

Unpacking the effects of thirteen years of crisis: A snapshot of humanitarian needs in post-Assad Syria

January 2025 | Whole of Syria

KEY MESSAGES

- The political transition in Syria after the collapse of the Assad government presents an **opportunity for an integrated and comprehensive Whole-of-Syria approach** that addresses the needs of affected populations across all regions. While the Joint Needs Assessment (JNA) provides an **initial snapshot of humanitarian needs and conditions across Syria**, significant information gaps persist. Further assessments are needed to address these gaps and strengthen the evidence-based humanitarian programming in Syria.
- The JNA suggests that **needs in Syria are critical and widespread across the sectors, with shelter, access to food and electricity emerging as the top three priorities**. The fluid demographic context – with **mass population movements** driven by the change in the political situation – places additional strain on already fragile systems. The rehabilitation of basic services, livelihoods and shelter are paramount to ensure a dignified return of displaced populations and sustainable and inclusive community recovery.
- Amid significant gaps across all regions, **humanitarian assistance remains insufficient**, hindered by years of limited access, political fragmentation and scarce funding. To remain accountable to affected populations, the humanitarian community needs to ensure that ongoing funding and assistance will effectively accompany the evolving needs, priorities and aspirations of Syrians during this critical period of change.

Adapting humanitarian efforts to Syria's changing political context

The military campaign launched on 27 November by opposition factions led to the [overthrow of the Assad government](#), marking the most significant shift in the country's political landscape since the onset of the civil war in 2011. This development follows thirteen years of conflict, repeated displacement and international isolation, leaving Syria facing economic stagnation, underdevelopment, continuously deteriorating infrastructure and inadequate basic services.

The fall of the government in Damascus on 8 December has brought forth new challenges for the Syrian people, notably regarding the country's [reconstruction](#). However, the new political reality may also present an opportunity for humanitarian engagement in the South-Central areas of the country, where access was previously limited. This could open new avenues for increased short-term relief and medium- to long-term stabilisation.

The current brief outlines key findings from the JNA conducted between 23 December 2024

and 2 January 2025 – **the first Whole-of-Syria multisectoral assessment since the change in the political context**. Coordinated by the Syria INGO Regional Forum (SIRF) and supported by REACH and 31 humanitarian organisations, the assessment utilised the [REACH HSOS methodology](#) to identify multi-sectoral conditions, barriers and priority needs in affected areas.

The methodology combined Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted in directly accessible communities with the Area of Knowledge (AoK) approach for areas with limited or no access, drawing on individuals who had recently left those regions to gather insights. Based on a 14-day recall period, the findings provide community-level insights and should be interpreted as indicative only. All findings are available via the dedicated [dashboard](#).

This assessment marks an **important first step in addressing essential information gaps in Syria** and strengthening the evidence-

based humanitarian response there. Sustained engagement and further assessments will be vital to understanding and addressing the evolving

needs of affected communities across Syria and supporting new pathways towards long-term recovery.

Mass movement trends highlight persistent challenges to safe, dignified returns

Key informants across all governorates reported that population movements in their communities were **predominantly driven by arrivals rather than departures**, with 76% of communities registering a substantial influx of people coming into their area. This trend was particularly pronounced in Rural Damascus (84%), Hama (83%) and Aleppo with 82% of communities reporting arrivals. Most of these arrivals were reported to be people **going back to their areas of origin** and people **reuniting with their family**.

(NES), like Hasakeh and Raqqa, saw an influx of people mainly due to security concerns in their previous areas – including hostilities, shelling and risks of detention. The recent escalation in the north, particularly around Tal Rifaat and Menbij, determined a **wave of displacement** into areas around Hasakeh, **Raqqa** and **Tabqa** in NES. Currently over **190 emergency collective shelters**, mainly closed-down schools in NES, are hosting over 25,000 people.



What were the main reasons why people arrived to the communities?

