

# YOUTH

## in Post-Liberation Syria



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Fostering Community Resilience

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## IDIL and EMISSA's Role in Preparing the Research

Innovative Development for Improving Lives (IDIL) and Emissa for Development (EMISSA) have played a pivotal role in the preparation and execution of this research, ensuring that the voices of youth and local communities in Syria are heard and accurately represented. Both organizations, with their extensive backgrounds in humanitarian work, community development, and youth empowerment, were integral in shaping the research framework, methodology, and focus.

IDIL, with its deep understanding of the socio-economic challenges facing marginalized communities in Syria, brought invaluable expertise in community-based initiatives. The organization's long-standing commitment to improving the livelihoods of vulnerable populations, particularly youth, has seen it provide education, vocational training, and psychosocial support in conflict-affected areas. IDIL's involvement ensured that the research was tailored to the specific needs of youth Syrians, providing critical insights into the barriers to employment, education, and social integration. Their participation also facilitated the identification of key themes to explore during the focus group discussions, which were essential in understanding the deeper social and psychological challenges faced by youth.

On the other hand, EMISSA's experience in peacebuilding, social cohesion, and fostering youth participation in community development was instrumental in guiding the research's approach to addressing the complexities of post-conflict Syria. With its emphasis on strengthening social cohesion, promoting mental health recovery, and facilitating youth-led initiatives, EMISSA brought a unique perspective on how to incorporate youth into the rebuilding process. Their expertise in facilitating community-driven projects ensured that the research methodology reflected the importance of local ownership and youth-led solutions in conflict recovery. EMISSA's commitment to peacebuilding and reconciliation also helped shape the focus group discussions to provide a platform where youth could openly discuss their experiences with trauma, displacement, and hopes for the future.

The collaboration between IDIL and EMISSA ensured that the research was not only grounded in a deep understanding of the local context but also guided by a clear focus on empowerment and sustainable solutions. The two organizations' ability to draw on their respective strengths – IDIL's focus on community development and EMISSA's emphasis on peacebuilding and youth empowerment – allowed for a comprehensive and holistic approach to the research.

Together, IDIL and EMISSA have played an essential role in ensuring that this research serves as a meaningful and actionable tool for policymakers, organizations, and community leaders seeking to empower youth and rebuild Syria. Their combined efforts underscore the importance of collaboration between local and international organizations in addressing the pressing challenges faced by young people in post-conflict societies. By engaging with young Syrians, these organizations have helped to illuminate the pathways for change, ensuring that youth are not only seen as beneficiaries but as active agents of transformation in the rebuilding of their country.

# Abstract



This research explores the situation of young people in Syria after liberation, focusing on their challenges, aspirations, and proposed solutions. The study is based on discussion sessions conducted across multiple regions, involving a representative sample of Syrian youth. Using qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, this study presents an in-depth analysis of the collected data and its implications for future youth-driven policies and programs.

The findings highlight the multifaceted nature of challenges faced by young Syrians, ranging from economic hardships, lack of employment opportunities, and disrupted education to political marginalization and psychological distress. Many young people struggle with inadequate access to healthcare, a lack of structured career pathways, and the long-term impacts of displacement and conflict. The study emphasizes that despite these obstacles, young people remain hopeful and eager to contribute to Syria's rebuilding process. Many participants identified economic empowerment, access to quality education, and civic engagement as crucial to their prospects.

In terms of methodology, this research incorporates both qualitative and quantitative approaches to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the youth experience. Structured discussion sessions, surveys, and ethnographic observations allowed for a robust data collection process, capturing both statistical insights and personal narratives. This mixed-method approach provides a nuanced view of young people's realities in different regions, acknowledging variations in needs and aspirations. The research also accounts for gender-based disparities, emphasizing the unique barriers faced by young women in accessing education, employment, and leadership roles.

Additionally, the research sheds light on the role of social cohesion and community-driven initiatives in post-liberation Syria. It highlights how grassroots movements, vocational training programs, and policy reforms can empower youth to take an active role in shaping their communities. Youth-led initiatives focused on entrepreneurship, digital innovation, and cultural preservation are emerging as viable pathways to economic recovery. The study underscores the importance of inclusive governance and targeted interventions that address regional disparities and ensure sustainable development.

Moreover, this research identifies key policy recommendations aimed at addressing the structural barriers impeding youth progress. These include the creation of government-backed job training programs, investment in higher education institutions, expansion of mental health services, and the establishment of youth advisory councils to promote civic participation. Strengthening international partnerships to support reconstruction efforts and integrate youth perspectives into peacebuilding processes is also emphasized as a critical step forward.

