Understanding resilience: Perspectives from Syrians

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"No matter how long the darkness is, the light must come, and no matter how long the clouds are, spring and flowers must come."

"Resilience means that you hold on to the thing you love most and keep a beautiful image of it despite the distortions of war. I see my country as the most beautiful thing in my life regardless of the destruction, killing, and displacement that was forced upon its people. I strive to become a distinguished person in order to serve my country and make it special again. One day Syria will become better than even before the war. I see it on the horizon and even if I do not live it myself, the next generation will."

Note: Photos are for illustrative purposes and do not feature participants in this research. Captions and credits for all photos are listed on the back page of this report.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

Understanding resilience: Perspectives from Syrians sought to examine resilience in Syria, from the experiences and reflections shared by Syrians inside the country. CARE and many other humanitarian agencies generally articulate resilience as "the ability of people, households, communities, countries and systems to absorb, adapt to and recover from shocks and stresses." The research focused on the following questions:

1. What does resilience mean from the perspective of people living in Syria?
   - What capacities do households and communities use and what strategies do households and communities adopt to become resilient in such a changing context?
   - What are the main factors that affect household and community resilience in an active conflict area?

2. How has the conflict affected the role of women within their families and communities (positively and negatively)?

3. How does it relate to the humanitarian community's and CARE's definitions of resilience?
   - Is CARE's understanding of supporting resilience suitable for the context within Syria?
   - How can the humanitarian sector build/improve on the capacities and actions that households and communities take to build their own resilience in Syria?

4. What systems need to be strengthened to better support the resilience of households and communities in protracted crisis?

The results of this research are meant to contribute nuanced insight and in-depth understanding of resilience in Syria, in order to both inform humanitarian efforts, as well as to reflect on CARE's Resilience Framework[1] which provided the framework for analysis.

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[1] CARE (2016a). Increasing resilience: Theoretical guidance document for CARE International.

Methods

This research prioritised in-depth and community-based qualitative methods, using a Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation and Research (PEER) methodology in which researchers already living in the research communities had access to locations and rapport with participants, that would otherwise have been very difficult and time consuming to achieve by an external field team. In conducting six months of longitudinal, qualitative research, the study included a total of 328 unique participants from 11 governorates (the majority from Aleppo and Homs), residing at the time of research in Idleb, Al Hassakeh, Raqqa, Aleppo and one host community in Jordan.

Participants were visited and re-visited over seven waves of research at two-weekly intervals, and they engaged in a range of guided and non-guided tools, including Key Informant Interviews, Life Stories, and Journaling. Participants were selected using a combination of purposive and convenience sampling, with the aim of capturing a broad variety of demographic features and variety of experiences Syrians faced during the conflict. As qualitative research, the sample is not meant to be representative of Syrians as a whole or any specific subgroup, but to share experiences and voices drawn from a broad range of individuals who may not be linked to any specific humanitarian assistance or programme.

Findings

OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPANTS' CIRCUMSTANCES

- The Syrian conflict context continues to be highly dynamic, and participants are facing multiple risks and hazards that are constantly changing in terms of source, type, intensity, and scale. These risks are complex, with harsh economic circumstances interconnected with continued conflict events and displacements.
- Most participants have been displaced one or more times, and acknowledge the possibility of future displacement for themselves and their families.
- Most participants have faced a massive loss in cash and material assets, livelihoods, and educational opportunities.

The findings are presented according to the four capacities for resilience within CARE's Resilience Framework:

Anticipatory capacity: The ability of individuals, households, and communities to foresee and therefore reduce the impact of hazards that are likely to occur and be ready for unexpected events through prevention, preparedness and planning.

Absorptive capacity: The ability of individuals, households, and communities to accommodate the immediate impact of the shock/stress on their lives, wellbeing, and livelihoods, by making changes in their usual practices and behaviours using available skills and resources, and by managing adverse conditions.

Adaptive capacity: The ability of individuals, households, and communities to adjust their behaviours, practices, lifestyles, and livelihood strategies in response to changed circumstances and conditions under multiple, complex and at times changing risks.

Transformative capacity: The ability of individuals, households, and communities to influence the enabling environment and drivers of risks to create individual and systemic changes on behaviours, local governance and decision-making structures, market economics, and policies and legislation.

ANTICIPATORY CAPACITY

Most participants had received some sort of warning of impending risk (either official or unofficial channels) though it was not always clear whether the warning was reliable.

- Participants trusted and relied upon on horizontal warnings (e.g. those coming from their social networks) the most and generally everyone has access to this information as they share it widely and indiscriminately.
- In many cases the information provided was inadequate to make an informed decision about how to respond.
  - Rural areas and camps received reliable official warnings more often than urban areas, though horizontal mechanisms were still relied upon.
  - People learned over time to observe subtle changes around them to anticipate impending hazards.

Even when participants had adequate warning, they generally lack the ability to prepare due to dwindling savings and assets.

- Over time they have learned to be as well-prepared for unexpected events as possible and understand the importance of preparing for shock events. Because of the multi-risk and multi-hazard environment – wherein the nature and intensity of a shock or stress varied widely – participants have learned to prepare for anything as best as they can, since they will likely need to decide how to act in the instant the hazard is materialising. The degree to which each person can prepare differs, but most are implementing similar preparation strategies, including:
  - Planning the best location to flee to
  - Noting the safest and fastest routes out of town
  - Establishing communication channels
  - Stocking food and/or securing residence
  - Keeping cash on hand or objects that can be carried away and/or sold
- As savings dwindled and with new income insufficient to meet basic needs, people are acutely aware that they should be saving and preparing for another shock event, but they lack the means to do so, causing psychological distress among many.

ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY

Decisions about how to absorb the shock (e.g. to leave or stay) are based on the degree of preparation and nature of the shock. Communities generally stick together in this decision, as it makes the absorption easier.

- For many participants, a higher degree of preparation (e.g. sufficient food stocked, plenty of cash on hand) was an important factor in deciding to stay in their homes in the face of a shock.
- The decision to stay or flee was also dependent on the type and intensity of the conflict event (e.g., burned bridges or road blocks might make escape impossible; ongoing shelling of nearby buildings means that staying is too dangerous). Communities often stayed together in such circumstances, as they cooperatively dealt with the risks at hand.

Savings, cash, and assets make it easier to absorb shocks and stressors, but psychological strength and social networks are just as critical; aid is not relied upon but is welcomed.

- Although people with savings, cash, or specific assets (e.g. a car) absorb more easily because of their ability to access food, transportation to a safer location, safe housing, and healthcare, sometimes no amount of cash or assets would be helpful to absorb a shock.
  - Those without savings or cash turned to family and friends for support, so being in a location where family and friends were nearby (either because they were displaced together, or because they were displaced to a location where they already knew people) was critical.
  - Support from family, community and neighbours was indispensible during all shocks: while fleeing, relocating to new areas and when staying at home during attacks. Participants also depended on social networks during individual shocks (e.g. assistance for disabled relatives, food and supplies for new babies).

- Aid is welcomed but not relied upon, given it has been typically inconsistently available or inadequate.
- Psychological strength is critical, and not necessarily linked to having cash or strong social networks.
  - Certain personal qualities, such as patience, mental strength, self-reliance, and religious beliefs contribute to effectively absorbing in the midst of the worst types of violence and shocks.
  - Substantial change in living conditions (e.g. from urban living to extremely rural or camp life; from being affluent to having nothing) had a negative psychological impact on individuals and families, making them less resilient in this domain despite having cash, family, etc.

ADAPTIVE CAPACITY

People are facing a 'new normal' with livelihoods, education, and gender norms, and are generally willing to adapt to the new normal provided it means stability and consistency.

- Across gender and age, participants are generally willing to adapt to their new normal as it relates to new livelihood strategies, new ways of accessing education, and residing in new locations, even if it is a significant departure from their previous life. Their main hope is for stability in this new normal, and to become less reliant on absorptive and anticipatory strategies to survive.
- Participants however are hopeful but cautious, focusing both on adapting to their new circumstances and remaining aware that they may have to react to new conflict events.
- Women in particular are adapting to very new roles as compared to before the conflict, particularly in terms of pursuing work outside of the home and as heads of households.
  - Many women discovered their potential as they adapt in order to ensure their own and their family's survival, and feel empowered by changes in traditional gender norms.
  - In taking on these new roles, women heads of households often feel incredibly stretched as both breadwinner and primary caregiver of children.
  - There are mixed ideas on the sustainability of new gender norms, and traditional views of gender are still held by some (from both male and female participants).

Education, transferrable skills, and access to finance make adapting easier; social networks are an indispensable safety net for those without such assets.

- Although people who have education, transferable skills, and access to finance (via their own savings or social networks) are better able to adapt to new and longer-term livelihoods, even they are not fully secure in the face of new shocks or stressors. Participants who did find new livelihoods experienced a significant decrease in their income compared to before the conflict.
- People who have strong social networks in a location that they have been displaced to (whether already there, or networks that displaced together) are more likely to effectively adapt to that new location.
- Access to finance (however obtained, e.g. loans, credit, cash aid) and skills training can help those who do not have social networks or higher education in pursuing adaptive strategies.
- The desire to continue education was one of the strongest sentiments from participants when describing their futures or the futures of their children

TRANSFORMATIVE CAPACITY

Social capital is and has been strong, but may be deteriorating.

- Social cohesion is a necessary component of transformative capacity, but the research indicates that while intra-group[2] cohesion and capital is strong in Syria (as it was before the conflict) inter-group cohesion may be degrading as a result of the conflict.
  - The data shows strong enduring social cohesion within groups that existed prior to the conflict (families, neighbourhoods, communities, rural towns) in response to conflict events. However, some participants

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[2] 'Group' refers to those belonging to a social network prior to the conflict, often made up of those living in the same geographical regions/ neighbourhoods or rural towns, and/or members of an immediate and extended family.

note that with communities and families disbanded across the country due to conflict, such social ties may be weakening.

- While there are instances of social cohesion between groups (especially between IDPs and host communities), this cooperation is largely acute and in response to basic survival needs. In terms of recovery and rebuilding, inter-group cohesion, collective action, and social capital across differing ethnic and religious groups, as well as sides of the conflict, is lacking and likely even deteriorating.

Conditions are not yet conducive to policy and systems-level changes.

- While people commented on certain policy and systems-level changes that they feel are needed in both their own communities and beyond as the conflict winds down, there are few concrete ideas about how to accomplish these. Participants noted that this is a result of their present need to focus on surviving and being still in the very active phases of anticipating, absorbing, and adapting.

- The degree to which local governing and decision-making structures were recovering varied by location and was indicated by increased access to and improvements in basic services (e.g. hospitals, schools, water, and sewage systems), as well as reviving markets and public transportation options.
  - Even where these structures exist, trust in and ability to actively participate in local governance and leadership is poor, limiting the degree to which individuals and families can (or feel as though they can) make changes to it.

- Trust in NGOs is also limited, particularly in urban locations. Participants describe lack of access and information related to NGOs, as well as poor cooperation and communication. Where they have been provided aid, it is often described as inadequate or redundant.

Conclusions

Based upon the perspectives of Syrians who partook in this study, defining resilience in Syria requires consideration of (a) straightforward economic and logistical resilience, such as livelihoods activities and access to financial capital at both the household and community levels; (b) characteristics of individuals, households, and communities such as self-reliance, flexibility, and adaptive learning; and (c) the central role of family ties, social cohesion, and community cooperation. Also, self-reliance, diversity and redundancy of skills and resources, flexibility, and adaptive learning feature prominently in descriptions of resilience in Syria among the participants.

It is clear from Syrian participants that resilience is a process, not a set of fixed personal, household, or community traits or assets. The lines between anticipating, absorbing and adapting are particularly difficult to identify in the Syrian context as a result of the protracted nature of the conflict, with new shocks and stressors occurring even after a period of relative stability and of rebuilding one's life. This means that one can effectively shift between these various stages in non-linear ways as needed. Even in a period of relative stability and adaptation, one is always anticipating another potential shock. If and when this does occur, one must be able to immediately use absorptive strategies again, and after absorbing to adapt in an entirely new way yet again.

The most consistent factor that contributes to resilience is social capital. In general, individuals without family resources or support are more vulnerable and exposed to shocks. Simultaneously, there are indications that social capital may be degrading as families and communities are separated and isolated as a result of the conflict. In these cases, cash and financial support may be even more critical for individual and household resilience.

A transformation of gender norms has occurred throughout the country, with women consistently taking on new roles that were previously in the domain of men, and often having to take on multiple roles. However, the nature and strength of such transformation differs both across and within locations, and there were differing opinions from women and men participants on the sustainability and desirability of such change for post-conflict Syria. Among those agreeing that women's increased agency was a positive shift, there was clear agreement that women should be at the centre of their own decisions regarding their lives now and in the future.

Recommendations

The recommendations have been drawn from the findings of this research, reflecting the needs of Syrians in becoming more resilient and how further humanitarian and recovery programming can best support them in Syria. More detailed background to these recommendations is in the findings of the full report.

Helping adapt to the new normal:

- Interventions around providing support for people's livelihoods, education, and settling into a permanent location should acknowledge that people are happy to adapt to a 'new normal', so long as it is a long-term and stable solution.
- Support livelihood interventions that will enable people to find or create long-term opportunities.
  - Support household enterprises and livelihoods that have room and opportunity to grow through a combination of interlinked support: new skills training and apprenticeships alongside providing access to finance and links to employers, entrepreneurial skills training, and market linkages.
  - Stimulate livelihood opportunities in rural areas, in particular where there are limited options beyond subsistence agriculture which pushes people to (less safe and secure) cities.
- Recognise that even within recovery support, programming should allow for quick absorptive/humanitarian interventions, as shocks are regular and often devastating. Flexibility in supporting adaptive capacity should also be part of the programming approach, since what may have been successful previously (what kind of support is needed) may not be successful after a new shock/stressor.
- Facilitate access to education for youth.
  - Explore educational offerings in programming areas, and link youth to education opportunities offered, including distance (virtual) education, accelerated learning, and alternative learning.
  - Provide scholarships for tuition and materials and examination fees.
  - Establish tutoring programmes in communities for college-educated Syrians to work with younger children unable to access school.
  - Identify examination periods and arrange for safe transportation of young people to take exams.

Supporting the continued empowered roles of women in their communities:

- Women should be encouraged to be the centre of their own decisions regarding their lives, now and in the future. Programming should emphasise choice, continued support, and cooperation within communities for women who want to take on new roles and relations that they did not have before, but not forcing women to do so.
- Facilitate dialogues with women, men, couples and youth that include: (a) women role models (in livelihoods and leadership positions); (b) supporting women who choose not to work, maintaining emphasis on their right to power in the domestic sphere and public life, in addition to those who chose new roles; (c) working with men to be advocates supporting gender transformation; (d) ensuring balanced programming with men and women that meets their different needs; (e) monitor potential resentment toward women as a result of these changes.
- Provide tailored support for women's economic empowerment.
  - Support the development of women-led enterprise co-operatives and women who choose to access skills training, asset accumulation and finance.
  - Support single women in their family and economic responsibilities, including those who have effectively absorbed and adapted to life without a husband. This may help women avoid risky situations where they feel the need to rely on a husband at all costs and revert to traditional roles for the sake of keeping themselves and their children supported.
  - Fostering new social networks, community cohesion and providing psycho-emotional support should be key elements of programmes that facilitate women's economic activities, alongside economic empowerment.

Facilitating cooperation between Syrian households and communities and local governing structures and institutions to support recovery:

- Build from existing social networks within cohesive communities to collectively identify local needs, concerns and opportunities. Support inclusion of women, youth and people with disabilities, and use conflict sensitivity, peace building and social cohesion approaches to build social capital.

- Support collaboration between host communities and displaced persons to jointly identify community-wide needs and proposed solutions, including preparedness and early warning, risk identification and risk reduction, asset mapping, market access and development opportunities, etc.

- Facilitate processes and platforms for dialogue between local governing and decision-making structures, institutions, NGOs and community members to encourage collective prioritisation of issues. These can also be used for communication of information by local leaders and institutions, and community members for raising concerns and feedback.

- Work collaboratively to identify ways to address these needs and opportunities and improve service provision at a local level and with local resources (from local leadership, institutions, private sector and community members themselves).

Improving humanitarian support:

- An initial phase of regaining trust and confidence may be a necessary first step of any programming. Expect that people may have ambivalent – and sometimes negative – attitudes toward interventions delivered by NGOs that have been helpful and even indispensable at times, but also highly unreliable, inconsistent, and sometimes untrustworthy.

- Improve communications and consistent provision of assistance. Continue to provide cash, food, and shelter to those in immediate need, and provide clear explanations (as possible) to those receiving it about what they may be able to expect next, and when, to reduce even further uncertainty in their lives.

- Consider the psycho-social needs that all Syrians may have and recognise the impact of trauma on people's ability to recover, regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, age, education level, or displacement status; offer or link them to services accordingly.

- Consider how to support those hardest to reach, particularly:
  - Returnees and people integrated into host communities (not in camps)
  - People who remained in beseiged areas
  - People with disabilities and special needs

- For sustainable recovery and more robust resilience, individual and household capacities and characteristics must connect outwards towards community, regional, and ultimately national systems. This is particularly relevant when planning humanitarian and longer term efforts, as it emphasises various points of entry situated within complex and dynamic social and political systems.

- Communities often stayed together in deciding to stay or flee in the face of an attack or other shock and to work cooperatively together. In arriving to a host community, some participants described the support provided to IDPs by community members to help them deal with being displaced. Those who stayed at home during heightened conflict relied even more heavily on family, friends and neighbours, establishing self-supporting networks of assistance (e.g. vehicles, provision of supplies, access to goods to purchase, etc.). In the recovery and rebuilding phases, possible degradation of social cohesion may have very real consequences for effectiveness. Provide humanitarian support in ways which support and strengthen social networks and social cohesion, and self-supporting networks of assistance to provide a strong foundation for future recovery.

- Engaging youth and women in the delivery and leadership of humanitarian programming can support empowerment, strengthen social networks and the benefits these bring (e.g. information dissemination, social cohesion), increase the skills from which they can build for future recovery, and ensure their particular needs are addressed.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The research

This research study, *Understanding resilience: Perspectives from Syrians*, sought to examine what resilience means for people inside Syria from the perspective of Syrians themselves. CARE's extensive work on resilience globally was used to develop an initial conceptual framework, which was also informed by literature specific to conflict contexts. The purpose of the research was both to refine this conceptual framework to reflect the particular context of Syria today, and also to answer a number of specific research questions meant to inform humanitarian programming inside Syria. These research questions are:

1. What does resilience mean from the perspective of people living in Syria?

   - What capacities do households and communities use and what strategies do households and communities adopt to become resilient in such a changing context?
   - What are the main factors that affect household and community resilience in an active conflict area?

2. How has the conflict affected the role of women within their families and communities (positively and negatively)?

3. How does it relate to the humanitarian community's and CARE's definitions of resilience?

   - Is CARE's understanding of supporting resilience suitable for the context within Syria?
   - How can the humanitarian sector build/improve on the capacities and actions that households and communities take to build their own resilience in Syria?

4. What systems need to be strengthened to better support the resilience of households and communities in protracted crisis?

In August 2018, CARE Syria and CARE International UK contracted GK Consulting LLC (US) to conduct a six-month research study on resilience with participants inside accessible areas of Syria. This research intended to contribute new, in-depth understanding of resilience for programming inside Syria, and to feed into CARE's broader resilience

conceptual framework and programming. Due to access challenges, the research was conducted by working virtually with local researchers already inside the country. These research team members were residing within or very near to the communities selected as study locations and involved participants who were not necessarily recipients of support through CARE's programming in Syria.

In conducting six months of longitudinal, qualitative research across nine locations inside Syria, this report aims to highlight the voices, perspectives, and embedded capacities of those who partook in this research. The research has prioritised depth, detail, and nuance of individual and community experiences, thereby providing a unique opportunity for Syrians to speak for themselves as empowered agents capable of critical insights into their own circumstances and their own futures.