According to IDP Taskforce data from 2 January, approximately **627,000 individuals** had moved across Syria since 27 November. Of those, 522,000 people went back to their places of origin, mainly in Hama and Aleppo, areas previously inaccessible to many internally displaced people. This latter number includes both **long-term resettlements and short-term visits**.

While for most communities the main reason for the new arrivals was going back to their area of origin, some governorates in Northeast Syria

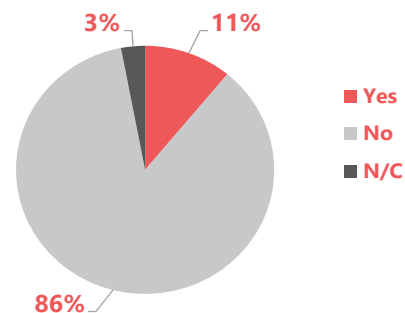
Many people going back to their areas of origin have faced **severe challenges due to damaged infrastructure, lack of basic services and security risks**, such as unexploded ordnance. In several governorates, local services and infrastructure appeared to be stretched beyond capacity. In Aleppo, 53% of communities reported overwhelmed services, as well as 45% of communities in Hama and 23% in Rural Damascus.

System strain and infrastructure damage were also two of the main reasons why some in-camp IDPs who initially went back to their place of origin eventually **returned to camps**. The **movement intentions survey** conducted by REACH in late December in five camps in NES suggests that only a small minority of people there intended to go back to their place of origin in the short term. The main cited conditions for a dignified return were access to livelihoods, basic services and rehabilitation of shelters. REACH and other organisations are closely monitoring these trends. A better understanding of movements intentions will be essential in the coming period to address populations’ evolving needs.

Syrians lack access to humanitarian assistance amid critical needs and limited funding

The Joint Needs Assessment highlights that **humanitarian needs persist across the Whole of Syria**. The majority of communities surveyed reported varying levels of hardship, with 49% classifying their needs as “severe,” corresponding to an inability to fully meet their basic needs, threatening the mental and physical wellbeing of the population. Another 36% of the communities reported “high” needs, suggesting that most people were able to meet their essential needs, but living conditions remained very poor.

In Hama and Aleppo, the proportion of communities facing severe needs exceeded 60%, driven by the impact of prolonged conflict, displacement and

