Palestinian Syrians at a Turning Point

Funding Priorities for Stabilisation, Protection, and Safe Return in Transitional Syria

"On the edges of life, we lose so much.
And with the first departure, we lose life itself."
Graffiti in Yarmouk, Damascus, October 2025

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Executive Summary

Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) face a decisive moment. More than a decade after the destruction and depopulation of major camps in Syria, such as Yarmouk, Khan al-Shih, and Daraa, returns are trickling into deeply damaged neighbourhoods where livelihoods have collapsed, basic services are scarce, and security is fragile[1]. UNRWA's financial crisis has further weakened a last-resort safety net, just as Syria's transitional authorities and municipalities struggle to include Palestinian areas in recovery plans.

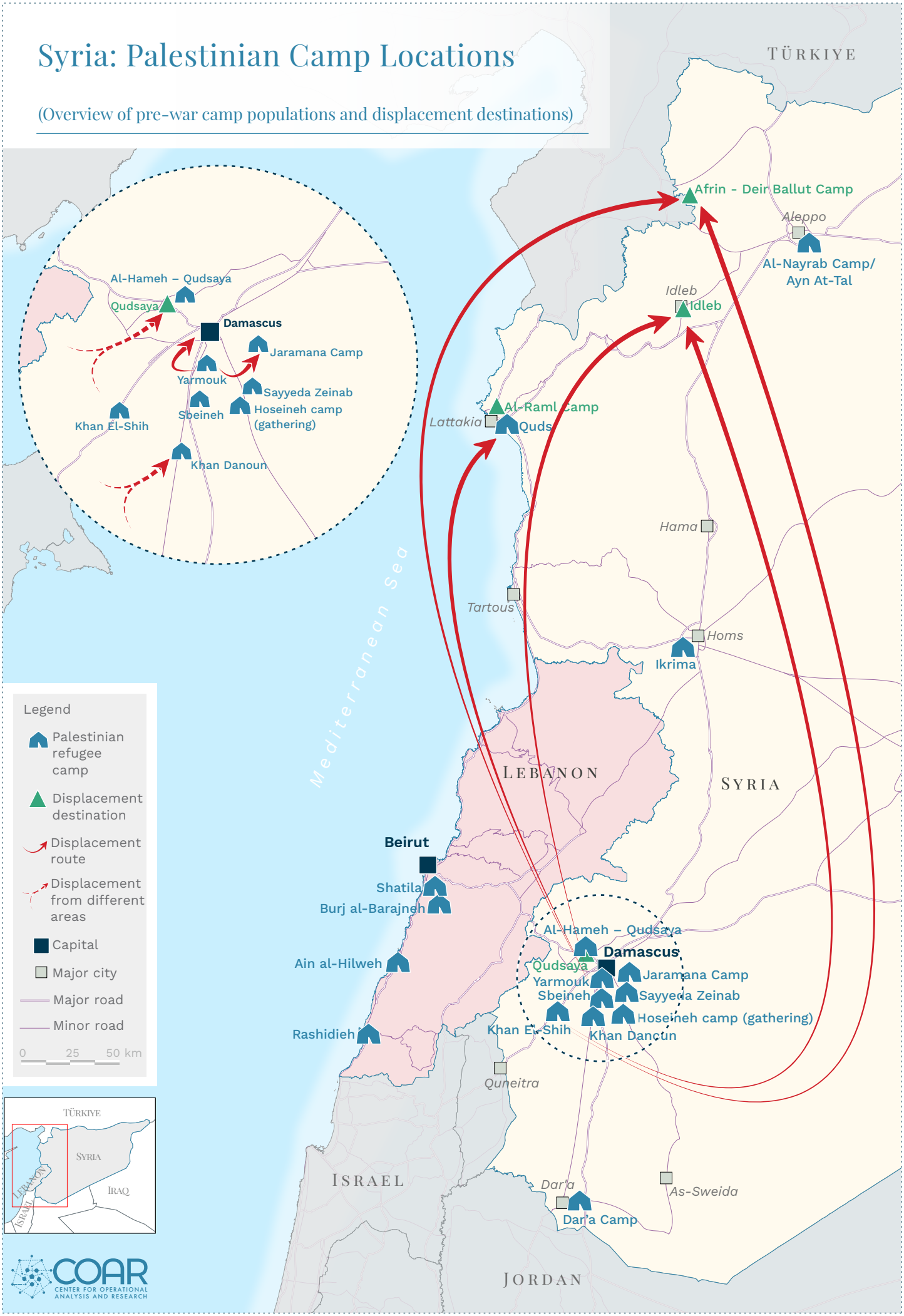
Without targeted support, PRS communities risk becoming flashpoints for renewed insecurity, irregular secondary migration, and recruitment by armed actors. This paper makes the case for urgent, ring-fenced funding to stabilise PRS areas and enable safe, dignified return and reintegration. We set out actionable programme options and funding modalities that strengthen UNRWA's Syria operation, empower Palestinian-led civil society, and link protection to early recovery, without compromising the right of return.

