Livelihoods in Syria

Written by Rayan al-Rammal

Part of a series of research papers entitled
"Syria and its people"

Produced by Sharq
in partnership with
the Konrad Adenauer Foundation

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Livelihoods in Syria prior to 2011

Written by Rayan Al-Rammal
Produced by Sharq.Org, 2018

Introduction - An overview of the economic situation in Syria before 2011

Following independence from the French mandate in 1946, Syria was able to rapidly develop its economy by supporting a private sector in agriculture and industry.[1] The French Mandate (1922 - 1946) had left the Syrian people destitute and lacking necessities including access to educational and medical facilities, especially in rural areas.[2] The sharp divide between social classes, also a legacy of the French Mandate, inspired the rise of political leaders, who, in the early 1950s, demanded that the newly independent Syrian state nationalize public institutions. The purpose was to allow the state to play a significant role in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the country. The repair of roads, ports and irrigation systems, for example, required significant Syrian government intervention.[3]

Syria's union with Egypt forming the United Arab Republic from 1958 to 1961 had a significant impact on the Syrian economy. The period witnessed the passing of laws with the intent to gradually move the UAR towards socialism. By the beginning of 1961, the country's natural resources were in the hands of the Syrian state. Along with this economic transferal, the Syrian government adopted a new economic plan that boosted public sector investments, while the banking system moved towards Arab nationalism. [4]

Socialist politics in Syria between 1963 and 1965 emerged with some force. In 1963, the Syrian state recuperated most of its land from feudal landlords and concurrently seized their political power. In the same year, the banking sector as a whole consolidated, and by 1965 most of the significant state projects had been nationalized.[5]

By 1966, the public sector in Syria had been able to develop multiple natural resources, electrical and water power, industrial and financial institutions, parts of its infrastructure, transportation, and import and export systems. The government had to rate products and wages. By 1986, the Syrian state controlled three-fifths of the GDP and retained the upper hand over private sector institutions.

President Hafez al-Assad (1971 - 2000) managed to open the economy somewhat to the private sector by providing government facilities for private enterprises to import more goods.[6] More than 100 products were introduced exclusively by the Syrian state. During the reign of Assad, the Syrian government established six free markets, and investment in tourist and industrial facilities (to a certain extent) buttressed the private sector.

Thomas Calillo (a leading historian of the economies of developing countries) believes that the economic and social policies of the 1960s had a negative impact on Syria.[7] The private sector witnessed an exodus of skilled labour and capital which the public sector incorporated.[8] The labour force in Syria grew significantly by 4.3%. Women's participation has doubled since the late 1990s. In 1980, women constituted 7% of the labour force but represented 13% in 2000.

The responsibilities of the Syrian government increased dramatically. This rapid shift of burden from the private to the public sector weighed heavily on the Syrian government which, by the mid-1980s, was unable to recover from the hold of its inefficient bureaucracy.

The Syrian government criticized the "detention" of competent minds, and persistent gaps in organization and achievement, and solicited foreign experts to address them. In spite of these difficulties, socialist policies did help to 'gradually improve' the quality of life of the Syrian people from the 1960s onwards through extensive investment in ports, roads, schools and dams (on the Euphrates river). However, social class disparities persisted through to the 1980s.[9]

Under the pressure of dwindling government resources and austerity budgets in the mid-1980s, the state launched a second de-nationalizing, or "opening" policy, albeit for different reasons. Foreign markets flowing into the country through Gulf aid prompted the first such policy in the early 1970s. The scarcity of financial resources, which brought the state to the brink of bankruptcy, triggered the second. In the 1980s, however, the aim was to mobilize financial resources in the private sector to compensate for the inability of the state not only to sustain economic growth but also to secure the supply of consumer goods and imports for the private sector and the general public.[10]

In the late 1980s, the private sector-controlled agriculture, retail markets (especially clothing and textiles), construction, transportation and tourist infrastructure. However, the public sector remained dominant, primarily through the state monopoly of key Syrian industries, such as cotton.[11]

In the 1970s and 1980s, the biggest budget was allocated to the Ministry of Defence, accounting for three-fifths of government expenditure. This expenditure increased by 27% annually from 1970 to 1980 (from 675 million Syrian pounds in 1970 to 4.6 billion in 1987).

In the 1980s, the Syrian government tried to keep necessary provisions such as meat, bread, coffee, sugar and diesel (for irrigation systems) accessible to the poor by subsidizing costs and maintaining these products at a quarter of standard prices. The government increased its expenditure to meet expenses that grew from 600 million Syrian pounds in 1977 to 4 billion Syrian pounds in mid-1985. This increase was caused by both global and internal Syrian market inflation. The Syrian government was able to make good on its commitment to develop the economy through a substantial increase in the investment budget, which increased by ten times from 1970 to 1980 (from 1.4 billion Syrian pounds to 14 billion).[12]

With Bashar al-Assad taking office in 2000 (one month after the death of his father, Hafez al-Assad), a new phase commenced. Despite the disappointment of many who believed that Assad would change his political and economic plan, the absence of radical change did not mean that the economy remained the same, especially with the impact of new external factors.

In the 1990s, economic liberalization was still in its infancy, and people were debating whether the important of private cars should be allowed. Moreover, there was no discussion regarding the establishment of the private banks, insurance companies, or electricity companies that then materialized under Hafiz Al-Assad's son, or even the stock market that emerged during his rule.[13]

In his first speech, President Bashar al-Assad stated that economic reform and modernization would be priorities during his rule. He pointed out that he would seek to modernize the industrial

base by activating and encouraging investments from the private sector, removing bureaucratic obstacles to investments, increasing employment opportunities, processing and qualifying labour and specialized cadres, improving study opportunities, and expanding information technology. Indeed, many laws were passed encouraging economic openness, and upgrades were made in administrative structures and educational institutions. The state significantly reduced import tariffs for domestic manufacturing industries, and either removed or relaxed restrictions on import/export taxes and limits on foreign exchange transactions. The law no longer penalized the possession and circulation of foreign currency. The state also introduced a tax reform law designed to reduce tax rates while increasing the total returns of taxes to Parliament. Based on the Chinese model, the state also drafted a law on so-called economic zones for foreign investment. The Syrian Republic also established employment offices for the first time in its history, and government created an employment agency.

At the beginning of the previous decade, the government had granted financial support to public sector projects that created employment opportunities and provided loans for young graduates to set up their businesses. This law allowed for the establishment of private universities. The Ministry of Higher Education established the National Institute of Administration as well as a virtual university to connect Syrian students both at home and abroad to a global network of higher education institutions.

In January 2001, a crucial reform in banking law allowed, for the first time since nationalization in 1963, the establishment of private banks that allowed up to 49% their shares to be held as foreign capital. Bashar al-Assad imposed successive economic laws requiring banking secrecy and reorganization of the central bank. Given that Syria had not had experience in private banking for decades, it took some time to establish the institutional framework and move through the licensing process. Among the difficulties faced by foreign banks was their quest to find Syrian investors willing to contribute at least 51% of the shares. Expatriates remained cautious with their capital, and they decided to wait and see the outcomes of the massive economic reforms that were in progress. The opening of the first private bank in 2004 had the most significant impact as it was a clear sign of change.

It was clear, however, that these reforms would serve their purpose only if they became the cornerstone of a comprehensive effort to reform the economic system. The outcomes of the banking reforms were indicators of many of the obstacles to reform as a whole. There were divergent views within Bashar al-Assad's team on the scope of change and to what extent the Syrian state should extend its authority. Multiple obstacles, such as non-implementation of plans that limited bureaucratic red tape and corruption, prevented the full implementation of economic reforms approved by the political leadership.[14]

Dr. Bassam Haddad, director of the Middle East Studies Department at George Mason University, wrote about the economic situation in Syria before the "Syrian crisis" began on May 15, 2011: “Despite the many reforms that remained modest in the five years preceding the events, Syria has faced unique and fundamental challenges and interrelated problems that will not diminish by implementing measures described in conventional economic policy books. The key to solving Syria's economic problems is the political will to confront problems of administrative, legal and institutional reforms."

Haddad divides the core problems facing the Syrian economic system into three parts: first, those relating to political extensions and the consolidation crisis that ended in late 2005 (concurrent with the withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanese territory on February 14 of the same year, and following the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri); second, the problems related to the regional and international isolation imposed on Syria because of its political decisions, which witnessed a decline in 2008; third, issues that relate to the impending shortage of oil reserves. Although the first two of these problems were largely addressed between 2005 and the outbreak of the Syrian war, the third problem remains unresolved. In addition to the oil problem, the waste and exploitation of water resources have led thousands of Syrian families to move from their villages located in belts of poverty and neglect, adding to the burden of the Syrian economy.[15]

According to Haddad, the Syrian administration was aware that it would be futile to rely on social and economic policies. One example is the "government trade-off of regime support with the imprudent encouragement of big business," which highlighted Syrian achievements in the economy "but this brilliance did not succeed in concealing the great harm caused to the middle and poor classes." However, a comprehensive reform of Syria's administrative and economic institutions may require more than standard economic policy reforms, but this requirement runs counter to the interests of the ruling political class and businesspeople.[16]

Finally, it is noteworthy that Syria ranked 70 out of the 111 countries included in the Human Development Report of 1998 during the rule of the late President Hafez al-Assad. It was ranked 111 out of 169 countries in the same report of 2010, ten years after President Bashar al-Assad.[17]

The Labour Sector Before 2011

1. Public Sector
2. Private Sector
3. Joint Sector
4. Entrepreneurship Sector
5. The Shadow Sector

Since the beginning of 1970, Syria has adopted the principle of economic pluralism. The aim is to allow the private sector to play its role in building the national economy under the supervision of the public sector, which has remained dominant in economic and social development. The policy of economic pluralism was based on three pillars:

1- The public sector has a leading role in development. "The realization of economic development is the responsibility of the State."[18]
2- The private sector is a key partner in the development process because "building the nation is a national responsibility that lies with all citizens."[19]

3- The joint sector takes the form of cooperation between the public and private sectors where necessary. It is a way of dividing responsibility between sectors in development areas where cooperation is possible.

