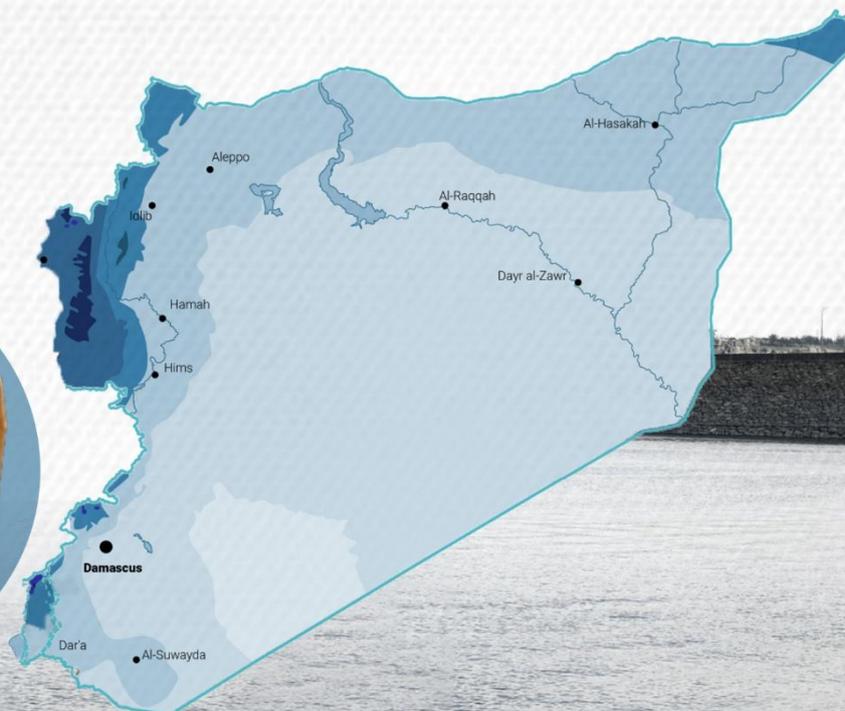


- **Policy Recommendations: Seven Priorities for Addressing Syria's Water Security Challenges in Early Recovery**

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We urge the new Syrian government and the international community supporting Syria's transition and socio-economic recovery to prioritize addressing water security issues



**Policy Recommendations: Seven Priorities for Addressing Syria's Water  
Security Challenges in Early Recovery**

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supporting Syria's transition and socio-economic recovery to prioritize  
addressing water security issues*

More than a decade of conflict has drastically worsened Syria's water insecurity, destroying a large part of water infrastructure, polluting key water sources and disrupting water governance. Climate change, with its rising temperatures and prolonged droughts, has further degraded water quality, quantity, and accessibility, placing Syria on the list of the world's most water-stressed countries. This has had severe impacts on public health and livelihoods of Syrian people, agricultural decline, and ecosystem degradation, which must be urgently addressed.

With the fall of the Assad regime, a critical window of opportunity has emerged to restore Syria's water systems and establish sustainable management of water resources. This is essential for public health, food security, and Syria's economic recovery and development, as well as for enabling the return of displaced populations and fostering long-term stability.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

### 1. Protect Water Resources from Militarization and Hostilities:

Water resources and installations across Syria have often been weaponized during the war, with devastating consequences for the Syrian population. Yet, even after the fall of the Assad regime, water facilities in the northeast are still being targeted by Türkiye and water resources in the south are at risk of militarization by Israel. All hostilities involving water resources and infrastructure must cease immediately to prevent further destabilization, human suffering, and environmental destruction. It is crucial to establish agreements among the parties involved in hostilities, whether national or international, to refrain from using water resources and infrastructure as a political or military tool.

### 2. Include Water and Sanitation Infrastructure in Recovery Efforts:

An estimated two-thirds of water treatment plants, half the pumping stations, one-third of water towers and one-quarter of sewage treatment plants have been damaged because of the conflict. The new Syrian government should prioritize the repair, expansion and modernization of essential water infrastructure, including drinking water infrastructure, irrigation systems, and wastewater treatment plants. The water and sanitation sector should be included in early recovery efforts and reconstruction programs, and should be supported by the international community through funding and technical expertise. Recovery efforts should integrate a gender perspective, ensuring women's participation in decision-making and addressing the disproportionate burden they bear due to water insecurity.