FIGURE 1: The entrance to Yarmouk Camp
(Palestinian Refugee neighbourhood in Southern Damascus), Syria, August, 2025

1 UNRWA, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2025 progress report, (June, 2025) https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/syria_lebanon_and_jordan_ea_progress_report_2025.pdf

Syria: Palestinian Camp Locations

(Overview of pre-war camp populations and displacement destinations)



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Introduction

Palestinian Syrians have historically held a unique position in Syria, enjoying near-parity civil rights while maintaining their distinct refugee status and identity[2]. The conflict disrupted this balance. Camps were affected by shifting frontlines, communities experienced internal and cross-border displacement, practical access to legal protections weakened, and poverty rates among PRS households rose significantly.

As limited returns begin and transitional Syrian governance arrangements take shape, donors have an opportunity - beyond the humanitarian imperative - to help ensure that PRS areas do not become systemically underserved or insecure. This is particularly important given Syria's wider political and economic transition, and the fact that some PRS communities, like many Syrian communities, have at times been situated close to armed actors, including groups with jihadist leanings. This proximity has often been a function of geography and conflict dynamics rather than political alignment, but it nonetheless underscores the need for early, stabilising investments that strengthen civilian resilience and reduce risks of exploitation. Targeted support for PRS communities at this stage aligns with donor objectives on stabilisation and prevention, helps reduce incentives for irregular migration, and contributes to a more inclusive national recovery.

The analysis in this paper draws on applied field insights, complemented by a desk review of relevant literature. To protect confidentiality, all individuals and groups consulted have been anonymised.

Key Takeaways

- PRS needs are distinct and under-funded. UNRWA remains indispensable but is under severe fiscal strain; parallel services have not emerged at sufficient scale to fill the gap.
- Under-resourced returns risk turning humanitarian need into security risk via armed-group infiltration, criminality, and social fragmentation, if not accompanied by protection, services, and livelihoods.
- Donor support for PRS does not dilute the right of return. Investing in services and livelihoods in Syria protects people now while upholding international law and UNGA Resolution 194[3].

2 Minority Rights Group, Palestinians in Syria (March 2018), https://minorityrights.org/communities/palestinians-4/

3 https://www.unrwa.org/content/resolution-194

- Coordinated engagement with the Syrian government is required to ensure PRS inclusion in area-based recovery (planning, permits, Housing Land and Property (HLP) restitution) and to mitigate political sensitivities.
- A dedicated, Palestinian-led funding window for civil society - paired with multi-year commitments to UNRWA Syria - can rapidly scale community-level delivery while maintaining principled, conflict-sensitive programming.

Recommendations

1. **Stabilise the safety net:** Multi-year, front-loaded contributions to UNRWA Syria (education, health, cash assistance) with an explicit stabilisation objective. Contingency line for service continuity during shocks (renewed conflict, local group escalations, drought, epidemics).
2. **Protect rights and reduce harm:** Legal aid and documentation hubs (IDs, civil registration, HLP claims), mobile teams for camp return areas, and court accompaniment. Community-based protection including GBV prevention/response, child protection case management, PSS (Psychosocial support), safe spaces, and youth mentorship. Community safety initiatives (unarmed community watch, referral networks, conflict mediation), paired with do-no-harm guardrails to avoid militia capture.
3. **Rebuild livelihoods and services:** Cash-for-work to clear rubble, repair WASH and electricity grids, rehab clinics and schools. Small business grants and vocational pathways tied to local demand, social enterprises for rubble recycling, shelter upgrades, and waste management. Education catchup and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) bridging for PRS youth; accelerated learning for out-of-school children.
4. **Enable inclusion and accountable governance:** PRS inclusion in municipal and transitional government planning bodies; participatory neighbourhood plans for Yarmouk and other camps/gatherings. Clarity and communication to communities on the roles and responsibilities between GAPAR (General Administration for Palestinian Arab Refugees) and local level committees. Monitoring of security actor presence and abuses in and around camps; dialogue platforms with authorities to reduce arbitrary controls.
5. **Fit-for-purpose funding:** Alongside front-loaded contributions to UNRWA, create a PRS stabilisation window (pooled fund) prioritising Palestinian-led CSOs, with light, rapid cycles and third-party monitoring. Maintain an area-based complement inside larger donor instruments to avoid fragmentation while protecting PRS-specific needs.

