

Prioritising Conflict Prevention in Syria's Recovery

Integrating Climate and Environment for Peace

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KEY MESSAGE

A window for conflict-preventive recovery in Syria has opened, but climate change threatens to close it. The fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 has created a rare opportunity to rebuild Syria on more just and resilient foundations. Yet rising temperatures, deepening droughts and growing resource scarcity are not waiting for reconstruction plans to catch up. Unless climate and environmental realities are placed at the heart of recovery planning now, Syria risks entrenching pathways that deepen fragility rather than prevent conflict. This brief presents five climate security pathways, priority flashpoints and six targeted recommendations for those positioned to act.

A Window of Opportunity and the Risks of Missing It

With the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, a window of opportunity has opened for a recovery rooted in durable peace. However, this window will not remain open indefinitely. Seizing it demands more than technical reconstruction, it requires rebuilding Syria's deeply damaged social fabric, and renewing the social contract between state and society – one grounded in accountability, inclusion and a shared stake in recovery. Central to this process is addressing climate and environmental realities. Decisions about who controls water, how land rights are adjudicated and which communities benefit from infrastructure investments will signal whether governance is inclusive and fair, or whether it will reproduce the patterns of exclusion that fuelled conflict. Early attention to climate and environmental realities – including rising temperatures, increasingly erratic rainfall and more frequent drought – is not a distraction from recovery, it is integral to making recovery durable.



**USD
216bn**

Estimated
cost of
reconstruction¹



13.5m

People
displaced by
conflict²



+2.55°C

Projected
temperature rise
by mid-century
(high emissions
scenario)³



**USD
320m**

Average annual
GDP loss from
drought alone⁴

¹ World Bank. (2025). The Syrian Conflict: Physical Damage and Reconstruction Assessment (2011–24)

² UNHCR. (2025). Mid-year Trends 2025. Mid-Year Trends | UNHCR

³ Geldin, S. (2026). Syria Climate Impact Profile. adelphi: Berlin.

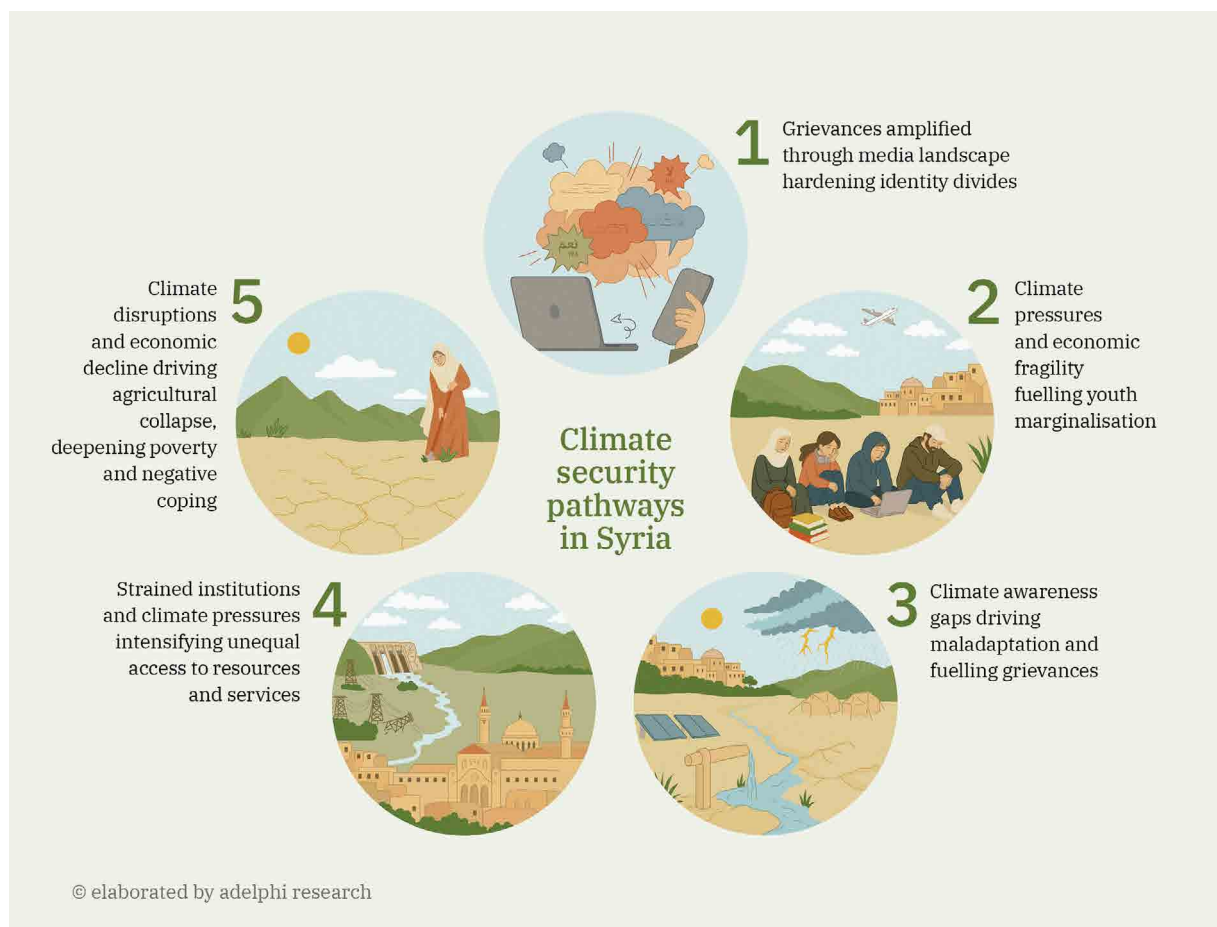
⁴ Geldin, S. (2026). Syria Climate Impact Profile. adelphi: Berlin.