### 3. Improve Water Governance at All Levels:

At both national and local levels, water governance should be improved to regulate and strengthen standards of water management and prevent exploitation of water resources, such as water extraction through unauthorized well drilling or pumping. This requires reactivating, rehabilitating or rebuilding capacities of water-related state institutions, adopting stricter regulations on water usage and waste disposal, and enhancing oversight mechanisms to curb illegal activities. A comprehensive national policy should ensure coordinated water management across sectors, including agriculture, industry, and domestic use.

#### **4. Promote Sustainable Water Use as Part of Syria's Climate Adaptation:**

Syrian authorities should develop and implement a national climate adaptation strategy that integrates water scarcity issues, agricultural vulnerability, industrial impacts, and disaster preparedness. The international community should support climate action in Syria, including the development of climate-resilient agriculture, infrastructure and urban planning. Both domestic stakeholders and international partners should promote awareness raising among the Syrian population about water insecurity and climate change impacts to encourage responsible and sustainable use of water resources.

#### **5. Clean-up Water Resources from Toxic Remnants of War:**

Water pollution from damaged infrastructure, [oil contamination](#), increase of agricultural run-off including phosphates and pesticides due to weak regulations, solid waste and inadequate [sewage treatment](#) continues to pose serious health risks. To mitigate them, it is crucial to conduct sampling and research on toxicity levels in soil, surface water, and groundwater in areas of damaged industrial facilities, oil infrastructure, and intense munitions use, as well as to establish public health monitoring in the affected areas. With support from specialized environmental agencies, the Syrian government should pursue clean-up and remediation of polluted water resources and soil, ensuring subsequent monitoring.

#### **6. Ensure Equitable Access to Clean Water for All Communities:**

Decades of war and discrimination have left many areas – especially in the [northeast](#) and [northwest](#), formerly known as opposition-held regions – without stable access to clean water. To address this, it is crucial to prioritize investments in water supply networks for underserved and displaced communities, address water access disparities between urban and rural areas, and introduce low-cost, decentralized water treatment systems for remote areas. Local communities – including women's groups – should be involved in designing and implementing new water management frameworks.

#### **7. Strengthen Cross-Border and Regional Cooperation on Water Management:**

Water resources in Syria are highly dependent on transboundary rivers like the Euphrates, the Orontes and the Khabour, which flow from neighboring countries. It is therefore crucial to engage in diplomatic efforts with Türkiye, Lebanon and Iraq to ensure fair water-sharing agreements, establish joint monitoring mechanisms for water flow and quality, and advocate for international mediation in water-related disputes to prevent resource-driven tensions. Within Syria, water resources should be also approached by the authorities and local communities as means for dialogue, community resilience, and peacebuilding.

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## About STJ:

- Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) started as an idea in a co-founder's mind while attending the U.S. Middle-East Partnership Initiative's (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program (LDF) in 2015. The idea became a reality and flourished into an independent, non-profit, impartial, non-governmental human rights organization.

STJ's beginnings were more than humble; initially, it only reported stories of Syrians who experienced arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, or torture. Planted in fertile soil, the seed of this project grew into an established human rights organization licensed in the Middle East and the European Union. STJ today undertakes to detect and uncover violations of all types committed in all Syrian parts by the various parties to the conflict.

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## About PAX:

- We have been working on peace for over 75 years, both in the Netherlands and around the world. We do so independently of political interests, with the support of concerned citizens, civil society organisations and together with hundreds of volunteers. We work with a network of expertise, from our headquarters in Utrecht, from Brussels (EU), New York (UN) and together with our local partners in conflict areas.

As part of our peace work, PAX aims to address the interconnected challenges of armed conflict, climate change, and environmental degradation in fragile and conflict-affected regions. We document environmental impacts of conflicts to build better responses, reduce threats to public health and strengthen resilience of affected communities.

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