Why PRS Funding Matters for Stability in Syria and the Region

Security Environment: Actors, Change, and Transitional Implications

The collapse of the Asad regime in December 2024 and the emergence of the new Syrian transitional authorities under Ahmad al-Sharaa[4] have reshaped Syria's political geography almost overnight. Yet for the Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS), this transformation has been less a clean break than a layering of old and new uncertainties. From the security branches of the Asad era to pro-regime Palestinian factions, to neighbourhood mukhtars aligned with intelligence networks - the structures that previously controlled PRS lives have now largely vanished. However, what has replaced these structures has been improvised, uneven, and highly local presenting new challenges.

GAPAR, Local Committees, and Overlapping Mandates

On the ground, PRS areas are governed by overlapping layers rather than a single chain of command:

1. The General Administration for Palestine Arab Refugees (GAPAR) survives as the statutory authority for Palestinian affairs and remains under the oversight of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MoSAL). In mid 2025, MoSAL refreshed GAPAR's leadership[5] - understood by many PRS families as a signal of continuity and institutional stability. As with much of the transitional state, however, inter-ministerial lines are still being defined. GAPAR's coordination with the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and Ministry of Defence (MoD) on matters such as civil documentation, neighbourhood security, and returnee management reflects the reality that Palestinian affairs intersect with multiple portfolios. What remains unclear is how these consultations are structured and how, in practice, they will be operationalised at the local level.
2. Local PRS committees, by contrast, have followed a more decentralised trajectory. Some committees have emerged organically as community-driven structures, while others have regularised during the post-December 2024 transition period through channels involving MoI or MoD intermediaries. This has produced significant variation across camps and neighbourhoods. In some areas, committees are closely aligned with municipal and civilian authorities; in others, their ties to local security actors are stronger, reflecting the histories of specific districts. These differences are not inherently problematic, but they do mean that GAPAR and the committees often operate through different patronage and administrative networks.

4 Ahmad Al-Shaara was the head of formerly designated foreign terrorist organisation Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).

5 https://refugeesps.net/post/31661/مجلس-إدارة-جديد-للهيئة-العامة-للاجئين-الفلسطينيين-العرب-في-سوريا (Accessed November 2025)

This dual evolution shapes governance on the ground. GAPAR retains responsibility for legal documentation, coordination with UNRWA, and the national framework for Palestinian affairs. Committees hold local legitimacy, proximity, and an ability to solve immediate problems; from rubble clearance lists to dispute mediation and returnee registration. In theory, these roles are complementary; in practice, the lack of a defined coordination mechanism means residents often navigate between two systems. The question is not competition but synchronisation, ensuring that community-level authority and national-level mandates reinforce one another rather than create uncertainty. In many areas, this relationship works informally through practical negotiation, but the absence of clearly articulated boundaries leaves space for misunderstanding and, occasionally, for intermediaries who exploit administrative gaps.

Security Actors and the Politics of Access

With regime-aligned Palestinian factions dismantled, several types of security actors now compete quietly for influence in PRS areas. These include municipal guards and transitional police, neighbourhood defence groups that never fully demobilised, service-oriented Palestinian networks (charitable, civic, religious), and, at the margins, small criminal groups, extremist remnants, and alignments with Iran and its affiliates. The contest today is not primarily about coercive power; it is about who can broker access to rubble removal, to service reinstatement, and to documentation pathways. Where these processes are transparent and grounded in formal institutions, stability follows. Where they are discretionary or opaque, the vacuum persists, and predatory actors gain ground.

FIGURE 2: The new local committee office in Yarmouk, Damascus, August 2025.

These overlapping layers have produced a security environment neither fully stabilised nor wholly insecure. Instead, PRS areas operate through what residents describe as "negotiated security". This is an interplay between overstretched local committees, UNRWA's limited but essential services, and the informal coping systems developed over more than a decade of conflict. Some districts, especially where property disputes, documentation gaps, or half-demobilised defence groups exist, are creating openings for opportunistic actors.