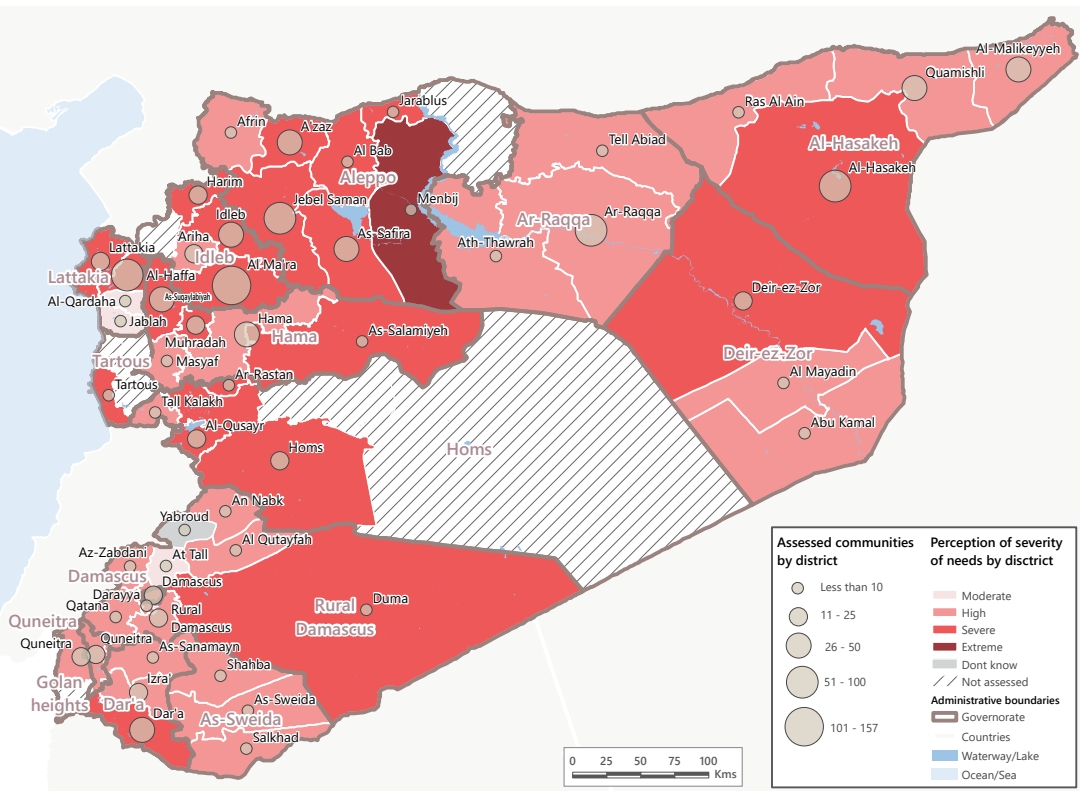


Did the majority of people in the community have access to humanitarian assistance?

¹ This indicator reflects KIs’ perceptions of the severity of needs within the communities they represent

² Term used to describe cases where KIs provided differing responses for the same community, hence “No consensus”

The map presents an indicative picture of the severity of needs at the district level across Syria. It is based on the perceived severity of needs as reported by the majority of assessed communities within each district: "In your perception, how critical was the level of needs in this community in the last 14 days?"



economic decline. These areas also reported [considerable damage to or destruction of infrastructure](#), further complicating relief and stabilisation efforts.

Meanwhile, **access to humanitarian assistance remained critically low across all governorates**. In Lattakia, 99% of communities reported no access to aid in the 14 days prior to data collection, while Aleppo and Hama both suggested that 93% of communities did not have access to assistance. The primary barrier to aid was simply the lack of available humanitarian assistance, reported by 83% of communities surveyed.

While political fragmentation, access constraints and conflict-related risks have long hindered humanitarian operations, the **low access to aid may also be linked to the limited funding available**, particularly noticeable in 2024, when only 33.6% of the [Humanitarian Response Plan](#) was achieved.

Communities signal shelter, access to food and electricity as top needs

Shelter was reported as the first priority need of assessed communities. In 37% of all assessed communities, the majority of people were living in either an unfinished or abandoned house, damaged residential building, non-residential structure, such as garage, or emergency shelters, notably tents. Among communities in Aleppo, 40% of them reported that the main shelter type was an unfinished or abandoned building and 14% reported they lived in damaged buildings. Aleppo has been particularly affected by recent shelling and fighting, including at the Tishren Dam which disrupted water and electricity delivery for [more than 400,000 people](#). Widespread [looting](#) has also been noted in Aleppo.

In Idleb, which was severely impacted by the 2023 earthquake, unfinished or abandoned buildings were the second most common type of shelter, while in Damascus, though only a few communities could be assessed, unfinished or abandoned buildings were reported as the primary shelter type. When looking at damaged infrastructure, Hama had the highest proportion of communities with damaged residential buildings. Nearly three-quarters of assessed communities there reported shelter damage, with 24% saying that "almost all" buildings were unusable, 21% indicating the same for "many" buildings, and another 21% noting "some" unusable buildings in their community.

Food was identified as the second priority need by communities in Syria. While many households relied on previously stored food, 91% of communities reported that purchasing food from stores and markets remained the primary source. Overall, **75% of communities noted that people were unable to access sufficient food.**

Economic challenges, particularly **rising food prices**, were reported across all governorates as the main barrier to accessing adequate food supplies. This is corroborated by REACH's Rapid Market Assessments (RMA) in northern Syria³ which show that, despite markets being largely operational, price increases restricted consumers' ability to purchase essential goods.

Electricity was reported as the third priority need of assessed communities. The primary source of electricity across governorates was the main network, reported by 43%, followed by solar panels. However, access to electricity was perceived to be a significant challenge, with 71% of communities citing partial or complete network failure and 68% reporting that solar panels or batteries were unaffordable.