1.2. Background and context

1.2.1. SYRIA CONFLICT CONTEXT

In March 2011, spurred by regional events, protests against the Syrian regime erupted and calls for president Bashar al-Assad to step down quickly escalated into violence. By July 2012, the conflict had escalated into civil war between the regime and a number of armed resistance groups. Over the course of eight years of war, the Assad regime has been challenged by dozens of armed resistance movements characterised by frequent fragmenting and realignment, many of which have received material and financial support from regional and global actors, each with their own stake in Syria's political future.

Prior to 2011, Syria was considered a middle income country with strong state and community capacity.[3] Syria's economy was comprised primarily of the agricultural and oil sectors, which together accounted for approximately one half of total GDP.[4] Seventeen percent of the population was employed in agriculture, with strong government support and subsidies. Severe drought occurred between 2006 and 2011, with dust storms destroying topsoil and devastating the agricultural pillar of the Syrian economy. Many analyses of the conflict point to this economic stress as a major trigger for the subsequent social and political unrest.[5]

The conflict dynamics in this war have been shaped by a complex map of stakeholders and actors both inside and outside the country, each with separate political, ideological, and economic motivations. This has included conflict-related deaths of 465,000 civilians (including 3,890 children); the use of chemical weapons against civilians by the Assad regime; mass displacement of Syrians both out of country (5.6 million) and within its borders (6.2 million); airstrikes and military action taken on the part of other countries (including the United States and its allies, Russia, Iran, Israel, and Turkey); proxy wars and complex regional and global geopolitics; and the emergence of the Islamic State/ISIL/associated groups. The complexity of relationships between various armed groups inside the country, exemplified by hostilities between regime forces, ISIL, various rebel groups, Kurdish fighters, and the Syrian Defence Forces, has compounded confusion and mistrust amongst civilians.

Progress towards resolution throughout the conflict occurred to little result; the UN Security Council was involved in diplomatic efforts beginning in 2011, with the fourth round of peace negotiations failing in Geneva in 2017. By March 2019, regime forces had retaken much of the country, with rebel holdouts in Idleb and Kurdish control of Raqqa, Al Hasakeh, parts of Deir ez-Zor, and northern rural Aleppo. Air raids and bombing attacks on civilian areas continued from April 2019 to the current time (August 2019) in Hama and Idleb.

In both areas where levels of conflict are declining and areas where conflict is escalating, critical humanitarian needs remain. Currently, 6.2 million Syrians are internally displaced across the country, with 11.7 million in need of

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[3] World Bank Group (2017). The toll of war: The economic and social consequences of the conflict in Syria.
[4] World Bank Group (2017).
[5] See, for example: Selby, J., Dahi, O., Frohlich C., Hulme, M. (2017). Climate change and the Syrian civil war revisited. Political Geography 60: 232-244; Gleich, P. (2014). Water, drought, climate change, and conflict in Syria. American Meteorological Society.

humanitarian assistance.[6] Syrian civilians have borne the brunt of the violence, with vast and absolute destruction to both urban and rural stretches of the country. By 2018, over 50% of Syria's social infrastructure had been destroyed.[7] In 2019, nearly one third of the population is considered food insecure.[8]

Regular internal displacement continues. Between January and December of 2018, over 1.6 million population movements were recorded across the country. During that same time, approximately 1.4 million people returned to their homes from internal displacement. Today, 86% of internally displaced persons live in urban areas.[9]

Critical protection concerns persist, with civilians exposed to a myriad of interconnected, complex risks, including: direct exposure to conflict and its effects (e.g. death, injury, trauma and psychosocial concerns, use of torture, recruitment of children to conflict groups, separated families); both new and protracted displacement; poor living conditions in camps and both formal and informal IDP settlements; unstable markets; lack of documentation; lack of job and income-generating opportunities; and lack of access to basic services such as healthcare, sanitation, and clean water. It is estimated that nearly half of all healthcare facilities are not at all or only partially functional. One in three schools have been damaged or destroyed in the conflict, which relates directly to global concerns over the "lost generation" of children and adolescents.[10] Dangers related to mines, crime, gender-based violence, and early marriage persist.

Both the massive and irregular displacements of people and the destruction of infrastructure in urban and rural areas have depleted livelihood activity and plunged most Syrians (an estimated 69%) into extreme poverty.[11] The severity and complexity of the situation has led to acute need in the case of 5 million Syrians.[12] Negative coping mechanisms for unrelenting and unpredictable economic shocks are reported across Syria. These include, for example, reduced food consumption, early marriage, and child labour.

UNOCHA's 2019 Syria Humanitarian Needs Assessment notes that "the scale and severity of unmet needs suggests that the overall resilience capacity of the population to respond to shocks is increasingly limited." By 2018 nearly half of all social infrastructure in the country had been destroyed. Rebuilding amidst ongoing hostilities throughout the country has been insignificant, and this lack of essential infrastructure has posed barriers to seeking adequate livelihoods and basic services for Syrians throughout the country. Lack of infrastructure has further impeded local and regional economic recovery, as well as the ability for those displaced to return home.

Currently, 3.4 million Syrians are in need of assistance to repair demolished, uninhabitable homes. Electricity is limited and unreliable in many parts of the country, which impacts other essential services, such as health care, clean water, food storage, and security. Estimates from 2015 indicated that over 83% of Syrians then lived below poverty line; UNOCHA suggests that in 2019 this has worsened. At the end of 2018, half of Syrians of working age were not partaking in income-generating activities.

1.2.2. RESILIENCE CONTEXT IN SYRIA – THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

There is much indication, however, that the embedded capacities (i.e. knowledge, skills, physical or financial savings and assets, relationships, and networks) within Syrian households and communities indicate myriad forms of resilience. Mercy Corps' 2018 research found that roughly one-third of Syrian households have found ways to adapt livelihood activities, and households that have initiated new activities fare far better in indicators such as food security and higher expenditures. Functioning markets are found in even the most besieged areas; access and proximity to such markets strongly predicts household welfare and propensity for livelihood adaptability.[13]

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[6] UNOCHA (2019). 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview.
[7] UNOCHA (2018). 2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview.
[8] UNOCHA (2019).
[9] UNOCHA (2019).
[10] UNOCHA (2019).
[11] UNOCHA (2019).
[12] UNOCHA (2019).
[13] Mercy Corps (2018). The wages of war: Learning from how Syrians have adapted their livelihoods through seven years of conflict.

Key findings from humanitarian actors in the resilience sector in Syria indicate that: (a) access to loans and capital (e.g. remittances) improve both food security and newly-initiated economic activity; (b) access to social networks and social capital are associated with higher food security, higher expenditures, and improved housing conditions; (c) significant changes in household labour breakdown – and, in particular, the greater frequency of women and youth income earners – has occurred, and these come with opportunity costs (e.g. leaving education); and (d) there is a strong preference for cash-based interventions in humanitarian intervention.[14]

Despite the overwhelming scale and severity of the Syrian context, the capacity of individuals and families to absorb shocks is emphasised across the literature. In terms of livelihood activities, the needs and actions of women, adolescents and youth highlight important avenues for supporting and building resilience. Much of the research within Syria to date has focused largely around livelihoods, which offers important but only partial perspective on resilience broadly. Expanding this focus beyond livelihoods and economic activity was, thus, an important priority for this research.

Syria remains dynamic, complex, and unpredictable. People remain in circumstances of acute humanitarian need. Throughout the research participants were dealing with continuing shocks and stresses: in January 2019 flooding in Idleb destroyed camps and homes[15]; conflict and insecurity returned to Izaz and disrupted economies and feelings of safety; and serious poverty is still the norm in locations like Al Hassakeh. While research participants noted their desire and attempts at long-term, sustainable, recovery-oriented efforts, they also described fear of continued conflict and the need for immediate cash assistance. While certain locations inside Syria are already receiving early recovery support and others may be transitioning to the recovery phase, parts of the country continue to experience acute humanitarian need. The provision of assistance, support, and ultimately reconciliation and governing within such insecurity is highly complex.

1.3. Resilience: a conceptual framework for Syria

CARE International's global theory of change (TOC) for programmes that increase resilience suggests: ***"If the capacities and assets to deal with various shocks, stresses and uncertainty are built and supported and if drivers of risk are reduced and if these actions are supported by an enabling environment, then resilience is increased."***[16] The Syria Resilience Consortium[17], a collaboration of six international NGOs working with over 10 local partners and led by CARE, has defined resilience as "the ability of people, households, communities, countries and systems to absorb, adapt to and recover from shocks and stresses." CARE International in Syria is delivering a four-year DFID-funded Syria Resilience Programme from 2016-2020, and is reflecting this overall theory of change in its approach to support resilience among Syrians.

The literature on resilience broadly offers a myriad of definitions, conceptual frameworks, and theories of change for both humanitarian and development programming globally. An integral aspect of this research, reflected in the first research question, was to capture aspects of this cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary field that are relevant, applicable, and true on the ground inside Syria today. Critical to this goal was the understanding that resilience is multidimensional, dynamic, and complex, and thus required holistic and cross-sectoral examination.

In humanitarian contexts particularly, individual, household, and community resilience is often considered within a typology of resilience capacities. CARE's own conceptual framework for understanding resilience in the face of complex humanitarian emergency is built around these four capacities, and the definitions for each are offered in Box 1.

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[14] Mercy Corps (2018).

[15] Since April 2019, renewed airstrikes by the Syrian and Russian governments in Idleb province have led to over 400,000 people displaced from northern Hama and southern Idleb, and hundreds of civilians have been killed or injured due to airstrikes and shelling since late April, according to the UN as of 4 September 2019: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/nwsyria_sitrep12_20sept2019.pdf

[16] CARE (2016a).

[17] The Syria Resilience Consortium is a consortium of CARE, Danish Refugee Council, Humanity and Inclusion, International Rescue Committee, Norwegian Refugee Council, and Mercy Corps who work in partnership with 10+ Syrian NGOs. The partners came together in 2016 around a long-term vision for the Syrian humanitarian crisis, aiming to reach conflict-affected communities to help restore their livelihoods and strengthen their capacity to respond to shocks. The consortium's work involves administration of programming via multiple funding streams, and is led by CARE. For more information on the Syria Resilience Consortium, see: https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/development-blog/embracing-the-spirit-of-consortium-it-s-about-making-the-right-investments-not-cutting-delivery-costs

Box 1: Resilience capacities[18]

Anticipatory capacity: The ability of individuals, households, and communities to foresee and therefore reduce the impact of hazards that are likely to occur and be ready for unexpected events through prevention, preparedness and planning.

Absorptive capacity: The ability of individuals, households, and communities to accommodate the immediate impact of the shock/stress on their lives, wellbeing, and livelihoods, by making changes in their usual practices and behaviours using available skills and resources, and by managing adverse conditions.

Adaptive capacity: The ability of individuals, households, and communities to adjust their behaviours, practices, lifestyles, and livelihood strategies in response to changed circumstances and conditions under multiple, complex and at times changing risks.

Transformative capacity: The ability of individuals, households, and communities to influence the enabling environment and drivers of risks to create individual and systemic changes on behaviours, local governance and decision-making structures, market economics, and policies and legislation.

The initial methods of this research were structured around these capacities in order to reflect CARE's conceptual framework. Recent Syria research elaborated on the devastating economic and social infrastructural impacts of the war,[19] including emphasising gender and experiences of women.[20] The research team drew on programme literature and learning from multiple relevant sectors, including livelihoods, governance, peace-building, community development, protection, health and nutrition, with strong emphasis on gender and vulnerability across these.[21]

Initial data throughout the research illuminated the centrality of social relationships to resilience inside Syria, which is another component of the CARE resilience framework.[22] Based on this strong emphasis by participants, further questions were then iterated to more deeply explore the significance of social capital for resilience, which includes "features of social organisation, such as networks, norms, and social trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit."[23] Three types of social capital were distinguished – bonding, bridging, and linking (defined in Box 2) – in order to assess the relationship between particular social relationships and resilience capacities. Literature notes the significant contribution of bonding and bridging social capital to the anticipatory, absorptive, and adaptive forms of resilience, as well as the critical role of bridging and linking social capital in transformative processes.[24] While degradation of certain aspects of social capital inside Syria has been documented at the height of the conflict,[25] the team sought here to delve into such relationships in depth, in order to extract greater detail and understanding of the importance of these for Syrians improving their resilience today and for the future.

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[18] CARE (2016a), p.6.
[19] Mercy Corps (2018).
[20] CARE (2016b). Women, work & war: Syrian women and the struggle to survive five years of conflict.
[21] See 'Concepts and dilemmas of statebuilding in fragile states: From fragility to resilience', OECD/DAC Discussion Paper, March 2008; Barbara Walter, Conflict relapse and the sustainability of post-conflict peace, Input Paper, WDR 2011; CARE (2016b).
[22] Within the CARE Resilience Framework, social capital is identified as part of the capitals and assets which provide the foundation for people to build their capacities. See CARE (2016a).
[23] Putnam, R. (1995). Tuning in, tuning out: The strange disappearance of social capital in America. PS: Political science & politics, 28(4), 664-683.
[24] Bernier, Q., Meinzen-Dick, R. (2014). Resilience and social capital (Vol. 4). Intl Food Policy Res Inst.
[25] Syrian Centre for Policy Research (SCPR) (2017). The conflict impact on social capital: Social degradation in Syria.

Box 2: Social capital definitions[26]

Bonding social capital: Describes strong ties and relationships within a network, community, or group among people who are already similar in some way (e.g. family members, close friends, neighbours, and community members). It brings together those who already have some affinity.

Bridging social capital: Describes weaker, more diffuse ties which link or cut across communities or groups. It can include networks and contacts between different or heterogenous groups (e.g. from different backgrounds, locations, or communities).

Linking social capital: Describes relationships between those in different social positions of power or authority. Includes networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal, or institutionalised power or authority gradients in society.

Initial rounds of data also underlined the idea of resilience as process, rather than a set of individual traits or assets.[27] It confirmed that resilience and vulnerability were not mutually exclusive, and that ideas about resilience (i.e. research question 1) are dynamic, interwoven, and potentially change over time. Thus, the questions in subsequent data gathering were iterated to capture the evolving concept of resilience from the perspective of respondents. The conceptual framework for the research, which used CARE's framework as the basis, was simultaneously refined to reflect these ideas.

Ultimately, the conceptual framework that guided this research (a) reflects alignment with CARE's definitions and global experience in supporting resilience; (b) elaborates on important themes such as social capital which are highly prioritised in the Syrian context; and (c) maps how certain principles of resilience broadly interweave with social and political systems, processes of aid and recovery, and multilevel relationships. In particular, (b) and (c) emerged from the data and are a strong reflection of the perspectives of Syrians who participated in the research.

This adapted conceptual framework is displayed in two figures below. Figure 1 offers a broad overview of resilience and response in the Syria context, and Figure 2 illustrates how the elements of resilience shared by participants correspond to the components of the framework. This framework provides a tailored understanding of CARE's resilience framework for Syria, which emphasises the aspects that are prioritised by people within Syria that they feel have been critical for their own resilience. These specific elements of resilience are elaborated on in the Findings section of this report and the cross-cutting themes related to them are explored in the Conclusions section.

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[26] Aldridge, S., Halpern, D., Fitzpatrick, S. (2002). Social capital: A discussion paper. London, England: Performance and Innovation Unit.
[27] Ungar, M. (2018). What works: A manual for designing programs that build resilience. Resilience Research Centre; Masten, A. (2014). Global perspectives on resilience in children and youth. Child development, 85(1), 6-20.

Figure 1: Adapted resilience conceptual framework for the Syria research[28]

Individual and Community Resilience

Response

Multi-risk context

social capital

Transformative
Capacity

Adaptive
Capacity

Absorptive
Capacity

Anticipatory
Capacity

enabling environment / factors

Stressor / shock severity of impact

**Reduce causes of
vulnerability and
exposure**

long-term
development

recovery

humanitarian
intervention

**Address impact of
shocks / stressors**

Figure 2: Aspects of resilience, environment, and response in Syria[29]

Risks, shocks, stressors:

**Conflict event
Economic stress / shock
Displacement
Immediate loss
Injury / health problem
Trauma / mental health**

Transformative Capacity:

**Linking social capital
Bridging social capital
Formal safety nets
Access to markets, infrastructure
Adaptive learning**

Adaptive Capacity:

**Flexibility
Diversity and redundancy
Adaptive learning
Bonding social capital
Bridging social capital
Linking social capital
Savings / assets
Personal traits**

Absorptive Capacity:

**Self reliance
Flexibility
Savings / assets
Bonding social capital
Bridging social capital
Aid / support**

Anticipatory Capacity:

**Warning mechanisms
Preparedness
Bonding social capital
Bridging social capital**

Enabling factors:

**Family support: financial, logistical, emotional
Community support
Savings / assets
Livelihoods
Aid received
Personal traits**

[28] Adapted from Béné, C., Headey, D., Haddad, L., von Grebmer, K. (2016). Is resilience a useful concept in the context of food security and nutrition programmes? Some conceptual and practical considerations. Food Security, 8(1), 123-138; CARE (2016), p.5.

[29] The details provided here point to factors that are relevant to the particular capacities, conflict context, and risks/shocks/stressors based upon our research findings. Each are elaborated upon in the findings section of this report.

2. APPROACH AND METHODS

The longitudinal, qualitative research took place over six months, with seven waves of data collection every two weeks, using multiple qualitative data collection methods. The team was comprised of:

- **An international team:** consisting of a US-based consultant team and a Jordan-based coordination and quality control team.
- **Local field teams:** contracted, trained, and supported by the international team. These data collectors oversaw the data collection process, selecting and training volunteers, and gave valuable reflections and insight into adaptations and learning from the data.
- **Volunteers:** 2-3 in each community who were selected and trained by local field teams. They were involved throughout the duration of the project and conducted "story harvesting" with different participants for each wave of research.
- **Research participants:** in each community, participants were identified and interviewed by the volunteers, most of whom participated through multiple waves of the research.

2.1. Locations

The study included a total of 328 unique participants[30] in nine communities, originating from 11 governorates (the majority from Aleppo and Homs), residing at the time of research in Idleb, Al Hassakeh, Raqqa, Aleppo and one host community in Jordan (see Figure 3 and Table 1). Four of the communities were urban/peri urban, four were rural, and one was a camp in Jordan. These areas were selected based on where CARE could support access and ensure security and safety for the Syrian research teams – four governorates in the non-government-controlled areas of Syria, and one refugee community in Jordan.

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[30] In the analysis, focus group discussions are treated as one participant and coded based on the gender of the group (always separated by male and female), location at time of research, and displacement status (which was often matched across groups). Education level, age, and location of origin often differed within a group, and as such, no codes were assigned in those cases. Accordingly, when presenting tables disaggregated by age or education, FGDs are left out of the counts. As each focus group had 6-8 people participating, the actual number of unique respondents who took part in any portion of this study is approximately 528.