Legacies of Extremist Infiltration and Structural Drivers of Insecurity

PRS communities also remain deeply shaped by the layered traumas of past extremist infiltration, which unfolded not as a single event but as a prolonged collapse of governance across the early years of the war. In Yarmouk, the symbolic centre of Palestinian life in Syria, the deterioration began as early as 2012, when frontlines converged on the camp and informal extremist elements exploited the absence of state and factional control. What followed was not a swift takeover but a slow unravelling; humanitarian siege, the withdrawal of traditional Palestinian factions, the emergence of fragmented armed groups competing for influence, and the erosion of the social fabric that had previously anchored the camp. By 2013 - 2014, the camp's internal governance had all but collapsed. Families remember not only the violence but the loss of predictable authority, the fragmentation of community leadership, and the increasing reliance on informal networks simply to secure food, water, or passage between neighbourhoods.

When ISIS pushed into parts of Yarmouk in April 2015 entering through pre-existing fissures rather than overwhelming military force, it crystallised a trauma that still colours PRS perceptions of risk to this day. Residents recall that the group did not need mass support to destabilise the camp, it only needed governance vacuums, splintered authority, and a population ground down by siege. This historical memory is powerful because it reinforces a central lesson for PRS communities, namely, that extremist infiltration is not primarily an ideological phenomenon, but a symptom of institutional collapse and humanitarian desperation.

Although ISIS no longer controls territory in Syria, the echoes of that period remain. Small cells continue to operate in the Northeast of Syria, as well as rural Damascus, Daraa, and pockets of the southern belt, probing areas where conditions allow. These cells are opportunistic rather than strategically embedded, but in environments where civil administration is inconsistent, their presence can generate disproportionate anxiety. For many returning families, insecurity is therefore experienced not as the threat of a particular group, but as the fear that institutional gaps may once again allow marginal actors to exert coercive influence or manipulate local grievances.

In these localised environments, the structural drivers of insecurity that PRS communities report are:

- lack of resolved HLP claims, which fuels tension between returnees and secondary occupants;
- incomplete civil documentation, which complicates residency rights and access to services;
- thin policing capacity, especially in areas still undergoing debris removal and early reconstruction;
- unclear lines of authority between GAPAR, committees, municipal offices, and security actors;
- economic desperation, which creates openings for predatory networks;
- absence of reliable, trusted dispute-resolution mechanisms, leaving communities vulnerable to coercion.

PRS community members are already beginning to note how extremist actors are exploiting these conditions the way they did a decade earlier, not through ideology, but through the availability of space. This is why PRS communities continue to see governance clarity, predictable administration, and transparent security arrangements as their primary protection against any resurgence of criminal or extremist influence. The lesson of Yarmouk, reinforced through years of displacement, is that institutions - not factions - are the real buffer against insecurity.

Re-Emergent Palestinian Political Actors and Shifting Representation

Beyond camp boundaries, resistance-linked networks have re-emerged as security and political actors, particularly in neighbourhoods where they had long-standing social influence before the war. Their engagement is interpreted by PRS communities through practical lenses insofar as they provide protection, mobilisation capacity, and mediation with municipal or transitional authorities in spaces where governance is still consolidating. They operate alongside independent community committees, established charitable organisations, religious networks, and PLO-aligned civic figures. While retaining a measure of popular sympathy, Syria's focus on recovery entails widespread caution against any renewed instrumentalisation of PRS communities by these networks.

The broader Palestinian national movement is also recalibrating. The Palestinian Authority (PA), which largely withdrew operationally from Syria during the conflict, has initiated a return to engagement. High-level visits by Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa, and later, President Mahmoud Abbas, form part of a wider post-Gaza regional repositioning and signal the PA's intention to reassert a representational role for displaced Palestinian populations. For PRS households, this raises cautious hope that stalled documentation cases, cross-border family registration issues, and community representation may gain a coherent institutional anchor. Yet PRS communities emphasise that the impact will depend less on diplomatic signalling and more on sustained, practical cooperation with GAPAR, municipalities, UNRWA, and the local committees they rely on day-to-day.

A coherent national Security Sector Reform (SSR) framework including PRS

Taken together, these dynamics create a security environment defined not by chaos but by multiple authorities whose mandates, networks, and responsibilities still need clarification. Where GAPAR's statutory role, municipal service delivery, and committee-level authority align, stabilisation progresses quickly. Where boundaries blur or communication breaks down, insecurity and bureaucratic friction continue. For donors, the implication is clear: strengthening clarity, coordination, and procedural predictability across these layers will reduce security risks more effectively than security-first approaches. These investments support both international partner and Syrian state stabilisation priorities as well as the core aspirations of PRS communities, including, dignity, safety, and predictable access to the systems that enable return.

FIGURE 3: Damages in Yarmouk, October 2025.