1. The Public Sector

Characteristics of workers in this sector:[20]
Gender (2011): 27.8% women and 72.2% men
Principal professions: professional
Educational status: primary and middle school certificates, undergraduate degrees

*The statistics appendix includes other years.

The year 1963 marked a shift in the history of the modern Syrian economy. The historical rule of the "bourgeois and feudal" powers was replaced by the emergence of the socialist trends, the founding of the so-called "corrective movement" in 1970, and nationalization, agrarian and other reforms. These together led to a renaissance of industrial development, which became the key economic sector after agriculture's long domination of the Syrian economy. The growth of industry in practice, and the progress of socio-economic policy conceptually, both required the establishment of Syrian government institutions to lead the economy. Both Syria's central economy and the public sector flourished.

In 2006, the number of workers in the public sector reached 190,000 (see Document No. 1).[21] Most worked in industry (more than 90,000) between 1993 and 2010, followed water and electricity plants (about 60,000), and quarries and mines (about 20,000)[22] (see document 2).[23]

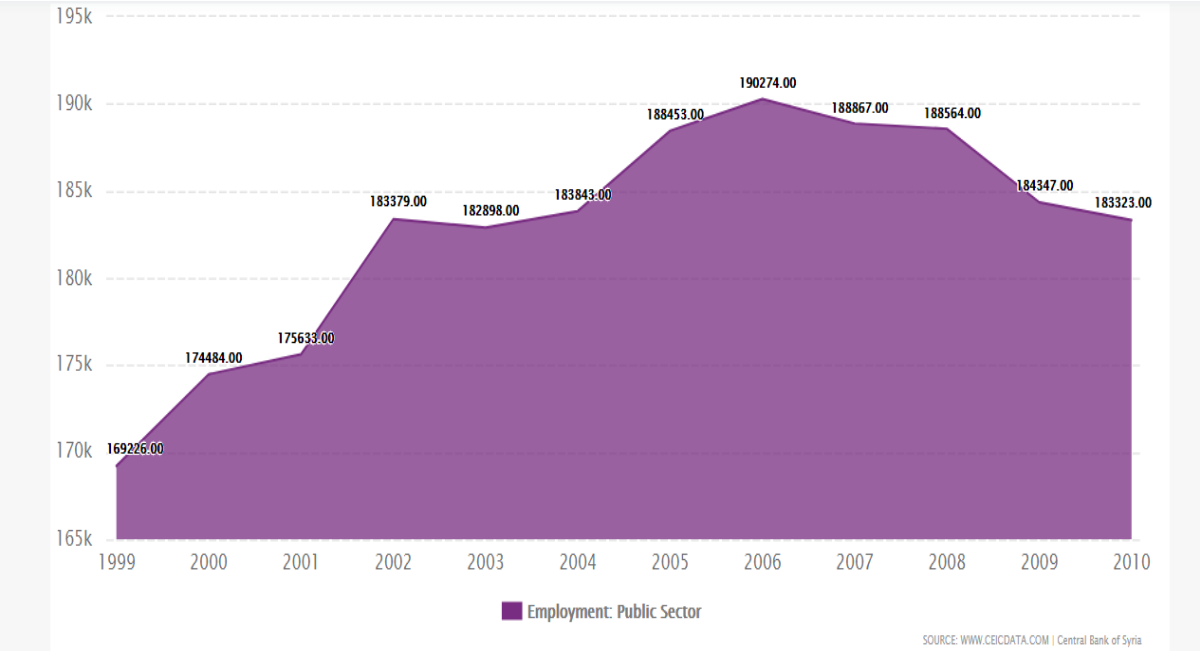

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Diagram 1:[25] *Diagram of the number of public sector employees per year*

Related indicators	Last	Previous	Min	Max	Unit	Frequency	Range
Employment: Public Sector: Electricity & Water Industries	▲ 66,124.00 2010	▲ 65,313.00 2009	29,376.00 1993	66,124.00 2010	Person	Yearly	1993 - 2010 Updated on 2014
Employment: Public Sector: Manufacturing (Mfg)	▼ 94,497.00 2010	▼ 96,383.00 2009	94,497.00 2010	109,471... 2002	Person	Yearly	1993 - 2010 Updated on 2014-09-07
Employment: Public Sector: Mining & Quarrying	▲ 22,702.00 2010	▼ 22,651.00 2009	15,736.00 1993	22,707.00 2008	Person	Yearly	1993 - 2010 Updated on 2014

Diagram 2: The Distribution of workers in the public sector by industry and energy

Figures released by the Syrian Central Bureau indicated that Syrian youth, both men and women, preferred to work in the public sector than in the private and joint sectors.[26] 80% of unemployed young people aged 25 to 29 years were interested in obtaining public sector jobs, and 60% of them wanted a job in the public sector exclusively. Of the young women, 90% would not work in the private sector, and 71% were looking for work in the public sector.

It seems that the tendency of Syrian youth to work in the public sector often stems from their desire for a traditional job that provides them with health guarantees and a fixed pension, as will be explained subsequently.

"I joined the military college in the 1980s, and I was lucky to work in the police department of the Interior Ministry. We were simple, rural people, and people from the countryside sought state jobs more than city people did. The latter worked in commerce, industry and the like. Society functioned through integrated rings: the farmer served, and the merchant served, and they benefited one another and contributed to the state through this collaboration - except in the case of the Ba'ath government, which was a curse on the people and not in the service of the people."[27]

"I grew up in the city of Aleppo in a poor environment. My father was a labourer, and my mother was a housewife ... My father tried to push us as much as possible to complete middle school. I reached secondary school and entered the army. I chose it as a job, without any other consideration. It shortened my studies and reduced expenditure. Also, it provided me with income, a livelihood, and allowed me to help my father."[28]

"The civil servant has a right to insurance benefits, as well as job security."[29]

Even this feature (the fixed pension) in the public sector seems to have lost its value, especially in the few years before the crisis, as wages were no longer sufficient for workers in this sector.

"From 1968 until 1975, the salary was sufficient, and you could save some of it if you wanted to live in dignity but frugally. Then, it was hard enough but after 1980 you had to work overtime to secure another income. This was the case until the end of my service. If you did not seek extra work or had no additional income or inheritance, you would die of hunger. "[30]

"Some of my friends could not get married and left their fiancés because of the economic pressure suffered by workers in state jobs; the salary of 5000 Syrian pounds was not enough to secure the necessities of living."

Most public-sector employees complained that the government jobs killed ambition and creativity because of routine, monotonous tasks that did not require workers to advance creativity or intelligence.

"I categorically refused to work with the state or in a traditional job. My parents were thinking traditionally and wanted to be employed and married and settled. However, I rejected this model and this way of life."[31]

After Bashar al-Assad took over the country, the Syrian government moved to adopt the public sector-led investment model for five years.[32] This change was part of its declared economic reform policy and march towards a social market economy. The Syrian state began to make way for the private sector after the public sector had long been the most crucial player in the national economy. The administration removed barriers to the private sector entering multiple industries, as well as schools, universities and banks. The government also sought to modify official institutions, such as labour laws, the public education system and social protection programs, allowing the private sector to expand.

The Government began to encourage Syrian youth (men and women) to enter the labour market with more opportunity to select their professional orientations. However, these reforms were not more economically attractive than the employment available in formal and informal institutions. Due to economic advantages, youth continued to prefer working in the public rather than the private sector.[33] In response to this problem, the Syrian government offered to reduce the number of workers in the public sector. However, it did not implement these changes and the number of public sector employees remained constant.[34]

2. The Private Sector Before 2011

Characteristics of workers in this sector:[35]
Gender (2011): 94.1% men and 5.9% women
Principal employment: production
Educational Status: primary school certificates

The Syrian government decided to open the door to private sector institutions in the 1970s. What motivated this decision was the need for the national economy's to support non-governmental organizations exclusively, and the demand for economic pluralism in the country. As a result, many public-private projects were established, most of them in the hotel and tourism industry. The government allowed tourism and hotel companies to combine both public and private sectors, and they benefitted from many economic privileges in terms of import, customs and tax exemptions. The state also established the Free Zone in 1971 with the aim of encouraging export industries.

During this period, the Syrian State sought to improve relations with Arab countries, especially the Gulf States, and with European countries. These diplomatic efforts resulted in financial aid of 1.5 billion dollars annually from the Arab countries, which the Syrian government used to establish development projects in infrastructure, new factories and so on. This aid became possible when the price of oil rose globally in 1973 and 1974, increasing the volume of production and opening the Arab markets, especially for Syrian youth in the oil countries. Arab countries diverted funds to contribute to the development of the country, and reduced restrictions on private sector imports.[36] The political transformation of the region in the second half of the 1970s, especially with Sadat's peace with Israel, had the effect of re-tightening the Syrian state's grip on the economy without suspending previous measures that had been implemented.

The 1980s brought many natural economic and political crises that negatively affected the Syrian economy and put additional burdens on the state treasury. Among these crises were: a decline in the price of oil worldwide, the volume of financial revenues, the exchange rate of the Syrian pound, and Syrian export revenues. Bureaucracy grew in public sector institutions, corruption and bribery spread, and inflation and unemployment were on the rise.

"Bribery spread after the 1980s and increased dramatically after the 1990s, not only with the aim of securing living necessities but of inflating wealth. An ordinary general might bribe to earn a living but a high official wanted to increase his fortune, build a luxury house or buy a villa. Where did those fancy houses come from? From our salaries! And how did those villas on the coast get built? The total of all salaries over a hundred years without spending is not enough to buy the likes of those villas along the coast or in the western Mezze in Damascus. A single one of those villas costs one hundred million Syrian pounds!"[37]

On the environmental front, successive dry seasons damaged agricultural production, which was vital to the Syrian economy. Politically, Syria was forced to pay for its political positions, such as its opposition to the Camp David Accords on 17 September 1978, its denunciation of the 1980 Iraq war against Iran, and the signing of the Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union in 1980. The Muslim Brotherhood's armed rebellion against the Syrian government also had a significant impact on the Syrian economy.