Ultimately, this research calls for a multi-stakeholder approach involving local authorities, international organizations, and civil society actors to support young Syrians in overcoming their challenges. By addressing their needs holistically and fostering opportunities for growth, the resilience and potential of Syria's youth can be harnessed to drive long-term stability and prosperity. Ensuring that young people have access to resources, education, and political representation is crucial to fostering a generation that can lead Syria into a more peaceful and prosperous future.

# Introduction

The war in Syria has caused catastrophic destruction, leaving entire cities in ruins and millions of people displaced. Infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, and transportation networks, has been severely damaged or destroyed, making it extremely

difficult for communities to rebuild. The economic collapse, hyperinflation, and a lack of stable governance have further exacerbated the struggles of the Syrian people. For many, access to basic necessities such as clean water, electricity, and healthcare

remains scarce, contributing to a worsening humanitarian crisis.

Among those most affected by this crisis are young Syrians. Having grown up in an environment of war and uncertainty, they face immense challenges in securing a stable future. With limited access to education, vocational training, and employment opportunities, many young people find themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty and dependence. The destruction of schools and universities has left countless students without formal education, making it difficult for them to acquire the skills necessary to contribute to the rebuilding of their country.

The economic situation for young Syrians is particularly dire. Many businesses have been forced to close due to the ongoing conflict, leaving few job opportunities

available. Those who do find work often do so in the informal labor market, where wages are low and working conditions are harsh. Brain drain has also become a significant issue, with many educated and skilled youth seeking opportunities abroad,

further depleting Syria's human capital and hindering national recovery efforts. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), over 5 million Syrians have sought refuge in neighboring countries, and a large portion of these are young adults who are seeking better opportunities for their futures.

In addition to economic hardships, young Syrians face significant social and psychological challenges. The trauma of war has left many suffering from anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The loss of family members, displacement, and prolonged exposure to violence have all contributed to a mental health crisis among the youth population. A report by the World Health Organization (WHO) indicates that up to 50% of displaced Syrian youth experience mental health challenges, which affects their ability to work, study, and contribute to their

communities. Moreover, societal fragmentation and sectarian divisions have intensified, making it difficult for young people to rebuild trust and social cohesion within their communities. This fragmentation often leads to feelings of alienation and disillusionment among youth, who may view rebuilding efforts as distant or unattainable.



Despite these overwhelming challenges, many young Syrians remain resilient and determined to contribute to the rebuilding of their nation. Across the country, grassroots initiatives led by youth have emerged, focusing on community development, education, and economic empowerment. These initiatives, such as local youth-led organizations and initiatives that provide vocational training and educational workshops, demonstrate a strong desire among young people to take an active role in shaping Syria's future. However, these efforts are often limited in their scope and impact due to a lack of funding,

proper infrastructure, and technical support.

A notable example is the "Youth for Change" initiative, where Syrian youth in cities like Aleppo and Idlib have organized community programs, including literacy classes, leadership development workshops, and employment skill training. These initiatives, although limited, have shown that with the right resources and support, young people can play a crucial role in rebuilding and revitalizing their communities.

However, without adequate support from local and international stakeholders, these efforts remain limited. The Syrian government's focus on the war and survival rather than long-term development plans leaves a gap in comprehensive support for youth initiatives. Furthermore, international aid, while crucial, often comes with bureaucratic delays, insufficient coordination, and limited scope, making it hard to target the specific needs of young Syrians.

This research aims to shed light on the realities faced by young Syrians in post-liberation Syria. By examining their challenges, aspirations, and proposed solutions, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current situation and offer data-driven recommendations for policymakers. Addressing the urgent needs of Syria's youth will require a collaborative approach involving government institutions, international organizations, and civil society.

Investing in education is paramount, not just to provide formal schooling, but to support non-traditional education such as vocational training and mentorship programs that equip young people with marketable skills. Employment support, including the creation of job opportunities and support for small business development, is crucial to mitigate the high unemployment rate among youth. Mental health support systems, particularly in conflict-affected areas, need to be expanded to help young people overcome the psychological trauma that impedes their personal and professional growth. Finally, inclusive governance initiatives that allow youth to have a voice in rebuilding efforts will help foster a sense of ownership and hope for the future.

Ensuring that young Syrians have the opportunity to rebuild their lives and contribute to a stable and prosperous future for their country is not only an act of humanitarian support but an investment in the long-term resilience of Syria. By providing a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to addressing the needs of Syrian youth, the international community can help create a foundation for sustainable development in post-conflict Syria.