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Syria: Palestinian Camps

(Armed Factions with Known Wartime Presence)

Armed Groups	Palestinian Refugee Camps: Al-Hameh – Qudsaya	Al-Nayrab/Ayn At-Tal	Dar'a	Hoseineh (gathering)	Ikrima	Jaramana	Khan El-Shih	Khan Danoun	Quds	Sbeineh	Sayyeda Zeinab	Yarmouk
Ahrar Al-Sham							●					
Al-Quds Brigade		●										
Fatah al-Intifada – Palestinian National Liberation Movement						●						●
Free Palestine Movement (FPM)	●											●
Free Syrian Army (FSA)	●		●				●			●		●
Galilee Forces (Quwat al-Jalil)								●				
General Command: Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP-GC)					●	●				●		●
HAMAS		●	●	●		●	●	●		●	●	●
Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)			●				●					●
Islamic State (IS)												●
National Defense Forces (NDF)						●						
National Guards			●			●		●		●	●	
Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ)	●			●		●		●		●	●	
Palestine Liberation Army (PLA): Al-Sa'iqa Forces			●				●	●			●	
Palestinian Free Army (PFA)				●								
Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (PPSF)											●	
Sheikh al-Karama						●						

Legend
- Palestinian refugee camp
- Capital
- Major city

TÜRKIYE
Aleppo
Al-Nayrab/ Ayn At-Tal
Idleb
Lattakia
Quds
Mediterranean Sea
Hama
Tartous
Homs
Ikrima
SYRIA
LEBANON
Beirut
Al-Hameh – Qudsaya
Damascus
Yarmouk
Jaramana
Sbeineh
Sayyeda Zeinab
Khan El-Shih
Quneitra
Hoseineh Camp (gathering)
Khan Danoun
ISRAEL
As-Sweida
Dar'a
Dar'a
WEST BANK
Amman
JORDAN
Jerusalem
GAZA STRIP

Scale and Nature of PRS Needs: Humanitarian, Legal, and Structural

«بعد تحرير ... صار عنا فرصة نرجع نعمر البلد»

"After the liberation (of Damascus)... we now have the chance to rebuild"

–AHMED (30 YEARS OLD)
PALESTINIAN REFUGEE IN SYRIA, RECENTLY RETURNED TO YARMOUK, DAMASCUS

PRS needs are multi-layered, highly specific, and structurally linked to wider questions of stability, migration, and human security. Indeed, they occupy a unique place in the country's post-war landscape, both symbolically and strategically. Before 2011, approximately 560,000 Palestinians lived in Syria, concentrated in twelve recognised camps and dozens of gatherings. Their relative social integration, access to education and employment, and participation in public life made them an exception among host states in the region. Law No. 260 of 1956 granted Palestinians nearly equal rights to Syrians in civil and economic domains while preserving their distinct national identity and the principle of the right of return.

The war dismantled this equilibrium. Once pillars of community life, camps such as Yarmouk, Khan al-Shih, Sbeineh, Handrat Hoseineh, and Daraa became battlefields - besieged, bombarded, and in many cases, depopulated. Today, around 438,000 PRS remain in Syria, while an estimated 200,000 fled to Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, or Europe. According to UNRWA, 90 percent of PRS live below the poverty line, and 80 percent have been displaced at least once. The scope of needs can be broken down into the following categories:

- **Humanitarian and Service Needs:**
Most camps remain severely damaged with rubble, unexploded ordnance, and collapsed waste management, health facilities and electricity networks. Families returning face chronic shortages of water, healthcare, and electricity. UNRWA remains the backbone of service provision but is under unprecedented fiscal strain. No parallel service provider has emerged at a scale capable of compensating for this shortfall.

- **Livelihoods and Economic Recovery:**
PRS households historically depended on small commerce, skilled labour, and public-sector employment. These sectors have collapsed. Unemployment is extreme, debt is widespread, and youth, once a key driver of upward mobility, now face recruitment risks from armed groups, criminal networks, and transactional political factions.

- **Legal Documentation and HLP Needs:**
Destroyed registries, lost IDs, and inaccessible property records have created a generation of "legally invisible" Palestinians. Without documentation, families cannot access services, claim HLP rights, or obtain security clearances required for movement and return. Entire neighbourhoods risk being excluded from reconstruction simply because their residents cannot prove tenure. Many PRS families now lack birth, marriage, and property records, rendering them effectively invisible to state institutions. GAPAR has lost most operational capacity, while overlapping roles between Syrian ministries under the new transitional authorities and the Palestinian embassy in Damascus have generated confusion rather than clarity.