Following the accumulation of these internal and external crises, the Syrian government was forced to re-activate the role of the private sector to alleviate the economic crisis that hit the country. In the second half of the 1980s, tourism, agriculture, and the import and export trade opened to the private sector. The markets of the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries between 1978 and 1992 opened up to private sector exports from Syria. Non-oil exports

increased from just over a quarter to about two-thirds of all commodities. This increase enabled conditions conducive to the rise of investment in the private sector. The value of private investment increased from 54,014 million Syrian pounds in 1980 to 57,255 million in 1990, and then to 94,359 million in 1995.

The 1991 Madrid peace negotiations (between Syria and Israel) contributed to an increase in domestic and foreign investment. In the same year, the Syrian State issued Investment Law No. 10, which provided many benefits and exemptions in the private sector, encouraging Syrian investors to launch their projects in Syria. By the end of the 1990s, the private sector share in various economic activities in Syria was as follows: 98% in agriculture, 72% in transport, 62% in trade, 59% in the financial sector, 50% in construction, and 37% in manufacturing industries.[38]

The Syrian State did not implement reforms in addition to Law No.10, feeling that it was less likely to open up even more space to the private sector after agricultural production improved the Syrian economy and reduced its dependence on remittances from expatriates. However, the failure of peace efforts between Syria and Israel put things back to square one, and the value of private investment in the second half of the nineties reached 56,761 million Syrian pounds in 2000.

The beginning of the first decade of the twenty-first century marked the peak of openness towards the private sector. This change manifested in the 2005 Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party conference, which was based on the ideal of economic transformation rather than a centralized economy. The state then adopted the concept of a social market economy in the tenth five-year plan from 2006 to 2010.[39]

In line with its new strategy, the Syrian state tried to create an attractive climate for investment. It expanded the country's infrastructure and created four industrial cities to establish large projects, having relinquished its monopoly over major industries in the private sector such as cement and sugar. It also liberalized foreign trade and allowed 14 private banks to be founded, as well as several financial services companies.

"I had an electronic embroidery factory in Aleppo and manufactured sportswear and robes. I established the factory in 1990 in the neighborhood of Lirmon, which was previously the choice industrial district in Aleppo."

"We had the support of European countries to export Syrian goods. For example, our goods were exempt from customs duties when exporting to Europe, while businesses importing goods coming from China paid duties."[40]

The private sector was also allowed to invest in higher education, private newspapers and magazines, and tourism. The volume of private investment increased from 62,290 million Syrian pounds in 2001 to 193,268 million in 2010."[41]

"Between 2005 and 2006, the Four Seasons hotel opened up and needed a large number of staff. I had some theoretical knowledge through what I had studied at the Hospitality and Management

Institute. I applied for work and was accepted. The salary was very good, and I could not believe they were offering such wages!"[42]

An aversion to the routine and traditional nature of public sector work was the first reason that prompted many young people to turn to the private sector.

"I worked as a private sector accountant for many years, and I advanced a lot in my work. My view of the government job was that the salary was limited and I had an ambition to get a better job and a higher salary, and to take my chances in life."[43]

However, part of the private sector in Syria was rigidly tied to the public sector. The Syrian-oriented economic plan restricted the private sector to specific frameworks, limiting investment and thus preventing the flow of funds.[44]

"I was working in trade and the distribution of food, and there were state restrictions on my work in the form of taxation, insurance, and so on. Unless a trader became a government worker, if he earned one hundred Syrian pounds, he paid 75 pounds to the state. Syrian trade regressed thereafter, whether in capital-dominated construction, restaurant work, or luxury car commerce. Trade was the domain of those with a large amount of capital. From the 1970s until early in the last decade, the state severely restricted traders with the aim of sharing in all their economic activity."[45]

3. The Joint Sector

The characteristics of workers in this sector:[46]
Gender (2011): 23.1% women and 76.9% men
Type of employment: production
Educational status: primary and middle school diplomas, and university degrees

The joint sector is an investment partnership between the public and private sectors in tourism, agriculture, industry and other projects. The joint sector mobilizes for profit but is cautious not to undermine the separate interests of the two parties. Typically, projects within a joint sector are subject to the laws in effect and require no special regulations. In the Syrian case, and because the economic system gives more weight to the public sector, the Syrian state issued several special laws for this profit-sharing sector. These laws varied in the joint domains of agriculture or tourism, with no additional code adopted that applied to all joint economic activity.

Data on the joint sector in the Syrian national records are minimal because they are divided by either public or private categories, which may indicate the small size and contributions of the joint sector compared to the public and private sectors. The joint sector was not successful in agriculture, which largely lost industry and services, even with the two resolutions (Decision No.35 of 1986 and Resolution No.10 of 1991) issued by the Syrian government. The private sector remained active in the food, textile, chemical, engineering and other industries (but not the oil extraction industry, which remained the monopoly of public sector investments).[47]

Syrian society was aware for over fifty years of the importance and necessity of the joint sector. It started with the establishment of Latakia Port Company as a joint venture in 1950. However, the industrial sector was not fully operational until the beginning of 1965 and after the partial nationalization of some industrial establishments in 1965 and 1966. The State nationalized 75 - 90% of many companies and industrial institutions, with the remaining percentage held by private owners. In 1970, the state issued Legislative Decree No.38, whereby the remaining shares of 74 industrial companies were also nationalized.[48] Bilateral governmental agreements between Syria and some foreign companies included a 1974 partnership with the Spanish company, Iberca. The bilateral or tripartite government agreements for cooperation and investment in 1975 also contributed to the creation of new companies, including the Syrian-Jordanian Industrial Company. In 1976, the Syrian-Saudi Company for Agricultural and Industrial Investments was established.

The Investment Promotion Law No.10 of 1991 and its amendments gave supporting benefits to the joint sector, whether through joint-stock companies or limited liability companies. State, private and Arab sectors initiated joint ventures, such as the Industrial Chemical Company, established in 1991, and the Ghadaq agricultural industry in 1995.

Before the crisis, the industrial sector in Syria included 13 joint-stock companies (between Syria and other Arab countries) that had limited liability and branches located outside Syria.[49] The first difficulty faced by the Syrian joint sector was its limited practical support. “It cannot fully operate or manage consistently, and functions differently from the private sector.” The joint sector has to declare income, expenditure, labour, as well as other elements that must be fully presented, "and this, in turn, carries additional burdens that increase costs and negatively affect competitiveness."

The second problem is a lack of reliability in selecting the leaders of these joint companies, and the public sector and state representatives in the boards of directors. "The choice is often made under the guise of development policy, and yet special benefits, personal relationships, and connections outweigh any criteria of efficiency and integrity."

Thirdly, there is no systematic follow up of the ensemble of activities of this sector, addressing shared problems, sponsoring business affairs, or assisting in development and expansion. Each activity has its sphere of reference, whose direction remains separate from the others. This dispersion contributes to the waste of resources and potential.

Fourth, the lack of integration and, therefore, efficiency of the joint sector and development plans, policies and procedures hinder the work of this sector. The contribution of the joint sector is still expected to bridge investment and productivity, the gaps between stated objectives and realistic objectives.[50]

4. The Entrepreneurship Sector

Characteristics of in this sector:
Gender: 77.6% men and 22.4% women
Age group: between 22 and 35 years old
Educational status: primary school certificate and above

Entrepreneurship involves individual initiative to create a new independent business for profit. It takes advantage of the available human resources and capital needed to face the obstacles associated with these businesses, with full awareness of the risks involved.

"I've heard that young people are starting ventures that fail to materialize. Even if they have something special, they try the market and do not succeed. The market is tough. I'm not saying that there is corruption, but the market is powerful. You can enter the market and compete, yes, but you have to have reserves, capital and connections, so it is difficult."[51]

"I was teaching for the agency, and I gave lessons to students at home, private lessons in Arabic. I gained competence in this skill, and later managed to open a private teaching centre that comprised only two rooms, but the number of students was higher than in other institutes in the region. Unlicensed centers were being shut down at that time, and people said to me, 'are you crazy? People are shutting down, and you will open up shop anyway?'"[52]

Entrepreneurship stimulates innovation in enterprises by staking out new opportunities and benefitting from existing resources. It is a phenomenon that regenerates (especially following the flourishing of the capitalist economy) in different societies and periods. In the Syrian case, before 2000 there were not many references to the conditions of entrepreneurship. The first reason for young people to become entrepreneurial may have been their rejection of traditional jobs, which indicated a preference for self-employment.

"I worked in the field of handicrafts in the market of Hamidiya and worked in the area of Sayeda Zeinab with Arabic calligraphy and oriental arts in general. I started with an art hobby then worked professionally until I mastered the handicraft industry and began to sell my products to tourists and locals." [53]

"I graduated from the nursing school at the University of Aleppo and opened a clinic in Hreitan, a village that had no midwives or female doctors, and catered for the surrounding villages. I gave it up due to the difficult nature of the job, whereby you were sometimes forced to work after midnight." [54]

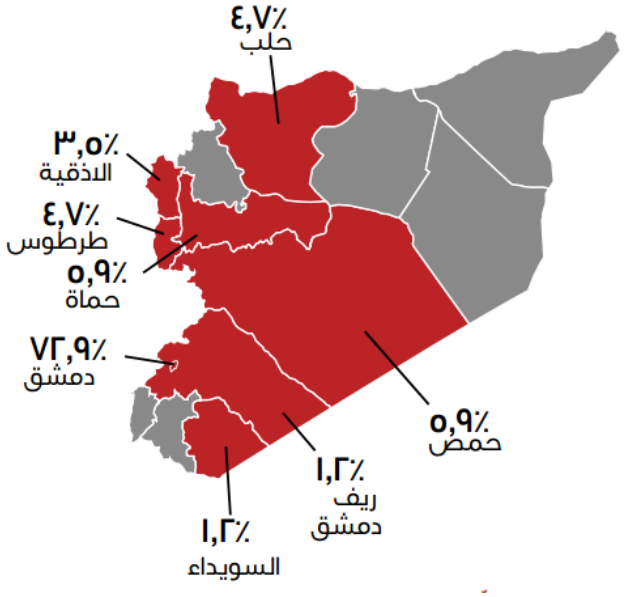
The following information highlights the reality of entrepreneurship in Syria from 2000 until the beginning of the crisis, focusing on the experiences and needs of entrepreneurs and the challenges they face. This is based on a special report entitled "Entrepreneurship in Conflict Areas - Perspectives on Emerging Companies in Syria" [55] This report was based on data from interviews with 268 Syrian business leaders and leading experts, and an in-depth study of start-ups.