Figure 3: Participant governorates of origin and research locations
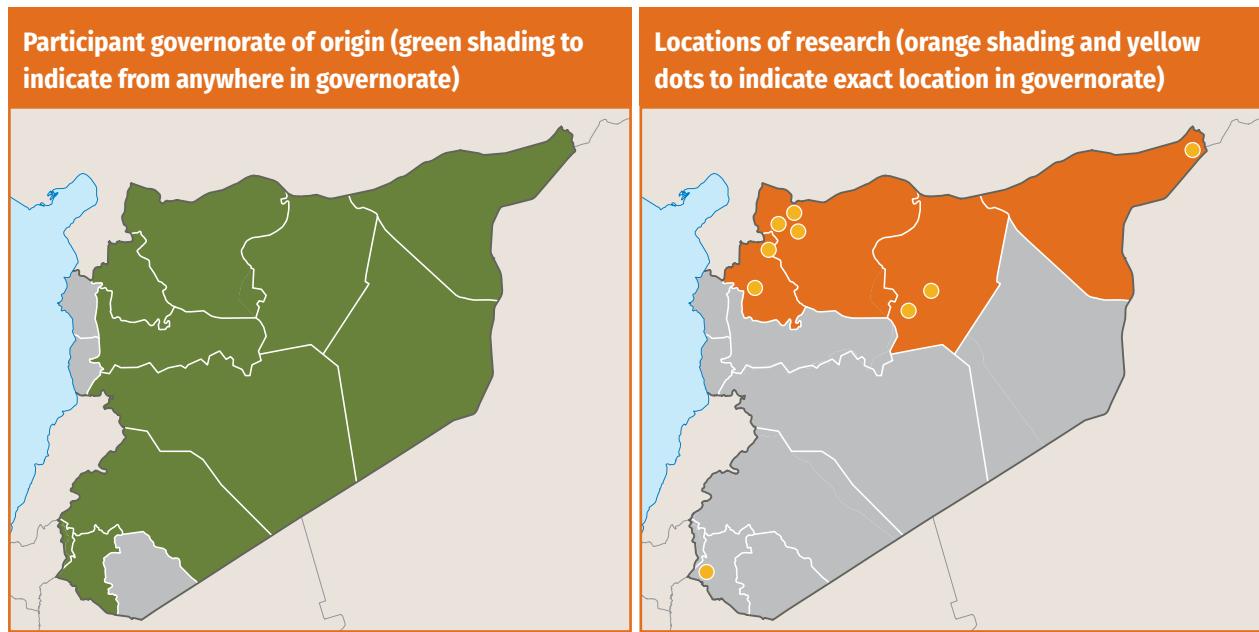
Table 1: Number of unique participants, by governorate of origin and location at time of research, disaggregated by gender[31]

	Place of origin among those displaced at time of research			Location at time of research		
	Female	**Male**	**Total**	**Female**	**Male**	**Total**
Al Hassakeh	7	0	7	11	0	11
Aleppo	91	43	134	75	63	138
Damascus	6	0	7	0	0	0
Dara'a	0	6	6	0	0	0
Deir ez-Zor	4	0	4	0	0	0
Hama	12	0	12	0	0	0
Homs	48	42	90	0	0	0
Idleb	11	0	11	60	14	74
Quneitra	8	6	14	0	0	0
Ramtha (Jordan)	0	0	0	11	5	16
Raqqa	5	0	5	57	29	86
Rural Damascus	17	10	27	0	0	0
Unknown	5	4	11	0	0	0
TOTAL	214	111	328	214	111	328

[31] As a result of difficulty matching demographic surveys with notes in a few cases, 10 participants were not identifiable by place of origin and three participants in the research were not identifiable by gender, only location.

2.2. Participants

Participants were selected using a combination of purposive and convenience sampling, always with the aim of capturing a broad variety of demographic features and a variety of experiences Syrians faced during the conflict. The research was intended to have a strong focus on women's experiences, thus the majority of participants were women. Participants were not selected based on involvement in CARE programming or receipt of any other assistance. This was a deliberate approach, as the focus of the research was to understand the resilience of Syrians and their own capacities from their own experiences, and not a reflection on humanitarian programming specifically.

Table 2 provides a summary of the demographic characteristics of the 328 unique participants who participated in the study, whether in one or multiple waves.

Table 2: Participant characteristics, all waves during the data collection phase

Themes		Female (n=214)	Male (n=111)	Total (n=328)
Education level	None	7%	0%	5%
	Some or completed Primary / Junior	25%	23%	24%
	Some or completed Secondary	15%	18%	16%
	Some or completed University	30%	42%	34%
	Unknown	23%	16%	21%
Displacement status	Presently displaced	50%	59%	52%
	Returnee	7%	0%	5%
	Never displaced	19%	24%	21%
	Unknown	24%	17%	22%
Living in urban / rural / camp area at time of research	Urban / peri urban	45%	39%	43%
	Rural	43%	34%	39%
	Camp	12%	27%	17%
Age	18 - 35	47%	54%	49%
	36 +	30%	27%	29%
	Unknown	23%	19%	22%

2.3. Data collection methods

The research was conducted using Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation and Research (PEER) approaches,[32] in which researchers are members of the communities in which they undertake data collection and are able to conducted repeated visits to each community. The value of this approach was fourfold:

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[32] The PEER method is a way to gain understanding of the lives and experiences of people in a community through collecting stories and narratives. Specifically, community members are trained to develop and conduct interviews within their own networks, so that participants feel comfortable and safe discussing their lives, feelings, and experiences. The method is truly community-based and prioritises the contextual and experiential knowledge of the field team members, who are thus well-equipped to get exact, nuanced, and in-depth information. Our methods and toolkits for PEER were developed and adapted using: Elmusharaf, K., Byrne, E., Manandhar, M., Hemmings, J., OïDonovan, D. (2017). Participatory ethnographic evaluation and research: Reflections on the research approach used to understand the complexity of maternal health issues in South Sudan. Qualitative health research, 27(9), 1345-1358; International Planned Parenthood Fund. (2013). Rapid peer review handbook. Explore: Toolkit for involving young people as researchers in sexual and reproductive health programmes; Price, N., Hawkins, K. (2002). Researching sexual and reproductive behaviour: a peer ethnographic approach. Social science & medicine, 55(8), 1325-1336.

1. PEER methodology with repeat visits ensured a high level of rapport between each researcher and participant, opening up the possibility for deep conversation. Obtaining this level of trust to discuss issues that were particular to each respondent was critical in order to delve deeply into the concept of resilience in Syria.

2. Multiple visits with the same participants allowed the research team to conduct additional participant-specific exploration into issues based on previous interview data and what was emerging as critical information for the broader research project. Multiple visits also allowed for the refinement of methods and tools.

3. Multiple visits over this period allowed for a critical look at how dynamic the situation in Syria is. In many situations, ongoing and new shocks and stressors occurred, and the research team was able to discuss participants' coping mechanisms, as well as the changes to their situation, in real time. As well, the team was able to observe how people's ideas, ambitions, and situations shifted over time.

4. Researchers were able to identify the participants themselves and were not constrained by requirements to speak to humanitarian assistance/project beneficiaries only, or other stakeholders who may have particular interests. The research was not associated with any organisation or agency and was driven by the teams in Syria in order to be as neutral as possible.

Via this PEER approach, key informant interviews (KII), focus group discussions (FGD), life stories, and journaling (each elaborated on below) were conducted. In addition to conducting 229 one-time KIIs or FGDs across nine communities, 106 people were interviewed three or more times. Ultimately, hundreds of pages of detailed narrative were collected that provided significant depth of responses.

Of the 328 unique participants, 139 were part of Waves 1 and/or 2, during which they participated in semi-structured interviews in a one-on-one or focus group setting with questions designed to mirror CARE's resilience framework. During Wave 3, 98 additional participants were included and interviews focused on questions relating to their livelihoods, past and present. Seventy participants took part in Waves 4, 5, and 6 to share their life stories through more in-depth and personalised interviews (thus fewer total respondents in those waves). Twenty people wrote in journals over one or more waves throughout the study. Wave 7 involved in-depth interviews with members of the research team about what they had learned and their own experiences and ideas about resilience. Table 3, below, provides the number of interviews conducted and journal entries collected by wave and by method, along with the number of unique participants per method. Several respondents provided more than one interview, life story narrative, or journal entry.

Table 3: Number of interviews/entries, by method, by wave

Method	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6	Wave 7	# unique participants		
								Female	Male	Total
Journal		12	10	8	8	5	0	17	3	20
FGD Capacities	8	15	0	0	0	0	0	13	10	23
KII Capacities	76	87	0	1	1	2	0	81	32	115
FGD Livelihoods	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	6	1	7
KII Livelihoods	0	0	138	0	0	0	0	45	34	81
Life story	0	0	19	64	50	33	0	45	25	70
Team debrief	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	7	6	13
Total	**87**	**118**	**168**	**76**	**59**	**40**	**13**	**214**	**111**	**328**

2.4. Iteration and validation of methods and findings

The process of collecting and analysing data was frequent and iterative, and allowed for adaptation of both the methods and the research design. Table 3, above, summarises the methods used during each wave. The objective of the first two waves of data collection was to form a general understanding of the issues specific to each community.

These two waves were characterised by targeting a large number of participants with short, closed-ended surveys and developing community profiles. In these waves, participants were asked about their experiences over the course of the conflict, with particular emphasis on describing certain shocks and stressors, and how they and their families coped.

Also in Wave 2, participants who volunteered were asked to keep journals and write as often as they wished. Participants were guided by prompts at each wave, and follow-up prompts specific to their previous entries (see Figure 4).

During Wave 3, field teams revisited some of the same people from Waves 1 and 2, as well as new participants, and conducted only key informant interviews. During this wave, teams asked specific questions related to livelihoods.

At this point, a preliminary report of findings and methodological challenges was prepared for Wave 1 and reviewed by CARE staff. While Wave 3 was underway, two full-day learning events were held with GK and CARE

Figure 4: Journaling page

staff in Lebanon and Turkey to gain feedback and steer on the next waves. This helped focus the research on gaining deeper information to learn more about resilience, focusing on depth and quality of data over sample size.

At Wave 4 a new methodology was introduced: the collection of life stories (see Figure 5). This involved selecting a smaller sample of participants in each community. Field researchers spent a longer time with each and constructed life timelines in which participants discussed key moments in their lives (before and during the war) and were asked questions related to their resilience about each of these moments.

The same participants were visited again for Waves 5 and 6, with specific follow-up questions. This generated significantly more in-depth and nuanced information about resilience and allowed us to situate participants' descriptions and perceptions of resilience within their larger context.

2.5. Analysis

Because of the qualitative and varied methods used over the course of five months, a flexible and adaptive approach to analysis was adopted. While specific themes and research questions formed the foundation of the methods, analysis of the dataset incorporated inductive approaches as well. This allowed additional themes to emerge with each wave, which were often followed up on in subsequent waves of data collection.

The general method for analysis involved coding each individual interview or focus group discussion according to specific categories and themes (both predetermined and inductive), and then counting the number of KIIs/FGDs coded on each theme. This method allowed for quantifying the incidence of people expressing certain concerns or feelings. Responses were disaggregated by location, gender, education level, displacement status, and age group to offer comparison. The structure of the analysis differed across waves based on lines of questioning. For example, specific codes related to each of the four resilience capacities were used for Wave 1 and 2 data in which specific questions related to the capacities were asked, but not for other waves.[33] Additionally, other codes (e.g. feelings

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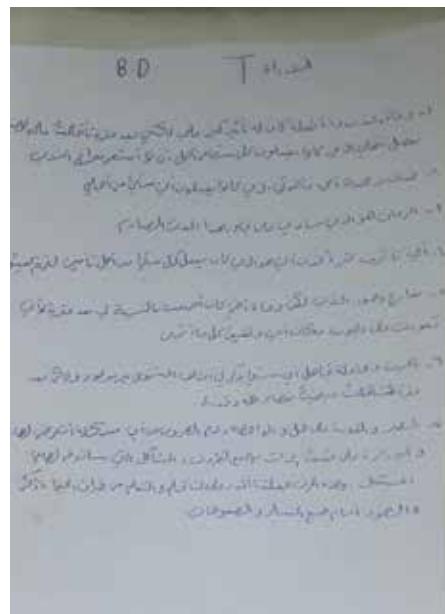
[33] For Wave 3 and on, the teams no longer used the questionnaires based on capacities, so certain codes were no longer relevant for the later data. As stated above, these later waves instead focused on more in-depth, individual- or community-specific lines of questioning that were developed based on data from previous waves.

about the future) were used in all waves of data. Throughout this report, in each case where data is presented, the waves from which it comes is specified.

The analysis tables presented in this report show the frequency of coding on each theme in the qualitative data. Tables with numerical data and percentages are not meant to be interpreted as quantitative data. Rather, they offer a numerical depiction of the codes contained in the qualitative dataset to show relative prevalence of each theme discussed. Because the tables are based on coding of open-ended data, the percentages will not always add up to 100%. This is because responses may be coded on more than one theme (e.g. when participants give more than one type of response to the same question) and/or because responses may not be coded on any of the themes (e.g. when participants do not give a response related to a particular theme). As in most qualitative research, no response options were provided to participants; the themes presented in the tables are based on the most commonly given response types. This analysis approach differs from quantitative research, in which participants are asked more specific questions and given response options. Finally, where comparisons are made between subgroups, these should not be interpreted as representative of all members of the subgroups. Instead, the comparisons should be interpreted as between individuals *in our sample only* which may be illustrative of trends but cannot confirm or accurately measure their scope.
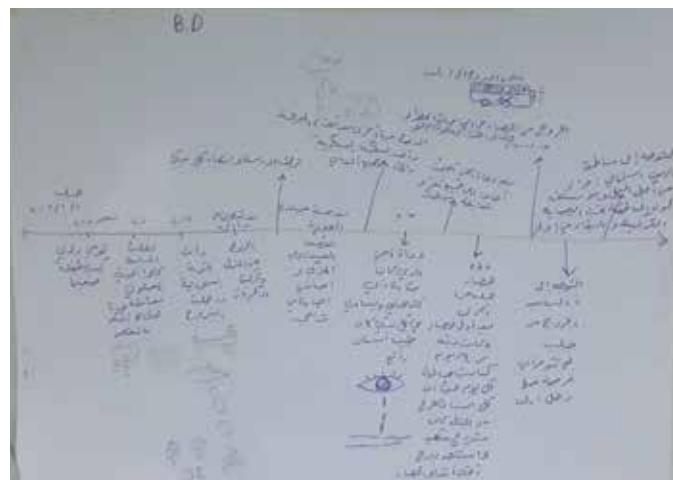
2.6. Ethical considerations

Being conducted inside Syria with a remote team, undertaking this research required a keen understanding of the situation on the ground and how the frequently changing, high-risk environment may exacerbate the situation. As such, rigorous ethical protocols[34] were established during the inception phase. Additionally, the complexity of the conflict context required the research team to adapt to ever-changing human and political threats to civilians and stability. Thus, the team incorporated a peace-building and violence prevention lens into the overarching approach. Every field team member underwent an intensive training module on research ethics that included detailed information on:

- How to obtain informed consent; making clear to participants that their participation is voluntary and can be stopped at any point they wish. Each participant is read a statement of informed consent, given a copy, and asked to sign it by hand (at every wave of research to allow the opportunity for them to leave the study).
- How to maintain anonymity for participants (assigning each a code; never using names in documentation).
- How to conduct research with vulnerable people, including youth.
- How to ensure confidentiality for participants, transmitting data and destroying hard copies, and securing field notes in a private location and destroying them after sending to field manager.
- Protocols for reporting child protection and other issues to CARE staff (as per CARE guidelines for such situation).
- Paying close attention to field conditions and observing if it is unsafe for researchers or participants, even if it is only a slight feeling of something wrong, to suspend research temporarily or permanently.

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[34] For further detail, please contact CARE international UK for the research toolkit, which includes the full ethical protocols.

2.7. Quality control

To maintain quality of the data collection, the core GK team (a) prepared training videos in Arabic that presented the research process and each of the tools; (b) reviewed data collected during piloting of the tools and provided follow up training as needed; and (c) implemented a knowledge assessment that each of the team members was required to complete before receiving approval to begin the research tasks. During the data collection phase, field teams checked frequently with the Jordan-based coordinator. The field teams provided sample data and asked clarifying questions, and the international team provided feedback. After each wave of data collection, the core GK team reviewed all new data and conveyed appropriate follow-up questions and notes on methods for the field team members through weekly debrief and reflection sessions. These regular debrief meetings also provided an opportunity for the research team to share experiences, provide support to each other and trobuleshoot challenges.

2.8. Considerations and limitations

As with any field research in a complex environment, there were some limitations to the design, implementation, analysis, and interpretation of the research.

The research was only conducted in four non-government-controlled governorates, where access was feasible. As much as possible, the teams tried to identify displaced individuals originating from all governorates across Syria in order to hear about their experiences. However, the team was unable to capture the experience of individuals who still remain in government-controlled areas. There are likely substantial differences in experience and perceptions of resilience for individuals in those locations, and this is important to bear in mind when reading the subsequent report.

The study is not representative of Syrians generally, of different sub-groups of Syrians, or even of Syrians in governorates where research was conducted. As a longitudinal qualitative study, the goal was to do in-depth descriptive research with fewer participants, rather than to capture generalisable information from a larger, representative sample of participants (as a quantitative study would). Whenever possible, the field teams attempted to implement purposive sampling and interview a wide variety of people to capture multiple experiences (e.g. older and younger, women and men, displaced and returnees, from rural or urban, etc.). However, ultimately many of the interviews were conducted based on convenience sampling. As well, the safety of the research team and research participants made it even more essential to use purposive sampling. Also, as some of the data collection methods required a high level of literacy, in-depth stories tended towards participants who were more confident in self-directed writing with higher levels education. The research team attempted to balanced with KIIs and facilitated data collection methods for those less confident in writing.

The study did not focus on host community members but rather on Syrians who had been displaced at some point, in order to understand the issues they faced as a result of displacement. While it would have been valuable to learn how host communities were responding to the conflict, and particularly the influx of displaced people into their communities, this would have required further resource and widening of the research scope. Still, some participants were members of host communities (approximately 4% [n=14] of participants had never been displaced in communities that had received IDPs), and some findings from host members and displaced persons do provide information on relationships with host communities. However, without purposive sampling of host community members, such descriptions are only preliminary.

Obtaining permissions from local councils was not always easy, in particular in north east Syria where permission was denied in the first two communities chosen because the communities did not see the benefit of their participation (i.e. there was no programme coming as a result). As such, the research team worked with CARE's office to get permission to conduct research in a community where they had been working. This required a relatively long process of obtaining research permits, and ultimately only two waves of data collection took place in this region. Positively, however, at this point the team had refined the methodology to conduct life stories, so the data collected during these two waves were very rich in detail.

Security became an issue for some researchers and participants in one community. In particular, male researchers felt uncomfortable moving around as a result of increasing activity from factions, so they effectively stopped working in this community after Wave 3. Women, however, were still free to move around so there are many more female participants than male participants in this community.

There were particularly sensitive topics – especially related to conflict dynamics – that the research team was unable to ask about. Feedback from the research team during pilot noted that civilians were still extremely fearful of conflict actors, and thus questions about politics or past actions related to the conflict may have caused participants to feel unsafe. While some participants voluntarily shared such information, the teams did not explicitly ask for this. Conflict details deemed too sensitive to share have been intentionally left out of this report.

It was often challenging to identify when and where specific events occurred in people's lives when they were displaced multiple times. The data was ultimately disaggregated by present location (e.g. governorate, rural/urban, or community), which should be interpreted carefully especially in making comparisons of events and situations. Though some narrative was provided that did help to identify specific times and locations when events occurred (e.g. when and where a person was warned of an attack by social media; when and where a person was when they received aid), this was not systematically collected. Instead, for individuals who shared their life stories, the full narratives were used to analyse and compare different locations, as it was possible to deduce more accurately where an individual was during a specific experience or description.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Overview: Impact of conflict on communities and participants

3.1.1. MULTI-RISK, MULTI-HAZARD

The Syrian conflict context continues to be highly dynamic, and Syrians are faced with multiple risks and hazards that are constantly changing in terms of source, type, intensity, and scale. These risks are complex, with harsh economic circumstances interconnected with continued conflict events and displacements. Two samples of stories below offer a glimpse into the backgrounds and experiences of many of the research participants. Box 3 illustrates the complexity of the conflict – many participants described the environment to have multiple risks and hazards, and experiencing multiple displacements.

Box 3: Participant lives: Multi-risk and multi-hazard environment

Male, 33, Raqqa returnee, Life Story

Waves 1 and 2

We had no idea when exactly the clashes would happen. We heard stories about the fights starting, but we didn't know exactly when or where. The last clashes between ISIS and the freedom fighters were for a whole week, and we were at home. We could not leave the house for one whole week. We finished the food, but luckily, we store wheat, so we cooked and ate three days until the clashes subsided. At that time we were not sure when it would start again, so we took a risk to move. In the last year, we moved over four times – to villages, to random camps, and to formal camps, and back again. There were times when we had no roof over our heads, no blankets, and we had to eat from the ground whatever we found. We stayed all year on the move until ISIS left Raqqa and we came back home.

