

# **RESEARCHING INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT**

**Working Paper No. 26**

## **Socio-Economic Challenges and Demographic Changes Arising from Internal Displacement in Syria**

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## **Abstract**

*This study analyses the waves of internal displacement that Syria witnessed from 2011 until the implementation of the study in 2016, through a case study of Swaida (Swaida Governorate in the south of Syria) and Salamiyah (Hama Governorate in the central region of Syria). By analysing Syrian internal displacement in four stages that describe different temporal and spatial scales, the study is able to map out the resulting demographic change. In parallel, using a gender lens, the study sheds light on the most important socio-economic challenges faced by the displaced population. Finally, the study concludes that enhancing the capabilities of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and employing these capabilities through micro-enterprises programmes offer the solution to boosting and sustaining IDP resilience in various aspects, including the gendered dimensions of labour, education, protection, agency and mental health.*

## **Keywords**

Syria; Internal Displacement, IDPs; Socio-economic Challenges;, Demographic Change; Gender Norms.

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## 1. Introduction

More than ten years of devastating war in Syria has produced more than 6.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) within the internationally-recognised Syrian borders.<sup>1</sup> Around 52 percent of this population are children<sup>2</sup>. Syrian internal displacement has been an issue of intense and often heated debate. Accurate statistics are not widely available. Security and political causes limit the ability of humanitarian agencies including UN and NGOs to single out IDPs as a distinct population of concern.<sup>3</sup>

In this context, few robust studies address forced internal displacement in the Syrian crisis using gender analysis and examine its impact on the displaced population. Despite the plight of Syrian IDPs, academic studies fail to examine internal displacement trends, the challenges IDPs suffer to cope and survive and the protracted solutions to help them, with more academic work focusing instead on Syrian refugees outside the country.<sup>4</sup>

This study was produced to address a gap in the literature on internal displacement, in particular in the Syrian context, on the socio-economic challenges have been prompted by internal displacement, using a gender lens. This study contributes to the interpretation of demographic change in two areas - Swaida and Salamiyah - in Syria by illustrating the displacement trends from across Syria into the study sites. We identify the socio-economic challenges that IDPs face, including in work opportunities, poverty, housing, education and child labour, gender-based violence and protection, gender norms change and agency, psychological and mental health and social relations. Qualitative gender-focused analysis has been conducted to achieve the goal of this study. In addition, quantitative analysis has been utilised to identify interventions that would

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<sup>1</sup>UNHCR. (2020). [Syria: Operational update](#).

<sup>2</sup> OCHA. (2019). [2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic](#); Steele. J. (2019). [Migration, displacement and education: Building bridges, not walls](#). UNESCO and Global Education Monitoring;

<sup>3</sup> Kristian. B. H., and Yogev. B. O. (2016). [Syria's Internally Displaced and the Risk of Militarization](#). PRIO Policy brief 06. Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO); Doocy. S., Lyles. E., Delbiso, T.D., et al. (2015). [Internal displacement and the Syrian crisis: an analysis of trends from 2011–2014](#). Conflict Health 9 ( 33); Mooney. E. (2014). [The inside story: internal displacement in Syria](#). Forced Migration Review 47; Al Asali. W., Elizabeth. W., and Ramage. M. H. (2019). [Living on the move, dwelling between temporality and permanence in Syria](#). Journal of Housing and the Built Environment; Davis. R., Taylor. A., and Murphy. E. (2014). [Gender, conscription and protection, and the war in Syria](#). Forced Migration Review 47; [Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre \(IDMC\)](#). (2020). Country Profile: Syrian Arab Republic.

<sup>4</sup> Harrison, E. (2016). [Modelling Syrian Internally Displaced Person Movements: A Case Study of Conflict, Travel, Accessibility, and Resource Availability](#). Virginia's Community College System. Student Writing; Adam. B., Gilles. D., and Arthur. Q. (2018). [Civil War in Syria. Mobilization and Competing Social Orders](#). Cambridge University Press, P.336; Lichtenheld. G. A., and Schon. J. (2021). [The consequences of internal displacement on civil war violence: evidence from Syria](#). Polit Geogr, 86; Deng. H., Li. H., Xiao. S., et al. (2021). [Integrating multi-source spatial data to assess the impact of the Syrian civil war on cities and population](#). Arabian Journal of Geoscience, 14; European Asylum Support Office (EASO). (2020). [Syria Internally displaced persons, returnees and internal mobility](#); Doocy. S., Lyles. E., Delbiso. T.D. et al. Opt.cited (2015); The World Bank Group. (2020). [The Mobility of Displaced Syrians An Economic and Social Analysis](#); UN Human Rights Council. (2018). [Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic](#).

improve the living conditions of displaced households in general and women-headed IDP households in particular.

