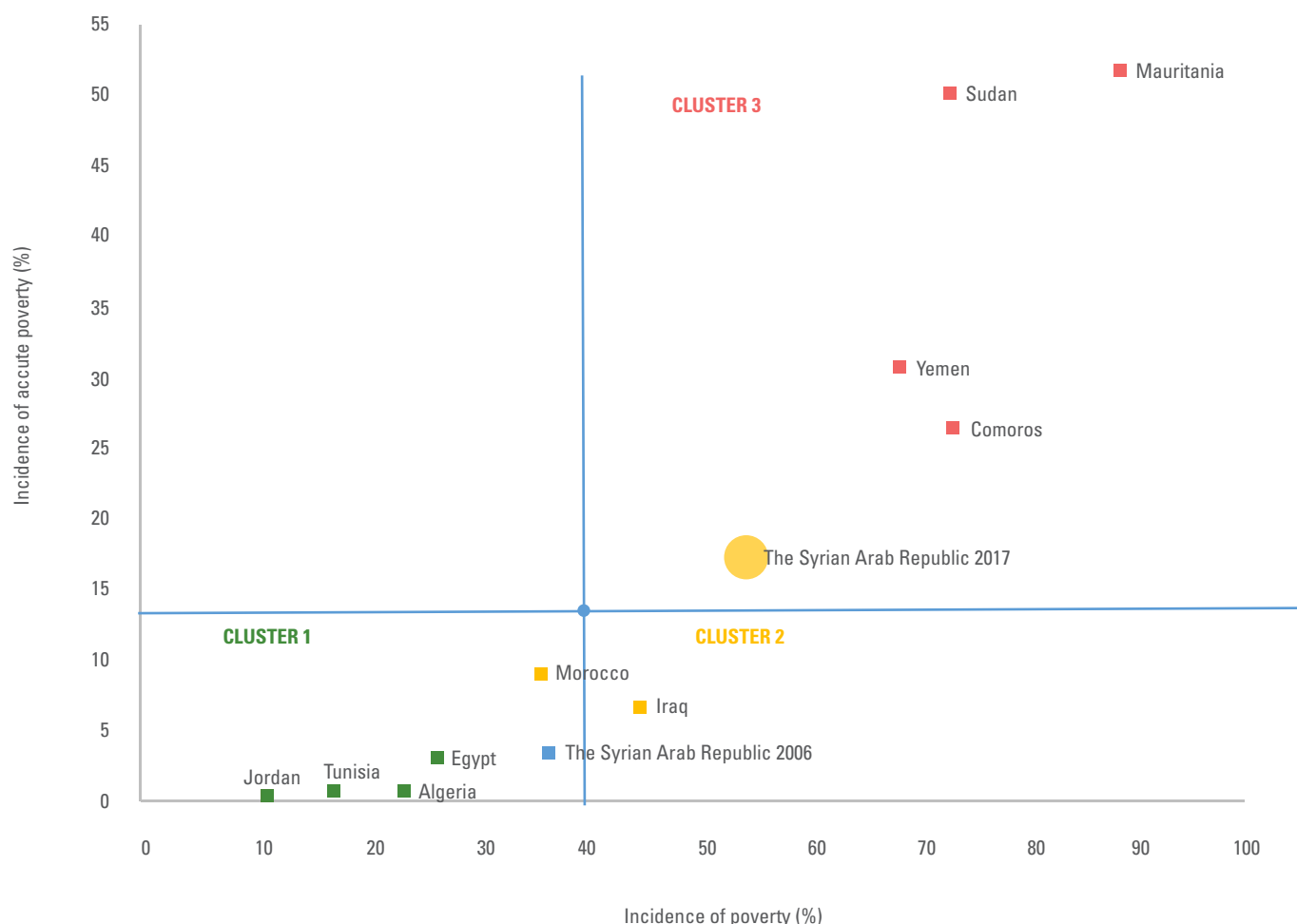
Broadening the definition of poverty from acute to moderate results in a substantially different pre-conflict socioeconomic outlook. The prospects were far from ideal. Most of the population was deprived in the key social indicators, including education and housing, with another significant proportion of society at risk of falling into deprivation. It is worth noting that the troubles began as a non-violent call for reform as people became discontented with the socioeconomic status quo. Extensive deprivation played a partial role in fuelling discontent, particularly among youth who fell short of their aspirations.¹⁰²