Every time I moved was to a different place. I stayed with my brother once and another time with my maternal uncle, who gave us a roof, food, and everything we needed.

Then we moved again, because of cross fire between so many groups known and some unknown. How can we be ready for all of the dangers? We went to the village of Musheirefah near the city of Raqqa. The situation there was fairly good, but we knew we were still in the danger zone. After a while, the village was bombed, and the residents decided to build a camp near the village. The idea of the tent camp was that during the day people could go to their homes, and then at night go to the tents for fear of warplanes bombing the village at night. The villagers continued this situation until the battle began in the area, and we were forced to go to the open in the area of Maizela where there was no housing or water, or even food. We had to sleep on the ground in the dirt with no covers or blankets.

Then we moved to an informal camp, which was bad but better than staying out in the open. One day, I came home from the village with my wife and the camp had been disbanded. My family was nowhere, and the army was forcing us to leave the area. We refused to go, saying we would not leave my parents and our family. Thank God, they came back and we were able to leave together – this was the most terrifying thing because I care for my family.

Next we moved to Ain Essa camp, where we were given food, blankets, and detergents. But it was overcrowded, and we decided to leave back to another village because it was too much stress in the camp. We waited for the city to be liberated so we could move home.

Now, I hear of kidnapping and looting. The real danger is not having safety and security, even though clashes have stopped. Since people do not yet feel safe, they will not start rebuilding the city. Unfortunately, the type of danger we face nowadays has no warnings. You only know after the event, like explosion of mines or looting or kidnapping.

The biggest thing that has changed from my life before is my job. I graduated and worked as a civil engineer. Now, I have had to take many jobs, such as taxi driver. Once, when I had no job I invented something: I bought some petroleum and made my own gas station – I stood in the streets of the village selling to passers-by.

Our priorities have all changed and we have had to adapt. We never thought of food and water before the war; they were available always. We had services, colleges, schools, and hospitals. We used to have a good life, full of life and happiness. Now all we think of is how to provide the basics for our family. Of safety and security. Everything here is demolished and wrecked.

As well, over the course of the six-month study, a number of participants went back and forth between optimism and pessimism; opportunity and despair; profit and loss. An advantage of the longitudinal research was the relationships built between the field team and participants, and the field team members' ability to track change (and discuss it in real time) over the course of the project. Box 4 illustrates the constantly shifting experiences of participants.

Female, 34, displaced from Homs to Ikhtarin, KII

Wave 1

I am a pharmacist, married, and I have three children. Last year was relatively good as this year. I opened my own pharmacy and stood up on my feet. I live in a middle-income society consisting of small traders, farmers and craftsmen.

I can describe a danger that occurred [where I lived]. We received warning of a forthcoming strike by aircrafts on the area, but the exact date was not specified, and the military was the source of the information. My husband told me, and we prepared ourselves to move to a safe place. We went at night, and the strike occurred the next morning. Residents were bombed. It was a hazardous situation, especially with children.

We went through many difficult and risky situations. For instance, we faced a severe shortage of food and medicine during a blockade in a conflict area. We could not feed our children; we fed ourselves with weeds and some animals to survive. I felt desperate and miserable, especially for my kids. What did they do to be deprived of a basic need such as food? Afterwards, we had food baskets from the Red Cross; it was a breakthrough after suffering from the siege. It was announced about the entry of convoys – this is how I knew – they provided food baskets with essential and canned food, in addition to flour which we almost forgot its taste.

Wave 2

Yes, I went through a drastic change in my life, as I managed to open my pharmacy and practice my profession in order to provide for my husband and children after deprivation. I did not have to alter my lifestyle to cope with the new changes as they are all familiar to me from before. The most pressing daily constraints are the deterioration of security in the area and the widespread problems and fights between military institutions which consequently hinder our progress as an effective society within the nation.

The past year has been better in terms of settling in. I feel more settled. It is better than the last years. The community we live in is simple, and there is a good relationship among people. The locals are owners of land and work in agriculture. There is a good harmony between the rural and urban and IDPs settling in the area. I am a member of the pharmaceutical syndicate.

Wave 3

The ugliest event happened two weeks ago, that my pharmacy was stolen and then burned completely. They have burned my heart with it, and so far the actor has not been identified. The world has blackened in my face, and I no longer see anything positive in my life.

I no longer feel safe after this incident, especially since people are no longer able to keep their property safe from thieves. I am very concerned about my economic situation. I need to re-establish myself and my pharmacy from scratch. This is not currently possible, knowing that the pharmacy is my only source of income.

The most important challenge is to secure a large amount of money to reopen the pharmacy. I am not thinking of anything else. I will work to re-open the pharmacy in the coming weeks. I am trying to contact my friends to help me solve this problem, and to contact some medical organisations to try to do what is necessary to help me. I am concerned about the security and economic conditions. I am worried that I won't be able to re-open my pharmacy again.

3.1.2. TYPES OF SHOCKS AND STRESSORS

Participants shared the shocks and stressors they experienced, the most regularly mentioned being displacement (74%), exposure to a conflict event (69%), and economic struggle (69%). A sizeable minority described immediate loss such as death or detainment of a family member (25%), injury or health issues (21%), and experiences of trauma (16%). Table 4 shows the percentages of women and men who described certain types of shocks and stressors, and many individuals reported experiencing multiple types.

Table 4: Shocks and stressors mentioned, by gender, among those specifying any shocks and stressors (multiple responses possible, will not equal 100%)

Shock/stressor	Female (n=201)	Male (n=100)	Total (n=304)
Exposure to conflict event	74%	60%	69%
Economic struggle	64%	79%	69%
Displacement	73%	75%	74%
Destruction of home	6%	10%	8%
Immediate loss (e.g. death or detainment of family member)	31%	13%	25%
Acute health issues, including injury	24%	14%	21%
Experiences of trauma / mental health challenges	19%	8%	16%

Among those who discussed displacement as a shock they faced, many people faced displacement multiple times or acknowledged the possibility of future displacement for themselves and their families. The majority of participants who discussed displacement were displaced one or two times, nearly a third were displaced three to four times, and 11% five or more times (see Table 5).

Table 5: Frequency of displacements, among those mentioning displacement status, by education, age, and gender; nature of displacement, among all respondents mentioning displacement (will not equal 100%)

	Age group		Education		Gender		
	18 – 35 (n=120)	36+ (n=76)	Junior secondary or less (n=76)	Some secondary or more (n=128)	Female (n=162)	Male (n=80)	Total (n=242)
Frequency of displacements							
1 to 2	52%	63%	52%	59%	58%	52%	56%
3 to 4	32%	34%	34%	32%	31%	36%	32%
5+	16%	3%	13%	9%	11%	13%	12%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Nature of displacement							
Outside Syria	24%	13%	12%	23%	21%	17%	20%
Family separated	25%	17%	21%	22%	28%	9%	22%

Further, the majority of participants in this research who discussed displacement had, at some point, been displaced from urban to rural areas, as is shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Types of displacements experienced during conflict at any point, among those specifying status, by gender (will not equal 100%)

Type of displacement	Female (n=162)	Male (n=80)	Total (n=242)
urban to rural	42%	40%	41%
urban to camp	7%	10%	8%
urban to urban	10%	13%	11%
semi urban to rural	2%	0%	2%
semi urban to camp	1%	1%	1%
semi urban to urban	3%	4%	3%
rural to rural	20%	26%	22%
rural to camp	27%	45%	33%
rural to urban	9%	14%	10%
camp to urban	1%	0%	1%
camp to rural	0%	0%	0%
not displaced	8%	0%	5%
returned	33%	29%	31%

3.1.3. PERCEPTIONS OF SITUATION

Some participants discussed their perceptions of whether their situation was improving or not. There were mixed opinions from participants on whether their situation today was improving, the same, or getting worse. In rural areas and camps, half of people felt their situation was staying the same and over one-third of people felt their situation was improving, while in urban and peri urban areas nearly equal percentages felt their situation was worsening, improving, or staying the same. Those with more education tended to think that their situation was staying the same or improving, and men and women had similar perceptions on if/how their situation was changing (see Table 7). In fact, an individual's perception about their current situation likely changed multiple times within the course of the study, as indicated in the narratives in Boxes 3 and 4, above.

Table 7: Perception on the situation today, among those specifying opinion at the time of interview, by gender, education, and geography

	Education		Gender		Geography		
	Junior secondary or less (n=56)	Some secondary or more (n=114)	Female (n=127)	Male (n=59)	Urban / peri-urban (n=115)	Rural/ camp (n=70)	Total (n=186)
Worsening	29%	19%	22%	25%	29%	14%	23%
Same	39%	39%	42%	36%	34%	50%	40%
Improving	32%	42%	36%	39%	37%	36%	37%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

The following sections present the findings organised by the specific resilience capacities from the Resilience Framework discussed above. Within the findings are highlighted examples for each capacity; the main limitations; and descriptions of what attempts are made by participants to overcome these challenges. The overarching themes and recommendations drawn from this section are presented in the Conclusions and Recommendations sections.

3.2. Anticipatory capacity

3.2.1. INADEQUATE WARNINGS

Anticipatory capacity: The ability of individuals, households, and communities to foresee and therefore reduce the impact of hazards that are likely to occur and be ready for unexpected events through prevention, preparedness and planning.[35]

In general, most participants stated they had some warning of impending risk, either official[36] or unofficial (e.g. through horizontal channels[37]), though it was not always clear whether that warning was reliable, and in many cases the information provided was inadequate to make an informed decision about how to respond. At any point during the conflict, three-quarters of participants who mentioned warnings of impending risk had been notified via an informal warning mechanism, and just under two-thirds via an official warning. Many participants indicated they received both. Less than 10% of participants said they had received no warning at all for any event they had experienced. One-third of participants said that among the warnings they received, at least some were inadequate. Male and female, older and younger, and more and less educated people reported similar experiences with the types and adequacy of warnings received (see Table 8). Among those receiving official warning, it was most often via TV/radio or leaflets. Few (10% or fewer) mentioned mosques, local government, sirens, or military warning. Among those receiving an informal warning, three-quarters indicated it was via word of mouth, and one-half mentioned social media.

Table 8: Types of warnings ever received during conflict, among those mentioning warnings at all (multiple responses possible, will not equal 100%)

	Education		Gender		Age group		
	Junior secondary or less (n=51)	Some secondary or more (n=69)	Female (n=83)	Male (n=37)	18 – 35 (n=69)	36 + (n=45)	Total (n=120)
Official warning	53%	74%	63%	65%	61%	71%	64%
Informal warning	73%	86%	82%	77%	77%	84%	80%
Inadequate warning	47%	32%	41%	38%	35%	44%	40%
No warning	12%	6%	7%	13%	7%	9%	9%

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[35] Definitions based on CARE guidance documents. See: CARE (2016a); CARE (2017). Reaching resilience: Handbook 2.0 for aid practitioners and policy makers.
[36] For this research, "official" warnings are considered to originate directly from a formal organisation or actor, such as government, local council, military, mosque, television, media, or NGO. Unofficial or informal warnings included all second-hand information from neighbours, friends, and communities, including social media, "rumours", and unofficial word-of-mouth from military individuals, as well as interpretation of signs of change, such as road blocks or price changes.
[37] The term "horizontal mechanisms" refers to pathways of communication and support that originate with others in similar positions of power within and across communities. This may include family, neighbours, and extended members of communities who may be exposed to warnings at different times or places, who then initiate communication of these warnings to others within their networks.

In general, it was said that official warnings were more consistent and reliable in rural/camp areas, and inconsistent, insufficient, and often unreliable in urban or peri urban areas. For example, in urban Raqqa, participants described little to no warning before large-scale military events. In the event that there was some warning (e.g. leaflets dropped from planes), these warnings were said to be not specific enough (e.g. no dates given) or did not leave enough time for civilians to prepare to safely exit the city. One participant said, *"What can you do in such short notice? Hopefully what we do is get stocked on food."* (Female, 41, Raqqa, displaced, KII)

By contrast, in rural Ikhtarin, Raqqa, and Hazima, news from television, sirens, or announcements/visits from local leaders and organisations offered enough time and information for civilians to make informed decisions about how to proceed, whether it be to flee or to obtain basic items and take cover in place. In camp settings (e.g. Bab Salameh), NGOs and local councils issued official warnings to inhabitants via neighbourhood door-to-door visits or loudspeakers. Leaders said that they communicate across camps (via NGOs and local leadership) to obtain information.

While they received both official and unofficial warnings, in general people tended to trust warnings received horizontally from fellow community members. Communities supported and informed each other; rumours of impending danger spread quickly and efficiently, most commonly by word of mouth. People noted a strong sense of trust for neighbours, because they knew that their intentions were similar to one's own: survival. Even those who were new to a location (and noted not being fully integrated) heard warnings from neighbours, social media, or at markets.

Participants said that young people know the most, the fastest, due to their access to social media and internet, and their greater mobility. One participant said, *"We mainly got this information via the youth; they are the only ones who can travel quickly and they put themselves in danger for the safety of the rest. They used to go to the next villages and get the information. We didn't care about if the news was true or not, we always took it into consideration."* (Female, 55, Hazima returnee, KII) Participants described the mobility of both young males and females in this respect. Young people share with their close families and friends; news spreads from there. Internet and social media were referenced often as effective informal warning mechanisms.

In urban areas in particular, people have also learned to stay attentive and notice the subtle signs of oncoming conflict/shock, for example observing a new military presence, change in market prices, and blocked roads. In Ikhtarin, for example, participants described the ability to identify the type of plane or missile based on its sound alone (including what conflict actor it belongs to, which provides useful information related to the potential type and scale of incoming danger). Participants were knowledgeable of the location of nearby military bases, and they used updated conflict knowledge to predict when such bases may come under attack. In Raqqa, participants noted that a sharp increase in food prices may be indicative of road closures, which they interpreted as a sign of fighting forces moving closer. People learned to interpret small changes, as such "advanced" warning can have a profound effect.

This sensitivity to change does not appear to be different based on the type of location, nor whether or not it is an individual's place of origin. Instead, people describe increased vigilance and perception to change as the conflict continues.

3.2.2. PREPARING FOR EVERYTHING; STILL INADEQUATELY PREPARED
Over the duration of the conflict, people have learned to be as well-prepared for as many types of unexpected events as possible. To put it another way, people who reported being unprepared were generally referring to earlier instances of risk; as time went on and risks became more apparent, they learned how to prepare better. As they were exposed to more shocks and stressors over the course of the war, people become both better at preparing and also more aware of the critical need to be ready for subsequent conflict events whether or not they had prior warning.

The degree to which each person could actually prepare differed, but all were implementing similar strategies, including:

- Planning best location to flee to
- Identifying safest and fasted routes out of town
- Having well-established communication channels
- Stocking food / securing residence for a long-term stay without leaving
- Having access to cash or other objects that could be liquefied easily

Despite having these strategies in mind, because the timing, nature, location, and strength of a given shock was unknown – that is, extremely difficult to anticipate – people were still not certain which strategy to prioritise until the event materialised. People were often thrust into action regardless of preconceived ideas of what they would/ should do, and their decision-making processes were continually adapted as they move and learn over the course of the conflict (see Boxes 5 and 6).

Box 5: KII: Prevented from fleeing

"We were planning to leave in the car to the north, to go to the village of my wife's relatives. But then the bridges were bombed and so we could not escape from the city that way. We could not go, so now we stayed in our home and prayed for safety." (Male, 41, Raqqa, returnee, KII)

Box 6: KII: Difficult decisions to make

"Things were stable and then we heard of some conflict and rocketing again... the markets had come alive but after this stopped. We feel very worried now – should we use the little money we have to stock up on [more expensive] food, or should we keep the money with us in case we need to flee and not be able to take anything with us? Even if we know that it is bombing, we do not know where we will go or how. We don't know how much time we will have." (Female, 29, Ariha, returnee, KII)

Also, while people have become increasingly aware of how to (and the need to) prepare for future shocks and stressors, they are not necessarily more capable of actually doing so, particularly when it comes to saving money, holding onto assets, and/or stocking food. As savings dwindled and with new income insufficient to meet basic needs, while people are generally aware that they should be saving/preparing for another shock event, they often lack the means to do so, some more than others. Not being able to prepare/plan is incredibly stressful and causes psychological distress for people, because they know they should be able to better prepare when they cannot.

This difference in the ability to prepare/plan and its consequences (the ability to absorb, then adapt) further highlights the interconnectedness between capacities.

3.3. Absorptive capacity

Absorptive capacity: The ability of individuals, households, and communities to accommodate the immediate impact of the shock/stress on their lives, wellbeing and livelihoods, by making changes in their usual practices and behaviours using available skills and resources, and by managing adverse conditions.[38]

The data related to absorptive capacity shows a variety of ways a person or family may be resilient (or not) at a given point in time (whether staying or leaving) to absorb a shock or stress. Importantly, their relative resilience is not purely dependent on cash, skills, or education, but also on the degree to which they have had to adjust from their normal way of life. Aid was welcomed and helpful when available, but not relied upon and therefore people continued to depend on their community to help them financially, logistically, and socio-emotionally. The process of and experiences of displacement were profoundly difficult for people (many named displacement as the most difficult circumstance they found themselves in), however support to directly help absorb the trauma of a shock was absent and much needed.

3.3.1. MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT WHAT TO DO IN THE EVENT OF AN IMPENDING SHOCK/ATTACK

After receiving warning, people had to decide what to do with this information. In most cases related to oncoming conflict, this meant either fleeing or remaining-in-home as the emergency unfolded. **How well people were prepared – through cash, food stocked, social networks outside of the community, knowledge of escape routes, etc. – was an important factor in deciding whether to leave or stay in the face of an oncoming threat.** Having been faced with such scenarios in the past, many had strategies or plans for what they will do in case of future emergencies (e.g. fleeing to extended family's home in a nearby village).

Communities often stayed together in deciding to stay or flee in the face of an attack or other shock, as they cooperatively dealt with the risks at hand both as they were unfolding and in the immediate period after. This decision was typically dependent on the type and intensity of the conflict event (e.g. burned bridges or road blocks might make escape impossible; ongoing shelling of nearby buildings meant that staying was too dangerous). When communities fled, the process of displacement itself was full of risk and danger, and families, neighbours, and communities came together to support each other logistically and psychologically as all dealt with such shocks. In the aftermath of bombardment, communities that stayed described banding together to support the injured, to cooperatively acquire food and water, and to continue to share information until further aid arrived.

The data offers examples of people who elected to remain at home longer than others in their community (e.g. if a family member is less mobile or if the family is waiting for someone to return). In these circumstances, those individuals described the challenges and fear involved in being left in a state of self-reliance for themselves and their families, since they no longer had others around their household to offer support. In some cases, community members had to work hard to convince someone else in the community who was not going along with the community's decision. One participant explained, *"Everyone usually hears [of the danger] but we had a neighbour who was deaf and would not leave her house. We forced her to come out with us when there was danger."* (Female, 49, Ariha, not displaced, KII)

Nearly all participants in the study had been displaced at some point and described experiencing various challenges both during and after their displacement. Around half described dangers during the process of fleeing. Participants had similar responses across gender, education level, location, and age (see Table 9).

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[38] Definitions based on CARE guidance documents: CARE (2016a); CARE (2017).

