



SACD
Syrian Arab Republic
Cooperation Development

Weaponization of Aid

Interference and Corruption

Syrian Regime's Methods of
Control of Humanitarian Sector



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Executive Summary

The Syrian regime's manipulation of the humanitarian aid that the manufacturing capacity of Syria's depend on has been thoroughly documented in the last 10 years. International human rights presented ample evidence that the Assad regime has deliberately created opposition-held areas, blockaded relief Nations (UN) agencies, appropriated aid for the military and police, used aid to advance its military strategy, propped up its war economy with aid funds, and employed various other tactics that involve using humanitarian aid/agencies to further its goals.

More recently, the regime manipulated the delivery of humanitarian aid to force opposition-held areas into submission through the coercive "normalization agreements" with the help of its Russian and Iranian allies. Russian support limiting of civilian areas, blockaded and targeted areas were essential. Opponents suffered from Assad's humanitarian aid if they submitted to the regime and accepted "normalization". According to *Al-Nasr al-Islami* and *Al-Nasr al-Islami* of the Centre for Operations, *Al-Nasr al-Islami* and the *UN Special Envoy for Syria*, *Al-Nasr al-Islami*.

Examples of manipulation as a humanitarian element of normalization proceedings are numerous. The promise of humanitarian relief was incomplete – and often explicit – violation of local normalization agreements throughout central and southern Syria, indeed the arrival of UN convoys frequently followed in the wake, or days, immediately after the signing of normalization deals. Prominent examples include Damascus, Deir al-Zor, Idlib, and cooperation in northern Hama. For instance, in Idlib, in various stages along the main frontlines of siege, members of the Damascus-based council stated that UN staff had expressed to them that UN aid convoys would be conditioned upon a normalization agreement that would the surrender of local armed opposition groups. Damascus matters in their city, Idlib, Hama, Hama and other regions are and some of the reality.

The systematic use of the Syrian regime's blockade of humanitarian aid delivery is a central focus of discussions on delivering more border aid to millions of displaced Syrians in the North as the UN Security Council (UNSC) most recently in July 2020. Russia has used its veto power to block the UNSC to prevent and force them, one systematically reducing the number of crossings through which aid is delivered to some 10 million Syrians around the world. It means that the aid is delivered through Damascus to give the regime complete control over the flow of humanitarian aid with the aim of forcing the last opposition-held areas in the northeast of the country into submission, while increasing its profits from the increased corruption and appropriation of aid distribution.



Report from UNHCR: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugees-and-returnees/2020/07/16/syria-aid-delivery-reports.html>
"The Syrian Regime's Use of Humanitarian Aid to Further its Goals" (Al-Nasr al-Islami, 2020)

This report examines the mechanisms of the methods the Syrian regime uses to control and distort the work of humanitarian aid agencies, including the UN and other international aid organizations, as well as Syrian aid organizations that are either directly established by the regime's institutions or people. It is based on interviews with 20 employees of 20 organizations operating in coastal north Syria, mostly Syrian and several international, these individuals work in international aid organizations, UN agencies, and Syrian humanitarian and civil society organizations (CSOs). In most cases, their motive for participating in the study was to change the same gap in which the Syrian regime either directly or indirectly, but always decisively, interferes in the work of these organizations, making them yet another weapon in its arsenal directed against the Syrian people.

Regime interference ranges from directly influencing financial distribution, identifying who will and who will not use the humanitarian aid, various property to appointing people close to the regime to crucial positions of influence in these organizations to control and monitor their work, to directly appropriating either the regime's military and police, sometimes in huge percentages, than other means, the intended humanitarian. The acceptance of such interference patterns of aid organizations, international and Syrian, there is not a dangerous symptom between these organizations and the regime's institutions. Finally, most of the participants firmly believe that the Syrian regime is itself involved in creating many CSOs that later appear in political organizations as representatives of independent civil society.

These findings must affect the policies of the largest donors of humanitarian aid to Syria, primarily the United States and European Union. There must be an independent, objective study of how their funds are being used by the UN agencies and international and Syrian organizations, working at the ground to prevent aid manipulation and interference by the Syrian regime in favor of its repression, criminal agenda. These findings must inform discussions at how to end Russia's blackmail in the UN Security Council regarding cross-border aid and adopt alternative approaches to ensure that aid is better supply to the people without UNSC approval or regime interference. A comprehensive review of the policies and practices of UN agencies involved in humanitarian aid distribution in Syria is needed before any plans are developed for the upcoming talks, military and political return of displaced Syrians following a comprehensive political solution with robust international participation. It is necessary to assure humanitarian operations are conducted in line with the humanitarian principles and make them good beyond the money aid it is in line with the 2018 UN Principles and Parameters for Humanitarian Action. Syria: Increased monitoring of implementation is needed and must come too soon. This would require an investment here in the ongoing regional dialogue to ensure donor nations and basic operational standards are supported by UN agencies operating inside Syria, especially in regime-controlled areas. Furthermore, in their discussions, the UN Security Team and donors should take seriously evidence and recommendations from a neutral intermediary, such as the information contained in this report.