- **Migration Pressures:**
The combination of economic deprivation, insecurity, and institutional invisibility is driving a new wave of irregular migration. PRS are disproportionately represented among Syrians attempting

maritime crossings from Lebanon or overland routes through Turkey toward Europe.

These are not standard humanitarian deficits. They are structural vulnerabilities that armed groups, criminal networks, and political brokers have historically exploited and may yet do so again. If left unaddressed, they risk entrenching instability precisely in the urban areas most central to Syria's recovery. Inattention to the needs in PRS areas also have deeper political consequences. The disintegration of PRS communities has removed one of Syria's most historically cohesive social constituencies. The loss of property, documentation, and livelihoods has created "legalised invisibility". Palestinians are neither fully integrated nor fully protected. For international partners, this matters because stability in Syria will depend on whether transitional authorities can reintegrate populations whose very identity challenges exclusionary narratives. PRS are thus not a humanitarian footnote but an indicator of inclusive governance. If the transition sidelines Palestinians, it will be a signal to all Syrians that the new order remains selective and coercive. If it recognises them, it may help re-establish the principle that belonging in Syria is civic, not sectarian or ethnic, a foundational step for stability.

Between the Right of Return and Reintegration and Avoiding a False Trade-off

A special consideration in engaging with PRS needs must be the situation of PRS in wider regional politics and narratives around Palestinian self-determination. Support for recovery for PRS inside Syria is sometimes perceived - particularly by Palestinian factions and solidarity networks - as weakening the right of return. Yet for PRS families, daily survival and the political principle of return are not contradictory; they are intertwined. The right of return is a collective, long-term aspiration; the right to live in safety and dignity in Syria is an immediate necessity.

Framing support as temporary, rights-based, and non-political is essential. Communications that emphasise protection and human security, rather than "integration" or "resettlement," reassure communities that donors are not rewriting their political future. This is particularly important in light of the regional polarisation of Palestinian politics: while Hamas has re-engaged cautiously with Damascus, the PLO and PA maintain only a limited presence, most PRS express disillusionment with all factions, and particularly at a time when Syria's ongoing recovery broadly resists influence and/or instrumentalisation.

At the same time, Syria's transitional authorities and their regional backers view any "Palestinian exceptionalism" with suspicion. The challenge for donors is therefore narrative management, to demonstrate that investing in PRS does not privilege one group over others, but instead strengthens Syria's overall stability. In practical terms, this means aligning assistance with national recovery frameworks while maintaining clear identity markers such as the UNRWA mandate, community representation, and adherence to international law. Politically, it means engaging Palestinian civil society as partners rather than beneficiaries, signalling that Palestinians are agents in rebuilding Syria, not merely recipients of relief.

The cost of failing to make this distinction is high. If PRS perceive international programming as eroding their identity, it could deepen alienation and erode trust. If transitional authorities perceive PRS support as politically charged, it could provoke obstruction. A balanced narrative that protects rights without inflaming sensitivities is therefore the foundation of any successful engagement.

Programme Options

Several programming options emerge for aid actors and international donors to consider.

Protection & Community Safety

- **Integrated protection hubs in priority return corridors (Yarmouk, Khan al-Shih, Daraa, Aleppo)**

Protection hubs should bundle child protection, GBV services, civil documentation support, MHPSS, and case management in one accessible location. In transitional Syria, where residents navigate between GAPAR desks, municipal offices, and local committees, consolidated access points prevent bureaucratic fatigue and reduce opportunities for intermediaries to exploit families seeking papers or assistance.

- **Youth stabilisation pathways to counter recruitment and criminalisation risks.**

Given the history of youth recruitment into armed groups (from Iraq-war mobilisations to ISIS and other extremist exploitation during the siege years), structured alternatives are essential. Programmes can include stipend sports/cultural clubs, vocational pipelines tied to accredited training centres, community service projects, and leadership programmes co-designed with local committees. These initiatives help reduce individual vulnerabilities, economic desperation, unregulated environments, and weak dispute-resolution mechanisms.

- **Community safety partnerships bridging municipal authorities, GAPAR, and local committees.**

Rather than creating parallel structures, donors can support conflict-sensitive tools that build confidence across existing institutions: non-violent dispute-resolution training for municipal staff and community leaders; incident hotlines with safe reporting pathways; community-driven early-warning mapping; and survivor-centred GBV protocols. These mechanisms reduce local volatility, improve coordination, and help stabilise environments where authority remains contested.

