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3.3. Employment

Unemployment reached 24 % in 2024.[605] Labour force participation remained low, with significant number of people unable to access job opportunities due to the conflict and displacement.[606] A report by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) found that 73 % of respondents identified unemployment as one of the main risks and barrier to return.[607] In another assessment conducted between December and February 2025, survey participants ranked employment opportunities as the second most important concern after basic service access.[608] Access to livelihoods in Damascus scored 2.1 (challenging), with all other governorates - except Quneitra - assessed as either challenging or not conducive for return based on this indicator.[609] While the assessment recorded that, in areas with existing industry and commerce sectors, at least 85 % of key informants (Kis) reported partial or full operational status, in Damascus, 25 % of the industry and manufacturing sectors were described as non-operational.[610] Another IOM report released in May 2025 noted that the lack of economic opportunities and essential services posed the greatest challenge for returnees.[611] A survey by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) found that only 31 % had secured a temporary job. All households were found depending on support from relatives, communities, savings or remittances, and none were able to meet their basic needs. Another assessment conducted among returnees indicated that the majority of households were in debt especially in the areas of Aleppo, Dar’a and Rural Damascus.[612]

To mitigate liquidity challenges[613] exacerbated in the past by the ATM malfunctioning due to power cuts, lack of staff[614] and a severe shortage of banknotes,[615] the Ministry of Finance introduced in April 2025 the digital salary directing public institutions to pay their employees through the Sham Cash electronic application starting from May 2025.[616] Unemployment, job losses, and lack of access to essential services remained significant barriers to meeting basic needs. Many households resorted to borrowing money, selling productive assets, or engaging in high-risk or degrading jobs.[617] The lack of job opportunities forced many into low paid and insecure informal jobs.[618] The WFP reported, in April 2025, that the national daily wage for unskilled labour slightly increased by 3 %, reaching an average of approximately SYP 43 000 per day.[619] An analysis by SCPR indicated that, as of February 2025, civil sector workers in regions governed by the Syrian government earned significantly less than their counterparts elsewhere, receiving only 37 % of the wages paid in the SIG and SSG areas and 48 % of those in DAANES areas. Over 200 startups operated within the country, mainly in Damascus, Homs and Aleppo but only a dozen have reached growth stage.[620]

For information on reforms affecting employment in the public sector see section 1.4.

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