The policies and practices described in this report, which the Syrian regime's manipulation of aid and capture of civil society must not be normalized if there is to be hope of any long-term solution and stability. Ultimately, more must be done to ensure the corruption and using aid funds to finance the Syrian regime's war economy. The report's findings contribute to such policy changes.

Key Findings

Four fifths (80 per cent) of interviewees confirmed that based on their observations and direct involvement, the Syrian regime directly interferes in their organisation's work, mainly in the following ways:

- Suppressing who benefits from these organisations (and who does not)
- Appointing/dismissing managers, dismissing employees
- Drawing help and benefits to military and security agencies and personnel

Over three-quarters (75 per cent) of study participants identified "government agencies harming the organisation's work" as the main source of interference. More than a quarter (26 per cent) of participants indicated that unofficial military parties (bribe) have directly interfered in their work, while 16 per cent cited direct interference from official military structures.

The vast majority of participants indicated that they always accept any regime interference; only 16 per cent said they used to refuse it. Refusing to accept or submit instructions from the regime can result in harsh consequences ranging from making an organisation's permits or travelling documents or losing jobs. Nearly all participants (96 per cent) accept regime interference due to fear of losing their jobs; 16 per cent are afraid of detention or harassment, while 16 per cent have almost no view against them.

Approximately 56 per cent of survey participants describe corruption levels within humanitarian aid organisations (international and local) operating in regime-controlled areas as ranging from medium to very high; the remaining 44 per cent report low or very low levels.

International aid organisations and local agencies are mostly forced to accept certain levels of corruption in order to continue operating and avoid persecution by the regime. Most local organisations are flourished by individuals close to the regime as a means of obtaining funds, mostly through partnering with international organisations, with such partnerships closely supervised by the regime.

Approximately 66 per cent of participants believe that more than 25 per cent of the humanitarian aid targeted to regime-controlled areas is diverted to the military and military; 16 per cent of participants reported it was even higher; 18 did per cent of the aid.

Selection of regime-linked figures and those associated with the regime are appointed to most aid organisations to ensure allegiance to the regime and the parties that secured their employment about the activities of the organisations and their workers.

Nearly two thirds (64 per cent) of those interviewed believe the Syrian regime has had a hand in establishing numerous CECs in order to use them as an "independent" front to represent the civil society in the political track.

Research Relevance

Based on direct and privileged access and inside information, this report closely examines the policies and behaviour of humanitarian and aid organisations in Syria, and the true impact of their work. The research involved conducting interviews with employees of the main UN and international organisations operating in Syria. Employees of local organisations were also interviewed, but due to security concerns the report refers to these organisations in general terms.

The subject of how NGOs, local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international NGOs (INGOs), and even UN organisations and agencies operate in Syria, and the regime's level of influence over them (and the true motivation of its involvement) is extremely important but very rarely addressed or researched.

This research was undertaken by the Syrian Association for Citizen's Rights (SACR), a grassroots civil rights movement. The SACR is an active supporter of social movements and civil society initiatives to empower and serve civilians and protect their rights and livelihood. It considers this type of activism, bolstered by the support of local and international donors, to be a vital aspect of developing new social and political culture in Syria, and as a more promising future for the country.

The SACR seeks to prevent regime officials from misappropriating this support for political purposes or to inflict more damage upon the Syrian people. It is paramount that humanitarian resources are not diverted to benefit the oppressors or those committing systematic human rights violations in Syria.

This issue is crucially relevant and timely for the following reasons:

- The welfare and dignity of a large segment of the Syrian population is being torn apart from physical violence and war-torn cities and largely affected by the work of the organisations addressed in this report, especially during the country's winter and financial difficulties.
- Highlighting the issue of corruption in international and UN organisations in Syria is very important, as it is not just that misappropriation and mismanagement of aid does more effective policies and practices to serve the millions who suffer than need it.
- Exploring the relationship between these organisations and the Syrian regime, and fully understanding the levels of interference, as well as the role these organisations play in advancing the regime's agenda and narrative, is crucially important for helping policy-makers develop the realisation of Syrian society, instead of any authoritarian.

Methodology

This report analyses the results of a survey of 88 employees of 29 different civil organisations in regime-controlled areas, including both Syrian and non-Syrian nationals. The survey was administered in direct interviews either in person or virtually due to COVID-19 conditions.

Organisations were selected to participate in the survey based on the following criteria:

- Relevance and influence: the survey targeted organisations with the greatest impact and relevance within their field.
- Number of years in operation: preference was given to organisations that had operated since the beginning of the conflict but a minimum of 5 years was required.
- The organisation's known affiliation with the Syrian regime.

To facilitate comprehensive understanding of the Syrian regime's role in the operations and policies of various humanitarian organisations operating in the country, the study targeted a variety of types of organisations (see Figure 5). The listed organisations surveyed receive funds from the UN and international donors to execute projects and deliver services in Syria.

- UN organisations: 5 per cent (5)
- International organisations: 20 per cent (18)
- Local organisations: 64 per cent (55)

Figure 5: UN Types of Organisations Surveyed



These organisations operate in different sectors within the humanitarian and aid field, covering the following areas:

- Food security
- Health
- Services/infrastructure
- Early recovery
- Education
- Psychological and mental health support
- Capacity building

Survey participants worked during different periods of time between 2019 and mid-2021 when the information and data for this report were collected. Some of the participants were forced to leave their jobs; others decided to quit their jobs but to work in the humanitarian field in a different capacity, while others still work in the same organisations.