Our Approach

This assessment connects climate risk analysis with a conflict prevention angle, translating both into actionable entry points for investment and policymaking. The assessment draws on adelphi's *Weathering Risk methodology*, adapted to the Syrian context, which integrates climate and conflict lenses to identify where environmental pressures intersect with fragility and where opportunities for peace exist. The analysis combines technical and policy expertise with the lived realities of communities and input from experts across 10 governorates, drawing on more than 230 household and community-level interviews, 24 expert consultations, as well as stakeholder consultations in Amman and Damascus.

Key Climate Security Pathways

The report identifies five key pathways through which climate and environmental risks are converging with underlying security dynamics and sociocultural conditions to either exacerbate or mitigate tensions, generate conflict flashpoints, or impede stable recovery across Syria.



- 1. Grievances amplified through media landscape hardening identity divides:** In Syria's fragmented media environment – characterised by the dominance of informal digital channels and widespread disinformation – grievances are systematically reframed through sectarian narratives. This dynamic marginalises minority voices, particularly those already reluctant to engage online for fear of being targeted. Moreover, as sectarian identity becomes a dominant interpretive framework, disinformation not only reflects existing divisions but actively deepens them. The consequences extend to government legitimacy. Even evidence-based policies, such as those governing natural resources, risk being reframed on social media as deliberate attempts by the government to prevent communities from rebuilding – often before any official communication has reached the public.

2. **Climate pressures and economic fragility fuelling youth marginalisation:** Young people in Syria – who constitute a third of the population – are disproportionately affected by economic fragility, repeated climate shocks, and a labour market hollowed out by conflict and agricultural collapse. This is not merely an economic crisis. Limited access to stable livelihoods can undermine young people's social standing, sense of belonging and agency. This precarity pushes many towards informal work, migration and, in some areas, armed groups. This dynamic of exclusion deepens their disengagement from civic and community life.
3. **Climate awareness gaps driving maladaptation and fuelling grievances:** In Syria, climate change is primarily experienced through its immediate manifestations – such as a failed harvest, a dry well or an unpredictable season – rather than as a longer-term structural trend. In a context of acute and compounding crises, this gap in awareness and prioritisation is human. Yet its consequences are significant. Decisions being made now about where people return, how water is extracted and how regional trade is structured will lock in trajectories that are difficult and costly to reverse. Where climate considerations are not integrated, maladaptive practices can become structural. Meanwhile, where climate considerations are integrated but disconnected from lived realities, even sound policies risk being perceived as abandonment.
4. **Strained institutions and climate pressures intensifying unequal access to resources and services:** Climate pressures are landing in an environment where natural resources and services are severely strained and access is deeply unequal – both in practice and perception. With ministerial mandates and cross-sectoral coordination still being established, the institutional choices being made now are not simply technical, they will determine whether access becomes more equitable or whether existing patterns of exclusion are carried forward.
5. **Climate disruptions and economic decline driving agricultural collapse, deepening poverty and negative coping:** Syria's agricultural sector is facing pressures from multiple directions. The legacy of conflict, climate stress and exposure to international markets are interacting in ways that risk tipping farming communities beyond what they can absorb alone. Until now, farmers have been navigating these pressures alone, adopting coping strategies that are rational at the household level but accelerate environmental and economic deterioration at scale. Female-headed households, herders and rainfed farming communities in the north of the country face the steepest barriers. In contexts where vulnerability is most acute, the risk of grievance, social fragmentation and instability runs deepest.

“I have 30 dunums (approximately three hectares) that used to produce one tonne per season. This year, they produced nothing because of the extreme heat.”

– Mukhtar⁵, Al-Mukharrem
Al-Janoubi, Homs

“Climate change is real, but it is our smallest problem. Our focus is on how to escape the overall reality.”