First, the report notes that before 2011, Syria was ranked among the safest countries in the world and was in the process of achieving comprehensive development in various sectors, especially the entrepreneurial sector. According to the report, the Syrian capital, Damascus, was home to 72.9% of entrepreneurial projects and start-ups in Syria, the most substantial proportion among the surveyed areas (with 5.9% in Homs and Hama, and 4.7% in Tartous and Aleppo).

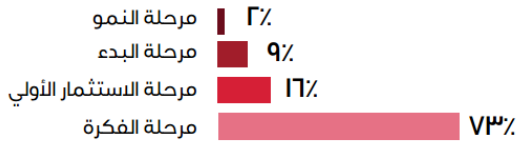
Emerging projects were divided according to formation stages: 73% were in the conceptual stage, 16% were in the initial stage of investment, 9% were in the start-up phase, and 2% were in the growth stage. As for the gender of entrepreneurs, the majority was male (77.6%) and 22.4% was female, indicating the significant difficulties faced by Syrian businesswomen. The nature of the projects included social non-profit (22%), technical (22%) and educational projects (21%).

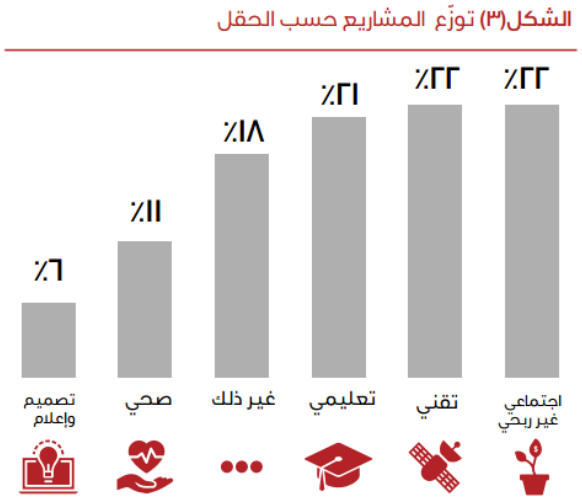
As for entrepreneurship support organizations and communities, the report states that not taking into account microfinance institutions, the primary support for emerging companies, entrepreneurs most often came from community organizations, with fewer from the private sector, and then the public sector.

الشكل(١): خريطة توزّع الشركات الناشئة (%)



الشكل(٢): توزّع المشاريع حسب المرحلة





The main challenges faced by entrepreneurs in Syria are: lack of adequate financial support; restricted access to markets and competition given the absence of a deliberate economic policy; weakness of the Syrian infrastructure; online payment limitations; increasing financial burdens; lack of technical skills and know-how; dwindling size of the market; corrupt bureaucracy; and lack of training in innovation in the education system.[56]

E. Shadow Sector

Characteristics of workers in this sector:
Gender: No precise statistics available
Top professions: No precise statistics available
Educational status: No precise statistics available

The shadow economy encompasses all forms of economic relations and operates according to the principle of profit and loss. There are no accurate statistics on the size of participation of the shadow economy within the formal economy in Syria; the difficulty of estimating the extent of this type of work (street stalls, small and medium enterprises, and family businesses) is that the state does not record it. Some reports by unofficial sources say that this economy accounts for more than 30% of Syria's real economy, while some estimate up to 60%.[57]

In the last few years that preceded the war in Syria (from 2006 to 2010), we got an idea of the number of workers in this unofficial sector. They accounted for about one-third of total employment in Syria and took the form of unusual organized economic activity. The difference between the levels of household income and expenditure is one indication of the proportion of unauthorized income from the shadow sector among Syrian workers, and this reached 34-35% between 2004 and 2010.[58]

Poverty, low income and the need to secure living necessities are among the reasons why the Syrian labour force is compelled to take on additional gainful work parallel to what is available in the formal economy.

"At the beginning of my life in Damascus, I sold perfume on Al-Thawra Street and yet this alone was not enough to meet my living expenses. My daily income was about 500 or 600 Syrian pounds. I continued to sell perfume for four or five years until it became profitable. I would not hesitate to work from a potato cart to earn my living as a respectable human being." [59]

The most important reason for the emergence and growth of shadow economic activity is the increase in unemployment, inadequate employment opportunities, and the lack of effective global fiscal policies. Also, development efforts are concentrated in major regions and cities, which encourages populations to migrate internally and resort to informal work.

The shadow sector contributes to falsification of national reports on economic growth, which, in turn, further obscures, the workings of the labour market (by the distortion of the labour market database and the real sector distribution). The shadow sector encourages corruption, lowers education standards by raising dropout rates, and diminishes the growth of enterprises operating in this informal sector due to a lack of opportunity to obtain support and government funding.[60]

"In my second year at university, I worked in the unofficial supply of drugs, whereby I was bought drugs and distributed them to pharmacies."[61]

"Illegal construction is unlicensed state construction. Construction on agricultural land, termed arbitrary, started to increase because population growth in the countryside lacked the necessary administrative advancement. Legal construction is expensive. I used to sell houses for 1000 pounds per square meter. In the suburb of Damascus, a contractor was in place to deal with the municipality, and this concerned state administrative corruption. I built many houses in violation of regulations and made good profits."[62]

Factors Affecting Livelihoods

1. Unemployment
2. The Gender Distribution of Employment Opportunities
3. Harmonization of Education and the Labour Market
4. Corruption

An Introduction

Respect for the humanity of workers is central to the role of work in ensuring basic needs and a dignified life. Good policy includes respecting the need to work in domains that meet aspirations and allow creativity, depending on individual aptitudes and desired skills. In this way, work is transformed from a function and a tool into an arena where individuals achieve.

"The idea of the emancipation of workers from the conditions of work may be a kind of utopian concept, especially given the predominance of the capitalist mode of production" whereby most people work to secure enough money to sustain their lives. To achieve this end, and to ensure the continuation of this mode of production, the most terrible means and policies continue, including wars, without the consideration of consequences like famine, disease, pollution and the destruction of the planet on which we live."[63] Yet, livelihoods in Syria are not only affected by the economic devastation of the capitalist system but also by dependence on the Syrian regime. In the following section, we highlight the most critical factors influencing livelihoods in Syria before 2011.

1. Unemployment

About 200,000 young Syrian men and women join the labour market every year. Studies and statistics indicate that most of them experience unemployment for long periods of time because the Syrian economy is unable to absorb them. Unemployment is one of the most significant internal economic problems facing the Syrian economy, and there was a dangerous and steady increase before the Syrian crisis. Known as the "mother of evil," unemployment may be one of the most important causes of political and social breakdown in any society. The first cause of unemployment is the widening gap between job opportunities and the growth of the labour force.[64]

The Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic stipulates that, "every citizen has the right and duty to work. The state shall provide work for all citizens. Every citizen shall be entitled to receive remuneration according to the quality of work and results." Based on the provisions of the Constitution and the socialist orientation of Syria, one of the main objectives of economic and social development plans since the 1970s has been to achieve full employment. Through new employment opportunities, the state seeks to eliminate unemployment among young people entering the labour market for the first time, including economically active individuals and the previously employed. Indeed, official data indicate that development plans in the 1970s and 1980s were able to meet objectives and market needs, absorbing a high percentage of workers. Unemployment, however, has returned to the Syrian community since then and is steadily increasing.[65]

Until the beginning of the crisis in Syria, the labour force was estimated to include about 5.7 million people - about a quarter of the population. Most employment was in the formal and informal sector (about 73%), with 27% in the public sector. However, it is difficult to get accurate figures describing unemployment in Syria because it is a complex phenomenon and difficult to estimate accurately, as is the case in other developing countries with problems of underemployment in the state and service sectors. Unemployment figures vary widely according to criteria of economic activity as well as the credibility of the source. For instance, in 2002, the economic reform program estimated the unemployment rate in Syria to be 9.5% of the total labour force but the same source also claims it reached 11.6%, equivalent to 637,805 people. The figures for the Unemployment Control Authority indicate that the number of unemployed reached 800,000 or 15%, whereas it was estimated to be 22% by many Syrian researchers.

One year before the outbreak of the war, Syria's unemployment rate was 8.4 % according to the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), which documented the results of the Labour Force Survey in all governorates during the first half of 2010. A total of 46,8010 people were unemployed. Employment in all governorates reached 91.6% or a total of 5112,291 workers. The data indicate that the highest rate of employment was in the industrial province of Aleppo at 94.8% of the labour force, while the governorate of Suweida recorded the lowest rate at 71.8%, and thus had the highest number of unemployed people at 18.3%.[66]

"It was hard for students to find work after graduating from university. I applied for many jobs, received job interviews, and waited months and days with no success."[67]

One cause of the failure to absorb young people into the labour market may be unsound investment policies by Syrian governments, in particular the complex investment procedures. Widespread administrative and bureaucratic corruption in public administrations helped spread unemployment. We must not lose sight of the relevance of education to labour efficiency. Poor educational planning and educational training meant the needs of the labour market in Syria were not met, and there was insufficient training in broad sectors of the labour force.

The labour market suffers from a lack of organization. "The absence of real social institutions" forces young people to assume work that does not suit their qualifications. Inability to cope with technical and production variations may result from the lack of qualifications, and so the workers are dismissed from their jobs. Added to this is the scarcity of investment capital and the fact that necessary capital is directed to non-productive sectors. Thus, many workers end up "fleeing abroad." Syrian unemployment may have some "natural causes," including high population growth rates and the massive Syrian exodus from the countryside in recent years.