## 2. Internal displacement and its impact

### 2.1 *Internal displacement concepts*

Before the 1990s, there was little recognition of internal displacement in politics. External displacement between states was the attention of politics, research and theories.<sup>5</sup> A key definition of internally displaced persons was advanced in the 1998 UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement: ‘persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border’.<sup>6</sup> In 2000, internal displacement concept got widened to include people who got displaced because of development projects.<sup>7</sup> Yet, conflict is frequently considered the main driver of internal displacement, by contrast to the political violence (or disasters linked to natural hazards) not so often seen as inducing this kind of displacement.<sup>8</sup> Some scholars identify internal displacement as a form of relocation more than a move. Varied types of internal displacement create this scenario, for instance, the temporary displacement in particular for those who do not live in displacement all the time as commuting and circulation displacement.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.2 *Demographic change and internal displacement*

At the national and local level, internal displacement creates demographic changes due to IDPs mobility. Some current research focuses on demographic change as a result of displacement, but without diagnosing whether it is created by internal displacement or by migration. Beyond

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<sup>5</sup> Cohen, R., and Deng, F. M., (1998). [Masses in Flight. The Global Crisis of Internal Displacement](#). Brookings Institution Press, Washington D.C.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Commission on Human Rights. (1998). [Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement](#).

<sup>7</sup> Eschenbacher, J. H, Editor. (2005). [Internal Displacement, Global Overview of Trends and Developments in 2004](#). Global IDP Project. Norwegian Refugee Council (Geneva), Switzerland; Cohen, R. (2000). [Background memorandum for the regional conference on internal displacement in Asla Bangkok](#). Refugee Survey Quarterly, 19 (2), P 4 -12.

<sup>8</sup> Adhikari, P. (2013). [Conflict-Induced Displacement: Understanding the Causes of Flight](#). American Journal of Political Science, 57(1), P 82–89; Czaika, M., and Kis-Katos, K. (2009). [Civil Conflict and Displacement: Village-Level Determinants of Forced Migration in Aceh](#). Journal of Peace Research. 46 (3), P 399–418.

<sup>9</sup> Evans, M. (2005). [Insecurity or Isolation? Natural Resources and Livelihoods in Lower Casamance](#). Canadian Journal of African Studies 39(2), P 282–312; Evans, M. (2007). [The Suffering is Too Great’: Urban Internally Displaced Persons in the Casamance Conflict, Senegal](#). Journal of Refugee Studies, 20 (1), P 60-85; Ramírez, S. G. (2017). [Forcibly urban: Internally displaced persons’ experiences of Bogotá’s neoliberal transformation](#). Ph.D thesis at Central European university. Department of gender studies. Budapest, Hungary.

fertility, mortality and changes in population size, conflict-driven displacement induces sectarian, religious, and ethnic change, which is significant in countries that have varied and complicated demographic fabric and tribal structures.<sup>10</sup> Some argue this demographic change is intended to create change for political reasons.<sup>11</sup> In Iraq, for example, the violence and displacement against the majority population from the Shi'a sect existed since the Ba'ath regime was in control, but it has been lasting for more than 30 years now owing to ISIS and radical parties fighting against all sects but Sunni.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, some researchers argue that the Syrian displacement is intended by the current regime specifically to displace Sunni people, who are the majority in Syria, in particular from Alawit and Shi'a areas.<sup>13</sup> Contrary to this theory, though, many Sunni people fled the armed rebel zones of Syria to the government areas and supported the regime.<sup>14</sup> In the same context, Syrian Kurdish forces have used the same tactics to evict the Arab population from the north and north east areas that were controlled by ISIS, whilst ISIS intended to evict all minorities from its territories.<sup>15</sup> As a result, internal displacement led to a significant change in the Syrian demographic dynamics, reflected in diverse changes to the population size and the relocation of sectarian and ethnic communities.<sup>16</sup>

### *2.3 Socio-economic impact of internal displacement*

Some academic studies examine the impact of forced internal displacement on the displaced population. Several dilemmas have come to the fore. The common cost of conflict-induced internal displacement is the loss of civilians' livelihoods. While some IDPs can build a new life in exile, many cannot survive in the new environment, leading to tens of millions of IDPs ending up being located under the poverty line.<sup>17</sup> This magnifies the displacement impact on civilians in securing safe and proper housing and means of earning a living. In Somalia and Ethiopia, for example, IDPs live in hard conditions in settlements among the local communities who are

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<sup>10</sup> Qutrib. H. I. (nd). [“Useful Syria” and Demographic Changes in Syria](#). King Faisal Centre for research and Islamic studies; Siminoff. S. G. (2020). [Demographic Engineering in Syria Sets the Stage for Future Conflicts](#). The New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy; Jusoor for studies. (2021). [Demographic Change in Syria 2021-2011](#).

<sup>11</sup> Qutrib. H. I. Opt.cited\_(nd)

<sup>12</sup> Al-Khalidi. A., and Tanner. V. (2006). [Sectarian Violence: Radical Groups Drive Internal Displacement in Iraq](#). The Brookings Institution; Cameron. T. (2014). [35 years of forced displacement in Iraq: Contextualizing the ISIS threat, unpacking the movements](#). The Migration Policy Centre, Policy Briefs.