– Male, 23, Suwayda (city), Suwayda

5 Neighbourhood or village-level representative in Syria.

Priority Flashpoints: Where the Window is Narrowest

Climate security risks do not fall evenly across Syria. Three convergence points demand particular attention:

The Northern Rainfed Agricultural Belt Idlib, Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, Hassakeh Syria's northern governorates face a convergence of successive droughts, reduced Euphrates flows and groundwater depletion. This is compounded by infrastructure destruction, and the collapse of agricultural support systems, including access to seeds, fertilisers, veterinary services and markets. These pressures are borne by institutions already overwhelmed by contested governance and among the country's highest concentrations of internally displaced persons. The human cost is not abstract. In 2022–23, reduced river flows concentrated pathogens to the point that more than 600,000 people contracted cholera – a climate-driven health crisis unfolding in one of Syria's most politically volatile regions.	The Coastal Corridor Latakia, Tartous The July 2025 wildfires – which burnt at least 15,000 hectares across coastal governorates still reeling from the mass killings targeting Alawite communities in March 2025 – illustrate how climate shocks, the legacy of conflict and governance failures can converge into a single crisis. The response was hampered by landmines, strong winds and years of limited forest management, leaving communities exposed. In a region where disinformation campaigns had already reframed local grievances along sectarian lines, the next climate shock risks being interpreted not as incapacity but as abandonment. Therefore, how authorities design institutional response capacities is not a technical afterthought, but a direct determinant of whether climate events deepen fractures or create opportunities to rebuild trust.	The Agricultural Stability Zone System Nationwide The 1975 agricultural zone classification – which has never been updated to reflect current climate realities – governs what land may be cultivated, by whom and with what access to water, and is widely seen as inequitable and a source of deep public grievance. A transparent, participatory review is one of the most visible peace dividends available to the new administration. Yet any reform will need to be designed with contextual realities in mind. Where communities are preoccupied with immediate survival needs, restrictions on cultivation – however environmentally sound – risk being reframed through informal digital channels as an attack on livelihoods rather than a step towards sustainable recovery.
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Six Recommendations for Conflict-Preventive Recovery

The following recommendations are directed at Syria's transitional authorities, civil society, international donors and climate finance institutions. They are grounded in both expert evidence and the lived realities of communities across Syria, and seek to support a recovery that is both climate resilient and conflict preventive.

- 1. Transparent, inclusive and climate risk-informed review of agricultural stability zones:** The agricultural stability zones, introduced in 1975, are now widely seen as inequitable and a significant source of public grievance. A transparent, participatory review could both contribute to evidence-based water management, while also offering the new administration an early opportunity to rebuild public trust and demonstrate its commitment to fair governance. The review should incorporate up-to-date climate projections and hydrological data, and be grounded in the contextual realities into which it will feed. In settings where information spreads through informal digital channels and communities are preoccupied with immediate needs, the legitimacy of the reform process – and how it is communicated – matters as much as its technical substance.

- 2. Climate-proof jobs and SMEs that contribute to social cohesion:** Job creation and SME development should be designed to be both equitable and climate resilient, avoiding investment in livelihoods and value chains that are likely to be undermined by climate change. Employment programmes that bring divided communities together around shared economic interests through, for example, cross-community cooperatives in climate-adapted agriculture, renewable energy installation and maintenance, and water-efficient technologies should be prioritised.
- 3. Equitable and climate risk-informed agricultural extension and veterinary services:** Support should be given to restoring agricultural extension and veterinary services, while ensuring they are equitable in reach and informed by current climate risk data. The rehabilitation of these services is not only a technical necessity, but also a signal of the state's renewed commitment to rural communities – many of which felt systematically neglected or punished under the previous regime.
- 4. Water and energy infrastructure rehabilitation with social dividends:** Infrastructure rehabilitation should be designed to deliver social cohesion alongside service restoration, ensuring equitable access across formerly divided communities, inclusive community-level governance and the recruitment of local workers from diverse backgrounds. When delivered fairly and transparently, these projects provide some of the most visible peace dividends available to the new administration and are critical to building trust in communities where access to infrastructure was previously weaponised as a tool of control and punishment.
- 5. Dialogue and reconciliation around mutual local concerns:** Use common environmental and service provision challenges – such as water scarcity, access to electricity, waste management and land degradation – as non-politicised entry points for local dialogue and reconciliation, including via social media, between communities that may otherwise have little basis for constructive engagement. Ensure that these dialogue and reconciliation processes are genuinely inclusive of marginalised groups, including women, young people, displaced communities and vulnerable returnees.
- 6. Harmonising data and creating a national climate security monitoring platform:** Establish a unified, interoperable, open-access data platform that harmonises climate, environmental, agricultural, displacement and conflict data currently held across multiple government ministries, UN agencies and NGOs, enabling integrated analysis and early warning for climate security risks.

AUTHORS

Fynn Kaltenpoth (adelphi research)
Josephine Collier (adelphi research)
Janani Vivekananda (adelphi research)
Emma Whitaker (adelphi research)

PROOFREADER

Jonathan West

LAYOUT

Odile Stabon

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adelphi research gemeinnützige GmbH
Alt-Moabit 91, 10559 Berlin, Germany
+49 (0) 8900068-0
office@adelphi-research.de
www.adelphi.research.de/en

SUPPORTED BY



CONTACT

Janani Vivekananda
vivekananda@adelphi.de

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