Table 9: Issues faced in early phases of displacement, among those mentioning issues, by gender and education (multiple responses possible, will not equal 100%)

	Age		Education		Gender		
	18 – 35 (n=125)	**36 + (n=67)**	**Junior high or less (n=70)**	**Junior high or less (n=126)**	**Female (n=167)**	**Male (n=70)**	**Total (n=237)**
Described difficulty during displacement	78%	79%	81%	75%	74%	81%	76%
Received aid during/post displacement	42%	54%	41%	50%	46%	56%	49%
Described dangers while fleeing	42%	36%	46%	35%	40%	40%	40%

3.3.2. AID

All forms of aid were welcomed but not relied upon, since it was typically inconsistently available or inadequate. Among those specifying their experiences with aid, nearly half specified that they received support but it was inadequate, and nearly a third specified that they had not received any support. Older and less educated participants indicated they received no support or inadequate support more often than younger and more educated participants. Women also indicated receiving no support more often than men (see Table 10).

Table 10: Experiences with humanitarian/NGO aid, among those mentioning aid specifically during / in aftermath of shock/stressor (multiple responses possible, will not equal 100%)

	Age		Education		Gender		
	18 – 35 (n=125)	**36 + (n=67)**	**Junior high or less (n=29)**	**Junior high or less (n=163)**	**Female (n=167)**	**Male (n=70)**	**Total (n=237)**
Support received was inadequate	36%	62%	59%	30%	43%	48%	45%
Received no support	30%	41%	52%	17%	36%	15%	28%

Once people were displaced, whether to camps or a different city/village than that of origin, they often had little to support themselves upon arrival. In many locations, NGOs were said to help with tents, blankets, or food (in Bab Salameh, Ariha, Izaz, Raqqa) for newly displaced people. However, in all types of locations (urban, rural, and camp), this assistance was described as random and unpredictable.

Respondents mentioned that, generally, there was acute humanitarian aid (e.g. food baskets, shelter, and critical non-food items) available directly after displacement, provided they were in a location that accepted large numbers of displaced people. For those in camps, this support continued for much longer periods of time. Returnees and those who integrated into host communities had to intentionally seek out aid, though it was often not available at all (see Box 7, for example). **Seeking out this support, it was widely agreed, was not worth the effort.**

"During the siege, we had no option but to run to safety in no man's land. We took some necessities, mainly some clothes, baby supplies, medication, and sun powered chargers... We escaped into the wild, to the lands. The bridge was bombed, so we had to go another way. We had no help or support, so we went to Ein Essa camp... We found good services there and much better than the open lands. When things quieted down, we came back to Hazima. Living in the camp was good, as everything was available and for free... food and health services for free. We did not need to seek the NGOs in the camp as they came to us with everything – food and water and shelter. Now in Hazima, what is needed is to fix the water channels in order to get back to our work on the land. Life is not getting better and there seems to be no light... electricity is not available and education has stopped due to the mines that were planted around the schools, and many schools have been demolished in the war... At the camp there was much support and assistance, but since we returned to our village here we have received nothing. We get support through family only. We have no relationship with leaders but I tried to seek NGOs after the return but had to travel a long way so decided to stop trying. They should come to us and find us and see what we need." (Female, 55, Hazima, returnee, KII)

In the direct aftermath of a shock event, there was often little outside support to help those who remained to absorb the shock. These were acute emergency contexts with massive destruction of infrastructure, and assistance/ aid typically took time to arrive (see Box 8).

Box 8: KII: Unreliable support

"The support was very little, every three months it might come or not come. I did not ask for support as I did not know how or where to ask for it and the closest place to find support was 5km away. Many organisations came to register and take information, but not all gave support. I never got cash support. Help came twice, once was a small bag of flour and cans of oil, and at the other time tents were distributed and accessories and a lamp of poor quality." (Female, 27, Raqqa, returnee, KII)

In Raqqa, Izaz, and Ariha (all urban areas) participants described aid packages arriving approximately every three months with few items, and the locations of these packages were often inaccessible. A Raqqa participant noted that tents were distributed once to people who had remained in the city but lost their homes. In Izaz and Ariha, participants described no aid available at all. In all urban locations, people indicated that they did not know where to turn for help, aid, or basic services in the aftermath of emergency. Participants reported that it was very difficult to obtain any information about the event that had taken place, or about the future.

While participants in camps and rural settings noted that aid was often available to the most vulnerable (e.g. widows, persons with disabilities), in urban areas this was often not the case (see Box 9, for example).

Box 9: KII: Lack of assistance in Raqqa

"I have reached out to many NGOs looking for assistance – for income or jobs, and for help treating my disabled son – but it was all in vain. Many organisations have headquarters in the city and websites, but I found out their major role was mine safety awareness, or providing synthetic limbs. My son's condition and our welfare were not within their mandate." (Female, 45, Raqqa, returnee, KII)

3.3.3. SOCIAL NETWORKS

A critical dimension of effectively absorbing a shock was being close to family and friends. This was important both in the immediate event of a shock (e.g. while fleeing the community or staying in place during an attack) or in the period during and soon after the shock (e.g. whether displaced or at home), illustrated in Boxes 10, 11, and 12.

Box 10: KII: Community decision-making about displacement

> "The people in the village came together in a civil gathering before leaving to displacement… They agreed that gathering together in a camp will serve everyone to help people stay alive. For example, if there is a need for water, young people help bring them to the tents. If there is one who needs food and has nothing to cook on, he will cook food at his neighbours and the other things. The village people helped each other during displacement but most importantly were together in this lonely remote area, in a community." (Male, 30, Hazima, returnee, KII)

Box 11: Journal entry: Relying on a neighbour for transportation

> "I am from Raqqa city which was under the rule of ISIS for three and a half years. ISIS first entered the city with air force, there was bombing all the time, day and night with no breaks, destroying almost everything. We were scared, we could be dead at any moment but we had to stay in our houses because we had no money to go somewhere else. May 5, 2017 was my worst night of all time, my daughter got hit by a missile while we were in the sitting room. I looked at her with tears all over my face. I was terrified. My husband is blind so he couldn't see, and I couldn't take her to the hospital. There was her blood all over. I went out to the street screaming for help, there was non-stop bombing on random houses. No one was there, it was dark and everyone was hiding. I couldn't do anything except pray to God. Luckily, my neighbor's husband finally heard my screams, he came from hiding and took my daughter to the hospital with his car. I will never forget what he has done. He saved my daughter's life." (Female, age unknown, Raqqa, displaced, journal entry)

Box 12: Life Story: Caring for children with support from family

> "When the Kurds began to move towards the village, we had to leave our homes and build tents to live in. It was all very bad, but my family was together. The water was so dirty and I was worried about my child's milk. At first I gave him sheep's milk because he was starving, but he got sick from it. My brother's wife breastfed my son and her children at the same time so that he would not starve." (Female, 25, Hazima, returnee, Life Story)

Some participants elaborated that when people fled in the direct aftermath of attack, often they did not know exactly where they were going, for example, if it was night-time and dark and the situation was chaotic and scary. Also, they may not have had the resources they needed, for example, to sleep outside. In these situations, people relied heavily on help from one another. In Raqqa, participants described men carrying neighbours' children or groups working together to travel with disabled community members from the city and towards safety. One participant said, "What helped us cope was people's help in the neighbourhood. Mainly the young men were helping the women and carrying children while running." (Male, 37, Raqqa, displaced, KII)

Support from family and community was indispensable while displaced. Emotional support, logistical support, and financial support from family specifically were most often described, with more women highlighting the value of social and emotional support as compared to men. Perceptions were similar between the different age groups and education levels (see Table 11).

Table 11: Family and community support while displaced, among those mentioning support while displaced, by age, education, gender

	Age		Education		Gender		
	18 – 35 (n=146)	36 + (n=85)	Junior high or less (n=85)	Junior high or less (n=149)	Female (n=194)	Male (n=93)	Total (n=287)
Social and emotional support received from family or extended family	68%	59%	64%	64%	68%	49%	62%
Logistical support received from family or extended family	56%	53%	52%	56%	59%	43%	54%
Financial support received from family or extended family	52%	44%	51%	47%	52%	39%	48%
Remittances received from family or extended family	9%	7%	11%	6%	10%	8%	9%
Social and emotional support received from community	31%	33%	40%	27%	34%	23%	30%
Logistical support received from community	29%	34%	35%	29%	30%	28%	29%
Financial support received from community	15%	15%	20%	13%	15%	13%	15%

Those who stayed at home during heightened conflict relied even more heavily on family, friends, and neighbours to cope and absorb the impact of the event, given that aid did not arrive immediately and when it did it was often to inconvenient locations. People remarked on family "crowd-funding" in which, essentially, one person went around to all of the family members in the area to collect small amounts of money to send to a family member who is in particular need at that moment. In Raqqa, participants described neighbours coming together to transport injured individuals in cars to hospitals (which were often no longer functional). Transportation was often impossible to access, in which case families and neighbours came together to provide ad hoc medical care until it was safe/feasible to move within the city again. In particular, as a lot of urban residents did not have cars, there was one person in a neighbourhood whose car was designated to be used in an emergency. In such cases, the car was used to transport people to hospitals after bombings/attacks, or to send an individual to get critical supplies such as baby formula.

Communities were particularly vigilant about supporting vulnerable households who may be most affected by (and most unable to cope with) a shock event. This included, in particular, female-led households and homes with older or disabled family members. Throughout the data, there were numerous descriptions of both receiving and providing such support: *"My husband does not work because of his illness as he has asthma, we live by aid and charity from people. My sister supports me and my family financially and mentally. I have four daughters and I cannot work because they are still young in addition to my disability as I have DDH (developmental dysplasia of the hip). My daughter Fatimah, who is six, has a disability in her hand and I cannot afford treatment or medication expenses. We do not own a home so we are living at my brother-in-law's house."* (Female, 35, Sleiman Sari, KII)

Often, people intentionally fled to locations where they had relatives or friends who helped to support them with shelter, food, and even cash support until the displaced were able to return home or find work. Direct family connections were described as critical (see Boxes 13 and 14).

Box 13: KII: Living and moving with family

> *"My life these past eight years is all displacement. We have been on the move between my house, my sister's house, then to my brothers'. Then last year we all left Raqqa because of the talk of the collapse of the dam. We went towards Yarmouk, where other relatives live. We lived with them for some time, all in the same house, until the invasion reached us again. We moved with these relatives, too, then to the village of Hazima, which had been liberated."* (Female, 45, Hazima, displaced from Raqqa city, KII)

Box 14: Life Story: Adapting to life with in-laws

> *"When the shelling was harsh in our neighbourhood, my husband decided to move us to his family's village until everything calmed down. So we went and lived with them in their small house. It was only two rooms, with a small kitchen and one bathroom. I could not understand how we would all live together: my husband's father and mother, his two brothers, two sisters, and his brothers' wives. All of our children. I cried a lot... I had no solution but to adapt to my new situation."* (Female, 38, Turmanin, displaced from Aleppo, Life Story)

However, the strategy to displace to a location near family and friends was not possible for those without those social networks already in place in accessible and safe locations. Going somewhere entirely new, with few or no family or friends, was a necessary step for some people. In arriving to a host community, some participants described the good support provided to IDPs to help them absorb the new situation of being displaced. Efforts, especially on the part of both host and IDP women, were made to reach out to new communities and foster new social relationships. Host communities were also noted to help with basics (such as food, water, and shelter) and even longer-term assistance (such as offices rented cheaply as living spaces, or jobs given in agriculture to those who were untrained to work in that field).

Participants noted that they may stay longer in such a location (where there is strong tie to the host community), as the transition to a more normal life was easier and faster (Box 15).

Box 15: KII: Support from host communities

> *"Last year my family was displaced to the fields near the village... in the field were villagers and displaced people from Raqqa. I have encountered an unprecedented collaboration between villagers; they stand by each other helping to build the tents and make the field into an organised camp to shelter all the families."* (Male, 49, Hazima, returnee, KII)

There is evidence that this may be easier if the locations are culturally and traditionally similar to one's home, as well (Box 16).

Box 16: KII: Cultural similarities between host and displaced groups

> *"The community I live in now is very similar to where I lived before I was displaced in terms of culture and traditions; they are close socially and I got much help from them. I have been here nine months and did not move."* (Male, 40, Ikhtarin, displaced, KII)

Conversely, when displaced to a location where people were culturally and traditionally dissimilar, there were some negative experiences described in terms of immediate local support. Some people were looked down upon as an IDP, with little support offered from locals. Also, in some locations the displaced were not allowed to remain and forced to keep moving unless there was a connection to the village/location established. In Hazima and Izaz,

participants described the rent charged as unaffordable for IDPs, often with commentary of how locals may be trying to take advantage of the circumstance of the displaced.

3.3.4. CASH, SAVINGS, AND ASSETS

Although people with savings, cash, or specific assets (e.g. a car) absorb more easily because of their ability to access food, transportation to a safer location, safe housing, and healthcare, sometimes no amount of cash or assets would be helpful to absorb a shock. For example, when bridges were burnt on the outskirts of Raqqa, cars could not leave the city and people had to go on foot, taking only what they could carry with them. When shops and markets were destroyed, obtaining food and other basic items was often impossible even with cash savings. When shops and markets re-emerged, savings were often used quickly due to inflated prices.

Participants in both urban and rural locations noted using (and often depleting) savings to survive during displacement. When cash ran out, people had to find other ways to obtain cash for survival in the early days of displacement. For example, participants sold assets (including productive assets) such as women's family jewellery, motorcycles, sheep, and sometimes rented out houses they owned. A participant in Raqqa (male, 28, KII) dismantled his former business's agricultural and industrial equipment and sold the parts. **As with those in displacement, having savings/cash or specific assets prior to the shock reduced difficulties, but also in communities where people were not displaced, this was not a sure solution;** instead, family cooperation was continuously relied upon (Table 12); this was the case for people regardless of age, education level, or gender.

Table 12: Types of absorptive strategies among those specifying strategies, by age, education, gender (multiple responses possible, will not equal 100%)

Attitude conveyed	Age		Education		Gender		
	15 – 35 (n=90)	36+ (n=52)	Junior secondary or less (n=53)	Senior secondary or more (n=93)	Female (n=120)	Male (n=51)	Total (n=171)
Assets/savings	22%	19%	23%	22%	19%	25%	21%
Family cooperation	93%	85%	89%	90%	89%	88%	89%

When people found themselves without basic necessary items, it was a risk to even leave home to attempt to obtain them. In such situations, people within a community were sometimes unable to check on or help each other or the most vulnerable. Curfews were often enforced during or immediately after a conflict, which meant that individuals could not leave the home to acquire basic items. In such circumstance, the most vulnerable were at even greater risk due to isolation.

3.3.5. PSYCHOLOGICAL STRENGTHS

Psychological strength is critical, and not necessarily linked to having cash or strong social networks. Participants described personal qualities such as patience, mental strength, dedication to religion, readiness to work hard to survive, independence and self-reliance, that contributed to their survival in the midst of the worst types of violence and shocks, regardless of their education level, assets, or social networks (Boxes 17 and 18).

Box 17: Life Story: Overcoming loss through religious faith

"I managed to stand on my feet after a long time from the death of my uncle who was like my big brother. Words of condolences could not ease my pain... I can say that the main logic for recovery was religious and personal. It did not come from anyone else, only from my faith in God's justice and that good came from what He chooses for us." (Female, 25, Ariha, not displaced, Life Story)

Box 18: Life Story: Psychological and moral support from a spouse

> *"My wife did not do any work outside the house, but you can call the support she gave me psychological and moral support because I was in desperate need of someone who stood by me and spoke to me all the good and strengthening words. She did that. My wife was the happiest person when she spoke to me and she was patient in all circumstances. During the period of displacement, we passed through very difficult days and I was surprised by the steadfastness and patience and concern she had for the children, especially in the period of the air strikes. As for the adjustment, my wife, like the rest of the women, was forced to adapt to the new situation during the displacement. She was inventing new ways in order to alleviate the severity of the situation and the difficulty of life during that period. She invented this toilet for us that was good for people with a disability; it was mainly for my mother who was sick and could not walk away to far places (away from people's eyes) as we all did to use the bathroom. The best thing about my wife is her smile and laughter; she was able to keep the happy and comforting feeling in the house despite all the hard times we went through."*
> (Male, 38, Hazima, returnee, Life Story)

The psychological impact of moving into a more basic living standard was also described as substantial. Significant change in living conditions (e.g. from urban living to extremely rural or camp life; from being affluent to having nothing) had clearly negative psychological impacts on individuals and families, **making them less resilient in this domain despite having cash or family support.**

Both male and female participants described the transition to living in tents (in rural or camp settings in Izaz, Ariha, Bab Salameh, and Hazima) as an incredibly difficult adjustment. The immediate adjustment to such basic living is described as traumatising, and participants who ultimately returned to their homes (or moved elsewhere) often noted that this was the most difficult adjustment during their displacement. Some described conditions in the camps as being harsh and inadequate (Box 19).

Box 19: KII: Harsh conditions of camp life

> *"We went to Ein Essa camp, where we stayed through the summer. The camp is a big prison once you enter it, and you cannot leave until you have a guarantor. Despite all the organisations there to help, the camp is a primitive place and the tents do not fend summer heat or winter cold. There was an uncovered WC in the camp. We were exposed, because of the water pollution, to an epidemic which spread among the camp inhabitants. Measles spread amongst the children. Some organisations had to bring in immediate vaccines to prevent further spread of the epidemic."* (Female, 44, Raqqa, returnee, KII)

The trauma of losing everything affected a person's or family's absorptive capacity; those who were initially better off financially than others described significantly more trauma associated with the changes than those who were not. In many situations, it may be that because there was so much to lose, the shock of such dramatic loss of income or capital may have profoundly traumatic effects that negatively impacts absorptive capacity. So while poverty and lack of assets is related to less economic resilience, there are other forms of resilience that people with "less" may possess. For example, they often described living in tents, multiple displacements, or economising food as less traumatic. Essentially their "new normal" was closer to their old normal, while for those who lost significantly more, there was a need to absorb relatively more with such drastic change. Moreover, those who may have struggled to make ends meet before a shock may actually be better equipped to absorb shocks and stressors generally, given they had to adopt similar coping strategies before the conflict.

3.4. Adaptive capacity

Adaptive capacity: The ability of individuals, households, and communities to adjust their behaviours, practices, lifestyles and livelihood strategies in response to changed circumstances and conditions under multiple, complex and at times changing risks.

3.4.1. THE NEW NORMAL

People are hopeful but cautious about adapting to a new normal as a result of having to repeatedly absorb new shocks and stressors. The line between absorbing and adapting is particularly difficult to identify in the Syrian context as a result of the protracted nature of the conflict, as new shocks and stressors occur even after a period of relative stability and/or rebuilding. In the interviews conducted for this research, **the distinction between whether a person was adapting or absorbing was subtle.** Respondents were asked to distinguish between their responses that were immediately and directly related to a shock, versus responses that occurred during a phase of relative stability. This section focuses on the latter, but acknowledges throughout that in such a context, to be resilient, one also must have immediate absorptive strategies for survival to utilise either alongside adaptive strategies, or to fall back on entirely in the event of a new shock. Recovering from additional, new shocks, then, might mean having to adapt (perhaps in a different way) yet again.

As such, people are hopeful but cautious about the future, so adaptations are always viewed with some degree of fragility. There is a fine line between absorbing and adapting as a result. What might be one's new normal, that would be continued if conditions allowed, may be disrupted at any moment (Boxes 20 and 21).

