

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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