After eight years, conflict had led to a sharp deterioration in all social, economic and development indicators. Quantifying its impact is increasingly challenging, the consequences split between tangible and intangible perspectives and, more importantly, short- and long-term outlooks. For instance, statistics on the quantity and quality of infrastructure, including disruptions in accessing improved water and sanitation, and house demolition, reflect the immediate impairment. Similarly, tightening restrictions on delivering food assistance and basic survival medicine, and inadequate medical provision, directly translate into worsening health and nutrition indicators, such as a rise in food-insecure people, child mortality and reported cases of communicable diseases. Present-day education indicators do not provide a concrete assessment of the cost of conflict as it takes

several years for indicators, such as illiteracy rates, mean years of schooling or completion rates, to fully reflect the generation of unschooled children.

The severe socioeconomic contraction has led to a sharp decline in the middle class. Millions have been pushed into multidimensional poverty, and vulnerability rates have increased. Following the Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report,¹⁰³ countries are classified into three clusters based on their two poverty levels, with cluster 1 having relatively low poverty incidences using both definitions (figure 22). In 2006, the Syrian Arab Republic's regional position fell between clusters 1 and 2. Its low levels of acute poverty were close to cluster 1 countries, but with higher levels of poverty and thus into the range of values for cluster 2 countries, where it sat between Morocco and Iraq. Yet, as the conflict escalated, poverty incidences increased considerably at both poverty cut-offs, with headcounts in 2017 estimated to exceed 50 per cent for poverty and 15 per cent for acute poverty.¹⁰⁴ Acute poverty estimates for 2017 mark a fourfold increase relative to the baseline year. The Syrian Arab Republic's position has worsened compared with its Arab counterparts, its deprivation levels approaching those of the least developed countries in cluster 3, which substantiate the Human Development Index (HDI) findings that also indicate a conflict-induced downgrading in rank, from medium to low human development.

Figure 22. Prevalence of acute poverty and poverty for the Syrian Arab Republic 2006 and projected estimates for 2017 plotted on prevalence in Arab countries



Source: Authors' calculations based on League of Arab States' Council of Arab Ministers for Social Affairs, ESCWA, UNICEF and OPHI, Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report (2017).

Note: The blue lines indicate the weighted average of countries. please add the yellow circle as it is found in the word document represents the 95 per cent confidence interval for 2017 poverty estimates for the Syrian Arab Republic.

K. Conclusion

The human suffering due to death, injury and displacement in the Syrian Arab Republic is immense but one of the conflict's most destructive legacies, in the longer term, may be in the social polarization it has produced. The potential for a new social contract has been stunted by this grinding conflict. The actions of the main parties to the conflict became co-constitutive towards further escalation, entrenchment and division. Agitation along identity lines, deep societal mistrust of the motives of other parties and exclusionary discourses that "cancel the other" may have long-lasting and irreversible effects and must be acknowledged in the post-peace accord process if an equitable and sustainable social contract is to be forged.

Despite the deep challenges, most Syrians speak of a unified society and have a belief in that, even if they disagree on many aspects of its mode of governance. There has been a backlash among most Syrians against the warring parties that seek to erase the country's current boundaries, and thus Syrian identity. The years have brought conflict but also numerous examples of societal initiatives, grass-roots efforts and other joint moves seeking to cross boundaries, build bridges and move society forward. If approached with an eye towards human rights and gender equality, an accountable, inclusive and equitable reconstruction process may start the long but necessary task of mending the wounds and building a future for all Syrians.