For these reasons, the unemployment rate before the outbreak of the Syrian crisis reached 9% as an official figure (between 2009 and 2010). In fact, the unemployment rate was about 16%, accompanied by a decline in investment capacity in the government sector.[68] The unemployment rate in Syria increased during the years before the war, coinciding with the increase around the world following the further spread of the capitalist system in the world economy.

The above data can be used to conclude that the rate of economic growth was very low compared with the rate of population growth, and the annual increase in unemployment was about 200,000, with the total number appearing to have reached one million. Unemployment among youth under the age of 30 rose to 90% of total unemployment among women and men in the workforce. Unemployment was more prevalent in rural areas than in cities.

Unemployed people in the labour force generally have comparatively low levels of education but unemployment among high school graduates is on the rise. Some economic analysts expected (before the crisis) that unemployment would increase "as a result of neo-liberal policies on the path of privatization, the decline of the economic and social role of the Syrian state, and implementation of the benefits of the Association Agreement between Syria and the European Union."[69]

"Perhaps education did not have great value among the people of my generation because the highest unemployment rates were among the educated and university graduates. I remember that my father told my brothers when they left school, 'let them learn the importance of a teacher.' There had always been this thinking that teachers and employees had value and a good income but not in our time."[70]

2. Unemployment and Corruption

The spread of corruption within state bodies and institutions is not limited to the looting of funds and resources, but includes wide-ranging negative consequences for everyone, most notably, the mismanagement of unemployment. The corruption of decision-makers and policymakers means they develop misguided, even disastrous, policies based on miscalculations of conditions. The right person is not put in the right place, and favouritism and special interests supplant competence. This corruption leads to the general failure of institutions, and the inability to properly empower labour.

Some Syrian government institutions also employ excessive numbers of workers so that inflation conceals unemployment. This policy, in blatant excess of institutional needs, shifts unemployment from a plain to a hidden reality. Some private sector institutions in Syria also employ children due to the low wages they can pay them. As a result, legitimate labour is laid off.[71]

All of these factors are superficial if compared to the underlying causes of unemployment. If we explore this problem more deeply, we find economic policies through which the state forsook its economic and social role. State relinquishment of its commitment to employing university graduates, for example, caused the unemployment of a large segment of society. The absence of civic freedoms sustains the underlying causes of unemployment and renders the prosecution of corruption hopeless. The root of the problem is, hence, impossible to address.[72]

There are other complications stemming from the absence of civic freedoms, including the prevention of workers from forming independent unions, and the banning of demonstrations and strikes. The repression of freedoms further strengthens employer control on working conditions and increases the number of unemployed. At the same time, maintaining exceptional laws discourages investment capital, including that from the Diaspora, that would have created new job opportunities in Syria.[73]

3. The Gender Distribution of Employment Opportunities

We may think that the injustice inflicted on women is limited to physical and moral violence, and yet economic injustice is one of the most severe types of violence practiced against women. Economic subordination not only marginalizes women but also increases their social dependence on the system and prevents entire families from realizing their full potential. Wage disparity between women and men may be one of the most apparent forms of economic discrimination against women but it is not the most extreme. In spite of the privileges that women have gained

through their continuous struggle and some of the legal transformations that they achieved, working Syrian women continue to face difficulties preventing them from assuming their full social and economic roles.

The Syrian Constitution guarantees in Article 208 / No.25 that "citizens are equal before the law in rights and duties," and that "the state guarantees the principle of equality of opportunity among citizens." Article 45 states that "the State shall guarantee to women all opportunities to enable them to contribute effectively and fully to political, social, cultural and economic life and to remove the restrictions that prevent their development and participation in the building of the Arab socialist society."

The banner of emancipation and the renaissance of Syrian women brought forth by powerful women enabled the realization of many of their aspirations for social justice and equal opportunity with men. They could hold office in local councils, the People's Assembly, parties and executive bodies, and join the judiciary and the police. They were able to establish civil equality laws concerning rights and duties. However, many customs and traditions continued to restrict the application of women's rights and the removal of social and, therefore, economic injustice, particularly in rural areas.

"They say girls should marry. If we were men, we would not have been subjected to these pressures and we could have found jobs in the village itself or the city without having to move from Suweida to Damascus."[74]

Shedding light on the development status of women in Syrian society involves monitoring three factors related to livelihoods; these may be the best indicators of the development status of women in any country: economic participation, power over economic resources, and economic decision-making. There are no accurate or specific statistics on women's standard of living in Syria because of the lack of accurate statistics on women's work in all economic sectors, especially in the agricultural sector, which constitutes the largest proportion of rural women's work.[75]

Economic participation: the universally appropriate standard of living is measured by the estimated income of purchasing power parity in US dollars. The standard of living for women is measured by comparing their wages to that of men in all economic sectors, in addition to the GDP and per capita share. In 2005, Syria ranked 84th for women's development. Annual income was estimated at USD 1,584 for women compared to USD 5,534 for men – in other words women earned about a fifth of what men earned.[76]

Power over economic resources: statistics show that the proportion of women in the total Syrian labour force reached 18.3% in 2000 in the agricultural, industrial and service sectors. In 2008, the figure rose to 22 percent.[77]

Owning economic decisions: "Women are still far from holding economic decision-making positions. The concentration of women's employment lies in the social services sector and away from the productive process, which has most decision-making positions."[78] For example, despite the high proportion of female teachers in various sectors of education, their low numbers in

higher education results from the required number of years of full-time education; this is impossible to achieve in a traditional society that encourages early marriage, or condemns women to years of exclusive learning without marriage.

Syrian law has tried to achieve equality between women and men regarding rights and duties, and women have opportunities equal to those of men. For example, women have the right to hold the post of Vice President, minister, member of the People's Assembly and director, as well as the right to work in all sectors. However, some social norms have slipped into the law. In particular, discriminatory laws exist governing relationships between men and women within the family and private life. This discrimination serves to prevent achievement at work, where the preference for men is justified by the additional time he can ostensibly devote to work because "an essential priority for women is to devote more time to her family." Men, by contrast, enjoy greater social freedom and work without restrictions, including freedom of movement and the freedom to be absent from home for extended periods, gaining them higher wages and more functional incentives. It is social pressure that overrules official law or even contributes to shaping them [79]

"At that time, female employees were rare, and all the burdens of domestic labour - raising children, buying necessities and so on - were on them, without any cooperation from the men who went to work from six in the morning and returned in the evening. Women served their husbands, as did their mothers and grandmothers before them."[80]

"At first it was difficult as society did not accept a woman working in an onion factory but after the number of women working increased, it became an advantage, and I felt some pride that I was a working woman."[81]

"It is normal to have contact with employers in a beauty salon, and this reality provoked anger towards me. How could a 17-year old woman rent a shop alone or work? Our society is narrow and closed, and I always needed a man beside me. Two years later, I decided to open my salon and I looked for a shop. I rented it with the help of my father, and I found it difficult to deal with the owner. Society did not accept women working on their own."[82]

Sometimes additional burdens can be imposed on women, including that they have to spend their earnings on family members to prove that they are good and dedicated women. Social norms also interfere with Syrian women's employment choices, not only in terms of specific professions but in the selection of one sector over another.[83]

"I chose it as a job alone, with no other considerations. This choice shortened my length of study and reduced my expenses, in addition to providing me with income that helped me earn a living and help my father financially."[84]

A 2008 paper by Kabbani and Habbash confirms that men choose to work in the public sector to secure the needs of their families through a fixed and guaranteed salary. Women's choice of section, in contrast, is influenced by local social views, which consider employment in the public sector to be better for women because government jobs have more flexible working hours and provide maternity leave.[85]

The rate of unemployment among women is twice that of men due to the early marriage of women, especially in conservative areas, and high dropout rates, among other factors,

"They do not care about women's education. It is important to read and write but beyond this learning is not required as sooner or later a woman will settle in her husband's house."[86]

"As for girls, their educational level was low and did not extend beyond primary school; then they were married off at the age of thirteen or fourteen."[87]

"There are many social pressures, and women are expected to marry by the age of 20. My older sister studied at the teachers' college and married at the age of 20. After her children grew up, she enrolled in the university and studied Arabic literature. She got married and then completed her studies after marriage." [88]

The situation changed gradually as the years passed, until the idea of learning became important for both genders, at least throughout primary school. In most cases, education has become a recognized right for Syrian girls.[89]

"There has been a qualitative leap in educational levels, especially in the case of girls, and all parents were keen to educate their daughters and enrol them in universities. We have had female doctors, teachers and workers in various fields since the seventies." [90]

"There was not a large percentage of women working in the past but after the 1980s the proportion of female workers reached about 50%. Remember that the economic conditions fell below average in the first half of the seventies. After the 1980s it became common for couples to pursue their studies and improve their economic conditions from poor to average. Most of these couples were in from the middle classes and lived in peaceful cities.[91]

It seems that the educational and practical achievement of women has helped to narrow the gap and create opportunities for equality between genders. This has contributed to the advancement of women and the decreased prevalence of notions about female inferiority in society generally.

"I'm talking about what I saw and lived. There was no particular view of women and men; there was no discrimination. Some women are shy by nature, and some families are conservative. Society does not dictate this. Also, many boast about having a doctor, engineer or teacher in the family, whether man or woman."[92]

4. Continuity Between Education and the Labour Market

Training and education are essential factors in increasing development and reducing unemployment rates because education has a reciprocal relationship with livelihood. There is also a direct correlation between the allocation of GDP for education and the rate of growth in GDP as a result of its multiplier effect in increasing income, absorbing the labour force, and

reducing unemployment rates. To ensure that education and training are more effective at achieving development objectives, governments make plans to harmonize education and training with the needs of the labour market, and thereby increase the supply of high-skilled national labour and recruit workers to higher-value jobs.[93]

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in Syria took steps to increase training in the various sectors through the establishment of the Labour Market Observatory, which opened one year before the start of the crisis under the chairmanship of Mohammed Al-Kawah and in cooperation with the UNDP team.[94]

The Observatory was primarily focused on two tracks: first, providing support for policymakers and strategies for global employment in Syria; second, ensuring that education and training were in sync with actual labour market needs by networking with job seekers and employers, and by designing intervention packages to stimulate the labour market.[95]

However, the impact of the delay in establishing the Observatory is evident in the Syrian market. Once young Syrians take steps to enter the labour market after graduation from university, many are surprised to face unemployment. The lectures, examinations and graduation projects they worked on for years do not narrow the gap between their education and the requirements of the labour market. They head to training centres in the hopes of securing work. However, the know-how and methods of the training centres are pre-war, still non-academic, and lag behind.[96] This gap between education and jobs may be attributed to the failure of curricula to cope with the rapid development of the labour market in Syria during "economic openness" and global technological progress.