<sup>13</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2013). [Syria: Mass Executions by Government Forces](#); Holliday. J. (2013). [The Assad Regime: From Counterinsurgency to Civil War](#). Institute for the Study of War (ISW); Al-Ahmad. G. (2016). [Demographic Change: Assad's Guarantee for an Alawite Quasi-state](#). The Atlantic Council, Washington, D.C; Amnesty International. (2015). We had nowhere else to go'- Forced displacement and demolitions in northern Syria.

<sup>14</sup> Lekic. S. (2016). [Vast majority of internally displaced Syrians chose government side, officials say](#). Stars and Stripes; Al Monitor. (2014). [Syrian coast attracts Aleppans displaced by war](#); Balanche. F. (2015). [Ethnic Cleansing Threatens Syria's Unity](#). Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Washington, D.C.

<sup>15</sup> Amnesty International. Opt.cited (2015).

<sup>16</sup> [Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre \(IDMC\)](#). Opt.cited (2020).

<sup>17</sup> Kälén. W., and Chapuisat. H. E. (2017). Breaking the impasses: Reducing the protracted internal displacement as a collective outcome. OCHA; OCHA. (2019). Reducing protracted internal displacement: A Snapshot of Successful Humanitarian-Development Initiatives.

affected significantly by paying additional cost for housing after IDPs arrival.<sup>18</sup> This situation of vulnerability exists in many conflict countries, including Syria. More than 13 million persons in Syria, including IDPs are in urgent need for basic needs, with nine of ten persons living under the poverty line.<sup>19</sup>

Displacement deprives people of their advantages. They flee their homes, properties and assets with very low chances to take the transitional assets with them. Studies show IDPs face impoverishment in their host areas, where they have lack access to resources. These challenges are acute for the most vulnerable parts of the IDP population, children and women.<sup>20</sup> Many displaced children drop out of schools and most of them enrol the labour market with very abusive conditions and low wages.<sup>21</sup> More than 6 million children in Syria have basic needs unsatisfied, and around 3 million dropped out of school.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, displacement depletes families' ties and social relation,<sup>23</sup> an issue linked to domestic violence and sexual gender-based violence (SGBV).<sup>24</sup> Women are the main victims of all kinds of violence. Some researchers find gender norms change among displaced households and the transition into women-headed households and women breadwinners are causes of this violence. As few researchers examine these gendered norms and cultural change, the balance and transition of agency inside the displaced households is still ambiguous.<sup>25</sup> These severe challenges and the conflict trauma complicate IDPs health, resulting in a mental health and psychological burden on IDPs.<sup>26</sup>

IDPs usually are self-settled, especially in urban areas.<sup>27</sup> Integration is a challenge in conflict-affected countries where resources are limited even for the host community. This pressure on

<sup>18</sup> Yasukawa. L. (2020). [The Impacts of Internal Displacement on Local Communities: Examples from Ethiopia and Somalia](#). Refugee Survey Quarterly, 39 (4), P 544–551.

<sup>19</sup> World Bank . (2017). [The toll of war: the economic and social consequences of the conflict in Syria](#).

<sup>20</sup> Ivlevs. A & Veliziotis. M. (2018). [Beyond Conflict: Long-Term Labour Market Integration of Internally Displaced Persons in Post-Socialist Countries](#). Journal of Vocational Behavior, 105, P 131–146; Gimenez-Nadal. J.I., Molina. J.A., and Quintero. E. S. (2018). [On the Relationship between Violent Conflict and Wages in Colombia](#). Journal of Development Studies, 55(4), P 473–489; UNHCR. (2016). [Internal Displacement Profiling in Mogadishu Report](#); Davies. A., and Jacobsen. K. (2010). [Profiling Urban IDPs](#). Forced Migration Review, 34, P 13–15; Verwimp. P., and Mu~noz-Mora. J.C. (2017). [Returning Home after Civil War: Food Security. Nutrition and Poverty among Burundian Households](#). Journal of Development Studies, 54(6), P 1-22.

<sup>21</sup> Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. (2004). [Global Survey on Education in Emergencies](#).

<sup>22</sup> Mooney. E., and French. C. (2005). [Barriers and bridges: Access to education for internally displaced children](#). Brookings Institution; UNICEF. (2020). [Syrian crisis](#).

<sup>23</sup> Yigzaw. G. S., and Abitew. E. B. (2019). [Causes And Impacts Of Internal Displacement In Ethiopia](#). African Journal of Social Work, (9)2, P 32-41.

<sup>24</sup> Benjamin, J. A., and Fancy. K. (1998). [The Gender Dimensions of Internal Displacement](#). UNICEF.