Box 20: Journal entry: Hopeful, but cautious

"In the past weeks I fixed the house and we are ready for a new stable life. My work is closer to home; my children moved to school close by. Now I plan to save half of my income and spend only half. Although this is really difficult I will try my best; this requires major economisation. There is always something that comes up that would require expenses and it was not expected. For example, last month my wife got really sick and for over three weeks she was in bed and could not walk. This, of course, added to the expenses, as we had to seek a doctor's help as well as many types of medicine. On top of that, she could no longer breast feed our baby as she was sick and the medicines were very strong and transferable through breast milk. Thus, we started buying baby milk and this is really expensive. That month ended without being able to save anything. I hope the coming months will be better and we can save. I hope no conflict occurs again and we remain in the house stable here. I am currently tired between working both outside and inside the house as my wife is weak. Therefore, I am trying to get my children to depend on themselves, the older one to help the younger one. I can say that now our life is better; the income is good enough but not great. Our life is improving unless another conflict occurs. If that happens, I might lose my job and become unemployed again. I worry a lot about that and about suffering again." (Male, age unknown, Hazima, journal)

Box 21: Life Story: Income challenges as a new normal

"I live with my parents who both cannot work, and my husband cannot work as he is blind. I am the main source of income. We can just cover electricity, heat, food, used clothes, medicine for my father and daughter who are both sick… Our main challenges the past two weeks have been getting gasoline which is far and you need a car to get it (we don't [have one]). Prices of vegetables and fruit are increasing too, and when you ask the seller he would say the dollar is increasing so they need to increase the prices. I am the breadwinner for my family and think about getting a second job, but it would be at night and then I could not see my family. I would be too tired for my first job. I worry, of course, about our economic situation. If any of my parents get sick, I really can't afford to take them to the hospital with this very low income. We run out of money mid-month every month." (Female, 25, Ramtha, displaced from Euphrates Shield, Life Story)

Women, men and youth were generally willing to adapt to a new normal as it relates to new livelihood strategies, new ways of accessing education, and residing in new locations, even if it is a significant departure from their previous life. Participants did not want to remain in the state (or mindset) of absorbing, which was comprised of reliance on aid, short-term livelihood strategies, and insecure housing. The main hope expressed is for stability in this new normal, and to become less reliant on absorptive and anticipatory strategies. They understood and accepted that life was going to be different than before the conflict, and maintained that their goal was stability and recovery, even if it was a completely different direction than was being pursued prior to the conflict.

3.4.2. NEW NORMAL: LIVELIHOODS

Livelihood strategies in the direct aftermath of a shock or stress, which were often quite different from what a person or family's livelihood strategy was before the conflict, helped families to get back on their feet and survive. In all locations, this meant women taking on work outside the home while also keeping their previous duties inside the home, or men and women taking jobs in new fields, or individuals creating entirely new livelihoods with whatever assets they had (e.g. driving a taxi because the family had a car; tutoring students because someone in the family had some college education). It was common for people to have – or be looking for – a second job in order to have enough income to survive. It was also common for men to go to Turkey for work in order to send remittances to family inside Syria, though it was often said that this was ultimately not effective because there were few jobs there, as well, and they eventually returned. Younger people and those with more education indicated that they had a new livelihood slightly more often than older people and those with less education (see Table 13).

Table 13: Livelihoods, new, old, or none, among those indicating their situation around livelihoods, by rural/urban, education, and gender (will not equal 100%)

	Age group		Education		Gender		
	15 – 35 (n=102)	36+ (n=64)	Junior secondary or less (n=63)	Senior secondary or more (n=104)	Female (n=141)	Male (n=65)	Total (n=206)
New livelihood	75%	67%	65%	78%	72%	74%	72%
Old livelihood	16%	30%	22%	19%	21%	12%	18%
No livelihood	19%	20%	29%	13%	21%	25%	22%

At the time of the research, most people were adapting by taking on whatever work they could get in order to meet basic needs; still, there was hope and expectation that this tendency toward short-term and ad hoc work was not the new normal. Instead, participants anticipated long-term rebuilding and sustainable development in which they could take on jobs that provided more stability, even if not related to their original career path or previous training; even if it was in a community to which they had relocated as a result of displacement (Boxes 22 and 23).

Box 22: KII: A new home and a new job

"I moved so many times in the past year, up to 13 times in seven different locations until I got here. I lost close friends on the way here due to plane shelling; the past year has been sad. The community that I live in here is very similar to where I lived before displacement in terms of culture and traditions; they are close socially and I got lots of help from them. I have been here for nine months. There are few job opportunities but it is safe and I am lucky I have a job in the education department. I have had different jobs in other places where I was displaced to... We all now live in places that are not where we want to be. Yet we found out that this is our new reality and we cope and adapt and integrate. Our neighbours and people here are all adapting together. We are creating a new home, we are building new social worlds. It would be hard to leave here now, but it is most important to be safe and I will be able to cope if we do." (Male, 45, Bab Salameh, displaced, KII)

"The most difficult situation that happened was when we had to leave our house because of the heavy shelling and siege and go to another place where we do not know anyone. We suffered in the beginning because of the siege and after we experienced the lack of money and the difficulty of adapting to a new community and the difficulty of finding new work for my brothers and my father. But, thank God, we gradually integrated into society. My brothers found work for them in a clothing store. Organisations provide food and cash coupons and they also provide better job opportunities through training courses. I took a sewing training course with one NGO. One of my neighbours talked to me about the sewing workshop that she owned before she was displaced and how she was successful in her work and her physical status was very good but after she was forced to leave and left her home and her work she was very sad and affected by her new situation which completely differed from the previous. Yet her determination was not weakened and asked one of the organisations for financial support to add to the money which she had to buy a sewing machine. She started a small project which grew to four sewing machines and gathered women to work with her and others getting trained in the profession." (Woman, 23, Turmanin, displaced, KII)

Collecting data over six months enabled the research team to observe the difficulty in finding sustainable, adequately-paying, long-term livelihood opportunities and, accordingly, a decrease in optimism about obtaining the desired "new normal" in terms of livelihoods. One research team member working in urban Raqqa shared at the end of research: *"When we first entered the city [Raqqa], people were expecting to start house repair and reconstruction of the city and the morale was high... But after a period of time, the dream had gone and the crime started in the city because people were desperate."* There, the lack of jobs lead to decreased security, with crime and then night-time curfews instituted. The same researcher described more consistency but ultimately fewer options for work in nearby rural Hazima: *"Life [in Hazima] is still as it was, the work is in agriculture. The search for means of making a living and learning is generally not so changed..."* – but also those living there often reported not making adequate income and thought about moving to urban areas.

3.4.3. NEW NORMAL: PURSUING EDUCATION
The desire to continue education was one of the strongest sentiments from participants when describing their futures or the futures of their children. Education is viewed to be a critical path to a viable livelihood (Boxes 24 and 25).

Box 24: Life Story: Education opens new horizons

"Education for me is the truest base of life; eventually returning to it is my weapon to face the days. Education opens up new horizons for me despite the war... My life does not depend on getting a certain certificate or degree right now, as a person can learn every day and learning is a continuous process. Learning is a true priority in my life... I think that education is the key for getting our rights and to make a just country for Syria." (Female, 32, Ariha, displaced, Life Story)

Box 25: Life Story: Opportunities post-displacement because of education

"When I was young, everyone in my family encouraged me to enrol in nursing school, which was three years study, and then I would have a job immediately, and so I did... After we were displaced, I started working in a health centre and this job helped me to cope quickly with the displacement. I have learned from the past events that education is essential for success in everything, and if I did not complete my education I would not have this job or any other." (Female, 37, Ikhtarin, displaced from Homs, Life Story)

At the same time, parents, youth, and other community members all described significant barriers to accessing education, as well as poor or inconsistent quality of education. Teachers were not paid well or regularly because of the conflict.[41] Positively, schools continue to follow the national curriculum, which at least offers consistency for students who have missed out on education or been displaced to new locations. Still, participants expressed significant concern about restoring strong education services.

Given these challenges, **some communities adapted and found ways to initiate continued education access for themselves and/or their children.** There were frequent reports of youth studying on their own with whatever books they could access; there were some reports of youth traveling in dangerous circumstances to take exams despite the risk. Others waited patiently for an alternate location for exams to be arranged. Even those who had been out of school since the start of the conflict described continuing education as their hope and goal for the future. Some of the participants in the research who had college degrees explained how they earned money by tutoring local young people who still desire to continue their education despite not having access to school.

In Bab Salameh camp, IDPs came together to establish a school when the camp had none. Former teachers met with camp management, local governance structures, and NGOs working in the area in order to facilitate the construction and funding of education services for camp inhabitants (Box 26).

Box 26: KII: Cooperation to ensure education for all children

> *"Teaching in a tent is very difficult to adapt to for students and teachers. Students had a hard time adapting at first because there were insufficient supplies and no seating. We cooperated all together with the leadership and the NGOs. Cooperation is needed to make sure all the children in the camp can still have education."* (Male, 45, Bab Salemeh, displaced from rural Aleppo, KII)

Despite the desire participants had to ensure all children have an opportunity to continue their education, some shared concerns that they may not be able to do so (Boxes 27 and 28).

Box 27: Life Story: Barriers to education

> *"I do think that education is a key for recovering and making a just country... I feel sorry for the young children nowadays, those that grew up during the war. They face so many issues today at school, and they have lost a lot of time. This has caused the value of education in their eyes to become less. They go to school, but they have many other issues to deal with. Schools are still on and off because of the unstable situation. Sometimes classes stop for 15 days or more, and children need continuity, otherwise they lose interest and forget. Also many parents do not send their children to school, worried that the children might be in dangerous situations. In many areas, schools do not operate any more at all."* (Female, 32, Ariha, returnee, Life Story)

Box 28: Life Story: Displaced from home and from school

> *"The worst part of displacement from Aleppo was leaving my high school. I can't describe how sad I was at that time. I had a lot of questions in my mind, one of them was if I was going to be able to continue my studies. It was very hard to accept the fact that we moved and I had to live in a village and continue my studies alone without a school or a private teacher. After a period of time, I started to know the neighbours and met a girl who volunteered to teach me."* (Female, 25, Turmanin, displaced from Aleppo, Life Story)

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[41] Descriptions of poor quality in teaching and learning align with other qualitative research that has emerged from Syria in 2019. See: Integrity (2019). Research to improve the quality of teaching and learning inside Syria.

In short, youth were eager to access education at this moment in time in whatever form it is available. However, this desire may weaken as time goes on and livelihood opportunities become more available and/or prioritised over education.[42]

3.4.4. NEW NORMAL: WOMEN'S ROLES

Women in particular are adapting to very new roles as compared to before the conflict, particularly in terms of pursuing livelihoods and as heads of households, which they took on as an absorptive strategy. For years during the conflict, women had been required to take on new roles to absorb a shock or stress, such as working outside the home or acting as head of household. This occurred in cases when multiple adults work in order to generate enough income (often in lower paying jobs than prior to the war); when a woman has become the sole breadwinner in a household (e.g. if her husband has died); and in cases where the man (formerly the sole income-generator) is injured or unable to work. Some of these jobs are considered "gendered" (e.g. sewing, shops for children's/women's items), while others are not (e.g. teacher, janitor). Individuals describe creating new livelihood opportunities through ingenuity and hard work (Boxes 29 and 30).

Box 29: KII: Women going to work

"When something bad happens, women do not sit at home. For example, when I was arrested, my wife went immediately to work. When my brother-in-law was detained, my sister had never worked before. Initially, she worked in sewing because she had the skill. Then she learned a new profession (and gained skills through an NGO's training courses). She then became a kindergarten teacher with a better salary." (Male, 50, Turmanin, displaced from Aleppo, KII)

Box 30: Life Story: Women's new roles

"The things that happened to me last year were bad. I was separated from my husband and our lifestyle changed completely. It was my responsibility now to raise my children and take care of them in all respects on my own. The current circumstances have played a role in this change, but I have managed to overcome and adapt to the new situation. I was able to find work and earn some money. With hope and strength, after I got a job I was able to secure the needs of my children and provide all their requirements. I was satisfied with my life after I overcame these conditions imposed on me." (Female, 29, Turmanin, returnee, Life Story)

Women also frequently are adapting to be a single parent and caregiver. Being a widow brought stigma; women had to work hard to feel seen and respected and not treated with only pity. They have to prove that they can still be contributing members of society. Participants emphasised that it is very hard work, fighting social stigma while simultaneously working to provide and care for their children and families.

During the first two waves of research, all participants were asked to describe a woman they know who has shown strength in the face of adversity. The overwhelming majority of the responses described a woman who had lost most or all of her family, but has since been able to earn income through ingenuity and hard work, and strength to keep going in order to provide for herself and her remaining children. *"One of my relatives lost her husband and she was supporting three children. At the beginning she was going around asking for help and then she thought she needs to be productive so she started her own home cooking project. Now she does not need anyone and supports her family. She cooks well and sells all kind of homemade food and pickles."* (Female, 22, Turmanin, KII) There were also descriptions of aid programming offered in camp settings which targeted widows, in order to teach new livelihoods skills and offer community-based support.

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[42] 2019 research from Mercy Corps echoes this sentiment, noting that older adolescents (who have missed out on a significant school number of school years) reported feeling less sure about the future and less likely to return to school. See: Chen, A., Wells, A. (2019). Adolescence lost: Forced adulthood and a fragile future for Syria's next generation. Mercy Corps.

Many female participants described the positive impact having these opportunities had on their own perceived empowerment. These opportunities contributed to the development of personal attributes such as self-reliance and independence, both of which participants linked to increased resilience (Boxes 31, 32, and 33).

Box 31: KII: Feeling more economically secure

"I joined a women's group that attends hairdressing training. I attend classes on a daily basis and consider this as something very positive for me and my family in the future… I feel safer and less worried about my economic condition than before, because I am sure now that I can get a job after this training ends." (Female, 38, Ikhtarin, displaced from Homs, KII)

Box 32: KII: Women gaining a new identity

"As a woman I was liberated from many restrictions especially concerning work, though not many suitable jobs were available… Despite hardships, women have gained their own identity." (Female, 29, Raqqa, returnee, KII)

Box 33: KII: Experiencing a new freedom

"Women in rural areas have become freer. They can go to markets and work, just like men." (Female, 45, Hazima, not displaced, KII)

Some women spoke of changes and new conceptualisations of their identities, experiences, and futures in relation to the war. This included changing views of themselves, their marriages, and how such change may translate into their new post-conflict lives (Box 34).

Box 34: KII: Changing identities

"During the siege, one of my friends said to me, 'Look at our forms. We do not remove our headscarf from our heads until only right before we sleep.' We were always ready for anything – to run, to protect our families. There were no mirrors to see ourselves nor did we remember to look anyway. When my family arrived in Idleb and we took a house, I looked into the mirror and raised my hijab. I saw myself as a very different person. I wondered how my husband would see me after this very difficult period. We did not really look at each other at all, since all we cared about was protecting the children, and surviving hunger and bombing. The temporary calmness in Idleb has brought back to us the fact that we are also our own women, and wives too… In this town there is no shop for women, and we must still go to the neighbouring areas to ensure the simplest necessities. So I want to open a shop with make-up and women's accessories here. I want to relieve myself from thinking about all the terrible things that we went through. It may be kind of an escape, to unburden my soul and not imprison myself into thinking about the past. I will not be defeated. I will not die. I am alive." (Female, 34, Ariha, displaced, KII)

A participant's Life Story from Bab Salameh (recounted by the researcher, Box 35) describes how working and returning to education helped her find a new sense of pride in herself and gave her direction for the future.

Box 35: Life Story: Confidence through hardship and new responsibilities

"After she was displaced from her beautiful village – first to Turkey, then north to the harsh camps – she had the opportunity to work in one of the international humanitarian organisations. While she was working she realised the importance of education. She had not completed her education after she became engaged, so she then insisted to pursue her dream of completing it with the encouragement of her mother and husband (though he refused at the beginning)… She faced much pressure while she was studying because of the children and the difficult times they were going through. But her abilities generally were improved, and she gained more confidence in herself, which was reflected in the way she treated her children. She helped her husband with their livelihoods, too. She was feeling proud…. Now she is in the graduation stage from the Faculty of Education. In the future she wants to open a centre for girls who haven't studied (and even older women and widows who have not, too), so they may find a job and earn a living." (Female, 27, Bab Salameh, displaced from North Aleppo, Life Story)

Some women felt sufficiently empowered to make drastic and non-traditional changes in their lives, such as divorcing their husbands (Box 36).

Box 36: Life Story: Rushing into marriage to try to make ends meet

"Getting divorced was a difficult stage in my life as it is not easy to be a single parent for two children and to leave my home… though it was the only solution to end the suffering with my marriage. I compromised a lot for my children's sake to stay, but the situation only got worse. Once, when my daughter was sick, my husband refused to take her to the hospital. Similar incidents made my life so tough and forced me to ask for a divorce. In the future, I do want to marry again. I need a husband, a man who is compassionate and who can love me and my children. I need someone who can compensate for the dreadful days we went through, who stands beside me to raise the children and be responsible for them and give them the love they did not get from their father. I really want someone who is supportive in order to go through this harsh life and difficult conditions we are living in." (Female, 29, Turmanin, returnee, Life Story)

Despite these widespread and significant changes in gender roles, it is not clear to what extent these changes will be permanent, nor the extent to which some women want them to be permanent. While many women (as discussed above) desire to maintain these new roles, some women indicated that while they could carry the weight of the whole family, it was not easy nor necessarily desirable as their workload and emotional stress was increasing significantly. Women described this difficulty, and some expressed a desire to return to traditional roles (Boxes 37 and 38).

Box 37: KII: The double burden women carry

"These new circumstances have put me in the position of being both mother and father for my children, and this applies to most women in my community… The current situation supports women's empowerment and the idea that she is equal to men, but the reality is that she now took on the role of both males and females simultaneously. Now she does both." (Female, 35, Raqqa, displaced, KII)

Box 38: Life Story: Desire to return to former roles

"I don't want to work in the future. I want to marry a man who loves me and raise my children and take care of my husband. I do not want this job." (Female, 24, Izaz, Life Story)

Likewise, others indicated that it was simply a matter of necessity that women were working, and it was temporary for those who could afford to have the woman not work (Box 39).

Box 39: Life Story: Temporariness of independence

"I have learned from events that women have to be independent... This independence is more common in some regions already than others because of traditions that did not allow women to work or sometimes leave the home prior to the war. Women have become more independent since the start of the war because they are trying to help their husbands or their children, especially if there is no husband (like me). But in general, women everywhere who are alone are forced to work. I believe that these changes are permanent for some people like me because my family has no other income. But for other women, it may be temporary if things are stable and calm again in Syria." (Female, 42, Ikhtarin, displaced from Homs, Life Story)

Additionally, due to security concerns (mainly in urban locations), some women describe having less independence, freedom, and ability to participate in society than prior to the conflict. In Raqqa, participants noted that female adolescents and youth may only be allowed to leave the house while accompanied by a male relative, whereas they enjoyed greater freedom of movement before the war. With reports of kidnappings, rape, and robberies, concern about the safety of female family members was noted frequently in locations where safety was a major concern. In more rural areas where families felt more secure, women's freedom of movement (especially to work) was less restricted than prior to the conflict. Negative coping mechanisms, such as early marriage, were noted in rural areas (Ramtha, Hasakeh, Izaz). Early marriage was discussed in negative terms by the majority of respondents who mentioned it, though it was notably described as normal prior to the conflict amongst rural-originating participants.

Relatedly, it was extremely hard for single or widowed women to support their families alone, and many saw that their only option was to find a partner. In some cases, the resulting situation was worse than their struggles alone (see Box 40).

Box 40: Life Story: Re-marrying and giving up children

"I had to marry for the second time without really taking time to consider if the man was suitable. When my first husband died, I could not take care of my daughters financially, and my parents could barely carry our burden, so I just married my second husband to take care of us. If I had my own income I would not have married, but instead worked and rented a house for me and my daughters. My parents pressured me to marry quickly as I was still young and a widow. 'If not now, then maybe never,' they said. My parents could not help as they had to rent a house and pay for utilities which they could barely afford. As a consequence of the second marriage, I lost my daughters. My new husband cannot have them in the house; he cannot afford it, and also my ex in-laws would not allow my daughters to live with a strange family. If I had had time to think right, I would have found a way to keep my children with me and not hastily marry, as now they have to live with my in-laws." (Female, 27, Ramtha, displaced from Dara'a, Life Story)

Alongside descriptions of women's new roles and norms, there were also more traditional descriptions (from both men and women) of the innate characteristics and abilities of women to adapt, as well as descriptions of social norms in patriarchal terms. This is illustrated by one participant who said, *"Of course men and women are treated differently. It is a man's society and he has the last word"* (Female, Izaz, FGD). **Since such perceptions continue to endure, there may be resistance against a new normal in which women sustain previously male-dominated roles.**

Across the data, both male and female participants describe women with words such as "fragile" and explain that it is harder for them to adjust, such as in the following statements: *"Women prefer safe places as we are more fragile and need peace"* (Female, 33, Bab Salameh, displaced, KII), and *"The men's nature and ability to cope and bear the hardship is more than women"* (Male, 27, Raqqa, displaced, KII).