"When we entered the Faculty of Engineering and the Department of Electronic Engineering, we did not know the truth. We may have learned late that the university did not have the academic level required, that it was behind what is available, new and up-to-date."[97]

Ineffective and decades-long educational policies further complicate the education problem in Syria. The free state universities are based on a two-stage system of student admissions and the volume of demand.

"The student of the vocational branch (industry) heads towards this specialization not because of a love for it but on the basis of assessment and grades that force him to enter the branch even though secondary school studies are the right of any student, whatever his degree. In all countries of the world including Japan, vocational students are not evaluated and forced to study in a particular industry or trade but are entitled to complete high school and then choose according to their affinities. Vocational students often learn in fields they do not like, and hence view themselves as somehow substandard, as do teachers and administrative staff."[98]

It often happens that those who wish to study medicine have to study engineering, and those who want to study engineering have to join the Faculty of Law or Arts, and so on. Either students comply with this, or else they are forced to pay large sums in private universities to study in their preferred disciplines.[99]

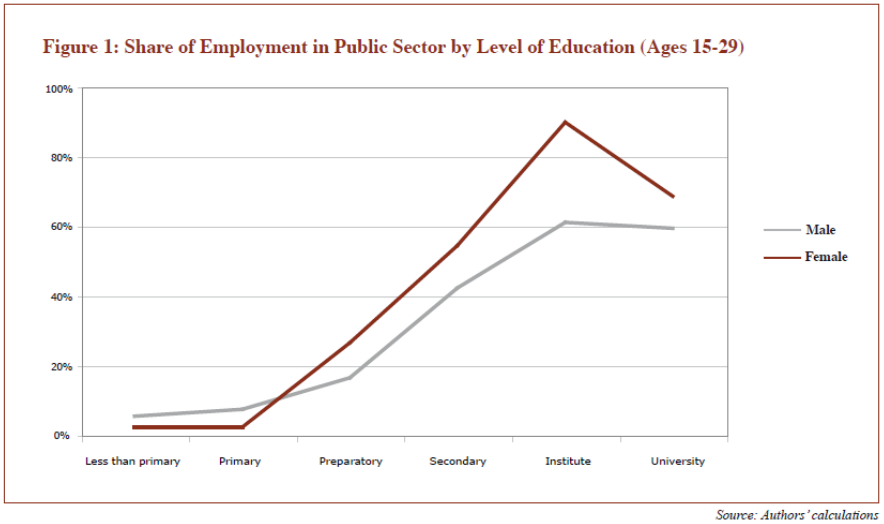
"Everyone wants the best section, but our grades are in control!" We chose to study in the best discipline our grade average permits."[100]

"I did not have good enough grades. I wanted to study archaeology, museum curation or history but the new trade-off system did not allow me to do so, and so my grades did not allow me to enter the university. I studied a specialization related to tourism in the tourism institute."[101]

5. Catalysts in the Public Sector

Many public-sector incentives have made young adults appear more enthusiastic in pursuing a traditional course of study to increase their chances of getting employment in the public sector. Syrian education and curricula are designed to cohere with the public not the private sector.[102] Students sit for the official examinations that provide access to public sector jobs. And yet students are not required to develop any capacities that are needed in the private sector.[103] Although qualified to work in public sector jobs, students need to use family and other connections to secure their first jobs within the public sector.

Academic progress often opens up opportunities to attain higher positions in the public sector. Syrian youth are keen to achieve a high level of education to increase their chances of obtaining stable government jobs.[104] The following graph shows how the employment opportunities of young people in the public-sector increase with an increase in educational level, reaching a peak of 60% for men, and more than 80% for women, especially after enrolling in post-secondary education. The rate of women in the public sector and with university degrees increased from 7.9% in 2001 to 17% in 2007.



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In addition to requiring that Syrian students achieve the grades needed to choose their future professions, parents often direct them to study in disciplines that enable them to enter the public sector. This imposition means students give up desires and talents to secure prosperous futures for their future families.

"The level of education attainable in Syria is controlled, and this is a problem of societal development. Student aspirations are secondary, subordinated to the need for quick employment and securing a steady income. The problem in Syria is that the private sector does not provide jobs offered by the state because it is weak and unproductive, full of consumer cadres without financial returns. That is why the jobs are largely under state control. Because of limited family resources, families invest in their children's education oriented to precise specializations to protect themselves and the future, but in so doing they neglect their children's hobbies and desires such as writing, poetry and literature."[106]

6. Corruption

The classic definition of corruption, according to Transparency International, generally applies in the case of Syria: "the misuse of power and public funds for personal gain and benefits." [107]

"My work in finance has allowed me to get a closer look at the Syrian economy, and at the magnitude of corruption in the Syrian intelligence services."[108]

A report issued by the Syrian Economic Forum classified the most prevalent types of corruption in the public and private sectors in Syria as follows:

1 - Bribery: Syrian law criminalizes bribery of all kinds in the public sector (and no similar requirement applies to the private sector). We find, however, that bribery is rampant in Syrian government institutions and departments, especially in the form of gifts or money for illegal services. Corruption is particularly prevalent in the judiciary and security services and within the departments, such as those issuing licenses etc.[109]

"Salaries were low relative to purchasing power and insufficient without additional income, and this remained the case until the end of my service. If you did not find additional income your heirs would starve to death."[110]

"There was much corruption - rampant corruption - and nothing resolves without it. Money solves problems better than a Minister's knowledge."[111]

"I used to work selling vegetables, stockings or anything really, and the municipal police continuously chased me to extract bribe money. If you paid, you were legal, and if you did not pay you were not, and they had the right to confiscate a portion of your goods. They take from you the sweat of your brow, even though you can hardly survive without this dealing." [112]

2 - Exploitation of power, security and partisan hegemony: the official exploitation of professional positions in Syria is the second most prevalent form of corruption. Some businessmen exploit their influence and knowledge of decision-makers to extort funds through bribes, threats or temptation.

"Security interventions happen everywhere. In all the departments of the state there are security interventions that say you must do this and not do that; ignoring these injunctions is a risk, and you face security measures. In all countries of the world, the security apparatus or the military should not interfere in the work of a civil institution. Of course, there is no domain in government departments without security intervention, even the education sector."[113]

This security hegemony impedes all citizens from obtaining equal opportunity, and encourages the flattery of security representatives and illegal acts to avoid facing threats and intimidation. Security or partisan control may be one of the most prevalent forms of corruption in Syria, where belonging to the ruling party, the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party, is a critical criterion for employment.[114]

"We have developed twisted talents as a result of this environment, and seek to manipulate to make connections with the state and secure benefits."[115]

"When the state is corrupt, all systems will be corrupt; if the state allows increases in salary, this accompanies an increase in prices. Practically, the employee does not benefit from the increase, but this allows the system to shine in the media."[116]

As corruption spreads in various fields and sectors, it is not surprising that it is even sneaking into the creative art sector.

"In Syria, talent alone is not enough, and I mean true talent without ambiguity. The path to stardom requires three things: the first is luck, which applies to not more than 15%; the second is privileged connections, comprising 75%, and the third is brown-nosing, which constitutes 10%. For an artist to become a star in Syria, he either has to be supported by a certain intelligence group, the Republican Palace, or the Republican Guard. In this case, they will show his work a lot on television, and they will give him heroic roles so that he will be remembered in the minds of the people. This happens very simply following an order from the Intelligence Division, or the Palace, to the Producers." [117]

3 - Misappropriation of public funds: embezzlement is a crime in public administration according to the Syrian Penal Code. However, it appears to be a prevalent crime in Syria. Legal embezzlement is the seizure of public money by an employee handling funds. The current crisis is, in part, a manifestation of long-standing and large-scale embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds. The failure to implement sanctions has led to an increase in the scale of these crimes. Consequently, the size of misappropriated funds increases economic damage to the sectors in which funds should normally have been used to expand investment, support the sector, and improve the livelihoods of its workers.[118]

"Each person steals from his sector depending on his position. The officer robs the engineers of building materials; the head of the command robs those under him of leave time. 'Altafyish' refers to when soldiers recruited from their homes give monthly payoffs to officers in charge of them. A brigade commander has forty or fifty soldiers, and a commander of the battalion has ten;

not including other bribes, each pays off the officer in higher command. Of course, this cannot be regarded as the general rule."[119]

Syria occupies a high position in the global ranking of corruption. In 2010, for example, Transparency International's annual report ranked Syria 127th out of 180 countries worldwide, and number 15 among Arab countries.[120]

Reflections on Corruption and Livelihoods

Corruption is not limited to its place of occurrence. Its impact extends to political, economic and social systems, and threatens their structures and impedes growth and development. Corruption undermines economic development in Syria because it leads to distortion and the derailing of projects. In the private sector, bribes and illegal payments increase the cost of doing business and of managing negotiations among officials. Bribes also allow officials to pass laws and delay carrying out formal operations, thus weakening institutions. Corruption in the private sector drives away foreign investment and disrupts domestic capital flows.

In the public sector, corruption generates economic falsifications by transforming non-profit development projects into gateways of investments, bribes and profit-sharing among politicians and businesspeople in the form of economic monopolies. For example, officials sabotage one project sighting technical complications to conceal their looting of public funds, as well as their general interference with development projects. These projects would have stimulated the economy; once sabotaged, the quality of government services diminishes, leaving budgetary and subsequent burdens on the state treasury.