<sup>25</sup> Klugman. J. (2022). [The Gender Dimensions of Forced Displacement](#). World Bank Group; World Vision. (nd). [A Comprehensive Gender and Age Analysis for the Northwest Syria Humanitarian Response](#); Lokot. M. (2018). [Syrian refugees: Thinking beyond gender stereotypes](#). Forced Migration Review, 57, P 33-35.

<sup>26</sup> Sirwardhana. C., and Stewart. R. (2013). [Forced migration and mental health: prolonged internal displacement, return migration and resilience](#). International Health, 5 (1), P 19–23.

<sup>27</sup> Mann.G. (2002). [‘Wakimbizi, Wakimbizi’: Congolese Refugee Boys’ and Girls’ Perspectives on Life in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania](#). Environment and Urbanization, 14 (2), P115–122; Sommers. M. (2001). [Young, Male and Pentecostal: Urban Refugees in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania](#). Journal of Refugee Studies, 14(4), P 347–370.



economic and natural resources in addition to economic competition between the host and the displaced population can increase IDPs vulnerability. These challenges are significantly affected by the host area and community conditions, including work access and the marginalisation status. For example, rural IDPs in urban areas lack the agricultural work access with very limited demand for their low skills. Thus, they get stuck in an ambiguous circle of labour market dynamics and lack access to the production sector and affordable food.<sup>28</sup>

### 3. Methodology

This study follows a deductive and inductive approach. Both are served by participatory approach to conduct the field survey including quantitative and qualitative data. Rapid appraisal has been conducted to identify the semi- structure questionnaire and the targeted areas. The targeted persons (study sample) were selected through ‘snowball’ method based on their willing to get interview among the displaced civilians who fled their homes from varied provinces over Syria to live in different villages in each of Swaida (Swaida governorate in southern Syria) and Salamiyah (Hama Governorate in the central region of Syria). These two areas are among the relatively safe areas in Syria that received large numbers of displaced people, despite the lack of required resources and infrastructure to meet the requirements of increased population. 193 personal interviews<sup>29</sup> were conducted in 2015-16 with the heads of displaced households in addition to specific questions for labourer members and the rest of the household members including children, this required for around 30 to 60 minutes with each household. For qualitative data, five focus groups were conducted, one FGD for women and one for men in both governorates in addition to mixed FGDs in Salamiyah. Each FGD has around 10 to 20 participants and needs around 2-2:30 hours. Life history interviews were conducted for the sample members (before and after displacement) in addition to 7 key informants’ interviews in those areas including local/civil leaders, governmental employees and international organisations and INGOs. Local leaders have played main role to reach out to the displaced communities. Although it was not allowed to visit the collective shelters, we could meet some of displaced persons out of their shelters, as interviews and meetings were held in IDPs places.

The deductive approach was implicated to examine the ongoing war impact on IDPs in the targeted areas. Qualitative and quantitative analysis were conducted to emphasise the socio-economic and demographic impact and the household structure change in line with the gender lens to highlight the war gendered impact when women became the bread winners of their households. The study examined the poverty status for the research participants and the potential interventions to enhance the life of this displaced population. Binary logistic regression has been

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<sup>28</sup> Evans, M. Opt.cited (2005); Evans, M. Opt.cited (2007); Yigzaw, G. S., and Abitew, E. B. Opt.cited (2019).

<sup>29</sup> The study did not require permission from the Syrian government as we were a researcher at a government research centre. All participants gave verbal consent to participate in the study and their responses were anonymized.

conducted to find out the most important variables affect the probability of poverty, given that the dependent variable is a dummy variable classifies the targeted households according to their poverty into poor households ( $Y=1$ ), not poor ( $Y=0$ ). Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MLE) based Wald test was used to estimate the probability of the logistic regression parameters that fit and best explain the sample data (see table 3). The independent variables are the household head age, the educational level, work; household size; getting benefit from micro enterprises programme; income amount; the presence of another source of income (see table 1). To measure the psychological status of the interviewed household members, specific indicators were used (pessimism, sadness and rejecting the current life, and the change in the moral behaviour.) Grades were given to build a three-level scale for the psychology status (stress, crisis, emergency) based on the total indicators' scores for each case (see table 2a and table 2b).

The inductive analysis has examined the literature review that cover war geography over Syria and the progress phases from 2011 until the date of conducting this study, based on the political scene, to examine the displacement waves. The internal displacement waves analysis has taken into account the displacement history of the targeted community (study sample) to allocate them into the internal displacement waves categories the inductive analysis has addressed and highlight the resultant demographic and sectarian change.

## **4. Empirical Results**

### *4.1 Demographic impact*

This study addresses internal displacement through Syria and highlights the resultant demographic change based on the sectarian change in the studied areas.

#### **4.1.1 Internal displacement phases and categories**

According to the intersection of the Syrian conflict analysis and the study sample of displaced population communities and their home areas, we identify four phases of displacement in Syria.