These statements exist alongside descriptions of significant adaptations and female contributions to family income and wellbeing. Interestingly, individuals may even express seemingly contradictory perceptions of women within a single interview. This was most commonly observed when a participant described a strong, enduring woman he/she knows and her particular situation (a question explicitly asked in Wave 1), but still uses words like fragile and weak to speak about women generally. The unpredictable and fast-changing context of Syria has thrust women into new roles; while many participants of both genders describe such change positively, conventional perceptions and views are also prevalent.

3.4.5. ASSETS TO HELP ADAPT

People with higher levels of education were more capable of adapting their livelihoods toward those that were more stable and long-term. NGOs, for example, were said to mainly hire those with formal education through university. As such, **many people noted that returning and completing education for themselves (as adults) was a goal because it was, to them, the only pathway to obtaining a better job. This attitude also translated into parents who strongly prioritised their children's return to school** in order to ultimately assure better livelihood opportunities for themselves.

Still, even those with relatively high education and good jobs were aware that their relative stability was tenuous, and change could come at any moment (Box 41).

Box 41: KII: Income challenges for middle-income families

> *"I can say that the most important [recent] incident was my husband losing his job... We were shocked because our financial situation is already relatively poor, even though I was a school principal and my husband was an accountant. We barely have enough money to live... and my husband has not yet found new work. We had two salaries a month but we are barely surviving. Imagine how we will live with only one salary now! If it remains like this for a long time it will be a disaster."* (Female, 45, Ikhtarin, displaced from Homs, KII)

Many participants identified training in new skills as helpful in enabling them to create new livelihoods and also to connect with other people to work together (e.g. knitting wool, sewing, computer skills, tailoring, mechanic, food production, etc.). Even if these skills were completely different than their previous livelihoods, it was felt anything that could help them to earn income was valuable, especially as most participants were finding it necessary to take on multiple jobs to make ends meet.

Accessing capital was identified as a challenge for creating new livelihoods, alongside the need for stability (Box 42). Some participants had ambitions to expand their businesses and provide jobs for others but found accessing capital was a major constraint.

Box 42: Life Story: Need for capital to improve livelihoods

> *"When Ariha was liberated from the Assad army I went back to work. I worked in a car wash, I was only moving from my work to my house and I did not go anywhere else because I cannot leave my family alone. I work now in fixing and cleaning cars, the work is slow but thank God. I suggest that NGOs need to build businesses like mine. For example I work in cars, if they give me cash to expand my business I could hire 4 to 5 people who can support their families instead of waiting for baskets of food and rely on help and become lazy. I would even pay back as a loan."* (Male, 45, Ariha, returnee, Life Story)

People adapt more easily to being displaced in new places when they have strong social networks. Families helped each other by providing a new home and community – since families are large and often spread out, there were often differing levels of intensity of conflict in different locations. Thus, families in instances of acute need received money from other family members who were experiencing periods of calm and/or had savings and assets still available to them (Box 43). Remittances sent home to Syria were also common, and family members outside of the country often offered the only assistance available to those in crisis.

Box 43: KII: Financial support from family

> *"I am a widow now for eight years and a mother for an autistic 13-year-old child. I returned to Raqqa shortly after liberation; I returned to my home and society. I live now with my sister and her family, who lost their home due to bombing. We are now one family who support and take care of each other through hardships."*
> (Female, 45, Raqqa, returnee, KII)

Conversely, when people were displaced (often from cities to rural/camp settings), they often found themselves far from family and community. This was a real challenge to adaptation and wellbeing, and was noted especially in regard to children growing up far from extended families. Though host communities often made attempts to help the displaced, families were still accustomed to living in proximity to each other and supporting each other through hard times. **Many prioritised creating new communities in their new locations:** *"Our way of life has changed dramatically because we live away from family and it is not easy to grow up without that and know them well. Our children are growing up in a different way as their family is not close by. Our social life is the most affected by displacement... Yet we found out that this is our new reality and we need to cope and adapt and integrate. Our neighbours and people in the area try to help by creating social bonds and visiting [each other]."* (Male, 40, Ikhtarin, displaced, KII)

3.5. Transformative capacity

Transformative capacity: The ability of individuals, households, and communities to influence the enabling environment and drivers of risks to create individual and systemic changes on behaviours, local governance and decision-making structures, market economics, and policies and legislation.[43]

3.5.1. SOCIAL CAPITAL
As mentioned repeatedly throughout these findings, social cohesion, collective action, and social capital were strong within groups throughout the conflict, and were critical in helping people remain resilient. Among those describing social capital, 87% indicated positive bonding attitudes or experiences[44] in at least one interview, notably in comparison to descriptions of positive bridging[45] (21%) and linking[46] (15%). Attitudes were similar across age groups, education levels, and genders (see Table 14). Syrian society prior to the war was marked by strong social relations, based on kinship bonds, shared morals and values, and a culture of volunteerism and charity.[47] Such norms carried over to the acute shocks that individuals and communities experienced at the outset of conflict. Rich descriptions of extended families, neighbours, community members, and even strangers helping each other to survive were collected in all locations and from all ages and genders.

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[43] Definitions based on CARE guidance documents: CARE (2016a); CARE (2017).
[44] Bonding capital is described above as: strong ties and relationships within a network, community, or group among people who are already similar in some way.
[45] Bridging capital refers to weaker, more diffuse ties which link or cut across communities or groups.
[46] Linking capital refers to relationships between those in different social positions of power or authority.
[47] See: SCPR (2017); Batatu, H. (1999). Syria's peasantry, the descendants of its lesser rural notables, and their politics. Princeton University Press; Barakat, H. (1993). The Arab world: Society, culture, and state. University of California Press; Barakat, H. (2006). Alienation in Arab culture: Between reality and dream. Beirut, Centre for Arab Unity Studies.

Table 14: Bonding, bridging, and linking attitudes, among those discussing social capital at all, by age, education, and gender

	Attitude conveyed	Age		Education		Gender		
		15 – 35 (n=124)	36+ (n=70)	Junior secondary or less (n=75)	Senior secondary or more (n=121)	Female (n=165)	Male (n=70)	Total (n=235)
Bonding	Positive	91%	86%	85%	91%	87%	89%	87%
	Negative	12%	11%	12%	12%	16%	7%	13%
Bridging	Positive	22%	20%	19%	24%	19%	26%	21%
	Negative	8%	3%	7%	6%	5%	11%	7%
Linking	Positive	14%	14%	9%	19%	15%	16%	15%
	Negative	13%	16%	17%	12%	11%	17%	13%

A Field Team member explained how profound the degree of social cohesion was that she observed over the six months of research (Box 44).

Box 44: Researcher's perception of social cohesion

"We met people who went through very difficult conditions, and despite all the news we heard about [such conditions] through the media, we had not heard such real stories told by the same storyteller [as we did in conducting this research]. [Our participants] went through these very difficult circumstances that no one could imagine. Yet they had altruism and did not abandon their principles and good morals. They offered the bit that is most needed to a small child instead of having it themselves. This position is purely humanitarian and altruistic. I have only heard of such human cases in fiction, but now I have heard them in reality."

As well, those with positive attitudes about bonding and bridging were more hopeful for the future than those with negative attitudes to bonding and bridging, who tended to be more worried for the future. Positive or negative linking attitudes were not associated with hopefulness or worry (see Table 15).

Table 15: Bonding/bridging/linking attitudes by hopes/worries for future, all waves

	Attitude conveyed	Hopeful for future	Worried for future
Bonding	Positive (n=210)	23%	15%
	Negative (n=32)	6%	34%
Bridging	Positive (n=52)	27%	12%
	Negative (n=16)	13%	25%
Linking	Positive (n=36)	28%	31%
	Negative (n=31)	23%	16%

Women in particular were said to create new communities in new locations with a key objective of rebuilding social and community relationships. In Ikhtarin, women describe their outreach to local communities in order to bridge new relationships between IDPs and locals. Women, participants note, understand the importance of human connection and social bonds in recovery and healing. There is an expressed appreciation for this as families and communities adapt and heal. A number of women's centres were described that were locally driven and designed to help get women back on their feet by adapting to their new situation and learning a new skill, such as a craft or the basics of entrepreneurship. These centres (set up by NGOs in Bab Salameh and Ikhtarin) additionally hosted social events and offered awareness-raising and life skills education related to, for example, the dangers of early marriage. In Izaz City, women often travel to the nearby camps to access services offered at these centres; in this location, establishing these centres in the city so that women can more safely and regularly access them was an important point noted by participants.

Social cohesion and capital are necessary components of transformative capacity, but the research shows that while intra-group cohesion and capital is extremely strong in Syria (as it was before the conflict) inter-group cohesion and capital formation may be degrading as a result of the conflict.[48] Transformative capacity, in particular, critically relies upon bridging and linking social capital as both individuals and societies recover and transform; additionally, exposure to direct violence (e.g. war, displacement) negatively impacts both of these forms of social capital.[49] While there are descriptions of some inter-group cooperation (e.g. between IDP and host communities helping each other with basic survival needs), the counts of such descriptions across the data (n=52) are substantially less than descriptions of bonding social capital and relationships (n=210). Alongside this are descriptions of mistrust and fear related to groups on opposing sides of the conflict itself, which sometimes shifts to a focus on helping everyone survive (Boxes 45 and 46).

Box 45: Life Story: Changing community relations

"In our old life, everything was organised. Children were in school; my husband was working; water and electricity were of course available. Then, people cared about each other in the community. When one had a problem, everyone would jump up to help out. When the war started, people stood by each other. But now it is more 'me first'... Most people came back to the village. The village is the same but people are not the same anymore. They are keeping to themselves; people don't ask about each other anymore. Each one is living separately, although they were helping each other until the last day before we parted ways in displacement. Family helps out most, neighbours here barely have enough for themselves." (Female, 38, Hazima, returnee, Life Story)

Box 46: Life Story: Temporary disputes

"As for the family disputes among the people in the village, I know neighbours who had disagreements. They differed on opinions on ISIS. The most controversial were the ones who said that ISIS was right and was helping the village, and the others saying that they were wrong. The dispute grew so big that they no longer talked to each other. However, when the conditions became more difficult and the displacement started, 'the water returned to its course' and the differences between the two parties ended. They became even more loving than before the period of displacement." (Male, 30, Hazima, returnee, Life Story)

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[48] The term intra-group is used here to refer to closed systems within a similar group, and inter-group to refer to interactions and cooperation between different groups. In the Syria context, inter-group may refer to IDP/host communities, as well as opposing political allegiances. We used these terms in alignment with bonding (intra-group) and bridging (inter-group) social capital, but also to reflect a critical aspect of post-conflict peacebuilding, in which social and political cohesion will become essential.
[49] SCPR (2017), p.65.

There is evidence of tense relationships between host communities and IDPs, particularly when the cultures are considered to be dissimilar. As the conflict has endured, new security concerns (e.g. kidnappings, looting, rape) coupled with unrelenting economic pressure have only worsened such tension and mistrust. This echoes 2017 findings from the Syrian Centre for Research and Policy (SCRP)[50], which measured the significant degradation of social capital inside of Syria since the start of the conflict. Descriptions of mistrust of others, of fear and insecurity, and worry for the future because of such difference were present (Box 47).

Box 47: Life Story: Difficulty finding a new place to call home

> *"It was a really hard time when we got out of Jericho. It affected us a lot. It is very hard when you move out of your home and your country because of the unjust regime. What made it worse was that the people in the village we first went to did not accept us because they were afraid that the regime would harm them. We moved to another village but they also did not agree to help us find a house. We finally were able to stay in an old shop for over a year. Anyone who flees his home wants to find anyone who could help him, and it is a shock that people would refuse to help."* (Male, 45, Ariha, displaced, Life Story)

As noted in the limitations, exploration of conflict dynamics, and thus political inter-group social cohesion, was intentionally left out of the study design and the research team did not ask explicit questions. Despite this, many participants did describe political views, political events, and perspectives on the revolution and war. While specific conflict details have not been included here, generally these participants described sustained and strong fear related to politics, feelings of mistrust and betrayal by various conflict actors, and worry for the future in terms of reconciliation.

Due to these limitations, it is impossible to offer perspective on civilians' social cohesion across the opposing sides of the war. The data shows cooperation across difference (mainly social and cultural) during acute emergency and, in particular, in relation to support for basic survival. An overwhelming theme of this research is Syrians' willingness to help, cooperate, and support one another. Alongside this cooperation, there were also descriptions of communities working through mistrust and conflict.

Inter-group politics will undoubtedly become more and more relevant as Syria moves into recovery and reconciliation stages; for large-scale transformation to occur, inter-group cohesion will be essential.

Despite the above examples, the instances of inter-group social capital, cohesion, and action observed in the data and presented in previous sections – mainly between IDP and host communities – have certainly improved resilience at household and community levels.

3.5.2. LOCAL GOVERNMENT, POLICY, SYSTEMS-LEVEL CHANGE
While people commented on certain policy and systems-level changes that they feel are needed in both their own communities and beyond, there are few concrete ideas about how to accomplish these. Participants noted that this is a result of their need to focus on surviving right now and in the near future. In past years people may have followed the details of the conflict itself, but by the time of this research participants have spent a more significant amount of time just trying to survive.

While many participants described alliance with groups on one side of the conflict, they also noted how difficult it became to distinguish the goals of these groups as the conflict continued. As mentioned previously, many noted that they had "given up politics" to focus on survival of family. Additionally, many had had experiences of betrayal that left them with mistrust for forces with whom they were previously aligned (see Boxes 48 and 49).

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[50] SCPR (2017).

Box 48: Life Story: Betrayed by changed allegiances

> "When the truce occurred [in Ghouta], we had two choices to either stay or leave to Idleb. This was a great shock for us; we felt that we had been sold at a very low price and that all our endurance in staying through the siege was in vain. The forces that supposedly were defending us changed allegiances because of this truce. We felt that we lived in such fear and we lost so much: relatives, dear ones, years of our lives, and our houses. All for nothing." (Female, 22, Ariha, displaced from Ghouta, Life Story)

Box 49: Life Story: Not knowing who to trust

> "At one point in the village... we had ISIS coming from one side and the aligned forces from the other. Leaflets from planes warned us, but we did not know if we should trust warnings or who they were from. We moved to the empty lands north of the village in the cold; people suffered a lot but we had to leave or we would have died under bombs and shells from one side or the other... We were hopeful after displacement and liberation that things would be better than before. But we were shocked that factions lied and did not do what they promised. There were more clashes, and corruption, and imprisonment of civilians. It did not get better." (Male, 30, Hazima, returnee, Life Story)

Overall, both trust and access to participate in local governance and leadership is poor, which limits the degree to which individuals and families can (or feel as though they can) make changes to it. Throughout the research, participants described their lack of trust in local governance structures; this applied to these structures' intentions, their ability to actually take action given the circumstances, and their potential corruption or inclination towards supporting their own families and communities first.

In urban locations, trust in NGOs is also limited. Participants describe lack of access and information related to NGOs, as well as poor cooperation and communication. Where they have been provided aid, it is often described as inadequate or redundant.

Overall, participants distrust national institutions more than they trust them; this is the case across all groups. Table 16 shows the breakdown of conveyed trust/mistrust for both institutions and NGOs. Very few participants trusted national institutions (e.g. schools, hospitals); the few who did were older and more educated. Local leaders and NGOs were equally trusted, with around half having positive attitudes and half having negative attitudes. Younger people and more educated people trusted NGOs more often. There were no major differences between genders.

Table 16: Trust in entities among those commenting on perception of those entities, by age, geography, and education level

| | Attitude conveyed | Age | | Education | | Gender | | Total |
		15 – 35 (n=124)	36+ (n=70)	Less educated	More educated (	Female (n=42)	Male (n=21)	
National institutions	Positive	0%	25%	0%	8%	0%	10%	4%
	Negative	100%	75%	100%	92%	100%	90%	96%
	Total n	14	5	8	13	14	10	24
Local leaders	Positive	44%	52%	37%	53%	46%	44%	45%
	Negative	56%	48%	63%	47%	54%	56%	55%
	Total n	39	29	27	45	57	27	84
NGOs	Positive	45%	27%	32%	56%	47%	40%	45%
	Negative	55%	73%	68%	44%	53%	60%	55%
	Total n	38	23	25	39	49	25	74

A community leader in Hazima described the lack of coordination and also relevant skills for the current situation in the city (Box 50).

Box 50: KII: Randomness in distribution of aid

"According to what I see there is no organisation in the work of aid organisations or local councils, they do not have established mechanisms or a clear vision on how to work in the region to support the people. You see an organisation distributing food baskets and you also see another distributing the same baskets. There is a lot of randomness. The municipality in the village did not repair the roads inside the village since it became active again. The region is almost completely destroyed and there is no experience in this field to make these needed repairs. Local and municipal workers do not have the competence to run the country in this particular circumstance. As for capacity building, we urgently need experts who could manage and direct the managers of the region." (Male, 55, Hazima community leader, returnee, KII)

A participant in Raqqa described the inadequacy of government-led repairs and reconstruction efforts, which ultimately impede further recovery (Box 51).

Box 51: KII: Inadequate provision of support

"The municipal government is more active now and provides some services. But there are accusations of corruption directed at them. The support provided is repairing bridges, repairing some roads, opening schools, activating them and distributing water, but these things are not enough. Bridges were repaired quickly and inefficiently. This reform was not proper. When the rain comes out, these bridges are out of service. Even the roads are fixed inefficiently, a spot here and a spot there. Water pumps break quickly." (Male, 44, Raqqa, displaced, KII)

The research team sought to speak with members of local councils in each location; these leaders expressed similar sentiment in terms of trust, efficiency, and effectiveness of governance and aid mechanisms/support. They also noted that they, too, struggle to survive in dire circumstances alongside the people in their communities (Boxes 52 and 53) .

Box 52: KII: A state of chaos

"I do not have an official status, but I sit in an office and work with the people on community problems (new problems, resolving family issue, etc.). Some aid organisations came to us to provide them with explanation about the services currently available in the village, but nothing was done and then people blame us. After the formation of the local village council, all the services became linked to us. Of course, the change in life is drastic for everyone, especially after the fall of the regime in the region. It has become a state of chaos… the price of food and transportation costs became very high compared to the salaries of people. Life has become harder than before and frankly the situation has become unbearable as poverty began to increase in the region. In general the area is in chaos and much cannot be controlled. Most services are not available. There is no longer any authority here to rely on solving issues of interest to people, such as irrigation and agricultural support which is important in this location. When the SDF took over the area, we began to communicate with them in order to find ways to rebuild the region. No-one cooperated with the council, so we stopped trying." (Male, 55, Hazima community leader, returnee, KII)

"I am a member of the local council... We worked so far to secure food and medical supplies in warehouses, and to install loudspeakers to warn people. We worked with NGOs and the trade unions to organise support and cooperate. At the moment the economic and security situation fluctuates everyday... My salary is fixed but still not enough to live on, especially with winter coming when everything rises in price. To overcome these challenges, I will be looking for an extra job like everyone else." (Male, 40, Ikhtarin, displaced from Homs, KII)

For participants, most noted that they did not know how to contact local governance structures, NGOs, or other official entities that may offer support. This lack of access to participate in decision-making regarding recovery may result in individuals, families, and communities feeling abandoned to care for themselves and each other, a point that is reflected in people's descriptions of the critical value of self-reliance. In moving from absorptive and adaptive responses towards transformation, this disconnect between leadership and the local population will likely hinder recovery efforts.