Due to security threats, special measures were taken at each phase of the survey, including the sample design phase, the candidate and organisation selection process, and the communication with participants. All the names of the participants and organisations were kept anonymous, especially local ones since they are more vulnerable to being targeted by the regime. All participants gave their signed consent after the risks and implications of participating in the survey, as well as the measures taken by the UNCT, were fully explained.

The study sought to create a gender-balanced sample: 50 per cent of participants were female.

Figure 100: Participants' Gender



The analysis splits the participants into two groups based on their age (Figure 3).
 71 per cent (36 of 51 years)
 29 per cent (15 of 51 years)

Figure 3: Participants' age groups



The study questions were tailored to participants' managerial levels within their organisation's hierarchy, since these imply different levels of:

- Information access
- Access to relationships and engagement with the system engine
- Technical knowledge of the modes operated and project delivery

Nearly three quarters of the participants (71 per cent) were managers and directors; the rest were employees (non-managerial partners) (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Participants' managerial level



It was difficult to categorise participants' positions regarding the system engine and the assets of the last 10 years. However, their testimonies and answers reflect a variety of political attitudes.

Prevalence of Syrian regime's interference

The questions in the following sections were asked of directors and managers within the sample of participants; 88 per cent confirmed that the regime directly interferes in their organisation's work based on their observations and direct involvement.

Figure 1: 88 regime interference



Note: Figure 1 does not represent the question to those who have been this agent¹⁰

The responses to this question are in line with the general (yet characteristic) interventionist nature of the regime with respect to any activity or organisation operating in Syria, though the percentage is higher than expected given that the vast majority of organisations included in the survey are not operating in security-sensitive sectors.

66

Many organisations stated that the government interferes directly in operating managers and employees (and in the fact that managers and directors have very particular hiring policies that are in line with their interests and partnerships with government entities).

Source: Syrian HRM Survey

53

66

"Government interference is a type of partnership and/or an interference per se. The organisation is considered to be a government agency that belongs to the state fully, not an independent one. In practice, this organisation is "stronger" than the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, and controls a large number of organisations working in Damascus."

88 Syrian HRM Survey

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The respondents' testimony about engagement in an independent organization, is considered the *hybrid government*. The hybrid leads that movement takes under the government and under direction in consultation with the Ministry of Forest Affairs and Nature and the Ministry of Forests and Agriculture. The Ministry of Forests and Agriculture, on the other hand, is not the main actor of all the movement. The hybrid leads that movement is the Government and of the hybrid government.

Source: *Hybrid 2018 - Change*

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The work of educational and cultural projects and social training, but very few forest projects or education are dedicated. The forest is close the future is to come under the Ministry of Forest Affairs and Nature, which gives responsibility and other things without power of direct control and is fully integrating forest affairs and giving gifts in order to build healthy, spiritual work of the organization.

Source: *Hybrid 2018 - Change*

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The forest of Ministry of the organization has strong ties to public community there is additional other culture figure who have huge influence. The public testimony, the forest are designed in a way that is not very characteristic from people.

Source: *Hybrid 2018 - Change*

39



There has not been interference the work of the organization because the relationship was originally built on common interest and motivation with government agencies and mostly because of these organizations support the region primary and other economic and not to follow and that results.

Source: *Hybrid 2018 - Change*

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The relationship of the two members. There is some effect in the organization that is linked to security, health and the Ministry of Forest Affairs and Nature. This security affects responsible to monitoring and employment of other assets.

Source: *Hybrid 2018 - Change*

39



There is only with the government rather than individuals.

Source: *Hybrid 2018 - Change*

39

The concluding impression obtained from the survey and the conversations with participants is that the relationship between the hybrid regime and humanitarian organizations and agencies goes beyond regime interference. There instead appears to be a somewhat symbiotic relationship in which the regime, through different bodies and figures, controls the decision-making process and defines the "activities" for these organizations, and has considerable influence over determining the beneficiaries.

Types of Interference

Figure 100: Types of interference



The survey shows that the regime is interested in controlling almost entirely from these organizations separate in terms of decision making and control of staff delivery (Figure 100). It regularly interferes with the following:

- Determining the benefits from these organizations (whether they are)
- Supporting decision-making, and hiring employees
- Showing help and benefits in making and security agencies and personnel



Sometimes during the last distribution in some cases that were severely ignored by the Syrian government. The Syrian government and others who were spending they independently in the last distribution process, and then there were other cases for themselves to achieve the distribution of aid to children.

Quote: Syrian HRW - Aleppo

19



"We are not that the presence of the Syrian state that the aid is required by the regime in all aid distribution and reconstruction projects and it is a regime and an organization interference by the regime."

Quote: Syrian HRW - Aleppo

19



"In the regime in the state as well as the state control and security services interfere in the operation of organizations in order to avoid aid transfer, specific transactions or to give employment to certain people."

Quote: Syrian HRW - Aleppo

19



Some projects were awarded but were interrupted for various reasons that were under the opposition coalition's control and/or by the regime.