- i. Individual displacement from 2011 until July 2012: it is defined as individual cases at the household level. They fled their areas after the emergence of sectarian and political loyalty conflict, kidnapping, threats, clashes, and looting prevailing, in addition to destroying the education scheme after getting schools out of service.
- ii. Mass displacement from July 2012 until the mid of 2013: these groups fled because of looting prevailing for public and private properties, in addition to the absence of public services as electricity, water, communications and the huge damage in the health and education sector. This



phase started when large areas of Damascus and its countryside got out of Syrian regime control in parallel with getting involved into violent conflict in what is known by ‘Damascus volcano’. Then the armed conflict was extended to reach the countryside of Hasaka and Deir ez-Zor (East north) and Aleppo city (North). The end of this phase was when the countryside of Raqqa in the northeast of Syria got involved into the armed conflict.

iii. Extremist and terrorist control from the middle of 2013 until the end of 2015: this phase was characterized by the increased terrorist parties’ influence, between Al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra on the one hand, and ISIS on the other. The intensification of the struggle between these parties to win the battles affected civilians badly using brutal practices far from humanity and Islam. Households fled their houses searching for safety, security, services and means to earn their livings. The majority mentioned that they were afraid their children would absorb this terrorist approach especially after they dropped out of the fully destroyed schools. Meanwhile, many of them were afraid about their women and girls after the spread of rape and sexual abuse accidents by these parties.

iv. Major battles from 2016 to present: as the battles intensified at this stage between the Syrian regime and its allies (Russia and Iran) on one side and the armed parties and their allies (USA, Turkey, Gulf countries) on the other. As a result of the excessive violence, many displacement waves of civilians were generated, such as the battle of Aleppo and its countryside, a battle of Tabqa, the battle of the northern Hama countryside, and the battles of the countryside of Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor.

#### 4.1.2 Governorates and regions of the displaced population

The displaced population in the study areas belongs to varied areas at the centre, north, northeast, northwest and the south of Syria. The majority of the respondents came from Damascus, followed by Damascus countryside, Homs, Daraa, Aleppo, and a few interviewees came from other governorates such as Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor and Idlib. Most of the original regions of the displaced population are rural areas, many of them were vulnerable and socially and politically marginalised. This population who fled to the targeted areas has two categories. Many of the displaced households were from rural areas in Damascus countryside, from traditional and conservative communities, such as Al-Thiabiya, Al-Hussainiya, Al-Moadamieh, Zamalka, Arbeen, Ain Tarma and Al-Kiswa. The others fled slums in poor and vulnerable cities, such as Al-Tadamon, Al-Hajar Al-Aswad, Palestine Camp, Al-Qaboun and Barzeh in Damascus and Al-Bayada, Bab Amr, Bab Dreib, and Al-Shamas in Homs Governorate at the centre of Syria. The field survey shows that rich cities and towns did not generally get involved with fighting, with no exporting of displaced population. Yet, there were some exceptions, e.g. cities that got involved with armed clashes leading to huge displacement waves, such as Al-Waer city in Homs

governorate. However, rich people tended to move to the capital Damascus or out of the country seeking a secure refuge in neighbouring countries or Europe.

#### 4.1.3 Sectarian change

These forced movements mixed up the ingredients of Syrian society, creating a diverse fabric of demographic and sectarian change. The people of our sample have been forced to leave their home but they have selected their host areas by their taking into account their own financial status, connections and the alternative options. More than 80 percent of the interviewed IDPs in Swaida, where the Dersi sect is very common, belong to Sunni sect from rural Damascus and Daraa. While 17.8 percent were Dersi persons who are originally from Swaida. In Salamiyah, which Ismaili sect is very common, around 60 percent of the displaced persons are originally from Salamiyah related to Ismaili sect and only 10 percent related to Alawites sect. Yet 40 percent of the displaced persons in Salamiyah are Sunni came from varied areas including Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor and Idlib. It should be noted that at the beginning of the demonstrations, the area of Salamiyah received many of the displaced people from the Hama city, but the majority returned to their city when it became safe after few months, while some of them towards the northern countryside of Hama and very few towards Idlib to engage into the armed groups. We examined the cohesion and integration between the IDPs communities and the host community, through investigating the study participants' interaction and relationship with the host communities from different sects during the daily life. The answers were fully clear that the targeted IDPs community has no religious, ethnic and sectarian conflict with their host community.

#### 4.1.4 Displaced household structure change

The ongoing war in Syria impacts the composition of the Syrian household. One sixth of the sample households left some members in their areas, in particular, old individuals who rejected the journey of displacement and preferred to remain alone in their homes. Meanwhile, children and youth had been forced to migrate in order to avoid conscription. 20 percent of the interviewed households became headed by women. The male heads in these households got killed, disappeared, or preferred to stay at home to protect their properties or to fight with the armed groups. War and displacement forced many households to rely on women as breadwinners (although the male heads were still there, but could not work for varied reasons). As a result of the presence of more than one of the above cases within the same household, more than one third of the interviewed households were affected by the deterioration of household ties, adding more burdens on and new responsibilities for women in new environments, where lack of safety, security and stability is very common. Table 1 shows the main characteristics of these households.