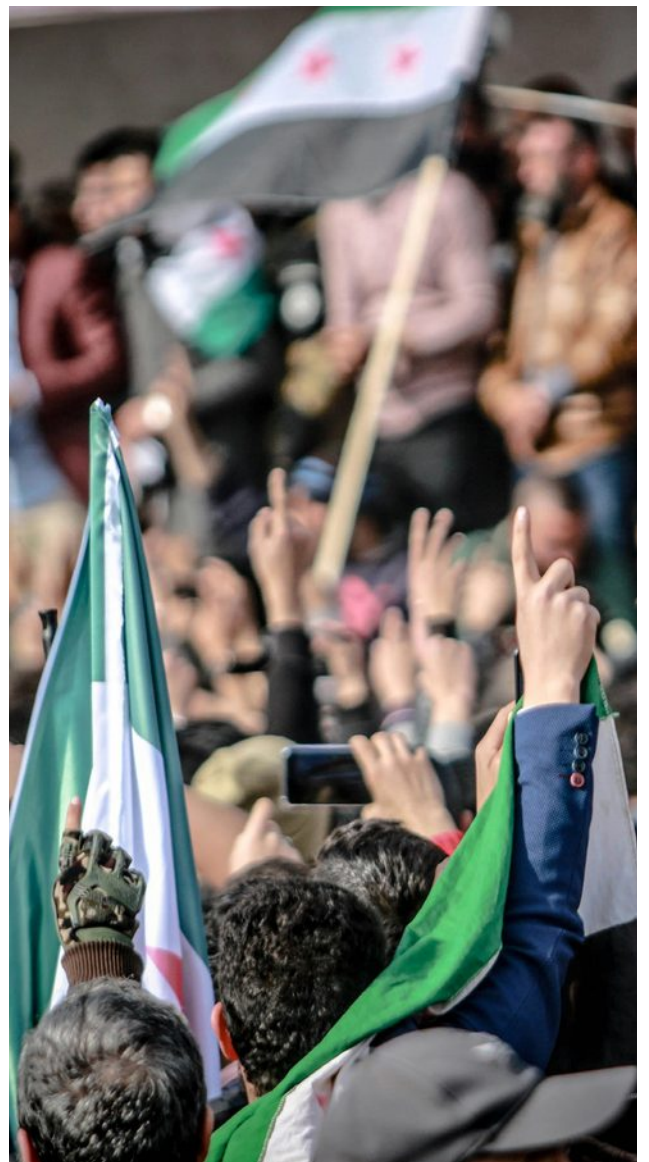




## Research Methodology

### 1. Sample Selection

- o The study utilized a purposive sampling method, targeting young people aged 18-35 years across various regions in Syria.
- o Participants were selected based on diversity in gender, socio-economic background, and geographic location to ensure a representative sample.
- o A total of 12 focus group discussions were conducted, with an average of 20 participants per session (equally split between males and females). The regions included in the study are:
  - Urban Areas: Idlib, Aleppo, Latakia, Tartous, Homs, Damascus, Sweida, Daraa
  - Rural Areas: Rural Aleppo, Rural Idlib, Rural Damascus, Rural Hama
- o Total Participants: 240 participants (12 sessions × 20 people per session)





## 2. Data Collection Methods

o **Qualitative Data:** Semi-structured focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted, each attended by 15-25 participants. These discussions allowed for open-ended conversations about personal experiences, social dynamics, and future visions.

o **Quantitative Data:** Opinion polls were distributed to capture statistical insights on participants' employment status, education levels, and political participation. The survey aimed to measure:

- **Employment:** Youth employed in organizations, freelancers, and job seekers.
- **Education:** Differentiation between educated and uneducated youth.

o **Ethnographic Observations:** Researchers observed and documented behavioural patterns, emotional responses, and levels of engagement during the FGDs.

o **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** The sessions aimed to explore key themes such as economic challenges, educational gaps, political aspirations, and security concerns.

## 3. Data Analysis

o **Thematic Analysis:** Qualitative responses were analyzed to categorize data into key themes such as:

- Economic Conflicts
- Educational Gaps
- Political Aspirations
- Security Concerns

o **Quantitative Analysis:** Statistical tools were applied to identify patterns and correlations within the survey data.

o **Comparative Analysis:** A comparison of regional disparities in challenges and aspirations was conducted to determine unique issues faced by youth in different regions of Syria.

o **Triangulation:** The integration of both qualitative and quantitative findings ensured the reliability and validity of the results.

**Quantitative Breakdown of Key Categories:**

• **Education Status:**

o **Educated Youth:** 65% (156 participants)

o **Uneducated Youth:** 35% (84 participants)

• **Employment Status:**

o **Employed in Organizations:** 40% (96 participants)

o **Freelancers:** 25% (60 participants)

o **Job Seekers:** 35% (84 participants)

# Results and Discussion

## 1. Economic Hardship

• **High Unemployment Rates:** Unemployment continues to be one of the most pressing issues among Syrian youth, with a marked difference between urban and rural areas. The unemployment rate is 75% in rural areas, compared to 53% in urban centres, though both figures are significantly high. This disparity is largely due to the destruction of infrastructure and industries in rural regions, which were already economically fragile before the conflict.

o High youth dependency ratios and lack of job security contribute to the increasing discontent among youth. The youth-to-adult unemployment ratio in rural areas is 2:1, with youth bearing the brunt of economic instability. Moreover, economic support from families has become increasingly limited due to the deterioration of local economies, leaving many youth with no reliable source of income.

o Economic fragmentation has contributed to the breakdown of traditional community support networks, leaving youth with fewer avenues to access job opportunities.

• **Informal Employment:** The reliance on informal employment is pervasive across Syria, particularly among youth who cannot find formal jobs due to the limited availability of positions. The self-employed youth sector in urban areas comprises approximately 65% of the working youth, involved in freelance jobs, small businesses, and the gig economy. This shift is reflected in the decline of formal labour markets, which have failed to provide opportunities to the younger generation.

o Young women are disproportionately affected by the informal sector, with 70% of female youth engaged in informal work compared to 50% of males. This trend is linked to cultural and social factors, including limited mobility for women, which restricts their access to formal labour markets.

o This reliance on informal work not only perpetuates cycles of low wages and job insecurity but also leads to wage disparity. Youth working informally often earn 30%-50% less than those in formal employment, with no social security benefits or labour rights protection.

• **Brain Drain and Migration:** One of the most significant outcomes of economic hardship is the massive migration wave among youth. 40% of youth in urban areas and 35% of youth in rural regions reported actively seeking opportunities to migrate abroad, driven primarily by the desire for better economic prospects and a higher standard of living.

o Edged by conflict and economic collapse, youth see migration as the only viable option for achieving stability. Many young people are leaving for neighbouring countries, including Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, with 20% of migrants from Syria identifying as youth. 70% of youth migrants are highly educated, reflecting a significant brain drain that further reduces Syria's human capital.

o Migration is not only affecting skilled workers but also young entrepreneurs, leaving a void in innovation and local economic development. The result is an increasing gap in skills, with those left behind often lacking the resources to develop their own businesses or find steady employment.



## 2. Educational Barriers

- **Disruptions to Formal Education:** The educational sector in Syria has been devastated by the ongoing conflict, with many schools destroyed or repurposed for military or refugee accommodation. As a result, 52% of rural youth reported a complete cessation of formal education during the past five years, while 40% of urban youth stated that their education was disrupted due to conflict and displacement.

- o Access to education remains an acute issue for displaced youth, with many in conflict zones unable to attend school. This is especially pronounced for children in areas that have been repeatedly bombed or those living in makeshift camps.

- o The most significant barrier is the lack of safe, functional schools, with 56% of youth indicating that they felt unsafe traveling to school or attending classes due to the threat of bombings or armed conflict. In some

areas, youth education has been relegated to makeshift learning spaces, which lack adequate teachers, materials, and facilities.

- **Limited Access to Vocational Training:** Vocational training programs, which could equip youth with practical skills and increase their employability, are highly limited in Syria. Approximately 63% of rural youth and 50% of urban youth reported no access to vocational education.

- o The few programs that exist are often underfunded, poorly equipped, and inadequately staffed. For example, vocational institutions in rural areas only operate 20%-30% of the year due to financial instability, further exacerbating the education gap between urban and rural youth.

- o Moreover, gender disparities in vocational training access are significant. In rural areas, 75% of young women reported having no access to vocational training, which limits their opportunities for employment, independence, and social mobility. This exclusion from vocational pathways forces young women to accept lower-paying informal work or rely on family support.

- **Inadequate Educational Infrastructure:** As mentioned, Syria's education system is plagued by crumbling infrastructure and a shortage of qualified teachers, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas. Many schools and universities operate under subpar conditions, lacking basic educational resources such as textbooks, internet access, or functioning laboratories.

- o For example, 40% of youth reported that their educational institutions lacked basic resources such as electricity or clean water, making learning nearly impossible in these conditions.

- o Digital learning has become a necessary alternative, but it remains accessible only to 30% of urban youth, with rural youth lagging far behind due to poor internet connectivity and a lack of digital devices. This digital divide exacerbates inequalities in education and prevents young people from accessing quality learning resources.





### 3. Political Participation

- **Underrepresentation of Youth in Governance:**

The youth of Syria are largely excluded from political power structures. Approximately 80% of youth in both urban and rural areas reported feeling marginalized from political decision-making processes. They perceive the government as unresponsive to their needs, and 75% of urban youth expressed a lack of trust in existing political institutions.

- o This political apathy is compounded by the absence of youth representatives in governance, with only 5% of youth reporting any form of political representation in local councils or governmental structures.

- o Youth advisory councils or political inclusion mechanisms are practically non-existent, resulting in a growing sense of disillusionment among young people who feel that their voices are not being heard.

- **Increased Interest in Civic Engagement:** Despite the political exclusion, there is a strong desire among Syrian youth to engage in civic activism and social justice causes. 60% of youth expressed interest in organizing or participating in community-led initiatives, focusing on issues such as human rights, democracy, and social justice.

- o However, these youth-led initiatives are often short-lived or suppressed by authorities, who view them as a challenge to the status quo. As a result, many youth turn to informal activism, such as social media campaigns or small-scale protests, where they can voice their concerns without fear of retribution.

- **Limited Platforms for Political Expression:** The lack of freedom of speech and the suppression of political opposition are critical barriers to youth participation in politics. In both urban and rural areas, 70% of youth reported feeling afraid to express their political views due to fear of surveillance, reprisals, or censorship.

- o Young Syrians often resort to online platforms to discuss political issues, but even this form of expression is fraught with danger as the internet is heavily monitored by authorities. The 20% of youth engaged in online activism often face the risk of being arrested or persecuted for their views.

## 4. Social and Psychological Well-Being

- **Psychological Trauma:** Psychological well-being remains one of the most significant challenges for Syrian youth. The trauma resulting from years of war, displacement, and violence has left many young people deeply affected. 85% of youth reported suffering from anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with 72% of rural youth experiencing higher rates of PTSD due to prolonged exposure to conflict and displacement.
  - o Many youth report a loss of hope for the future, with 75% of respondents stating that they feel emotionally detached or disconnected from their pre-war life. This mental health crisis affects their ability to engage in social and educational activities, creating long-term consequences for both individuals and communities.
- **Effectiveness of Community-Led Support Systems:** In the absence of comprehensive mental health services, community-based support systems have emerged as essential sources of emotional and psychological relief. 58% of youth in urban areas have benefited from community-led programs, including peer counselling, group therapy, and mental health awareness campaigns.
  - o However, such programs are less accessible in rural areas, where only 40% of youth reported having access to similar services. The lack of professional mental health services, combined with social stigma, prevents many youth from seeking help.
- **Gender-Specific Challenges:** Gender-specific challenges, particularly for young women, are prevalent throughout Syrian society. Early marriage remains a significant issue for young women in rural areas, where 65% of female youth reported being married before the age of 18.
  - o Additionally, 35% of young women reported being socially isolated due to gender norms, which prevent them from seeking employment, education, or participating in social activities.
  - o Gender-based violence is also a growing issue, with many young women facing physical or emotional abuse. 43% of young women reported experiencing some form of gender-based violence in the last year.



## 5. Health and Well-being

- **Access to Healthcare:** Access to healthcare remains a significant issue for Syrian youth, exacerbated by years of conflict and displacement. 70% of youth in rural areas and 50% in urban areas reported limited access to adequate healthcare services. The destruction of hospitals and medical facilities, combined with the scarcity of medical professionals, has made it difficult for young people to receive basic care.
  - o Chronic health conditions such as respiratory issues, malnutrition, and psychological disorders have surged due to poor living conditions and lack of access to treatment. 60% of youth living in displacement camps reported suffering from chronic diseases, most of which are preventable or manageable under normal circumstances.
  - o The situation is further complicated by the lack of specialized services, with 45% of youth reporting difficulty accessing services for mental health, maternal health, and sexual health, which remain essential for their overall well-being.
- **Impact of Conflict on Physical Health:** The direct effects of the conflict on the physical health of youth cannot be ignored. 35% of youth reported injuries sustained due to bombings, shelling, or clashes. Many of these injuries resulted in long-term disabilities, which affect not only physical health but also access to education, employment, and social participation.
  - o Additionally, landmine accidents have severely impacted young people, especially in rural regions, where mines remain a threat to everyday life. This ongoing danger has led to higher injury rates in rural youth populations compared to urban areas.
- **Malnutrition and Lack of Nutrition:** A significant portion of youth, particularly in conflict zones and displacement camps, face issues related to food insecurity. 50% of youth in rural areas reported insufficient access to nutritious food, with 35% of urban youth also facing food insecurity due to economic instability.
  - o Malnutrition is affecting youth growth and development, with 30% of youth in some regions suffering from stunted growth and nutritional deficiencies. In some areas, young people have limited access to clean drinking water, exacerbating their vulnerability to diseases related to poor sanitation.



## 6. Cultural Identity and Heritage

- **Impact of Conflict on Cultural Identity:** The ongoing conflict has deeply affected the cultural identity of Syrian youth. Displacement, destruction of cultural landmarks, and the loss of community heritage have caused 50% of youth to feel disconnected from their cultural roots. Urban youth, in particular, report a feeling of alienation due to displacement, which forces them to live in environments where their traditional culture is no longer visible or celebrated.

- o Cultural preservation programs are critical for youth, but there is a lack of infrastructure to support these initiatives. Despite this, 45% of youth expressed a desire to preserve their cultural identity through art, music, and language programs, particularly as a way to reclaim a sense of belonging.