Source: [Human Rights Watch](#).

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Most of affected figures express the concern of certain people who were awarded during military confrontations with the opposition as beneficiaries of external aid (political support):

Source: [Interviews with local opposition](#) / [Interview](#).

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the interference then is due to the blocking of employees and the type of projects undertaken, as well as the human and political attitudes of leaders that will benefit from the support.

Field: [Interviews with opposition](#).

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the type of interference is when someone is being and denying certain people by the enemy despite the fact that these people have experience outside the area, also know that that practice is for monitoring and sending reports regarding all operations/ reports, but using the people themselves.

Source: [Interviews with opposition](#).

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Another aspect of interference is related to imposing partnerships with other organizations that are supposedly independent and operate as NGOs, but in reality they are linked to the regime. This type of interference seeks to additionally fully control the country's civil society, to ensure it is in line with (and serves) the regime's policies and objectives.

The participants' testimonies convey an overwhelmingly negative perception of the role of the NGOs. Its presence is mostly imposed, and is always associated with the regime.

Within our work, security agencies select certain people to become part of the working team, and they select the names of people to benefit from our aid.

Towfik

International humanitarian organization - Manager

Main Sources of Interference

The question in this section was asked of all participants, regardless of their managerial level. More than three-quarters cited the most source of interference as "higher agencies increasing the organization's activities" (figure 3). In addition, all per cent of participants believed that politics directly interfere, while all per cent reported that official policy interferes.

Figure 3: All Source of interference



“

I work in procurement and logistics, and I get pressured on a regular basis through those who get me the job in that place since I was employed through connections, but I didn't imagine that there would be interference in all financial aspects, employees' salaries, sources of interference, and even the organization's funding. Indirectly, and my friend months ago after 8 years of working with them because of the interference issue!”

Moham - Life Agency - Manager

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"I worked for 15 years and also spent time on studying the mechanisms of functioning and the level of information transparency, the opportunities that we have today within the company, mechanisms that guaranteeing transparency with different people managing from within where the conflict has manifested and caused by various of the movement within system and various structure and various requirements of the movement. My conclusion is in my work with security employees' support by security agencies with the task of reporting on the requirements, also the structure and project budgets, as well as reporting to specific states within this regime - the work of security units' (please see how it being linked for interpretation of an abstract way objection to the work because it is not the management of the way growth in support. This work happens in all of the organizations to create in regime 'transparency'."

Halter (System BSC) - Manager

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The participant testimonies assert again that the interference in the work of both managers and employees is done through internal and external "agents", implanted in the organizations themselves or monitoring their work from outside. These agents are mainly influential figures with connections inside the regime, or regime agencies directly. Further testimonies reinforce the perception regarding the BSC's role in interfering in the work of organizations and being directly managed by the regime.

"My job is essentially a lot of conflicts regarding how to build partnerships and reach out to other organizations, and by my relationships with the security branches and British Party officials in the different governments in addition to the donors."

Halter (System BSC) - Manager

”

■ Interference: Acceptance

The survey results demonstrate that it is difficult to refuse or challenge direct regime interference, whether through official or unofficial channels. Approximately 83 per cent of participants indicated that they always accept any regime interference, while only 19 per cent said they would refuse it (Figure 5). The questions in this section were asked of all participants, managers and workers.

Figure 5.88: Accepting interference



Nevertheless, refusing direct or indirect instructions from the regime has consequences, ranging from reaching organisations' permits to cancelling projects or losing jobs.

““

“We have to follow steps for interference from state.”

Statement: *Interference from the regime is negative change*

”

““

“Regime is completely corrupt.”

Issue:
Corruption/Regime
negative change

”

““

“I cannot remember working on the ground. Every morning when we wake up and opening ourselves and again there is not for a group of colleagues that are subject of the law that could interfere in the planning phase and not in the cases of interference and the lot of workers that of course that have to be all given security measures but nevertheless is that, because this factor”

Statement: *At home (Change)*

”

Reasons for accepting interference

A staggering 95 per cent of participants accept regime interference due to fears of losing their jobs, which further confirms the regime's right normal of 'total influence over' these corporations (Figure 9). Almost 38 per cent are afraid of sanctions or harassment, while 19 per cent fear direct threats against them or further reminders of the security policies in regime-controlled areas, and the absence of a safe environment. These results are in line with the with the results and findings of the UNICEF August 2020 "Normalisation of terror" report. The topic in this section was discussed with all participants.

Figure 109: Reasons for accepting interference



"I was thankful my job despite the fact that I spent through a very affected businessman that someone who used to share previously in the organization as a regular team, now that after completing my tour about the regime's behavior, especially regarding the organization, really worried me because of what makes the regime reports any and supporting position, as well as the absence of most members of the regime, especially because I saw the people being arrested and take compensation about the death expenses of the leader"

Participant 1 (male, 30 years)



"Interference in my work was done through determining the regime's interference, as evidence in the direct interference of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, forcing us to participate in activities and events that are subject of harassment"

Participant 2 (male, 30 years)



Diversion of Humanitarian Aid to Military Forces

The issues in this section were discussed only with directors and managers due to the need for privileged access to information. Throughout the 12 years of conflict in Syria, there has been constant discussion and doubts regarding whether the international aid sent to regime areas was being delivered to the right beneficiaries. Some testimonies and witnesses have suggested that some UNHCR in Syria's in regime controlled areas ended up with the regime's military forces or allied militias.¹⁷

Approximately 42 per cent of respondents confirmed that they knew of cases where humanitarian aid was diverted to military forces (Figure 16). This is quite a high percentage given the individuals are privy to such information; the true percentage of humanitarian aid being diverted to the military and militia is therefore likely to be much higher.

Figure 16: Diversion of aid to military forces



Source: The figures display the percentage of answers to the question "Did you have information that confirmed that that UNHCR humanitarian aid was diverted to military forces?"



"The support for Hezbollah and security forces is done through giving thousands of humanitarian supplies for free." ¹⁸

Waleed, Syrian UNHCR manager



¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Support for Syrian Government Forces by Regime-Linked Organizations: Finding in Syria," 10 March 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/03/10/support-for-syrian-government-forces>.



"Many recruited military personnel have been registered in their families as they could find it hard to do so."

Witness:

International Human Rights Organisation - Myanmar

39



"Under the pretext of training and giving support to the Burmese government, in coordination with the military, we designed a number of members of the armed forces and military separately units."

Witness:

Anti-Myanmar Campaign

39



"We are forced to provide the military with weapons in the form of food and medical aid as they will let us go through without stopping or checking the kind of foodstuffs."

Witness:

Human Rights Campaign

39



"Even with the names and numbers of families, families have been prepared. They are normally first dispatched to a distance and then many others that relate to the organisation are removed. The real support of the military goes to families of members of the military forces and other civilian staff organisations as the same just to guarantee their subsequent security."

Witness:

Human Rights Campaign

39



"We always happen to my organisation."

Witness:

International Human Rights Organisation - Myanmar

39



"None of the aid is directed to targeted persons, nor do we not attempt to trace any donors."

Witness:

Human Rights Campaign

39



"Organisations operating in their children, a food security source of aid and aid that the food received for aid purposes apply to the military collection. Furthermore, the more often these organisations operate."

Witness:

International Human Rights Organisation - Myanmar

39

It is clear from the survey results and testimonies that donating aid to the military is required, controlled access from Myanmar is systematic practice due to the regime's security policies and the high level of interference with and penetration of humanitarian aid and aid organisations.

More than half (53 per cent) of respondents indicated that up to 25 per cent of their total aid offered by their organisation is diverted to the military forces and their families, as well as the military. 28 per cent confirmed that 26-50 per cent of their organisation's aid ends up with the military (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Percentage of Aid Diverted to the Military Forces and Families



Note: The figure displays the responses to the question: "What is the percentage of aid diverted from your organisation to the military forces and families (soldiers, military, military, officers, etc.)?"

”

“50 per cent of every project is assigned to support the army and finance the military, such as the National Defense and others. This is a known practice for everyone.”

Report of Syrian NGO managers



*This funding opportunity is open to all challenges to the country, open to the country itself. The country that wins the challenge is awarded a prize of \$1 million.

100%



*Matters of Reference will be referred to the relevant National or Regional Committee, and by the latter forwarded to the Council of what will be used as appropriate support for them, and not have to have concerned additional issues of the same. The Council of the National Committee will be the final decision-making body for all matters of Reference, and the Council of the National Committee will be the final decision-making body for all matters of Reference.

[illegible]

100



"There is a lot of overlap between the two parts of the funding plan. But, projects in existing federal and state and the department of providing their operations and identity is. However, there are many differences. There are opportunities for both state to provide services and support, as in the federal, state, and local government."



Approximately 63 per cent of respondents believe the military and security authorities have a high or very high level of interference in the work of humanitarian and civil organisations in Syria, while only 3 per cent believe there is no military interference (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Military and Security Forces' Interference in Humanitarian Work



Note: The figure depicts the response to the question "How do you estimate the interference of military and security forces in the work of humanitarian organisations?"

Corruption

The following sections examine corruption within the different types of organisations operating in regime-controlled areas using answers to questions asked of participants from all managerial levels.

Corruption levels in UN Organisations

Approximately 68 per cent of survey participants believe corruption levels within UN humanitarian and aid organisations in regime-controlled areas are medium to very high, compared to 62 per cent that report they are low or very low (Figure 55). The participant responses categorise this corruption as follows:

- Acceptance of conditions imposed by the Syrian regime and security forces regarding the designation of humanitarian aid as political aid regardless of the humanitarian conditions
- Appointing directors, managers and employees based on their affiliation with the regime rather than their competency and qualifications
- Accepting bribes and allowing a certain percentage of received aid to regime-aligned parties
- Selecting certain local organisations without clear criteria to benefit from international aid and grants

Figure 55: Types of involvement



"Organisations have become regime structures by offering various security and logistical assistance that now relies just as much on funding opportunities. The ethics are dying in humanitarian."

Barbara (Syrian Journalist)



*There is no compensation or reimbursement reported for these cases. They will not be able to operate a vehicle controlled state without going through either a private or government agency and paying a fee.

100%



*The cost of transportation for the first 100 miles is \$10.00 and for every additional mile is \$0.10. The cost of the rental car is \$20.00 per day. The cost of the car is \$10.00 per day. The cost of the car is \$10.00 per day.

100%



¹ "We already had 100 operations in completely new facilities that don't produce savings of anywhere but the good quality and consistency that 100 operations spending a couple million dollars on the Internet gives us access to achieve the costality of both operators, and that's a really great way to do it."

[illegible]

^aFigures in the text and tables are means with 95% confidence intervals and standard errors. Significant differences are indicated by asterisks. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.



*The significance of the correlation degree of morphology from the point of view of the first two is reduced (significant) compared to both.



"From personal experience, I dealt with the global health organization and reported a concern with them for a certain amount of time. I received half of the funds and they kept the other half. Other organizations also charge very a percentage of the funds."

Answer: [Open 1001 Manager](#)

39



"Transition is always challenging, patients and employees leaving our humanitarian activities under the spotlight, and trying to find time and adjusting with all the new staff practices."

Answer: [Open 1001 Manager](#)

39

"The government is trying to offer them a step toward computer due to the lack of connectivity and the percentage with bank operations that are coming in addition to the issue of bank infrastructure. Bank infrastructure is essential for managing under the current situation."

Answer: [Open 1001 Manager](#)



"Transition and operations play a major role in the work. The transfer of departments and offices got positive, high values and helped in getting things moving. The policies that these organizations want to help get paid correctly while those they don't intend to help have no real time a year and then shut down."

Answer: [Open 1001 Manager](#)

39

"There are challenges going forward with the government where they personally influence the system with government goals."

Answer: [Open 1001 Manager](#)

39



"Currently, corruption is less due to the cost of financial and the reduction in the cost of goods from delivery."

Answer: [Open 1001 Manager](#)

39



"In the past, of the aid meant for the people is dependent on unregulated private and financial expenses."

Answer: [Open 1001 Manager](#)

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► **Shareholder lawsuits for improper disclosure** Shareholder lawsuits for improper disclosure are on the rise. In 2013, 1,000 shareholder lawsuits were filed in federal court, up from 700 in 2012. The number of lawsuits filed in state court rose from 1,000 in 2012 to 1,200 in 2013. The number of lawsuits filed in state court rose from 1,000 in 2012 to 1,200 in 2013.



The data confirm the predictions and statements collected from participants indicating that international organizations encourage them more. Only 7 per cent of participants believe they exhibit a high level of corruption, and just over half (50 per cent) report a medium level corruption (Figure 1b).

¹Based on my familiarity with a good portion of the international organizations operating in Morocco, I can say that there are few and far between organizations interested in the last thing mentioned. The last two parts by the government, a large number of citizens, of officials and people in charge from these public organizations will be struggling to make way for these organizations that have a right to exist and to be successful.



International operations: In the case of an order, the company must be able to supply the goods from its own stock or from the stock of its subsidiaries or from the stock of its suppliers.

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Age Group	Percentage
18-24	35%
25-34	25%
35-44	15%
45-54	10%
55-64	5%
65-74	3%
75-84	2%
85+	1%

¹ "Narrowly defining educational opportunities speaks to the fact that, despite the government's continued efforts to fund private K-12 education, the government must do only its share of the responsibility. It is the responsibility of people close to the schools, where everything is everything, especially the students." *Id.*



”

“International organisations are considered to be more independent than the UN and local ones, but they are forced to let things go in order to guarantee their survival.”

Samuel

International humanitarian organisation, Lebanon

“Their work is politicised, corruption is there, and discrimination in granting projects is obvious, and they are in bad with the government.”

Ray

International humanitarian organisation, Egypt

“International organisations are generally respected but they suffer in the corruption in their partners due to their inability to monitor and their corruption means that partners those they are assisted by are corruptly treated.”

Samuel • Ray • Ray • Ray

“

Corruption levels in local Organisations

Figure 18: Level of Corruption in local Organisations



According to the testimonies and direct conversations with participants, local humanitarian and civil organisations have much higher levels of corruption. Some 62 per cent of respondents believe the levels of corruption in local organisations is either high or very high.

To a large extent this variation of percentages reflects a fundamental difference between international and local humanitarian and civil organisations in regime controlled areas: international ones are mostly forced to accept certain levels of corruption in order to survive and avoid persecution by the regime, while most of the local organisations are founded by individuals close to the regime as a tool to obtain funds; their partnership with the international organisations is imposed by regime linked parties.

"Here, local organisations are heavily corrupt and taking a lot of cash patron and corruption, most of the government corruption goes."

Source: UNHCR Syria – Manager

"Local organisations are governed by these organisations and follow their agenda and their decisions to achieve sustainability and continuity but on the other hand many corrupt people continue to be engaged in the work of organisations. They start working like an almost standard strategy to use the aid to obtain profits for organisations because many officials do this and succeed."

Source: UNHCR Syria – Manager

"Organisations actually operating in regime areas, especially in Damascus, are forced by the strategy of humanitarian aid and social service provision, joint campaigns to obtain the support of the regime and are generally corrupt, taking and giving bribes. Their goal is to get the largest amount of funding, regardless of whether it goes to the right place or not. If humanitarian aid of the state corrupts agencies in the field of humanitarian work."

Source: UNHCR Syria – Manager

"I was a volunteer who participated in one of the projects 2 years ago and was given a certain amount of money for my fees in the project. After a while I found out that they in the organization had sent invoices and receipts for an amount of three times the amount I received, and they signed on my behalf and the donors communicated with me directly and asked me about a lot of the financial matters that later turned out to be manipulated. Of course, the funding and support process has been stopped and the project has been suspended, but the organization is still fully engaged in its work and has found other supporters leading the corruption continues based on information obtained from the employees there. In addition, most of the employees in administrative jobs are the children of officers and officials, and the director of the organization is unable to take any decision independently of his inner-circle employees; this is one of the obvious aspects of corruption in the organization."

Samir - Syrian HSC - Employee

Types of Corruption

Figure 18: Types of Corruption



The study participants highlighted the following as the main types of corrupt practices undertaken by all types of beneficiaries and all organisations (Figure 18):

- Employment policies (94 per cent)
- Discriminatory selection of beneficiaries (89 per cent)
- Project selection to benefit figures in charge (87 per cent)
- Value projects to cover unemployment (72 per cent)

These figures again confirm a very systematic approach by the regime to exercise full control over these organisations. It plays a decisive role in appointing managers and workers, determines who benefits from the projects and uses which projects are implemented, and engages in a wide range of illegal activities in the process. It is a closed system with a very serious outcome.

Figure 19: Index with Regime officials



Note: The figure displays responses to the question "Has there been an official regime official or people linked to the regime in your organisation?"

According to participants, the most common practice to ensure that regional (local) figures are in charge of humanisation and all organisations is to employ relatives of officials or people close to the region.

Almost 83 per cent of respondents confirmed that there are officials' relatives or people linked to the region working in their organisations (Figure 18), and that 33 per cent of them are in upper level management (Figure 19).



Figure 19: Region working Practices



Note: The figure displays respondents to the question 'Are relatives appointed based on regional competence?'

Practices to hiring policies became even clearer when participants were asked whether the employment of officials' relatives in these organisations took into account the job candidates' merits and competence. It suggests 93 per cent think that the employment of officials' relatives and connected people is not done based on competence (Figure 19), and an identical percentage reported that connected employees are not suitable for their positions (Figure 20).

Figure 1.27: Satisfaction of employees with regime's structure



Note: The figure displays responses to the question, "Do you think they are fit for the position?"

Figure 1.28: Government employees as informants



Note: The figure displays responses to the question, "Do you think they should not report on the work of their colleagues?"

Approximately 87 per cent of respondents said that regime-linked workers and managers monitor and report to the regime and the parties that arranged their employment about the activities of the organisations and their workers (Figure 28).

This employment policy has enabled the regime to control different types of NGOs, and even the INRC. One has to think, 87 per cent of managers interviewed for this study assumed that the INRC is fully controlled by the regime, and that it suffers from high levels of corruption and politicisation of its services in a way that supports the regime and its military. 13 per cent also had a comment on the issue, and the remaining 10 per cent expressed their validation with the role the INRC has played since 2011.

■ The Role of the GARC

The GARC plays a pivotal role as an extension of the regime apparatus, and exercises a span of influence over other local, international and UN organisations. Official and international organisations cannot operate in Syria unless they partner with a local organisation, such as an NGO that has been approved and controlled by the regime; the GARC, or a specific ministry depending on the type of programs it intends to deliver in Syria. Thus the GARC is considered to be at the central level and positioning as a ministry or a regime approved local organisation.

Regime human published⁶ In August 2019 by the Syrian Justice and Accountability Centre documents from Intelligence agencies were giving explicit orders for their branches to work in close coordination with GARC to regulate the distribution of medical aid to these areas (under opposition control) and select the types of aid that will be allowed⁷. Other documents reference UN complaints, alleging its involvement in which security agents, interrogated and detained aid recipients directly from aid distribution centres.

Documents and receipts of aid and medical materials distributed presented by an ex-employee of the GARC to Human Rights Watch (HRW) show that the security branches monopolise all delivery of aid materials. Employees of local humanitarian organisations confirmed that the security forces check all materials delivered and seize the aid supplies. The security forces exploit this leverage to confiscate a portion of the aid for personal profit or block the delivery of essential medical aid for political reasons. A HRW report⁸ details these trends:

A former GARC employee told Human Rights Watch that over the course of the four years he spent with the organisation, he witnessed several incidents where high-level intelligence officers collaborated with GARC employees to steal and resell humanitarian supplies. He showed pictures of the supplies the soldiers seized, and broken seals on shipments, which he said had been inspected by the intelligence branches. Another human rights activist showed images of aid supplies seized in other localities but not at the same intelligence branch.

The GARC and some local organisations serve as a bridge between the security branches and foreign entities (i.e. official international parties) so the security personnel do not have to deal with them directly.