**Table 1: Household characteristics based on household head gender**

	Women-Headed households (%)	Men-headed households (%)
Household head age (year)	38	43
Household head work (employed)	89	29
Household head literacy (%)	97	93
Household size (members)	5	7
Presence of more than one income source in the same household (number of income sources)	5	60
Getting benefit form micro enterprises projects (%)	35	22
Income overage (USA \$ / month)	6	13

## *4.2 Gender analysis of socio- economic impact on IDPs*

The study results are in line with literature describing the vulnerability of Syrian internal displaced communities, where the majority have very low life standards. Here we are going to address the main social and economic impact of displacement on the targeted community using a gender lens.

### **4.2.1 Labour and labourers**

While some households lost their male breadwinners, two-thirds of the interviewed male household heads and labourers became unemployed for reasons including work staff reduction in privet sectors, war resultant illness and disability, lack of security and safety. Thus, women were forced to enter the labour market to earn living for their households. Getting women involved in the labour market breach the gender roles and norms in these conservative and traditional communities. The majority believe that the best place for women and girls is at home. Yet necessity and labour demand impose a new situation where the women become labourers and breadwinners. One third of the women in this sample became the breadwinners of their households, although they might not be the head. Unfortunately, lack of skills and expertise for those women limits the work access and increases the chances of vulnerability and exploitation. The war work conditions are harsh with lack of protection, stability, respect, and proper wages. Hence, women tend to work in agriculture, food processing, hand crafts and domestic service. Um Muhamad is a widow with 5 children when she had to flee her home in Al-Tabqa where her husband was killed there. She reported that she came from a community that does not support girls' education and women work. She stated 'I have no skills for a proper work to feed my children, the only thing I can do is cleaning houses'.

#### 4.2.2 Poverty

Some of the interviewed displaced household heads confirmed that displacement increased their poverty, but the majority consider displacement is the main destroyer of the household's economy and the poverty inducer. Considering the average household's size is five individuals, 90 percent of this population live under the poverty line of \$1.90 per person per day in 2016 with no savings nor access to any kind of assets. Many of them were non poor before they got displaced. Ahmad who came from rural Damascus after his taxi car had been stolen and his house had been bombed, became disabled person as he got shot when resisted his car thieves. He was really frustrated with his new poor situation. He told us how he used to provide regular charities for several displaced households before himself became unemployed head for poor and displaced household. Unsurprisingly, all women-headed households are located below the extreme poverty line at a rate of \$1/ person/day, in addition to some households headed by men. Thus, more than third of the households are in urgent need for humanitarian aid. As the inflation and living costs are increasing in Syria accompanied with deteriorating the Syrian pound value and loss of income sources, the plight of Syrians got worsened overtime. In Oct 2021, UN mentioned that over than 90 percent of Syrians over Syria live under the poverty line.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4.2.3 Housing

Securing a proper accommodation in the new host area is considered a challenging need for IDPs. The high cost of houses' rent forced people to live in houses do not match human needs. The field survey found that only half of the households could rent fairly suitable houses. One fifth of the households live in shared houses with their relatives. While some of the respondents share rooms with their relatives in collective shelters or live in under - construction buildings for a sum of money in most cases. Finding a proper accommodation is more complicated for women-headed households who lack the cost of housing, meanwhile, living without male head is a taboo and might affect them as a stigma. For that, most of the women- headed households who are not old enough, live in collective shelters or with relatives in shared houses. Samar is one of those women who work to feed her four children. She is divorced and live in a small room at the collective shelter with her brother, his wife and five children. Samar said 'when I asked to live in the same shelter but in another room, my brother threatened me and told me, nothing will stop him from killing me.' Samar was not happy that her daughters sleep in the same room with their male cousins, but her brother was not happy that his sister will live alone although she has four children.

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<sup>30</sup> United Nations: Security Council Briefing. (2021). [Syria: 90% living below poverty line](#).

#### 4.2.4 Education and child labour

Around half of the households were worried about their children's future, as a result of suffering war and displacement consequences on their children education. Fifth of children aged (6-14 years), had dropped out of school due to the parents' inability to secure school supplies, constant displacement and lack of schools and teachers. Many of these children, in particular boys, got involved in child labour with very low wages and exploited conditions. Mostly, these children came from households are headed by women. These women believe in the education value and importance to secure good future for their children. But the low wages that their children got help them to find something to eat where seeking food is their priority. War child generation in this study know only war and many children do not know how to write or spell their names. The fear is what if those children absorb the armed parties' manners with no neutral education. We witnessed many children playing fighting, but once we saw a child who threatened his friends with cutting off their heads. His mother was not surprised by his behaviour - though she was not happy with it - as they fled from ISIS where forces children to witness cutting heads punishment.