Several governorates, especially Lattakia with 46% of communities, but also Aleppo, Idleb and Hama, reported high proportions of communities with

³ RMA for [NES](#), RMA for [NWS](#), December 2024

no available electricity. **Many areas experienced on average only 2 to 6 hours of electricity daily**, a situation particularly prevalent in Dara, Lattakia and Damascus, affecting up to 75% of communities in some regions. Some governorates saw a majority of communities reporting on average less than 2 hours of electricity per day, namely Deir-ez-Zor with 74% of communities, Hama (77%), Homs (62%) and Rural Damascus (69%).

While Syria has faced for years issues related to electricity distribution due to infrastructure inadequacy, the recent hostilities have caused [further damage](#) to already strained systems. The **lack of electricity has been seen as having cascading effects on other essential needs and services**, including water pumping and heating, whereas its high costs have often forced vulnerable households to incur [further financial debt](#).

Barriers and gaps across sectors highlight need for multi-sectoral response

Most assessed communities reported that essential non-food items (NFIs) were generally available in local markets. However, **shortages persisted for key items, with 34% of communities reporting a lack of cooking fuel**, followed by solar panels with 30%, and batteries with 28% of communities. Shortages and high prices in fuel have affected to varying degrees most regions, with subsidised/unsubsidised/parallel market **diesel prices** in NES in December having risen by 28-100% and cooking fuel prices by 33% according to the [Joint Market Monitoring Initiative \(JMMI\) data](#). Moreover, new arrivals across the country in the coming period **may further increase demand for fuel** and lead to greater price spikes.

governorates like Idlib, Aleppo and Lattakia, private water trucking – generally more expensive and less safe – was a primary source. In 44% of communities, **access to drinking water was reported as the top WASH need**, followed by the rehabilitation of water networks and storage tanks.

KIs' perceptions of school attendance varied significantly across governorates, with **perceptions of a majority of children not going to school reaching 55% of communities or more in Hama, Aleppo and Idlib**, and higher perceived attendance rates in Lattakia, Dara, Sweida and Quneitra. Key education needs included improving school infrastructure, providing teaching materials and expanding education services.

While conflict-related protection indicators have generally decreased in intensity over the years, significant risks remain in certain areas. Overall, **conflict, violence and/or crime were reported in 36% of communities, with higher rates in Homs, Damascus and Deir-ez-Zor**. Social cohesion tensions were noted in 21% of communities, with Homs, Damascus, Dara and Deir-ez-Zor most affected. Key protection needs identified by communities included support for vulnerable groups, child protection services and explosive hazard awareness or clearance.

These challenges highlight the need for a comprehensive humanitarian response that addresses both ongoing emergency needs and conflict-sensitive, recovery-oriented solutions to build a dignified and safe future for the Syrian people.

82%

of communities said income does not cover the cost of living

While price volatility is expected to persist, insufficient livelihoods and low purchasing power compound Syria's prolonged economic crisis. **Income gaps that fail to meet basic needs were reported by 82% of communities, while 64% highlighted a lack of suitable employment opportunities**. As a result, households have resorted to coping strategies such as depleting savings, selling belongings and reducing spending on health and education. Historically prevalent economic sectors, such as agriculture reported by 45% of communities, were cited as the primary source of income for many.

The lack of livelihoods was found to have ripple effects on various other sectors. In **64% of communities, healthcare was reported as inaccessible, with two key challenges being economic**: the high costs of health services and the expensive transportation to reach facilities. The lack of medical equipment at healthcentres was also reported

among the top three barriers. The three governorates in which the highest proportion of communities indicated a lack of access to healthcare were Aleppo with 84% of communities, Lattakia 79%, and Dara 70%.

The sources of drinking water varied across communities, with 40% relying on piped networks as their main drinking water source. However, in

64%

of communities signaled a lack of job opportunities

56%

of communities pointed to the low demand of workers

ABOUT REACH

REACH Initiative facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite