

Syria

The Socio-Economic Situation in Damascus City

**Report based on Skype meetings with
sources in Damascus and Beirut**



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and Integration

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Disclaimer

This brief report was written according to the EASO COI Note Methodology.¹ The report is based on approved minutes from Skype meetings with carefully selected sources. Statements from sources are used in the report and all statements are referenced.

The report is not, and does not purport to be a detailed or comprehensive survey of all aspects of the issues addressed in the report and should be weighed against other available country of origin information on the socio-economic situation in Damascus City. It should be noticed that the report focuses solely on the situation in Damascus City, and not in the other areas in Syria.

The report at hand does not include any policy recommendations or analysis. The information in the note does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Danish Immigration Service (DIS).

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

¹ European Union: European Asylum Support Office (EASO), EASO Country of Origin Information note methodology, 10 July 2012. <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4ffc33d32.html> [accessed 18 March 2019]

Introduction and methodology

The brief report at hand focuses on the socio-economic situation in Damascus City, including access to water and sanitation, electricity, basic food items, healthcare, schooling, housing and labour market in Damascus City. Additionally, the report contains information on the socio-economic situation of single or widowed women with children, unaccompanied minors and people with disabilities in Damascus City. The terms of reference (ToR) are included at the end of the note (Appendix 2).

The report is based on Skype meetings with three sources in Damascus and one source in Beirut. The sources were asked how reference might be made to them in the report. All sources are referenced in the report according to their own request. The sources consulted were informed about the purpose of the Skype interviews and that their statements would be included in a public report. The minutes from the meetings with the sources were forwarded to them for approval, giving them a chance to amend, comment or correct their statements. All four sources approved their statements.

The report is a synthesis of the sources' statements and does thus not include all details and nuances of each statement. In the report, care has been taken to present the views of the sources as accurately and transparently as possible. The statements of all sources are found in their full extent in Appendix 1 of this report.

During the interviews, the sources highlighted issues that are not addressed in ToR. Since these issues could be relevant to refugee status determination, they are included in the meeting minutes in Appendix 1, but they are not addressed in the note.

For the sake of reader-friendliness, transparency and accuracy, paragraphs in the meeting minutes in Appendix 1 have been given consecutive numbers, which are used in the report when referring to the statements of the sources in the footnotes. The intention hereby is to make it easier to find the exact place of a statement in the meeting minutes.

Finally, attention should be called to the changeable and unstable situation in Syria and the fact that the information provided may quickly become out-dated. Therefore, the issues addressed in this report should be monitored periodically and be brought up to date accordingly.

The research and editing of this note was finalised by 22 March 2019.

Abbreviations

COI	Country of Origin Information
DIS	Danish Immigration Service
IDP	Internal Displaced People
HAT	The Humanitarian Access Team (of Mercy Corps)
SARC	Syrian Arab Red Crescent
SYP	Syrian Pound
ToR	Terms of reference
WHO	World Health Organisation

The socio-economic situation in Damascus City

1. Access to water and sanitation

There is a water supply network all over Damascus Province.² Generally, 80-90 percent of Damascus City is fully served in terms of sanitation and access to clean drinking water.³ There is also access to water in the slums of Damascus province⁴, however, in areas such as Yarmouk, Jobar, Barza Al Balad, Qaboun, Hajar al-Aswad and al-Qadam, the water supply infrastructure is damaged due to the past military operations. In these areas, water is supplied either by water trucks or through local water reservoirs.⁵

The high rain fall in the winter of 2018/2019 has increased the drinking water reserves in Damascus City.⁶ However, residents in Damascus City have experienced more water shortages since the summer of 2018⁷ which means that water has not been available some hours during the day, mainly because of overconsumption and lack of water pressure.⁸ Residents living in the outer areas of Damascus City experience more frequent water outages than residents living in more central and upscale neighbourhoods.⁹ When there is no water in the pipes, residents use water reservoirs on the roof or in their houses.¹⁰

2. Access to electricity

Damascus province has an electricity network, but as is the case with the water infrastructure, in areas affected by previous military operations such as Yarmouk, Jobar, Barza al Balad, Qaboun Hajar al-Aswad and al-Qadam, the electricity network is damaged.¹¹ The government is repairing the network, but the reparation is not expected to be done within the time frame promised by the government.¹²

Until the fall of 2018, there was sufficient access to electricity in Damascus City. However, six month ago many areas across Damascus began to experience power cuts.¹³ In many areas in the city, electricity is not available for several hours per day.¹⁴ Neighbourhoods that are more affluent, such as al Maliki and Abu Rummaneh, are better served than other areas in terms of how many hours they receive electricity.¹⁵ People use private batteries and power generators to compensate for the shortages.¹⁶

² A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 53

³ HAT: 14

⁴ A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 53

⁵ HAT: 15; A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 53

⁶ HAT: 14

⁷ A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 54; An international humanitarian organisation based in Damascus: 37

⁸ A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 54

⁹ An international humanitarian organisation based in Damascus: 37

¹⁰ A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 54

¹¹ HAT: 18; A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 55

¹² A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 55

¹³ An international humanitarian organisation based in Damascus: 38

¹⁴ HAT: 16; A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 56

¹⁵ HAT: 17; An international humanitarian organisation based in Damascus: 38

¹⁶ HAT: 16; A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 56

The electricity is provided at a low cost, which is why it is affordable for even low-income groups,¹⁷ but the electricity generators and the fuel needed to run these generators is expensive and not affordable for low-income families.¹⁸

3. Access to food

There is no shortage of basic food items in Damascus City, and all items are found at different qualities and prices.¹⁹ It is only imported foods that are in short supply in the city. However, one source mentioned that there are reports of long queues at bakeries around the city because of a shortage of flour.²⁰

There has been a drastic increase in food prices due to a drop in the value of the Syrian pound. Low-income groups in the city can still afford to purchase basic food items but they have to prioritise and rationalise their food purchases due to the recent sporadic increase of prices of some basic food items.²¹ People's income does not match the expenses. Many families have to rely on their extended family and networks, or financial support from friends or relatives abroad to afford to feed their families.²²

4. Access to schooling

Public schools are free and available for everyone in Damascus City²³ and no child is denied access based on his or her area of origin or ethnic background.²⁴ However, schools are overcrowded and many schools operate in two shifts in order to cope with the lack of capacity and growing demand. In the areas surrounding the city, schools are more overcrowded due to the high number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who reside in these areas.²⁵

According to a humanitarian organisation in Syria, the Syrian government encourages Syrians through media campaigns, and even Syrians who do not have required documents for enrolment, to enrol their children in public schools.²⁶ Children that return to Damascus after a period of absence can legally enrol in public schools. In order to be placed at a level which matches their age and skills in public or private schools, these children have either to certify their latest school attendance or to take a placement test to determine their suitable level. The Ministry of Education have offered children, who have missed school for a long period of time, the option to pass two educational years within one. However, this alternative is only provided in a limited number of schools.²⁷

¹⁷ A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 55; HAT: 19

¹⁸ A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 56; HAT: 16

¹⁹ A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 58

²⁰ Ibid.: 20-21

²¹ HAT: 20; An international humanitarian organisation based in Damascus: 39; A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 58

²² HAT: 22

²³ HAT: 23; A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 59

²⁴ A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 59

²⁵ A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 60

²⁶ A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 59

²⁷ HAT: 24-25

5. Access to healthcare

Every Syrian national, regardless of ethnic background or place of origin, have access to public primary healthcare services and hospitals in Damascus City.²⁸ While WHO in Damascus advised that the access is free of charge for every Syrian,²⁹ HAT mentioned that the cost of a consultation or medical check-up is very low (aprox. 0.5-1 USD³⁰) and therefore affordable for low-income groups.³¹ Emergency relief treatment in public hospitals in Damascus is free of charge.³²

Medicine prescribed by primary healthcare physicians is available to a great extent in pharmacies. The price of medicine is not high.³³ Medicine used to treat primary care patients are provided free of charge at Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) clinics in Damascus.³⁴ Medicine used to treat chronic diseases are provided free of charge by public healthcare clinics and hospitals.³⁵

The quality of treatment at public health centres and hospitals is, however, not high, and there are waiting lists for treatment due to the limited capacity. Many of the doctors currently working in Damascus are younger doctors that are typically not as well-trained as those doctors who left the country during the Syrian war.³⁶

In addition, there are shortages of equipment, medicine and surgeries in tertiary healthcare, including cancer, cardiovascular and other diseases.³⁷ There are waiting lists to receive treatments at public hospitals, and at private hospitals medicine and surgeries for these advanced diseases are very expensive.³⁸

There is a shortage in mental healthcare services across Syria, including shortage of psychiatrists³⁹ This was also the case before the war.⁴⁰ There are many more psychiatrists in Damascus than in the rest of the country. Psychiatric treatments and medicine are provided free of charge in public clinics.⁴¹ In Damascus City a number of NGOs, such as SARC that receive support from Danish Red Cross and the private sector, also provide psycho-social support.⁴²

²⁸ WHO: 1; HAT: 26, 29; An international humanitarian organisation based in Damascus: 43; A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 61

²⁹ WHO: 1

³⁰ HAT: 26

³¹ HAT: 26; A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 61

³² HAT: 26

³³ WHO: 2; An international humanitarian organisation based in Damascus: 41

³⁴ An international humanitarian organisation based in Damascus: 41

³⁵ WHO: 3

³⁶ HAT: 27

³⁷ WHO: 4; A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 62

³⁸ WHO: 4-5; A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 62

³⁹ An international humanitarian organisation based in Damascus: 46; WHO: 6

⁴⁰ WHO: 6

⁴¹ WHO: 6

⁴² WHO: 6; An international humanitarian organisation based in Damascus: 48; A humanitarian organisation in Syria:

6. Access to housing

House prices have been skyrocketing in Damascus City within recent years and most people cannot afford buying or renting a house or a flat inside the city. The high housing prices have forced a large number of people to take up residency in the poor suburbs of the city like Mazzeh 86, Rokneddin etc. where prices are more affordable.⁴³ In these areas, there is access to basic services such as sanitation, water and electricity, however, the infrastructure is vulnerable and a slight amount of damage can affect the whole area.⁴⁴

Previously, individuals had to obtain a security clearance to rent a property inside Damascus City, but this requirement has been waived.^{45 46} HAT mentioned that there were reports indicating that when people registered their leased house with the local authorities, officers from security divisions would pay a visit to the leased house. The source considered this a new way of conducting security checks instead of the waived security clearance process.⁴⁷

According to the law, citizens whose homes have been destroyed by the war have the right to receive compensation from the Syrian Government. However, the compensation is low compared to the damages.⁴⁸

7. Access to labour market

According to a humanitarian organisation in Syria, since many IDPs have moved into the city in recent years, the capacity of the labour market does not meet the growing demand for jobs. University graduates can still find jobs, but mostly not within their field of study. However, the fact that many Syrians have left the country during the conflict has opened some space for a new workforce in the labour market. In addition, since many men have left the country, one finds an increasing number of women in traditionally male professions. It is possible for unskilled labour to find jobs in the city and manage a minimum standard of living, especially if the person has been through some kind of vocational training program. It is still possible for unskilled people to find jobs such as porter in the market, taxi driver etc. The source underlines, however, that expenses are high in Damascus City and it is very difficult for low- as well as middle income groups to make ends meet.⁴⁹

⁴³ HAT: 31; A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 65-66

⁴⁴ A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 66

⁴⁵ According to Syrian Law Journal, "the Ministry of Interior is no longer requiring security clearance approvals to be obtained as a precondition for leases to be registered with municipalities.", Syrian Law Journal, 29 January 2019, accessed at: https://twitter.com/syrian_law/status/1090257282170990597

⁴⁶ A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 67

⁴⁷ HAT: 30

⁴⁸ HAT: 32; A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 68

⁴⁹ A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 69-70

8. Single/widowed women

Legally single women have the same rights as men. But culturally it can be harder for a single woman to secure the same rights and privileges as a man.⁵⁰

Women have access to the labour market and they are able to rent housing for themselves and their families. According to Mercy Corps, sources indicate that in one out of each three households a woman is responsible for securing the family's income.⁵¹

The biggest challenge for female-headed households is to manage rental costs in Damascus City. These families would usually be referred to local NGOs to receive support. The support may consist of vocational training where they learn some skills, receive food rations or other material assistance such as winter clothes. Many such families depend on food support from NGOs or SARC, even in female-headed families, where the woman already has a job, as the income is often not sufficient to cover all expenses of the family. In practice the allocated food rations are barely sufficient for families and sometimes the parents have to give their share of the food to the children in order to feed them sufficiently. The support provided by local NGOs and SARC has been diminishing recently due to lack of resources and many organizations have started reviewing their targeting criteria, so the aid is channelled toward the neediest groups.⁵²

9. Unaccompanied minors

The Ministry of Social Affairs in Syria is the authority that manages cases of unaccompanied minors.⁵³ Unaccompanied minors are often delivered to orphanages by police or extended family.⁵⁴

There are orphanages in Damascus City, but orphanages are struggling to handle the large number of children as service providers lack funding and adequate space.⁵⁵ According to a humanitarian organization the quality of the orphanages in Damascus is not high. There are also specialized agencies (such as UNICEF, SOS Children's Villages and Dar al-Rahma)⁵⁶ that are involved in dealing with unaccompanied minors and providing services to them.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ HAT: 33

⁵¹ HAT: 34

⁵² A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 71

⁵³ A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 72

⁵⁴ The Arab Weekly, *The lost children of Syria's war*, 5 February 2016, <https://thearabweekly.com/lost-children-syrias-war> [accessed 21 March 2019]

⁵⁵ TRT World, *Orphanages struggle to provide refuge for Syrian war orphans*, 16 January 2017, <https://www.trtworld.com/mea/thousands-of-children-orphaned-in-syrias-war-276349> [accessed 21 March 2019]

⁵⁶ The Arab Weekly, *The lost children of Syria's war*, 5 February 2016, <https://thearabweekly.com/lost-children-syrias-war> [accessed 21 March 2019]

⁵⁷ A humanitarian organisation in Syria: 72

10. Persons with disabilities

There is access to services and facilities for people with disabilities, but the access is limited and the services cannot meet the demand of the high number of people with disabilities across Syria who travel to Damascus to receive such services.⁵⁸

SARC, Amal Organization (Syria Trust affiliate) and some UNDP projects/partnerships provide services for people with disabilities in Damascus.⁵⁹ Every disabled person that reaches the centres will receive treatment free of charge regardless of his or her religious or ethnic background.⁶⁰

Mentally disabled people have access to specialised care. WHO supports two public hospitals in Damascus (and one in Aleppo) that provide treatment to mentally disabled persons. These three institutions are the only public hospitals in all of Syria that treat mentally disabled persons. WHO also provides training to families of mentally disabled persons.⁶¹

Prior to the outbreak of the Syrian conflict, local committees across Syria used to work with providing treatment and care to people with disabilities. The Danish Red Cross and SARC are currently working to identify former employees of these local committees in order to reenlist them in the efforts to provide care and treatment for people with disabilities in Syria.⁶²

An international humanitarian organisation based in Damascus mentioned that people with disabilities are still heavily stigmatized in Syrian society.⁶³

Persons with Down syndrome or autism have access to public health facilities like other individuals. There is a specialised centre under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour which provides empowerment activities and vocational rehabilitation. There are a few specialized NGOs centres which provide special service for persons with autism. One of those centres, called Amal, is well advanced.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ WHO: 7; HAT: 35; An international humanitarian organisation based in Damascus: 50

⁵⁹ WHO: 8, 10; HAT: 36

⁶⁰ WHO: 11

⁶¹ WHO: 12

⁶² An international humanitarian organisation based in Damascus: 51

⁶³ An international humanitarian organisation based in Damascus: 52

⁶⁴ WHO: 13

Consulted sources

Oral sources

- World Health Organisation (WHO) in Damascus
- An international humanitarian organisation based in Damascus
- The Humanitarian Access Team (HAT) of Mercy Corps
- A humanitarian organisation in Syria

Written sources

- The Arab Weekly, *The lost children of Syria's war*, 5 February 2016, <https://thearabweekly.com/lost-children-syrias-war> [accessed 21 March 2019]
- TRT World, *Orphanages struggle to provide refuge for Syrian war orphans*, 16 January 2017, <https://www.trtworld.com/mea/thousands-of-children-orphaned-in-syrias-war-276349> [accessed 21 March 2019]
- Syrian Law Journal, 29 January 2019, accessed at: https://twitter.com/syrian_law/status/1090257282170990597 [accessed 21 March 2019]

Appendix 1: Meeting minutes

Skype meeting with World Health Organisation (WHO) in Damascus, 12 March 2019

Access to healthcare

1. In Damascus City it is possible for people to access public primary healthcare services and to receive treatment in public hospitals. It is free of charge for all Syrians.
2. Medicine prescribed by primary healthcare physicians is available to a great extent in pharmacies. The production of medicine in Syria has resumed and has reached up to 35% of the production before the start of the Syrian war in 2011. The price of medicine is low compared to the price of medicine in neighbouring countries.
3. Medicine used to treat chronic diseases are provided free of charge by public healthcare clinics and hospitals. If this service was not possible, Syrians who are living under poverty line and who suffer from chronic diseases would not be able to afford to buy their medicine.
4. There are shortages in tertiary healthcare, including cancer treatments, cardiovascular surgeries and other complicated surgeries. These surgeries and treatments are performed mainly in Damascus City (but also in Aleppo and Latakia) but there are waiting lists. There is a shortage of equipment for treatment of cancer and cardiovascular diseases and there is also shortage of cancer medicine.
5. There are also high numbers of private clinics and hospitals in Damascus City. Syrians who need a specific type of medicine for tertiary healthcare that might not be available at public hospitals, will have to go to a private hospital to purchase it. Medicine and surgeries for advanced diseases such as cancer are very expensive at private hospitals. Advanced surgery can cost up to 6.000 USD, which is very expensive for most people living in Damascus.
6. There is a shortage in mental healthcare across Syria. There is a shortage of psychiatrists across the country but this was also the case before the war. There are many more psychiatrists in Damascus than in the rest of the country. Psychiatric treatments and medicine are provided free of charge in public clinics. A number of non-governmental organisations also provide psycho-social support in Damascus City.

Access to services and facilities for people with disabilities

7. There is access to services and facilities for people with disabilities, but the access is limited and the services cannot meet the demand of the high number of people with disabilities across Syria who travels to Damascus to get such services.
8. In Damascus City there is one public health centre, called the Centre of Artificial Limbs (previously called Disability and Physical Rehabilitation), that provide various kinds of physical rehabilitation. The

centre provides around 40 artificial limbs per month as well as necessary training, namely GATE training (the act of learning how to walk with the newly fitted prostheses), and physiotherapy sessions. Patients from all over Syria, and especially from north east Syria, including Qamishli, Hasakah and Deir Ezzor receive treatment at the centre.

9. Many people need lower artificial limbs but the waiting list is very long. WHO provides the centre with equipment, manufacturing materials for producing artificial limbs and trained health workers.
10. In addition, there is a physical rehabilitation centre in al-Zahera, for people with disabilities run by SARC. WHO is in the process of identifying the needs of the centres in order to provide necessary equipment, including advanced equipment to produce artificial limbs.
11. Every person with disabilities that reach the centres will receive treatment free of charge regardless of his or her religious or ethnic background.
12. Mentally disabled people have access to specialised care. WHO supports two public hospitals in Damascus (and one in Aleppo) that deals with mentally disabled persons. These three are the only public hospitals in all of Syria that treat mentally disabled persons. WHO also provides training to families of mentally disabled persons, through family well-being centres, in order for them to better assist and take care of their mentally disabled family members.
13. Regarding persons with Down syndrome or autism, they have access to public health facilities to receive all available health services similar to other people. There is a specialised centre under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour provides empowerment activities and vocational rehabilitation. There are a few specialized NGOs centres which provide special service for persons for autism. One of those centres is well advanced (called Amal NGO).

Skype meeting with the Humanitarian Access Team (HAT) of Mercy Corps, Beirut, 12 March 2019

Access to water and sanitation

14. 80-90 percent of Damascus City is fully served in terms of sanitation and access to clean drinking water. The high rain fall in the winter of 2018/2019 has increased the drinking water reserves in the city of Damascus.
15. In some areas in southern Damascus, such as Yarmouk, where most of the water and sanitation infrastructure is severely damaged, water is delivered to the residents by water trucks. The water trucks are privately owned and residents purchase water from these trucks. However due to the low number of civilians currently inhabiting the Yarmouk camp this uncommon approach is not widely used.

Access to electricity

16. In the city of Damascus there are power outages for approximately 12-16 hours per day with no electricity available across the city. Alternatively, batteries and private (individual) electricity generators are used to compensate for the shortage. However, it is worth mentioning that the recent fuel crisis has become an impediment against the use of generators, as owners are unable to secure the fuel required for their operation; both methods are assessed to be expensive and may be unavailable to the less-fortunate families.
17. The access and availability of electricity differs between different areas and neighbourhoods in Damascus City. Neighbourhoods that are more affluent, such as al Maliki and Abu Rummaneh, are better served than other areas in terms of how many hours they receive electricity. Neighbourhoods, such as areas around the presidential palace (a few parts of Muhajreen), in which the regime and state apparatus have a significant presence also tend to be better served than other areas.
18. In areas to the north, east and in the southern part of Damascus City there is more restricted access to electricity. Frequent power cuts can happen arbitrarily across the city of Damascus.
19. Electricity prices increased in July 2016, however, they did not increase significantly. Prices are affordable, even for low-income groups. Of note, returnees to areas that were formerly under opposition control (Yarmouk Camp, Qaboun and Jobar Sharqi) have been reported to have been charged with power bills for their houses for the period of abandonment (i.e. when these areas were under opposition groups' control). It is not possible to confirm whether a similar situation may occur in Damascus, however similar cases were reported previously in Rural Damascus (mainly in Bassel Al-Assad City – known as Adra Al-Omalyieh).

Access to Food

20. With the sanctions imposed on Syria only imported foods are in short supply in Damascus City. Daily basic food items are still available. However, the fluctuation in availability of items due to high demand, increased ground shipping costs (fuel prices), or - in some cases- the bribes/confiscation that several checkpoints were reported to be practiced on the city's entry points, generate a consequent sporadic inflation in prices.
21. There is, however, a shortage of flour, which is causing difficulties in terms of distributing and selling bread to the inhabitants. There are reports of long queues at bakeries around the city.
22. Regarding access to food, it is not the availability or the prices of food items which is a problem, but rather people's income, which does not match expenses. To support a family in Damascus for a month, it would typically cost around 325.000 SYP (about 650 USD), which does not include house leasing / rental costs. For some low-income families their average income is around 40.000-60.00 SYP (around 80-120 USD) per month, and many families have to rely on their extended family and networks to afford to feed their families. Some inhabitants in Damascus also receive financial support from their friends or relatives abroad.

Access to schooling

23. Public schools in Syria are free. Everybody can enrol their children in the schools of Damascus City.
24. Children that return to Damascus after a period of absence can legally enrol in public schools. However, these children will have to certify their latest school attendance in order to be placed at a level which matches their age and skills. If not, the student will be required to take a placement test to determine the suitable level. The same applies to private schools that are regulated under the same educational law as public schools.
25. For those who left school early for any reason, an alternative educational system (known as curriculum B), that merges two educational years in one, is offered by the Ministry of Education, however, it is available in only a small number of designated schools and is limited to students at an elementary level. For intermediary schools a similar curriculum known as “self-learning” is being assessed for as a possible alternative, however, HAT was not able to independently confirm its status.

Access to healthcare

26. Public healthcare is available to any citizen in Damascus City and everybody, irrespective of the level of income, can afford to pay the small fee for treatment at public hospital and its external public clinics. The cost of a regular consultation at local physicians (public external clinic) for a standard medical check-up is around 200 to 500 SYP (around 0.5-1 USD). Emergency relief treatment in public hospitals in Damascus is free of charge.
27. The quality of treatment at public health centres and hospitals is not high, and there are waiting lists for treatment due to the limited capacity. There has been an out flux of Syrian doctors due to the war, and as a result, many of the doctors currently working in Damascus are younger doctors that are typically not as well-trained as those who left the country.
28. To receive treatment at private clinics and hospitals is expensive. For example, a full medical check-up (including blood-tests, etc.), which is not provided by public hospitals, costs at least 60.000 SYP (around 120 USD) at a private hospital, which is equivalent to one and half month’s average salary in Damascus. Only 10-20 percent of the population in Damascus City can afford to be treated in private hospitals.
29. There are no reports of discrimination in terms of receiving treatment due to one’s ethnic background or place of origin, including persons from former opposition-controlled areas.

Access to housing

30. Despite the requirement to obtain a security clearance to lease / rent properties in Damascus being waived, individuals are required to register their lease contract in their neighbourhood’s municipality and at the “Mukhtar” office (the neighbourhood’s local administration representative). Upon

registration, security divisions have been reported to be conducting follow up visits to the subject houses, as an alternative to the waived security clearance process.

31. Affordable housing is very scarce in Damascus City. The average price to rent a one-family apartment is 300 USD, whereas the average monthly income for a family in Damascus is around 100-150 USD. Even in less affluent areas of Damascus the price to rent a one-family apartment is a couple of hundred dollars. The high housing prices have forced many Syrians to move to the suburbs of Damascus City. Even in these locations, prices are reported to reach 150 USD.
32. According to the law citizens whose homes have been destroyed by the war have the right to receive compensation from the Syrian Government. To get compensated, a public official will inspect and assess the damage to the property, however, there have been cases in Rural Damascus of officials routinely valuing the compensation lower than the actual value of the house prior to the inflicted damage. For example, if the actual value of damage to a house is worth four million SYP (around 8.000 USD), the typical compensation given would be around 200.000 SYP (around 400 USD). As regards Damascus Province, neighbourhoods with a high percentage of destruction, similar to Mezzeh 86 and Yarmouk, were reported to remain thus far “under evaluation”, with no actual compensations reported as paid to date.

Single/widowed women

33. Legally single women have the same rights as men. But culturally it can be harder for a single woman to secure the same rights and privileges as a man.
34. Women have access to the labour market and they are able to rent housing for themselves and their families. Sources indicate that one out of each three households is female-headed with a woman responsible of securing the family's income.

Services to persons with disabilities

35. Damascus City has few public and private centres for the treatment of people with disabilities. However, this was also the case even prior to the current conflict. There are, for instance, public centres which provide services for persons who suffer from hearing impairment (Aaal). However, while the exact capacity of such centres is not assessed, it was reported that it is relatively limited.
36. Amal Organization (Syria Trust affiliate) and some UNDP projects/partnerships all provide services for people with disabilities in Damascus.

Skype meeting with an international humanitarian organisation based in Damascus, 14 March 2019

Access to water and sanitation

37. In general, residents in Damascus City have experienced more water shortages since October 2018 . Residents living in the outer areas of Damascus city experience more frequent water shut off than residents living in more central and upscale neighbourhoods.

Access to electricity

38. Until the fall of 2018 there was sufficient access to electricity in Damascus city. Six months ago many areas across Damascus City began to experience power cuts. Generally, in the outer areas of Damascus City residents experience more frequent power cuts, than those residents living in more affluent neighbourhoods, including embassy neighbourhoods, as for example Abu Rumanneh and Mezzeh. Even in some affluent neighbourhoods, residents experience daily power cuts during specific hours of the day, such as the hours between 2-5 pm when the power is completely cut off. Sometimes electricity is suddenly cut off outside of the usual shut-off hours.

Access to Food

39. There has been a drastic increase in food prices in Damascus City due to a drop in the value of the Syrian pound. Low-income groups in Damascus City have had to prioritise and rationalise their food purchases due to recent price hikes.

Access to healthcare

40. There are no indications that the Syrian Ministry of Health is currently able to open more public healthcare clinics to meet the current and growing demand for treatments in Damascus city.
41. In general, medicine that is used to treat primary care patients is not expensive in Damascus City. At public governmental health clinics in Damascus patients can obtain a prescription for medicine and purchase it out-of-pocket at their own expense. Medicine used to treat primary care patients are provided free of charge at SARC clinics in Damascus.
42. There have been reports of IDPs in Damascus who have not been able to afford basic medicines for primary care.
43. To the source's knowledge, there have not been any reports of ethnic and religious discrimination with regard to access to medical treatment in Damascus.
44. Treatment related to mental health is available in Damascus, but psychiatrists in Damascus are generally employed within the public healthcare system or humanitarian organisations.
45. Issues of mental health are heavily stigmatised in the Syrian society and are considered a societal taboo.

46. It is estimated that there are around 30 psychiatrists in the whole country, with a majority of them being based in Damascus. But not all psychiatrists residing in Syria are currently practicing. Some psychiatrists are employed as advisors with international institutions, such as WHO and other similar organisations. The number of psychiatrists is very low compared to the number of patients who need treatment.
47. Various NGO's, including the Danish Red Cross through support to SARC provide psycho-social support for Syrians in Damascus. This type of support is provided for in community centres free of charge. NGOs, such as SARC, have mobile teams that support Syrians in need of psycho-social support directly in their communities.
48. There is no hospital in Damascus exclusively dedicated to treatment of mental health issues.

Unaccompanied minors

49. To the source's knowledge, orphanages do not exist in Damascus city.

People with disabilities

50. Presently SARC runs a clinic for physiotherapy in Damascus City, but apart from this, treatment centres and adequate treatment for people with disabilities is limited in Damascus. In addition, in cooperation with SARC, ICRC has a rehabilitation centre in Damascus to provide prosthesis for amputees.
51. Prior to the outbreak of the Syrian conflict, local committees across Syria used to work with providing treatment and care to people with disabilities. The Danish Red Cross and SARC are currently working to identify former employees of these local committees in order to reenlist them in the efforts to provide care and treatment for people with disabilities in Syria.
52. People with disabilities are still heavily stigmatized in Syrian society.

Skype meeting with a humanitarian organization in Syria, 12 March 2019

Access to water and sanitation

53. There is water supply network all over Damascus province even in the slums. However, there are areas in Damascus such as Yarmouk, Jobar, Barza Al Balad, Qaboun, Hajar al-Aswad and al-Qadam, where the water supply infrastructure is damaged due to the past military operations. In these areas, water is supplied either by water trucks or through local water reservoirs. Apart from these areas, people have access to running water in the rest of Damascus City.
54. In certain periods during the year, particularly in summer and the beginning of winter, the water is rationed due to overconsumption and lack of pressure, and water is not available some hours during the day. Most people in Damascus, like many other places in the region, have some kind of water reservoir either on the roof or inside their houses which they use when there is no water in the pipes.

Access to electricity

55. There is an electricity network all over Damascus and electricity is provided at a low price which is affordable even for low-income groups. However, in areas affected by the past military operations such as Yarmouk, Jobar, Barza Al Balad, Qaboun, Hajar al-Aswad and al-Qadam, the network is damaged and the government is repairing it. According to statements from state officials, the reparation will be completed during 2019, but most people doubt whether this will be fulfilled due to the huge amount of work needed.
56. All over Damascus, there are daily power cuts, for instance three hours on and two hours off. Many people have batteries and power generators in order to cover their needs during the cuts, but the problem is that fuel needed to run the generators is expensive for many households. The situation is worst during winter time when the weather is cold and Damascenes need electricity and fuel to make their houses warm. Power generators are expensive compared to people's income and low-income families cannot afford buying power generators.
57. The supply of Bhutan gas, which is used for preparing food in the kitchen, is insufficient, and people have to pay 8.000 – 12.000 SYP (around 16-24 USD) to buy a gas bottle in the black market while its normal price is 2.800 SYP (around 6 USD).

Access to food

58. There is no shortage of basic food items in Damascus, and all items are found at different qualities and prices. Generally, prices of basic food items are affordable for low-income groups. However, the prices, which are affected by the fluctuation of US dollar, have risen, and many families have to reduce their consumption of certain items such as meat and consume other cheaper items like vegetables. In general, people's incomes do not match rising expenses regardless of whether they are public or private employees.

Access to schooling

59. Public schools are free and available for everyone in Damascus City and no child is denied access due to his or her area of origin or ethnic background. The government encourages people through media to enrol their children in schools. Even people who do not have required documents for enrolment are asked to enrol their children in public schools. Public schools are almost free.
60. However, the schools are overcrowded and many schools operate in two shifts in order to cope with the lack of capacity and the growing demand. The further one gets away from the central and more affluent part of the city, the more overcrowded the schools are. This is because many internal displaced persons (IDPS) coming to Damascus reside in areas surrounding the city where house prices are lower. In these areas, one finds schools with even 50-60 students per class.

Access to healthcare

61. Every Syrian national, regardless of ethnic background or place of origin, has access to healthcare services in Damascus City. Public healthcare is very cheap, almost free, and is therefore affordable for low-income groups. Public primary health centres are found in every neighbourhood or in the vicinity throughout the city.
62. There are limited services regarding more complicated cases such as cardiac cases, dialysis and cancer treatments. There are long waiting lists to receive treatment for these at public hospitals. There are private healthcare centres and hospitals but they are expensive.
63. Psychiatric and psychological treatment is still a cultural taboo in Syria, however, Syrians have started accepting it. There used to be a big hospital in Douma in eastern Ghouta, but it has not been functioning due to the conflict.
64. Psycho-social support is mainly provided by SARC, other NGO and the private sector.