- o Many youth in refugee communities abroad are also finding it difficult to maintain their cultural identity, leading to identity crises as they struggle to balance their Syrian heritage with the cultures of their host countries.

- **Youth and Cultural Activism:** In response to the erosion of cultural heritage, youth-led cultural initiatives have emerged in various parts of Syria. 35% of youth have engaged in activities like photography, graffiti, and community theatre to express their struggles and preserve memories of pre-conflict Syria. These initiatives have not only become a means of preserving culture but also a platform for political expression and resistance.



## 9. Youth Mobility and Migration Patterns

- **Internal Displacement:** The internal displacement crisis continues to affect youth populations, with approximately 6.7 million Syrians displaced within the country. Among these, 45% are youth aged 18-35. These young people face a myriad of challenges, including loss of education, economic opportunities, and social support.

- o Internal migration from rural areas to urban centres in search of safety and livelihood opportunities has strained resources in cities like Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs, further exacerbating unemployment and housing shortages. 40% of urban youth report difficulties in finding accommodation or secure jobs in cities, leading to increased tensions between displaced youth and long-term residents.

- **Cross-Border Migration:** Many Syrian youth have sought refuge in neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. 38% of youth who migrated in the past five years stated that they left Syria in search of better job prospects, educational opportunities, and safety. Among these, 30% of migrants are between the ages of 18-24, reflecting the youth-driven nature of the migration crisis.

- o This migration is further driven by a lack of future prospects within Syria, with many youth seeking opportunities in fields such as education, business, technology, and healthcare. This phenomenon, known as “brain drain”, has significantly weakened the country’s human capital, as skilled professionals and university graduates leave for better prospects abroad.



# Recommendations from Youth

Based on the findings from this research, the following recommendations were put forward by youth across various regions of Syria. These recommendations reflect the urgent needs and aspirations of young people who are seeking to rebuild their lives and contribute to the future of their country. The proposals encompass areas such as education, employment, political engagement, mental health support, and social cohesion.

## 1. Economic Opportunities

### • Support for Entrepreneurship

o Percentage of youth supporting entrepreneurship initiatives: 72%

o Key insight: Youth expressed a strong desire for entrepreneurship support, with many believing that starting their own businesses would offer them greater financial independence and help reduce unemployment in their communities.

o Recommendation: Establish government-backed microfinance programs and provide entrepreneurship training.

### • Youth Employment Programs

o Percentage of youth seeking stable employment opportunities: 85%

o Key insight: A large proportion of youth, particularly in rural areas, highlighted the scarcity of stable jobs, leading many to seek informal, low-paying employment.

o Recommendation: Develop youth-targeted job creation programs in sectors like education, healthcare, and infrastructure development.

### • Rehabilitation of Informal Employment Sectors

o Percentage of youth working in informal sectors: 65%

o Key insight: Many youths find themselves working in the informal economy due to a lack of formal job opportunities, facing insecure work conditions and low wages.

o Recommendation: Formalize informal sectors, protect workers' rights, and improve wage standards and working conditions.

## 2. Educational Reforms

### • Expansion of Scholarships and Digital Learning

o Percentage of youth without access to higher education: 55%

o Key insight: Over half of the participants from rural areas indicated that financial constraints and lack of access to universities prevent them from pursuing higher education.

o Recommendation: Increase scholarships, offer digital learning platforms, and create remote learning centres to support displaced and rural youth.

### • Vocational Training and Skill Development

o Percentage of youth seeking vocational training: 68%

o Key insight: A significant portion of youth expressed interest in vocational training to gain skills that are directly marketable, especially in sectors like construction, agriculture, and technology.

o Recommendation: Establish vocational training centres in both urban and rural areas, focusing on practical, market-relevant skills.

### • Improvement of Educational Infrastructure

o Percentage of youth reporting damaged or overcrowded schools: 60%

o Key insight: Many youth from conflict-affected areas reported a lack of safe, functional educational facilities, hindering their learning opportunities.

o Recommendation: Rebuild educational infrastructure and establish temporary learning centres in regions where schools have been damaged or destroyed.





### 3. Political and Civic Engagement

- Increased Political Representation

- o Percentage of youth feeling underrepresented in political structures: 78%

- o Key insight: The majority of youth feel excluded from political decision-making processes and want greater involvement in governance.

- o Recommendation: Create youth advisory councils at local and national levels to provide youth with a voice in policy discussions.

- Civic Education and Political Awareness

- o Percentage of youth unaware of how to participate in elections: 50%

- o Key insight: Many youths lack knowledge about the electoral process and how to participate in decision-making, which limits their political engagement.

- o Recommendation: Introduce civic education programs in schools and universities to raise awareness about elections, rights, and democratic processes.