Livelihoods, Services, and Shelter

- **Labour-intensive cash-for-work to re-open camp neighbourhoods.**

Clearing rubble, reopening access roads, and restoring WASH and electricity remain prerequisites for return. Cash-for-work provides immediate income in areas with high unemployment, while also reducing security risks linked to economic desperation. Community-based selection committees (under GAPAR and local level municipal oversight) enhance transparency and mitigate factional capture.

- **Small business survival and restart grants (USD 1-5k) for camp-adjacent economic recovery.**

PRS markets historically relied on small enterprises like tailors, grocers, mobile repair shops, bakeries, many of which are now largely destroyed or depleted. Startup/restart grants, revolving micro-funds managed by Palestinian-led CSOs, and business coaching can rapidly re-activate economic life. This helps counter illicit economies that fill the void when legitimate livelihoods disappear.

- **Quick-impact repairs to restore essential public services.**

Funding for primary health services, classrooms, disability-inclusive access, and cold-chain capacity can rapidly stabilise return areas. When paired with municipal planning cells, such repairs signal early state presence and help replace the informal, "brokered" provision of services that characterised the war years.

- **Education: accelerated learning, catch-up classes, and teacher stipends.**

Given the high rates of out of school PRS children and adolescents, education programming should integrate psychosocial support, certification pathways, and coordination with UNRWA. Teacher stipends help stabilise service delivery at a time when the education sector faces severe fiscal stress.

Legal and Governance Support

- **Mobile documentation units and paralegal networks to close civil registry gaps.**

Loss of IDs, family books, and property papers are among the strongest drivers of insecurity and vulnerability in PRS areas. Mobile teams, trained paralegals, and court accompaniment for HLP claims (particularly in Yarmouk, Daraa, and Khan al-Shih) provide a lawful alternative to reliance on documentation brokers. Digitisation of surviving records reduces opportunities for coercion or manipulation.

- **Alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms linked to formal institutions.**

Given ambiguous boundaries between GAPAR, local committees, and municipal authorities, community-based mediation structures can prevent property disputes, inheritance conflicts, and small commercial disagreements from escalating into broader tensions. These should be tied to formal judicial pathways, so decisions are enforceable and transparent.

- **Representation and accountability: PRS advisory roles in local planning.**

Creating PRS advisory seats in municipal/transitional planning forums can help align reconstruction decisions with community priorities while avoiding political overreach. Community oversight of camp-area public works and simple grievance redress mechanisms reduce the discretionary power of intermediaries and rebuild confidence in institutions.

Security Sector Reform and Community Security

- **Community-policing pilots in key PRS return areas.**

Pilots in neighbourhoods such as Yarmouk, Khan al-Shih, and Daraa can strengthen predictable, civilian-led policing where transitional police, GAPAR liaisons, and local committees currently operate without clearly defined boundaries. Joint training on de-escalation, safe reporting, and rights-based procedures helps reduce confusion over mandates and builds public trust in early state institutions.

- **Demobilisation and reintegration pathways for residual local defence groups.**

Many PRS residents carried arms during the war out of necessity rather than political alignment. Tailored DDR options such as weapon registration, voluntary handover, vocational alternatives, and MHPSS accompaniment offer a structured exit for individuals who do not fit standard DDR profiles and reduce the risk of remobilisation or drift into criminal networks.

- **Light touch arms control and safe storage mechanisms.**

Anonymous handover channels, community trusted safe storage sites, and basic weapons management protocols help reduce household level risks and the leakage of small arms into illicit markets. Implemented in coordination with municipal authorities and local committees, these measures demonstrate early, non-coercive gains in public security.

- **Security-linked HLP and documentation support.**

Unresolved property claims, missing documentation, and overlapping residency records are major triggers for tension and opportunistic coercion. Linking security sector reform actors with HLP/legal teams through shared vetting, notice procedures, and case-tracking helps prevent contradictory decisions by different authorities and ensures disputes move through formal channels instead of informal enforcement.

- **Rule-of-law stabilisation: mobile judicial and administrative support.**

Targeted support to clerks, case registries, and mobile legal caravans can strengthen the "first mile" of the justice chain in districts where courts remain partially functional. These low-visibility investments prevent property disputes, commercial disagreements, and minor offences from escalating into security incidents handled by armed intermediaries.

- **Transparent coordination mechanisms for municipal and community security.**

Simple tools like shared incident logs, liaison desks, and publicly posted checkpoint procedures help reduce the discretionary power of intermediaries and the uncertainty that PRS returnees face when navigating areas with overlapping authorities. These approaches improve predictability while reinforcing the legitimacy of civilian institutions.