Access to housing

65. It is almost impossible to buy or rent a house or flat at an affordable price inside Damascus City now. Before the conflict, it was more or less affordable even for low-income groups to rent flat somewhere inside the city, but the prices have been skyrocketing in recent years due to the influx of IDPs from Rural Damascus into the city and the growing demand for a place to live. As an example, the source mentions that she used to pay 65.000 SYP (around 130 USD) for her rent apartment in a lower middle-class area in Damascus in 2013, but the rent has now increased to 175.000 SYP (around 350 USD) today. Such prices are not affordable neither for public employees or those employed in the private sector.
66. This situation has led a large number of people to settle down in slum areas in the vicinity of the city like Mazzeh 86, Rokneddin etc. In these areas, there is access to basic services such as sanitation, water and electricity, however, the infrastructure is vulnerable and a slight damage can affect the whole area. Rent is not low in these areas, but it is more affordable compared to the rent inside the city.
67. Previously, a person who wanted to rent a house in Damascus used to need to obtain a security clearance at the local police station. It was not difficult to obtain the clearance, but if the house was located in areas with sensitive, high-profile government, military or international institutions, it was not easy to get such clearance. It could also be difficult for people from certain rural areas to obtain the clearance. The requirement to obtain security clearance has however been waved recently.
68. It is possible for people whose houses have been subject to destruction due to the conflict to receive compensation from the Syrian government. A person, whose house has been damaged, can go to the police station and apply for compensation. The police will then visit the person's house and assess the damages, and 40 percent of the assessed damage will be covered by the state.

Access to labour market

69. The labour market in Damascus City is not promising at the moment, and it was also difficult to find a job even before the conflict. As many IDPs have moved into the city in recent years, the capacity of the labour market does not match the growing demand for jobs. The university graduates can still find jobs, but mostly not within their field of study. On the other hand, since a large proportion of skilled labour has left the country during the conflict, it has opened some space for the new workforce to enter the job market. In addition, due to the fact that a great part of those exiting the country have been young men, an increasing number of women have entered the labour market in Damascus City, and one can even find women in jobs which traditionally are considered as male jobs.
70. As regards unskilled labour, it is possible to find a job in the city and manage a minimum standard of living, especially if the person has been through some kind of training program. The source knows a family where the husband and the wife have acquired some basic skills within agriculture and sewing respectively through a short training program run by an UN partner and they are both employed now. It is still possible for unskilled people to find jobs such as porter in the market, taxi driver etc. The source underlines, however, that expenses are high in Damascus City and it is very difficult for low- as well as middle income groups to make ends meet.

Situation of single/widowed women

71. For a women-headed family, it is a challenge to manage rental in Damascus City. These families would usually be referred to local NGOs to receive support. The support may consist of vocational training where they learn some skills, food rations or other material assistance such as winter clothes. Many such families depend on food support from NGOs or SARC, even a female head of the family that has a job as the income is not sufficient to cover all expenses of the family. In practice the allocated food rations are barely sufficient for families and sometimes the parents have to give their share of the food to the children in order to feed them sufficiently. The support provided by the local NGOs and SARC has been diminishing recently due to lack of resources and many organizations have started reviewing their targeting criteria, so the aid is channelled towards the neediest groups.

Unaccompanied minors

72. The source has seen several cases of unaccompanied minors in Damascus. The source does not have information on such cases as such cases are managed by the Ministry of Social Affairs. There are orphanages in Damascus City, but their quality is not high. Specialized agencies may have more information on this issue as they are involved in dealing with unaccompanied minors and providing services to them.

Services for disabled persons

73. There are many disabled persons today, particularly children who have been physically disabled due to the conflict. There are services in Damascus for disabled persons such as physiotherapy treatment. Disabled persons are often referred to SARC and local NGOs to receive services, including help with regard to artificial body parts such as legs. It is too expensive for most people to get artificial legs or

other equipment in other ways than through SARC and NGOs. The waiting list to receive services from SARC and NGOs is very long as the capacity does not match the demand. However, it is a high priority for SARC and NGOs to provide services to disabled persons. There are also NGOs who provide wheelchair but their capacity to cover the need is limited. There is a centre for artificial legs managed by ICRC and SARC, which only help people who got disabled because of the war.

Appendix 2: Terms of Reference

1. Access to water and sanitation
2. Access to electricity
3. Access to food
4. Access to schooling
5. Access to healthcare
6. Access to housing
7. Access to labour market
8. Single/widowed women
9. Unaccompanied minors
10. Persons with disabilities