- Encouraging Political Dialogue

- o Percentage of youth seeking platforms for political discussions: 65%

- o Key insight: Youth across various regions emphasized the importance of creating safe spaces for intergroup dialogues to foster political and social unity.

- o Recommendation: Create platforms for open political dialogues that promote trust and communication across sectarian and regional divides.



#### 4. Mental Health Support and Social Well-being

- Access to Mental Health Services

- o Percentage of youth suffering from trauma-related issues: 80%

- o Key insight: A significant proportion of youth have experienced trauma, anxiety, and stress as a result of ongoing conflict and displacement.

- o Recommendation: Integrate mental health services into community centres and schools, with a focus on trauma recovery and psychological support.

- Social Cohesion Programs

- o Percentage of youth feeling socially divided along sectarian lines: 67%

- o Key insight: Many youths face social fragmentation, with sectarian divisions deepening tensions and making it harder to rebuild a cohesive society.

- o Recommendation: Invest in reconciliation and peacebuilding programs that promote cross-cultural dialogue and shared community activities.

- Support for Gender-Specific Needs

- o Percentage of young women facing barriers to education and employment: 62%

- o Key insight: Gender-specific barriers, such as early marriage and limited mobility, restrict opportunities for young women to thrive.

- o Recommendation: Implement gender-sensitive policies that address specific challenges faced by young women, ensuring their access to education, employment, and healthcare.

## 5. Security and Rule of Law

### • Protection of Youth Rights

o Percentage of youth feeling unsafe due to violence: 58%

o Key insight: Youth, particularly those in rural and conflict-affected areas, often feel unsafe due to violence and exploitation by armed groups.

o Recommendation: Strengthen legal protections for youth, ensuring their safety, rights, and freedom from exploitation.

### • Restoration of Security

o Percentage of youth expressing a desire for security and peace: 85%

o Key insight: The majority of youth expressed a deep desire for peace and security, emphasizing that violence and insecurity continue to impede their ability to rebuild their lives.

o Recommendation: Focus on national reconciliation and peace-building efforts, ensuring youth participation in the restoration of a peaceful and secure environment.



# Researcher's Recommendations

Based on the data gathered from the focus group discussions and the analysis of the key challenges faced by youth in Syria, the following recommendations are proposed to effectively address the multifaceted issues impacting the youth population. These recommendations differ from the youth's suggestions by focusing more on strategic, policy-oriented approaches, informed by the scientific data and contextual findings from the study.

## 1. Policy and Governance Reforms

- **Strengthen Youth Representation in Governance Structures:** One of the key findings from the research was the underrepresentation of youth in political decision-making processes, particularly at the local and national levels. This lack of involvement hinders the youth's ability to influence policies that directly impact their lives. Recommendation: It is crucial to establish youth representation mechanisms within government structures at both the national and local levels. This could include youth seats in national parliaments or youth councils within municipalities. A policy framework should be developed to ensure that youth perspectives are consistently integrated into governance and decision-making processes, ensuring their concerns regarding education, employment, and mental health are directly addressed. Scientific Example: In post-conflict societies like those in Colombia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the inclusion of youth in governance has shown to significantly enhance the development of policies that cater to youth employment, education, and community rebuilding (Pohl, 2015). Similar strategies can be applied to Syria to ensure that youth needs are systematically addressed.

## 2. Sustainable Economic Development and Employment Programs

- **Create Sustainable Youth Employment Initiatives:** The findings from the study indicate that youth unemployment, particularly in rural areas, is one of the most pressing challenges. Additionally, there is a significant dependence on the informal sector and migrant labour, leading to unstable and low-wage jobs. Recommendation: Develop sustainable employment initiatives that can offer both short-term and long-term solutions. This includes establishing youth-focused vocational training programs that align with the needs of local economies and reconstruction efforts. Additionally, support for youth-led businesses should be facilitated through micro-financing and business incubators. Public-private partnerships should be encouraged to create job opportunities in the growing tech and green energy sectors, which can offer stable employment prospects for youth. Scientific Example: A study conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Tunisia showed that providing young people with skills in growing sectors like renewable energy and digital technology led to an increase in youth employment by over 15% within the first year of program implementation (ILO, 2020).



### 3. Rebuilding Education and Capacity Building

- **Expand Access to Education through Digital Platforms:** The study's findings revealed that displacement, financial hardship, and the destruction of educational infrastructure have significantly disrupted youth access to quality education. Many young people have limited or no access to formal education or vocational training, particularly in conflict-affected rural areas.

**Recommendation:** To mitigate these educational gaps, it is crucial to expand access to digital learning and online educational platforms. Investment in digital education hubs in conflict-affected areas would provide youth with opportunities for distance learning and virtual vocational training. Furthermore, the government should partner with international NGOs and educational institutions to offer scholarships and online degree programs, which can help youth access higher education even if they are geographically isolated.

