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3.6. Housing, water, and sanitation

☐ (a) Housing

According to UNDP, about one-third of housing units – corresponding to 1.3 million - have been either destroyed or severely damaged over the conflict.637 According to The Humanitarian, 'There is no one number that captures how many homes, hospitals, and infrastructure have been wrecked over the course of Syria's war'.638 The same outlet stated that parts of Damascus like Eastern Ghouta, Qaboun, the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp639 and high-rise apartment blocks along the Damascus-Homs international highway640 were hit by bombing and shelling. Some neighbourhoods were eventually levelled by al-Assad's government, sometimes under the guise of mine-clearance, security objectives or redevelopment.641 An article from The Economist described the eastern suburbs of Damascus as 'a sea of undulating rubble and skeletal ruins'.642 UNOCHA highlighted how debris and damaged infrastructure continued to hinder the restoration of services and the resumption of business activities particularly as municipal services remained disrupted, with a lack of capacity-building.643 UNDP assessed that half of Syria's infrastructure has been destroyed or rendered dysfunctional including roads, bridges, power plants, grain mills, storage facilities, and bakeries.644

Over 40 % of surveyed returnees by NRC lacked access to adequate shelter. In areas like Aleppo and Rural Damascus, disputes over property rights and duplicated ownership claims were commonly reported645 with some people having official documentation proving housing or land ownership, and others lacking the necessary official papers to reclaim property.646 A source interviewed by The Humanitarian highlighted that 'property violations, and poor real-estate documentation lasted for years,' and that 'many houses that weren't destroyed are now inhabited by new residents.'647 UNOCHA found that key obstacles preventing people from returning to their homes or improving shelter conditions in Damascus included the lack of basic services such as water and electricity, limited funding and the lack of health and education facilities.648 As of mid-May 2025, people in Damascus were facing absence of housing, unreliable access to electricity, clean water, healthcare and work.649 At the

end of May 2025, the Syrian energy minister announced an agreement with Türkiye to supply Syria with gas starting from June, addressing the latter's longstanding power shortages.650 According to a source interviewed by the New Humanitarian rebuilding a house that isn’t completely destroyed would costs at least 50 million SYP (around USD 4 000).651

Due to widespread destruction in the suburbs of Damascus, there is a severe shortage of housing and limited availability of residential areas. Additionally, property prices in Damascus city are very high, making renting or purchasing unaffordable for most returnees. While some housing may be available on the outskirts or in more remote areas, the living conditions in these locations are generally poor.652

☐ (b) Water and sanitation

Over the past decades, Syria has experienced significant depletion of its water resources, primarily due to economic growth and competition for internationally shared waters.653 According to UNOCHA, in north-east Syria, water scarcity remains a major challenge, with over 80 % of water supply systems not functioning mainly due to damaged power systems. This caused 1.8 million people to lack access to safe water, including 610 000 residents and IDPs in Hasaka.654 The Alouk water station was still not operational as of 27 May 2025.655 Conflict-related damage to strategic assets such as the Tishreen Dam and Alouk Water Station has left hundreds of thousands without reliable access to water or power.656 In May 2025, Israeli military forces reportedly destroyed a local water well located near the Tel Ahmar base in Quneitra province. The well was the primary water source for Al-Asbah Al-Asha and seven surrounding villages, raising concerns over a potential water shortage if further damage to infrastructure occurs.657

The poor rainfall precipitation in the 2024/2025 seasons affected the productivity of water resources in the Southern and Northern areas, thereby affecting access to water for the most vulnerable communities, particularly in Damascus, Dar’a, Sweida, and Hasaka.658 Water supply to Damascus city was reduced due to the depletion659 of Ein El-Fijeh Spring, which served water to 1.1 million households.660 The crisis has been further exacerbated by the lowest recorded rainfall levels since 1956.661 The Damascus City Water Supply Authority declared a state of emergency662 and introduced strict water rationing measures, reducing daily water provision from 12 to 4 hours - a 66 % decrease compared to the previous year.663 In an assessment conducted by IOM between March and April 2025, 26 % of key informants in Damascus lacked access to drinking water, 21 % lacked water for hygiene and 19 % did not have

access to a sewage system.664

As of 27 May 2025, WASH Cluster partners reported serious depletion of groundwater wells in Hasaka governorate and critically low water flow in the Euphrates affecting electricity generation and water supply in Raqqa and Aleppo. IDPs in both north-west and north-east Syria continued to face limited access to water and sanitation services. 665

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