In particularly urban locations, recovery of local governing and decision-making structures is indicated through increased access to and improvements in basic services (e.g. hospitals, schools, sewage systems), as well as markets, and public transportation options. Participants describe this currently in the cities (Raqqa, Izaz, Ariha), though people are still caught up with challenges to safety and security in such locations. Safety concerns in urban areas are now largely related to criminal activity, which then inhibits civilians' ability to access and use basic services in the course of rebuilding. Access to basic services remains a challenge in rural and camp settings; participants in agricultural areas in particular note that their previous livelihoods depended upon government support (through provision or subsidising, for example, of pesticides, seeds, or water). There has been little recovery towards this type of support, and thus perceived growth in the agricultural sector remains stagnant (Box 54).

Box 54: KII: Needed support for agriculture

"I hope to have more support for farmers by decreased fertiliser and seed prices, and fixed waterways to avoid the risk of losing money and effort due to water cut-off. Farmers should be compensated in time of disaster such as when the outbreak of cotton worm occurred and destroyed the whole crop. The government used to give farmers money to buy seeds and fertilisers to be paid after harvesting, and in cases of disasters farmers received compensation. This support is needed in order for the agriculture sector and our economy to recover." (Female, 37, Ikhtarin, displaced from Homs, KII)

During the course of data collection, police crackdowns on crime in Ikhtarin and Izaz occurred, which had significant ripples of effect as a result of the lack of communication between people and government. Residents' movements were limited during this time, and thus many lost out on a few or more days of work. Participants expressed mixed reactions to this event: while they acknowledged that crime was a serious issue needing to be addressed via officials, they also described the fragility of their current situation as being unable to handle even those few days of missed income. In this case, recovery efforts such as these criminal crackdowns that contribute towards transformative processes of improving municipal level governance and stability created unintended, negative consequences at the household level, pointing towards a **need for more feedback, accountability and communication by official services.**

4. CONCLUSIONS

Through the detailed experiences and views shared by the Syrian participants and the research team, they have painted a nuanced picture of what resilience means for them. The findings shared above have increased understanding on the research questions in the Syrian context:

1. What does resilience mean from the perspective of people living in Syria?

   - What capacities do households and communities use and what strategies do households and communities adopt to become resilient in such a changing context?
   - What are the main factors that affect household and community resilience in an active conflict area?

2. How has the conflict affected the role of women within their families and communities (positively and negatively)?

3. How does it relate to the humanitarian community's and CARE's definitions of resilience?

   - Is CARE's understanding of supporting resilience suitable for the context within Syria?
   - How can the humanitarian sector build/improve on the capacities and actions that households and communities take to build their own resilience in Syria?

4. What systems need to be strengthened to better support the resilience of households and communities in protracted crisis?

Key reflections and conclusions are discussed below in relation to these questions.

4.1. Features of resilience in Syria

How does this understanding of resilience relate to the humanitarian community's and CARE's definitions of resilience?

Definitions of resilience in the literature vary depending on context. This study has shown another manifestation of resilience given the particularly complex situation and underlying vulnerability that people are faced with in Syria today. Based upon the perspectives of Syrians who partook in this study, defining resilience in Syria requires consideration of (a) straightforward economic and logistical resilience, such as livelihoods activities and access to capital and assets at both the household and community levels; (b) characteristics of individuals, households, and communities such as self-reliance, flexibility, and adaptive learning; and (c) the central role of family ties, social cohesion, and community cooperation.

Self-reliance, diversity and redundancy of skills and resources, flexibility, and adaptive learning feature prominently in descriptions of resilience in Syria amongst the participants. These characteristics were included in the original conceptual framework for the Syria Resilience Project, and emerged across capacities, locations, and over time.

- Self-reliance was critical to individual, household, and community resilience, and was explicitly mentioned across all capacities as well as over the course of the conflict itself. While social relationships (and specifically bonding social capital) regularly came up in explanation of how people were able to cope, there is considerable description of individual experiences and how personal traits, behaviours, and characteristics helped people to "keep going."

- Diversity and redundancy of skills and assets were critical positive aspects of resilience that were clearly lacking for most study participants. Description of circumstances of fragility and continued vulnerability – though frequently heard alongside narratives of "adapting" to the new normal – are ubiquitous in the data. A single further shock could send people back into acute crisis, wherein they cannot buy food, heat their home, or pay rent. Those with various kinds of resources (e.g. more than one of: savings/assets, family living in accessible locations, family with financial capital to share, education or transferrable skills) are more resilient to continued shocks because they have options (and backup options) when their situation is again disrupted.

- Flexibility relates to the above aspects of resilience – diversity and redundancy – but emphasises the ability to use various assets in new and different ways. It differs in that it underlines the individual or family's capacity to adaptively act/react after experiencing shock, via the use of diverse or redundant assets. The study demonstrated this in regards to people adopting entirely new income-generating activities with assets they have; in women learning new ways of using their skills to generate income; of families who live together in a shared home and adapt to shared income. Again, flexibility interrelates with diversity and redundancy of assets (i.e. if you have savings available, you have "starter" funding and thus more opportunity to do something different).

  Simultaneously, this study found descriptions of embedded flexibility across all groups, emphasising that those without savings and assets were also able to adapt effectively. This was particularly clear in rural-originating participants, who explicitly described a flexible approach to livelihoods strategies both before and during the conflict.

- Adaptive learning emerged as a defining theme in the data, both in terms of learning new skills and gaining new knowledge. The former was particularly poignant in regards to women gaining entirely new skillsets as they enter into jobs outside of the house for the first time. Often, women did so independently (e.g. a woman with sewing skills may learn to operate a small shop); through necessity – and often family or community support – she acquires the business skills to operate this shop and support her family. Women also adapted to circumstances at home given the responsibility is largely on them to ensure the wellbeing of themselves and their families during displacement. Women made a lot of the logistical adaptations in the aftermath of a shock/stressor, such as using firewood to cook and heat, new ways to wash, or traveling distances to retrieve water.

This adaptive learning can also be understood in terms of gaining knowledge and understanding to better react to the conflict environment. Both men and women spoke, for example, about learning to read informal warnings in order to evaluate the severity of new threats. Regularly, participants noted that they were (to a certain extent) more prepared now for any future emergency because of how much they had learned through past shocks and stress.

4.2. Resilience and vulnerability

What does resilience mean from the perspective of people living in Syria?

Resilience and vulnerability are not mutually exclusive. In all locations, people continue to be exposed to multiple kinds of hazards and threats. Although many describe themselves as adapting to their "new normal," they also note that even a single shock could send them back to barely surviving. Throughout the longitudinal data, there were countless examples of people describing a single event, which may be at the household or community level (return of small conflict; devaluation of the dollar; loss of one income; family member getting sick). Suddenly, these families could no longer pay rent, buy food, pay for heat, etc., which instilled great fear and worry in them. Ultimately, people's anxiousnesss and their circumstances inhibited them from moving forward in recovery and has a continued traumatic effect.

However, despite their fragile circumstances, there were very clear resilience capacities and processes occurring. People talked about the future; about instances of creating new income opportunities; and of working together as families and communities to collectively support each other. Additionally, there were in-depth descriptions of the personal qualities (strength, patience, independence, self-reliance) that people possess, and have often acquired, over the course of the conflict.

Thus, there is a sort of "spectrum" of resilience that people move along via often non-linear pathways; Syrians may be incredibly resilient in some ways and not in others. Underlying adaptation to a "new normal" is, for everyone, uncertainty and the continued vulnerability of households to be affected by future shocks. This is true even as they may have become more resilient over time. Overall, it appears that a key element of resilience in Syria right now is that most people's recovery is incredibly fragile, and individuals and households remain worried about basic survival even with seemingly resilient factors present. **The resilience capacities they exercise are often only enough for survival, due to the repeated shocks and uncertainty they face.** This is the case not only for the most vulnerable people, but for most people in Syria.

Relatedly, it is clear that resilience is a process, not a set of fixed personal, household, or community traits or assets. As stated above, participants moved across a spectrum of resilience in dynamic ways throughout the course of this longitudinal research. Additionally, they moved back and forth between absorptive and adaptive stages and strategies. Such non-linearity is an important element of this particular context, and one that is not always reflected in the humanitarian literature in which resilience capacities and stages are often described as chronological.

While specific capacities, traits, and assets were described at the individual, household, and community level, the data also reflects the critical interactions between these levels that affected overall resilience in often unpredictable ways. People who are the "most vulnerable" – widows, people with disabilities – were not necessarily the least resilient; conversely, people who have college degrees, savings, or assets are not necessarily the most resilient. Aspects of resilience may increase under certain conditions and for certain capacities at the individual and household level, but for sustainable recovery and more robust resilience, such capacities and characteristics must connect outwards towards community, regional, and ultimately national systems. This is particularly relevant when planning response efforts, as it emphasises various points of entry for humanitarian aid situated within complex and dynamic social and political systems.

4.3. Social capital

What systems need to be strengthened to better support the resilience of households and communities in protracted crisis?

Across the data, the most common factor that has strengthened people's resilience was social capital. To put it another way, individuals without family resources or support were, in general, more vulnerable and exposed to shocks. As noted throughout the above sections, mutually supportive, prosocial, helpful relationships and networks (i.e. bonding social capital) were of critical importance across all four resilience capacities as well as in all locations and context types. There was probably nothing more pronounced in the data than how much people rely on their families (including extended families), as well as close neighbours and friends. This support is emotional, logistical, and financial.

In Syria, family was named as a source of strength; a reason to keep going; motivation to work terrible, low paying jobs; and to endure through trauma and suffering. Participants described enduring sustained suffering in order to be strong for children, parents, and spouses. Simultaneously, for so many, family support comprises the critical means to keep going. Families depend on each other financially, logistically, and emotionally. There is nothing more prominent in the data than people claiming that family support is the only thing that helped them to survive.

At the same time, there are indications that social capital may be degrading in some respects as a result of the conflict. In particular, when communities are hit with a shock and some leave while others stay, this can break up social networks and relationships, and further degrade resilience of both groups in terms of social capital. When participants returned to their often-destroyed homes after displacement, they faced much more than just the rebuilding of houses. Processing trauma, grieving loved ones, and adjusting to profound changes in lifestyle all take considerable time and emotional energy. It is unclear from the data whether or not such processes will occur cooperatively within and across communities. In the recovery and rebuilding phases, the degradation of social cohesion may have very real consequences.

4.4. Transforming gender norms

How has the conflict affected the role of women within their families and communities?

The transformation of gender norms has occurred throughout the country, but the nature and strength of such transformation differs both across and within locations. In the data there are conflicting perceptions of the resilience and role of women in crisis contexts, as well as uncertainty about how changing gender norms will sustain or revert in the future. Women have taken on new roles outside the house (such as employment), adopted various methods to assure survival of children and family, served as connectors and the weavers of new and restored social relationships, and used both positive and negative coping mechanisms to create a "new normal." For many, they have found new identities and reservoirs of strength inside themselves that they speak about with pride. Men note the incredible strength and calmness of their wives that enabled the family's survival. Other women express a desire to leave behind their new norms and return to a life with family and home at its centre. In many cases women have been having to take on two roles, instead of one, and usually as the result of a traumatic event (e.g. death, injury or displacement of husband, brother or father).

Among those agreeing that women's increased agency was a positive shift, there was clear agreement that women should be at the centre of their own decisions regarding their lives now and in the future. There was much mention in the data of the efficacy of women's training and empowerment centres inside Syria, typically NGO-driven, but sometimes formed by people in communities. Programming that emphasises choice and continued support for women, and cooperation within communities, is described as effective and wanted.

4.5. Humanitarian sector support for resilience in Syria

How can the humanitarian sector build/improve on the capacities and actions that households and communities take to build their own resilience in Syria?

As seen through this research, understanding more about resilience in this context provides essential information to help plan improved interventions that are cross-sectoral, bridges the humanitarian/development nexus, identifies existing strengths and capacities, and can help to accommodate more flexible and adaptable assistance. In particular, focusing on resilience in humanitarian aid programming provides the following:

- It identifies early opportunities to bridge the humanitarian/development nexus.[51] **Humanitarian action in response to acute need in Syria is critical, but over time interventions must evolve towards supporting strengthened capacities and resilience of communities**, as well as reducing causes of vulnerability and exposure.

- It frames and incentivises cross-sectoral outcomes and action. Shocks/stressors in contexts such as Syria are strongly interrelated, and their impact, therefore, affects different groups in different (but related) ways. Simultaneously, resilience involves assets, capabilities, personal traits, and relationships, as well as access to each that will differ across and within populations. In other words, the impact of later shocks on individuals and communities is strongly related to their initial and/or previous vulnerability and exposure to shocks. In order to respond to this complex ecosystem of vulnerability, **it is essential to employ approaches that are multi-sector and holistic, in order to address both the impact of an individual shock itself, as well as to build and/or support the capacities of beneficiaries to better withstand such a shock (or others) in the future.**

- A focus on resilience ensures that programmes identify embedded capacities, assets and strengths at **individual, household, and community levels. Specific assets, skills, personal traits, social relationships, and capabilities for individuals and communities are interwoven with processes of resilience.** Aspects of resilience may increase under certain conditions and for certain capacities at the individual and household level, but for sustainable recovery and more robust resilience, such capacities and characteristics must connect outwards towards community, regional, and ultimately national systems. This is particularly relevant when planning response efforts, as it emphasises various points of entry for humanitarian aid situated within complex and dynamic social and political systems. To be effective, **resilience programmes must capitalise on these strengths at multiple levels.**

- The adoption of a resilience lens informs more flexible and adaptive humanitarian assistance. The Syrian context involves complex, diverse, and dynamic social systems and institutions, which differ across the country and over time. There will be different needs in different locations, and different needs at different moments in time within the same location. Understanding the relationships and interactions between different types of shocks and risks is critical, as is a response that is able to address and adapt to such differences. **Programmes must be flexible and nimble in order to deliver aid that is relevant and effective in a manner that is timely and efficient, and tailored to different people's needs.**

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[51] According to UNOCHA (2019), "The volume, cost and length of humanitarian assistance over the past 10 years has grown dramatically, mainly due to the protracted nature of crises and scarce development action in many contexts where vulnerability is the highest. For example, inter-agency humanitarian appeals now last an average of seven years, and the size of appeals has increased nearly 400 per cent in the last decade. This trend has given new urgency to the long-standing discussion around better connectivity between humanitarian and development efforts. At the same time, the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out not just to meet needs, but to reduce risk, vulnerability and overall levels of need, providing a reference frame for humanitarian and development actors to contribute to the common vision of supporting the furthest behind first and a future in which no one is left behind" (p.16). This strengthening of cooperation and strategic decision making is referred to as the humanitarian-development nexus.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below are based on the findings of this research, reflecting the needs of Syrians in becoming more resilient and how further humanitarian and recovery programming can best support them in Syria.

Helping adapt to the new normal:

- Interventions around providing support for people's livelihoods, education, and settling into a permanent location should acknowledge that people are happy to adapt to a 'new normal', so long as it is a long-term and stable solution.
- Support livelihood interventions that will enable people to find or create long-term opportunities.
  - Support household enterprises and livelihoods that have room and opportunity to grow through a combination of interlinked support: new skills training and apprenticeships alongside providing access to finance and links to employers, entrepreneurial skills training, and market linkages.
  - Stimulate livelihood opportunities in rural areas, in particular where there are limited options beyond subsistence agriculture which pushes people to (less safe and secure) cities.
- Recognise that even within recovery support, programming should allow for quick absorptive / humanitarian interventions, as shocks are regular and often devestating. Flexibility in supporting adaptive capacity should also be part of the programming approach, since what may have been successful previously (what kind of support is needed) may not be successful after a new shock/stressor.
- Facilitate access to education for youth
  - Explore educational offerings in programming areas, and link youth to education opportunities offered, including distance (virtual) education, accelerated learning, and alternative learning.
  - Provide scholarships for tuition and materials and examination fees.
  - Establish tutoring programmes in communities for college-educated Syrians to work with younger children unable to access school
  - Identify examination periods and arrange for safe transportation of young people to take exams.

Supporting the continued empowered roles of women in their communities:

- Women should be encouraged to be the centre of their own decisions regarding their lives, now and in the future. Programming should emphasise choice, continued support, and cooperation within communities for women who want to take on new roles and relations that they did not have before, but not forcing women to do so.

- Facilitate dialogues with women, men, couples and youth that include: (a) women role models (in livelihoods and leadership positions); (b) supporting women who choose not to work, maintaining emphasis on their right to power in the domestic sphere and public life, in addition to those who chose new roles; (c) working with men to be advocates supporting gender transformation; (d) ensuring balanced programming with men and women that meets their different needs; (e) monitor potential resentment toward women as a result of these changes.

- Provide tailored support for women's economic empowerment.

  - Support the development of women-led enterprise co-operatives and women who choose to access skills training, asset accumulation and finance.

  - Support single women in their family and economic responsibilities, including those who have effectively absorbed and adapted to life without a husband. This may help women avoid risky situations where they feel the need to rely on a husband at all costs and revert to traditional roles for the sake of keeping themselves and their children supported.

  - Fostering new social networks, community cohesion and providing psycho-emotional support should be key elements of programmes that facilitate women's economic activities, alongside economic empowerment.

Facilitating cooperation between Syrian households and communities and local governing structures and institutions to support recovery:

- Build from existing social networks within cohesive communities to collectively identify local needs, concerns and opportunities. Support inclusion of women, youth and people with disabilities, and use conflict sensitivity, peace building and social cohesion approaches to build social capital.

- Support collaboration between host communities and displaced persons to jointly identify community-wide needs and proposed solutions, including preparedness and early warning, risk identification and risk reduction, asset mapping, market access and development opportunities, etc.

- Facilitate processes and platforms for dialogue between local governing and decision-making structures, institutions, NGOs and community members to encourage collective prioritisation of issues. These can also be used for communication of information by local leaders and institutions, and community members for raising concerns and feedback.

- Work collaboratively to identify ways to address these needs and opportunities and improve service provision at a local level and with local resources (from local leadership, institutions, private sector and community members themselves).

Improving humanitarian support:

- An initial phase of regaining trust and confidence may be a necessary first step of any programming. Expect that people may have ambivalent – and sometimes negative – attitudes toward interventions delivered by NGOs that have been helpful and even indispensable at times, but also highly unreliable, inconsistent, and sometimes untrustworthy.

- Improve communications and consistent provision of assistance. Continue to provide cash, food, and shelter to those in immediate need, and provide clear explanations (as possible) to those receiving it about what they may be able to expect next, and when, to reduce even further uncertainty in their lives.

- Consider the psycho-social needs that all Syrians may have and recognise the impact of trauma on people's ability to recover, regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, age, education level, or displacement status; offer or link them to services accordingly.

- Consider how to support those hardest to reach, particularly:
  - Returnees and people integrated into host communities (not in camps)
  - People who remained in beseiged areas
  - People with disabilities and special needs
- For sustainable recovery and more robust resilience, individual and household capacities and characteristics must connect outwards towards community, regional, and ultimately national systems. This is particularly relevant when planning humanitarian and longer term efforts, as it emphasises various points of entry situated within complex and dynamic social and political systems.
- Communities often stayed together in deciding to stay or flee in the face of an attack or other shock to work cooperatively together. In arriving to a host community, some participants described the support provided to IDPs by community members to help them deal with being displaced. Those who stayed at home during heightened conflict relied even more heavily on family, friends and neighours, establishing self-supporting networks of assistance (e.g. vehicles, provision of supplies, access to goods to purchase, etc.). In the recovery and rebuilding phases, possible degradation of social cohesion may have very real consequences for effectiveness. Provide humanitarian support in ways which support and strengthen social networks and social cohesion, and self-supporting networks of assistance to provide a strong foundation for future recovery.
- Engaging youth and women in the delivery and leadership of humanitarian programming can support empowerment, strengthen social networks and the benefits these bring (e.g. information dissemination, social cohesion), increase the skills they can build off of for future recovery, and ensure their particular needs are addressed.