#### 4.2.5 Protection and gender - based violence

Varied exploitation, abuse and violence experiences among the respondent households were documented during the field survey. The fact of displacement and its consequences resulted aggressive behaviour among the household members and the domestic violence got prevailed. During the field survey we witnessed a women was crying her lost child; she did not hear anything about him since he ran away from his aggressive father. She did not want to explain further, she was literally scared from her husband. The domestic violence against wives became very familiar, though it might not limit to the displacement phase, however, displacement increased it. This is what we have been learned by women we have met, some of them confirmed that they are abused physically and financially by male members in their households or husbands. It is really hard to learn about gender - based violence stories. It consumed many hours to investigate some of those stories and experiences, which is not limited to domestic violence. The most severe experiences are sexual harassment that targets women and children in workplace and during the daily life. Usually, traditional and honour reasons prevent women and households from reporting such cases, it might lead to honour crimes. We have been informed about such harassment abuse cases happened for children, girls and women in the collective shelters by the shelter leader or the humanitarian organisations workers. In these poor and vulnerable communities, some authorised people use their authority to abuse women and children especially sexually in order to provide them food. Hana stated that her neighbour in the collective shelter was raped by the shelter leader 'she became pregnant, her family will kill her if they know'. Hana was really scarred, and she followed saying 'honour crimes are very common now.'

#### 4.2.6 Gender norms change and agency

Becoming an income-generator did not change the anatomy of masculinities in these communities. Leadership and making decision are only for men. Although some of our interviewees declared that displacement and enrolling women in the labour market changed the power and agency balance in these households, what we have witnessed that these communities worked hard to save their masculinities with the support of women themselves as well. Amal became a breadwinner of her family. She is a pregnant, tired, and has no rights. Amal still cannot take any decision at home. Her unemployed husband who prefers playing football rather than seeking work is the decision maker for family matters and Amal herself. She considers these assignments are for men not women. ‘He has the right to decide about everything and lead the family, he has the right to hit me. This is my society tradition and culture where I have no place to reject or change.’ Amal stated. She was really scared from getting divorced, which is unforgettable sin in these communities. Some of men and women interviewees declared that one of the interior problems’ reasons in households that women wanted to get more agency, but this increased the domestic violence and breached the family ties with more cases of divorce. ‘Educated and worker women need more space to practise their identity, even though this is not in line with the common traditions’ - this is what Um Hany said criticizing these women.

#### 4.2.7 Psychology status and mental health

The majority of household members both male and female showed significant symptoms at varied levels of pessimism, sadness and rejecting the real situation to get adapted to, and the change in their behaviour (tables 2a& 2b). Third of women- headed household members were in very bad psychology situation, and the only reason that prevented them from suicide is their Islam faith where suicide is forbidden in Islam. Unsurprisingly, this percentage decreased to 5 percent among men - headed households. This bad psychology status might affect people mental health with bad reflections on themselves and others. Some interviewees mentioned suicide cases among IDPs in Aleppo countryside where they came from, but they were really upset of the victims since they made a huge religious sin, ignoring all the pressure they had lived. Fortunately, the field survey did not record any suicide cases.

**Table 2a: Psychology indicators distribution based on the household head gender**

	Women-Headed households (%)	Men-headed households (%)
pessimism	50	36
Sadness and rejecting the real situation	25	38
Behavioural changes	13	25

**Table 2b: Psychological status distribution based on the household head gender**

	Women-Headed households (%)	Men-headed (%)	households
Stress	0	17	
Crisis	70	78	
Emergencies	30	5	

#### 4.2.8 Social relation

Displacement affected the household's life and its social relations internally and with the community. More than half of the interviewees reported how their relationship with relatives and neighbours and within the same household got affected badly, in particular with children. The labourer children and who dropped out of school became more rebellious against the family rules, these cases were reported by third of the targeted population. Living in small spaces that occupied by many people might belong to varied households does not enhance the social relation. Breaching the masculinity domination in the households affects the gendered relation within the household members and the community. We heard stories that confirm how psychological pressure breaks the family ties. One household head evicted his son's family. although they do not have alternative place to live in, because he cannot tolerate with the additional costs.

### 5. Looking to the future of IDPs

The future of internally displaced communities is still a controversial and ambiguous issue. Making decisions to settle in the new area or return home was based on problematic analysis about required needs and a resource assessment in both sites. Less than half of the interviewees wanted to stay at their new areas because they had lost all their properties at their home areas and had found a way to earn livings in the host area. The rest of the interviewees were not sure about their ability to stay or return, due to the uncertainty of the conflict situation in home areas and their poor economic and social situation. In addition, some interviewees wished to leave Syria and find their way to Europe or to new safe internal areas with more work opportunities, in particular for households that have young children. These people are worried about their children's future. Hence, one of the first issues that must be addressed and resolved quickly is the educational system because of its great role in building or destroying society.