FIGURE 4: Damages in Yarmouk, October 2025.

Financing Approaches to Enable Delivery at Scale

PRS needs are distinct, acute, and systematically under-funded, and the institutions that anchor their welfare, above all UNRWA, are under severe fiscal strain. Returns are accelerating in several areas, but without protection services, basic infrastructure, and livelihood support, these returns risk crystallising humanitarian deprivation into security risks, including renewed armed-group infiltration, criminality, and social fragmentation. Funding approaches must therefore reinforce stabilisation, uphold rights, and fit cleanly within the transitional context.

In this environment, the most effective strategy is to combine flexible, layered financing mechanisms that support PRS communities without creating parallel political tracks or undermining the right of return. Area-based recovery funds can incorporate dedicated PRS allocations, ensuring that documentation, HLP resolution, education, infrastructure repairs, and livelihoods are treated as core components of neighbourhood recovery. This embeds PRS needs within the national system of permits, planning, land restitution, while addressing the specific legal and administrative gaps that wider recovery programmes routinely miss.

A pooled funding arrangement, hosted by a neutral civil society platform, can scale delivery while maintaining principled, conflict-sensitive programming. A Palestinian-led window within such a mechanism enables community organisations, camp-adjacent CSOs, local committees, and municipal partners to work in coordinated ways, backed by predictable, multi-year commitments. This model strengthens transparency, reduces local political sensitivities, and channels support to those actors with the deepest roots in PRS communities.

At the same time, local Palestinian-led organisations remain irreplaceable for service delivery and social cohesion. Their proximity and credibility mean they can navigate the political, social, and security complexities of PRS areas in ways external agencies cannot. Sub-granting arrangements with strong financial oversight, conflict-sensitivity checks, and structured coordination with GAPAR and municipalities allow these groups to deliver protection, mediation, youth engagement, and community-safety programming at a meaningful scale.

Sequencing: Ensuring Stabilisation Before Scale-Up

Effective financing in transitional Syria depends not only on the choice of instruments but on sequencing interventions in a way that reinforces stability rather than exacerbating fragility. The first phase should prioritise the basics that enable dignified return: documentation, rubble removal, essential services, and immediate protection. Once foundational safety and administrative clarity are established, livelihoods recovery, youth stabilisation, and community-safety mechanisms can be layered in, creating buffers against the economic desperation and governance gaps that armed or criminal actors often exploit. Only when these building blocks are in place should light-touch security sector reform pilots like community policing, demobilisation pathways, and arms-management measures be introduced. Sequencing in this way prevents premature security programming, protects communities from shocks, and ensures that investments reinforce rather than undermine Syria's transition.

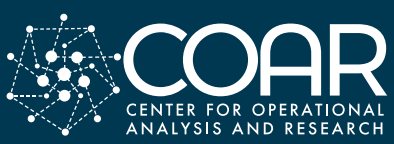
Across all channels and phases, a core principle should remain constant: support for PRS does not dilute the right of return. Improving services, livelihoods, documentation, and safety in Syria protects people now while expressly upholding international law, including UNGA Resolution 194. These investments reduce harm, mitigate security risks, and reinforce community stability without predetermining political outcomes. Coordinated donor engagement with transitional authorities ensures PRS inclusion in recovery plans, reduces bureaucratic friction, and helps manage sensitivities around permits, HLP, and local representation. Taken together, such a financing approach is principled, conflict-sensitive, technically feasible, and capable of delivering the scale required to prevent today's unmet PRS needs from becoming tomorrow's security crisis.

Why Supporting PRS Matters – and for Whom

Neglecting PRS communities carries tangible costs. It drives irregular migration, strains Lebanon and Jordan's fragile systems, and fuels extremist recruitment narratives that exploit perceptions of abandonment. Conversely, visible investment in PRS recovery delivers multiple dividends, it reduces displacement pressures, strengthens UNRWA's stabilising role, and demonstrates that international support for Syrians includes those historically left at the margins.

For Palestinian Syrians, meaningful inclusion in Syria's reconstruction would affirm that decades of contributions to Syrian society were not erased by war. For the international community, it would show that stabilisation can be principled, and that security, justice, and dignity need not be traded away.

Ultimately, the treatment of Palestinian Syrians will signal what kind of Syria is emerging from the rubble, one that rebuilds on exclusion, or one that rebuilds on rights. Donors who invest in PRS recovery are not only funding a vulnerable population, but they are also investing in the moral credibility and long-term stability of the Syrian transition itself.



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