"The state is rotten, and the economic system is corrupt; the salaries are low, and integrity cannot be maintained in office. For example, the city of Salameh is an industrial and agricultural zone, and the director of the region employs all of these security services, collecting what can be collected before he is dismissed. This corruption spreads throughout the state, and they practice their corruption freely. If the director of a peaceful area, for example, does not bow to the police chief and the police chief does not pay off the minister, he will not stay in office. Of course, we cannot generalize, and even in political security there exist respectable officers."[121]

Research Summary and Recommendations

This article studies the main sectors of the Syrian economy, the divisions of gender and age, and the educational levels of workers and employees, as well as the problems they face. The following are some of the recommendations based on this analysis.

Recommendations for improving the public sector:

The paper highlighted how government investment in the public sector has been and continues to be central to the Syrian economy but needs to work in conjunction with the private sector more effectively. The Syrian economy cannot recover after a crisis except through increased

government investment in the public sector and real cooperation with the private sector, especially by directing the private banking sector to contribute to development plans. We believe that the most sensitive and responsible step is to tackle corruption at its root and simultaneously unburden the bureaucracy, freeing it from party and security dominance, in this sector in particular.

Recommendations for improving the private sector:

The Syrian state must expand its economic openness and undertake a comprehensive reform process that involves not only opening up to private sector investments but also to fundamental changes in the legislative and regulatory systems that constitute the foundation of the economy. Economic policymakers should also define clear laws that codify the work of the private sector and allow it to stay within the desired limits.

Recommendations for improving the joint sector:

A study of each company is needed to define their respective regulations, and to surmount obstacles to the expansion of the joint sector. The state should provide incentives for this type of investment. A selection of candidates from these companies representing joint ventures must be scrutinized and chosen for integrity and efficiency, and not on the narrow basis of sectarian or party allegiance.

Recommendations for improving the entrepreneurship sector:

Economic decision-makers in Syria must be aware of the importance of entrepreneurship, given the global movement towards a capitalist economy. Therefore, they should work to enable Syrian youth to invest more in entrepreneurship as this sector has a real development horizon and can make a positive impact on the Syrian economy. Most needed are new educational programs that teach skills indispensable for this type of work, as well as financial support for this sector. It is also essential to support the individual initiatives of young Syrians, to encourage and nurture them by providing specialized programs and centres for the development of their capacities to lead such projects. Finally, concerning the joint sector, a single body (establishing a specific ministry) may be the best solution to the fragmentation of these companies.

Recommendations for addressing the shadow economy:

The shadow economy, which has a devastating impact on the Syrian economy in general, requires measures to reduce its activities by legitimizing them. This way, these activities can contribute to ameliorating and strengthening local economies in the face of crises.

It is necessary to transform this unorganized labour force into organized labour by providing regular employment opportunities. This regularization can be achieved by measures that simplify labour market regulations, improve working environments, fight corruption, support the small and medium enterprise sector, and take remedial and even preventive measures against the unemployment crisis. Together these steps would neutralize the activities of the shadow

economy and enhance opportunities for the development of the local economy. The solution lies in the problem. The shadow economy, which accounts for about 40% of the national economy, could provide nearly one million new jobs.

The second part of this article studies the main problems facing livelihoods in Syria in different sectors. The testimonies of Syrian citizens expressed how most work problems in Syria stem from being subjected to partisan domination, corruption, bureaucracy, bribery and social discrimination against women (which did diminish over time from the 1970s to the pre-crisis years).

The solution begins with the first social circle, the family, which must be the target of continuous awareness campaigns, especially in the conservative and rural areas, to explain the importance of education and the importance of equality in terms of rights and duties. Reducing early marriage may be a positive and relevant step to enable women to learn and work with equal opportunities and wages, and to gain independence regarding economic decision-making, thus breaking the cycle of economic violence and injustice.

There is also a need to find a comprehensive plan to improve education in Syria to keep up with the demands of the times and to prepare the students for the Syrian labour market. It is not enough for students to be directed towards different disciplines; it is essential to amend the system of grades and trade-offs that systematically alienate Syrian youth from what they wish to study because they are deemed unqualified. As most young people in Syria seek work in the public sector because it affords better financial and moral stability, formal education does not prepare young people to work in some technical fields, nor does it require creativity.

It is necessary to improve educational curricula so that everyone has equal access and opportunity to study in the disciplines that will later qualify them to work and innovate in the fields they love. Effort must also be made to ensure a useful link between education and the labour market.

Finally, the Syrian government must strive to provide uncontrolled working conditions, free from the guardianship of power, party and security control. The State needs to grant the freedom to participate in popular organizations, unions and trade unions, and to fight against corruption in all its forms. In the same context, serious transparency must be pursued in all sectors. What must be combated are security control, bribes and all kinds of corruption that promote economic underdevelopment, prevent equality and the ability to secure decent livelihoods, and that stand in the way of reviving the Syrian economy after the war ends.

Appendixes

Public and private sectors and the joint/family/civil/cooperative sectors

Gender, age, educational backgrounds, salaries

A. Labour distribution by gender:

In all sectors, most of the Syrian labour force is male because of complex social obstacles that have hindered women from studying and working. The number of women employed in the public sector is higher than in the private sector. The number of men also exceeds the number of women in the joint sector, with a slight incremental increase in favour of women.

Sector	2011			2010			2009			2004			القطاع
	مجموع	إناث	ذكور	مجموع	إناث	ذكور	مجموع	إناث	ذكور	مجموع	إناث	ذكور	
	Total	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	
Governmental	100	27.8	72.2	100	26.9	73.1	100	26.2	73.8	100	24.2	75.8	عام
Private	100	5.9	94.1	100	6.9	93.1	100	6.9	93.1	100	8.1	91.9	خاص
Collective/ Cooperative	100	23.1	76.9	100	14.1	85.9	100	20.0	80.0	100	16.5	83.5	تعاوني ومشترك

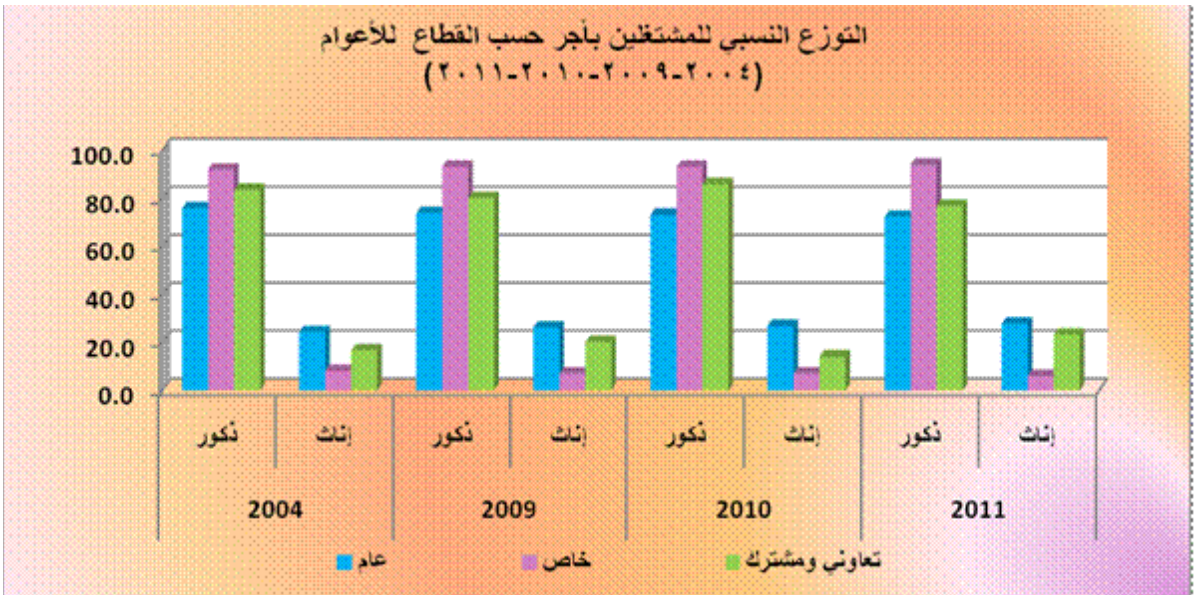

Table and graph highlighting the relative distribution of wage earners by sector for the years 2004, 2009, 2010 and 2011.[122]

The table above shows the distribution of male and female workers in Syria by sector. A quick look at the chart shows the following.

First, the number of men in both sectors has always surpassed the number of women to varying degrees. For example, in 2009, the number of employees in the public sector in Syria was 73.8% and the percentage of women employed was 26.2%. The same applies to the private sector, where the percentage of employees in the same year was 93.1%, while the number of female employees was only 6.9%.

Second, the change in ratios for higher representation of female workers is still very minimal. The number of women employed in the public sector in 2004 was 24.2%, an increase of only 3.6% over seven years, equivalent to 0.51% per year.

Thirdly, the number of women employed in the public sector is increasing, while the number employed in the private sector has been decreasing over the four years highlighted in the table, with 24.2% in the public sector in 2004 and only 8.1% in the private sector in the same year. In 2010, the percentage of women employed in the private sector was only 6.9%, while the percentage employed in the public sector was 26.9%.

The number of men has always exceeded the number of women in the joint sector, and time has not reduced this difference. Men constitute 80% of the labour force in the joint sector, and women 20%. However, we can see gradual progress for women.

B. Average monthly wage

A study of the figures below shows that public sector wages are generally higher than those of the private sector. The Syrian state system and institutions often invest more in the public sector than in the private sector. Wages in the joint/cooperative/civil/family sectors are the highest of the three.