Some researchers argue that micro-enterprise projects enhance quality of life during and after conflict.<sup>31</sup> Thus, we conducted analytical research in order to explore resolutions to mitigate the economic repercussions of displacement and improve the livelihoods of affected households. Logistic Binary regression was applied to the collected data from personal interviews to determine the most important factors and variables affect the likelihood of poverty, including households who received loans or grants for micro enterprises which amounted to 25 percent of the sample members. The results (table 3) show that establishing successful micro-enterprises mitigates the odd of poverty by 0.3, which sheds light on the importance of these projects as a tool for people and society development. This analysis considers the focus group discussions, personal interviews, a review of life history of individuals and reports of relief and development organizations. We found that market assessment is considered a fundamental for micro-enterprises projects success that are matched with the market demands, in addition to provide the beneficiaries of those projects by relative vocational trainings and the programmes with specific strategies are commensurate with war and post-war phases.

**Table 3: The association between poverty and household characteristics**

	B	Wald Test <sup>32</sup>	Exp (B)
Getting benefit from micro-enterprises programme (yes=1, no=0)	-1.166	18.638***	0.312
Household head age (years)	-0.003	9.985	0.997
Household size (members)	0.161	7.61	1.016
Household head work (employed=1, unemployed=0)	-1.311	5.621	0.363
The presence of another source of income (yes=1, no=0)	-0.121	3.091	0.977
Constant	0.323	5.875	1.381

## 6. Conclusions

The high cost of displacement impacts all household members. Yet, women and children are the most vulnerable category of IDPs, especially those in women-headed households. The bleak life that displaced Syrians have is very clear, and it is not easy to enumerate all its aspects in this study. However, internal displacement impact and consequences will be worse on the long run. The dispersal of households and the change in their structure smashed the Syrian social fabric. In

<sup>31</sup> Wilson. T. (2002). Microfinance during and after armed conflict: lessons from Angola, Cambodia, Mozambique and Rwanda. The Springfield centre for business in development; Doyle. K. (1998). Microfinance in the Wake of Conflict: Challenges and Opportunities. USAID .

<sup>32</sup> Note: Wald chi-square test is used to determine the statistical significance for each of the independent variables through the "Sig". It tests the null hypothesis, when it is rejected that means the independent variable is significantly fit the model.

addition, changing gender norms will have negative impact on these societies and in particular on women. This raises the necessity of women being part of the rebuilding and development of Syrian communities. Despite the major role that women conduct to help their households survive, they remain under the pressure of masculinities and the resultant abuse. These societies do not accept magnifying the importance of new roles that increase women's effectiveness, influence and agency inside and outside their households. This breaches family and societal ties - these repercussions are not limited to displaced households only, but also to the societies of the Syrian war as a whole.

The socio-economic consequences that IDPs suffer are numerous. They still suffer lack of stability, safety and security even for those who have been resettled in new areas as well. In tandem, displacement pressure in host areas brings bad consequences for both host and displaced communities. All governmental and non- governmental, and international and civil parties should strive to secure a decent livelihood for both communities in the new areas or to return IDPs to their homes according to the expansion of safe area.

Examining the role of micro-enterprises in alleviating poverty and the deteriorated education of the future human capital, manifests the importance of building an efficient human sources as the most important priority during and post-conflict, in particular for women. The study links the success of micro-enterprises projects with training and building IDPs capacities, considering the societal characteristics of the beneficiaries according to a specific strategy that fits the current stage of conflict, in addition to the communities' culture, for example, using AL MURABAHA system which is more acceptable by these conservative communities rather than commercial interest. Consistently, this study raises alarm call for IDPs youth and children education and highlights the need of supporting IDPs education, especially for children aged (6-14) years, to find a lifeline for them in the coming future and for their societies. In addition, there is the need to provide a psychological support for all affected persons.

As the Syrian war is ongoing, displacement and the demographic change continue as one of Syrian war's mechanisms and dynamics. However, what makes the situation worse is that the parties fighting in this war have adopted a new perspective on that victory and building the future in Syria means, one which is supported by all international parties and actors in the Syrian scene. It is represented by uprooting the other side and removing it from the Syrian map. Accordingly, the political dependency of many Syrian parties and actors on an extreme and polarised mindset might take Syria to a future crisis where the only victim will be the civilian people. As to internal politics, the degree of coexistence and integration between the different sects in the two areas studied suggests, in contrast to other theories,<sup>33</sup> that the Syrian war is not a sectarian war,

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<sup>33</sup> Tinas. M., & Tür. O. (2021). [Lebanon and the Syrian Civil War: Sectarian Perceptions and Positions](#). Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies, (23) 2, P 321-338; Phillips. C. (2015). [Sectarianism and conflict in Syria](#). Third World Quarterly, (36) 2, P 357-376.

despite its sensitivity to the sectarian dimension in the composition of Syrian society and the fact that sectarianism is one of the tools of war. Rather, the warring parties have used a sectarian approach and rhetoric to achieve their own political gains, without any regard for civilians and their human rights to a decent and secure life.

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