**Scientific Example:** During the Syrian conflict, UNICEF and UNHCR provided digital learning platforms for displaced youth in Lebanon, which led to a 50% increase in educational retention rates among Syrian refugee children and youth in the region (UNICEF, 2019).

### 4. Mental Health Support and Trauma Recovery

- **Integrate Mental Health Services in Community Development Programs:** The focus group discussions highlighted the widespread psychological distress among youth due to trauma from the ongoing conflict. However, mental health services remain limited, and many youth struggle to access appropriate care due to stigma and a lack of available resources.

**Recommendation:** The establishment of mental health support programs within community centres is crucial. These centres should provide access to psychosocial support, counselling, and group therapy for youth suffering from the long-term effects of war-related trauma. Additionally, peer-to-peer support networks should be encouraged to reduce the stigma around mental health issues. International partnerships with mental health organizations can provide expertise and resources to train local professionals in trauma-informed care.

**Scientific Example:** In post-genocide Rwanda, the integration of mental health services in community-based programs has shown significant improvements in psychological well-being among youth, especially when combined with social cohesion programs (Scholte et al., 2015). A similar approach in Syria could help youth overcome the emotional and psychological challenges resulting from the conflict.

### 5. Strengthening the Rule of Law and Security

- **Create Safe Spaces for Youth Participation:** Given the ongoing security concerns and political instability, many young people in Syria face the risk of political exclusion, militarization, and recruitment by armed groups. Additionally, sectarian divisions continue to hinder efforts for national unity.

**Recommendation:** It is important to create safe spaces for youth to engage in political discussions and reconciliation dialogues. These spaces should be neutral, inclusive of diverse youth groups from different sectarian and political backgrounds and focused on trust-building and conflict resolution. Furthermore, youth-led peacebuilding initiatives should be supported to encourage young people to take active roles in promoting peace and social cohesion.

**Scientific Example:** The creation of youth-led peace initiatives in Somalia and South Sudan has been instrumental in reducing youth involvement in armed groups and promoting community-led reconciliation (UNDP, 2017). Applying similar strategies in Syria could help foster a peaceful environment conducive to the post-conflict recovery process.

# Acknowledgments

The completion of this research would not have been possible without the invaluable contributions of many individuals and groups.

First and foremost, we would like to express our deepest gratitude to the team and facilitators who meticulously organized and conducted the focus group discussions. Their expertise, patience, and unwavering dedication ensured the smooth execution of the sessions. Each facilitator brought a unique set of skills, making it possible for the youth to express themselves openly and with confidence, creating an atmosphere that fostered meaningful dialogue. Your professionalism, commitment, and hard work were key to achieving the research objectives and to making the youth feel heard and understood. We would also like to acknowledge the logistical support that was critical in organizing the diverse range of sessions across multiple regions. Your attention to detail and coordination played a pivotal role in the success of this project.

We also extend our heartfelt thanks to the youth participants, who generously shared their experiences, challenges, hopes, and aspirations. Your resilience in the face of adversity, as well as your proactive engagement in shaping the future of Syria, was inspiring. You not only spoke about your struggles but also offered constructive ideas and solutions, demonstrating your commitment to rebuilding your communities and your country. The discussions we had were rich in insight, and it is through your voices that we were able to understand the complex issues that young Syrians face today. Your willingness to be part of this research reinforces the importance of youth in the process of societal transformation. We also appreciate the diversity in your experiences, representing various regions and backgrounds, which enriched our understanding of the challenges and opportunities across Syria.

The role of youth in building a new Syria is immeasurable. You are not just passive recipients of aid; you are active participants, agents of change who are ready to rebuild and lead. Your input will serve as a foundation for future programs, policies, and initiatives designed to empower young people and help them thrive. It is clear that you hold the key to Syria's future, and the work we do today is intended to create the space and opportunities for your voices to be heard and your potential to be realized. We believe that empowering youth is essential for creating a stable, peaceful, and prosperous Syria in the long term. Your ambition, vision, and commitment will be instrumental in shaping Syria's political, social, and economic landscape.

We also want to recognize the contribution of the local communities that have supported this research. Their openness and cooperation provided us with the necessary context to conduct our work effectively, and their role in creating safe spaces for youth to share their experiences is vital for fostering an inclusive, resilient society. Once again, we would like to thank each and every individual who played a part in this research. Together, we are paving the way for a brighter, more inclusive Syria, where the youth are central to the reconstruction process, leading with vision, hope, and resilience. Let this research be a starting point for future collaborations, initiatives, and actions that will transform Syria into a place where young people are given the opportunities, tools, and support they need to realize their full potential.



# YOUTH

## in Post-Liberation Syria



**emissa**

Fostering Community Resilience