Sector	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2002	2001	القطاع
Governmental	17044	13375	12730	12378	9931	9750	8364	6386	4923	حكومي
Private	11268	9793	9634	9249	8040	7630	7304	5629	4782	خاص
Collective/ Cooperative / Domestic / Family	18158	16545	14836	10675	7593	7462	6520	7468	5898	مشترك/ تعاوني / أهلي / عائلي
Total	14069	11344	11096	10719	9017	8696	7756	6017	4859	مجموع

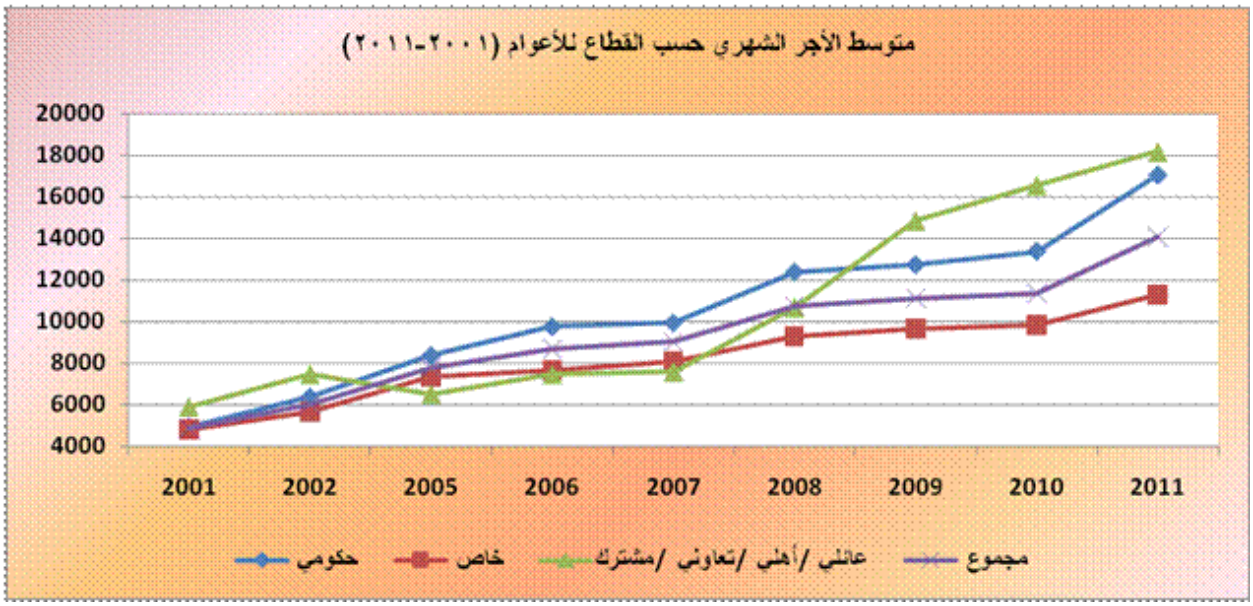

Table and graph highlighting average monthly wage by sector for the years 2001-2011[123]

The table and the graph above show that the average monthly wage in the public and private sectors was almost equal in 2001 (4,923 pounds per month in the public sector and 4,782 pounds in the private sector), and then increased in both sectors, becoming almost equal to wages in 2005. We can observe a change after this year. The average salary in the public sector was often higher than that of the private sector, reaching 17,044 in the public sector and 11,268 in the private sector before the crisis began in 2011. The joint/cooperative/civil /family sector records

the highest wages, especially since 2008 when wages amounted to 18,158 Syrian pounds in 2011.

C. Educational status of Syrian labour (until 2009)

The illiterate population is the least engaged in public and private sector jobs. Primary, middle school and high school graduates and university degree holders predominate in the overall ratio (men and women) of public sector employees. A large proportion of workers in the formal and informal private sector is primary school graduates. The joint sector has the largest percentage of women and men with secondary school educations, followed by those with primary school certificates and university degrees.

The table below shows the distribution of workers in the public and private sectors according to educational status. It shows that the largest proportion of workers in the public sector have only primary school certificates, followed by those with a middle school certificate, and then by those with university degrees or higher.

Educational status	المجموع Total			مشترك/تعاوني/أهلي/عائلي Collective/cooperative/ Domestic/family			خاص غير منظم Private Informal			خاص منظم Private Formal			حكومي Governmental			الحالة التعليمية
	المجموع Total	أنثى Female	ذكر Male	المجموع Total	أنثى Female	ذكر Male	المجموع Total	أنثى Female	ذكر Male	المجموع Total	أنثى Female	ذكر Male	المجموع Total	أنثى Female	ذكر Male	
Illiterate	380827	71606	309221	459	292	167	179233	46745	132488	181522	22241	159281	19613	2327	17285	أمي
Literate	797891	55698	742193	301		301	353073	38232	314841	383593	13120	370474	60923	4346	56577	ملم
Elementary	1826979	82150	1744829	2529	169	2360	690608	36929	653679	883280	32302	850977	250562	12750	237813	ابتدائية
Preparatory	697190	58403	638787	1832	310	1522	179752	10446	169305	331453	19882	311570	184154	27764	156389	إعدادية
Secondary	487913	76434	411478	2725		2725	71751	3805	67946	193905	23085	170820	219532	49544	169987	ثانوية
Intermediate Institutes	438583	174535	264048	1690	450	1240	16975	628	16347	74644	7896	66747	345274	165560	179714	معاهد متوسطة
University and above	425076	132052	293024	2432	467	1965	9813	2646	7168	132865	25394	107471	279966	103545	176420	جامعية فأكثر
Total	5054458	650878	4403580	11968	1689	10280	1501205	139431	1361773	2181261	143920	2037341	1360023	365837	994186	المجموع

Table highlights the distribution of workers in the public and private sectors by educational status for both men and women.[124]

The lowest ratio is for illiterate men, which indicates competitiveness in this sector. As for women, the most have diplomas from intermediate institutes. Hence, in the public sector the highest proportion of workers of both sexes has certificates from institutes. In the private sector, the largest proportion of both men and women has primary school certificates. This sector is not very different from the two others since most of the labour force has primary and middle school certificates, or university diplomas, and most are certified, despite the modest education level of the majority.

D. The types of employment in Syria in the public, private and joint sectors

The main public, private and joint sectors in Syria before 2011 range from professional and technical work, administrative and office work, services and sales, agricultural occupations, production etc.

أقسام المهن	حكومي			خاص منظم			غير منظم			مشترك/تعاوني/أهلي			المجموع		
	ذكر	انثى	المجموع	ذكر	انثى	المجموع	ذكر	انثى	المجموع	ذكر	انثى	المجموع	ذكر	انثى	المجموع
اداريون واعمال كتابية	279888	80387	360275	49662	9386	59048	10284	3781	14065	1872	848	2720	341706	94402	436108
مهنيون + فنيون	306144	257830	563973	109002	31857	140858	20491	8881	29372	2178	517	2695	437815	299084	736899
الخدمات والبيع	191418	12659	204077	501890	31785	533675	213058	16710	229768	8356	793	9150	914723	61948	976670
مهن زراعة	13463	2405	15869	360338	22589	382928	269237	141997	411233	2886	494	3379	645924	167485	813409
مهن انتاج	227219	13746	240965	756528	20293	776821	840090	14858	854948	11094	441	11536	1834931	49339	1884270
غير مبين	195	92	287		185	185	71		71				266	277	542
المجموع	1018327	367119	1385446	1777420	116096	1893515	1353231	186226	1539457	26387	3093	29480	4175364	672534	4847898

Table highlights the distribution of workers according to occupation and gender, public and private sectors (formal and informal) and the joint/ cooperative/civil sector.

Professionals and technicians constitute the most significant proportion of male and female public-sector employees. The majority have productive occupations in the formal private sector, as is also the case for the informal private sector, as shown in the table above. As for the joint sector, most of its employees are productive professionals.

Endnotes

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[8] The labour force in Syria has grown by 4.3%, which is a very high percentage. Women's participation has doubled since the late 1990s. While women constituted 7% of the labour force in 1980, they were 13% of the total by 2000.

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[18] ibid. McHugo,J. (2015)

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[20] See Appendix 3
[21] Central Bank of Syria

[22] https://www.ceicdata.com

[23] This table also shows that the power and electricity industries in the public sector witnessed a remarkable growth, with the number of workers rising from 29,000 to 66,000 between 1993 and 2010, and still increasing (65,000 in 2009 and 66,000 in 2010). In contrast, the industrial sector recorded a decrease of 2000 in the number of workers between the same two years (96,000 in 2009 and 94,000 in

2010). Mining and quarrying were the least developed in the public sector, with a very small number of workers (only 12,000) between 1993 and 2008.

[24] Central Bank of Syria

[25] https://www.ceicdata.com

[27] *Sharq Library of Oral History*, Syrian citizen from Aleppo, Eastern Province, Air Force Brigade. Date of interview: 22/8/2017

[28] *Sharq Oral History Library*, Syrian citizen, farmer. Date of interview: 17/6/2017.

[29] *Sharq Library for Oral History*, Syrian military from Damascus. Date of interview: 17/8/2017.

[30] *Sharq Library for Oral History*, Syrian citizen from Damascus countryside, construction worker. Date of interview: 16/7/2016.

[31] Ibid

[33] Essentially, the hourly rate is equal in both the public and private sectors (for men) except for private sector graduates who earn less than their public sector counterparts. However, backlogs in the public sector have meant the employment of youth is more attractive and thus the gap between the number of employees in the two sectors has increased.

[34] Kabbani, N. "Why Young Syrians Prefer Public Sector Jobs," *Middle East Youth Initiative*

[35] See Appendix 3

[36] Mohsen (2014). "The Stages of Private Sector Development in Syria," *Urban Dialogue*.

[37] *Sharq Library of Oral History*, Syrian citizen in the army, from Damascus. Date of interview: 17/8/2017

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[43] *Sharq Library of Oral History*, "Syrian citizen from Daraa, commercial accountant," Date of interview: 17/5/2017.

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[56] Ibid, *Entrepreneurship in Conflict Areas*

[57] "The Shadow Economy in Syria: Volume, Causes and Effects," *Omran Magazine*, Issue 3: Winter

[58] Ibid

[59] *Sharq Library for Oral History*, representative and playwright of Latakia. Date of interview: 22/6/2016

[60] Ibid, "A Shadow Economy"

[62] *Sharq Oral History Library*, Syrian citizen from Damascus, contractor in the building of the violator. Date of interview: 9/7/2017

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[105] Document 9. A graph showing the educational levels of public sector employees between the ages of 15 and 29.

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