The HRW report states that all the international organisations contacted expressed their concerns regarding the restrictions imposed on them by local partners, in addition to the constant interference of the security forces in deciding the list of distribution and beneficiaries, which hindered their capacity to execute their programs. The fact that the GARC is being imposed on certain local partners makes them harder to convince the actual distribution of aid, and curtails their operations more severely.

⁶ Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, *From the Syrian Justice and Accountability Centre* (2019) <https://www.sjac.org/>

⁷ *Human Rights Watch, "Regime-controlled Syria"*, 2019 <https://www.hrw.org/>

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Establishing NGOs in Regime-controlled Areas

Figure 100 Ability to Establish and Operate Humanitarian Organizations



Note: The figure depicts respondents' answers to the question "Is the freedom to establish and operate humanitarian organizations guaranteed?"

A large amount of variations and control ultimately determine which organizations are licensed. 83 per cent of participants assumed that the freedom to establish humanitarian and aid organizations and their operations is not guaranteed (Figure 100).

"The freedom to establish and operate organizations is not guaranteed because the body responsible for humanitarian assistance and operations is subject to the whims of local officials and above the Syrian Governing Authority. One way the parties outside institutions, cluster for aid of organizations and their projects, identify the projects themselves the interests of the government and with a very controlled activities close and just that from the state party, but operations"

Source: Syrian Arab Republic

"When establishing an organization, you have to deal with a culture, which is the following body, which makes the ability of others. They influence the conditions that determine the employment of people that requires a lot of time to establish the organization, and the way"

Source: Ethiopia, Manager

"There is no free that protects organizations, that work, because the freedom is not free there"

Source: Afghanistan, Manager

"There is no freedom, finally enough our situation is not good, and not really good, but we can represent for the organization. Because all the members were initially the members of the Board of Directors meetings, it is not that the work is not done without directly approval"

Source: Syrian Arab Republic, Manager

"The law does not allow the ability of local officials and above, and not secondarily, but on any project without obtaining the consent of government and security agencies, providing representatives of the project funding, simplifying the burden of the response to the authority, the ability, members of the cluster, and project"

Source: Afghanistan, Manager



Figure 1.28: Impact/Growth of Youth Organizations in Central Humanitarian Aid



Note: The figure displays the responses to the question “Does the regime establish organizations and prevent them, as appropriate, in order to control humanitarian aid?”

More than three quarters of participants (83 per cent) maintained that the regime allows the foundation and operation of humanitarian and aid organizations in territories under its control in order to control international aid in the country (Figure 1.28). By controlling this slowly needed aid through increasing the organizations that receive and distribute it, and by employing discriminatory policies and criteria in defining the beneficiaries, the regime is forcing people to leave the areas under its control from their hometowns all the while nonconsentant.

The HRH report¹ further exposes the damaging partnerships between HRH and international organizations on the one hand and local NGOs on the other hand, and how the regime officials benefit from it:

A HRH agency made the decision to partner with a local actor, founded by a member of the official National Defense Forces, to implement a protection project. Despite warnings by the technical officer in charge of the risks posed by partnering with an organization that belongs to a known human rights abuser, the HRH agency moved forward with the project. Six months later, in a rare monitoring and evaluation trip, the HRH agency discovered that the local partner had not implemented the project. The organization had been receiving the money from the HRH agency for 6 months and instead of carrying out activities, had been forging the signatures of purported beneficiaries.

¹ Human Rights Watch, “Regime’s System,” 2024.

"Working with the Agency that for development of all documents for the project, except those approximately 2000 for the Agency that has contributed to the project related to the legal status of business register?"
 (Name - Agency Head - Manager)

"There were many organizations actively affiliated with the region and providing themselves in the community as businesslike organizations above people to distribute aid and provide resources and support programs. But as far they are working under other rules and government in the country, making contribution to achieving funding from the government?"
 (Name - IFA Agency - Manager)

"Throughout work with many local organizations, it became clear to us that they are government affiliated organizations and that the state can't support either function and the committee group that supports the region instead of being interested in them at all?"
 (Name - International business organization - Manager)
 "Many of the well known organizations themselves are some of the region and the affiliated in Agency they are very active for achieving funding from external parties?"
 (Name - Agency Head - Manager)

"The Agency that the development is included as the project within project funding agreements, organizations for nearly 4 years. It includes the time and resources, primarily government and local community organizations that receive support in the form of funding large projects?"
 (Name - Agency Head - Manager)

"There were organizations that did not fit the region's actually receive resources under a businesslike organization's name in order to obtain financial and state support for selling activities?"
 (Name - Agency Head - Manager)

"Which affiliated organizations have been established to collect funding for the government to obtain the supporting resources in the area?"
 (Name - Agency Head - Manager)

"We created the state in the country, another large to establish committee, and a large number of organizations became affiliated with the region?"
 (Name - IFA Agency - Manager)

"Now the committee recently formed for the project. Some of them are supporting the business activity in business and receive funding from organizations after the activity supports state?"
 (Name - Agency Head - Manager)

Figure 3.26: Regime manipulation of international relations



Note: The figure displays the answers to the question “Do you think the regime exploits experts and tries to manipulate international relations through bribery and corruption?”

When participants were asked if the regime purposely infiltrates experts within international organizations or tries to buy the loyalty of certain international bodies through bribery and corruption, 78 per cent of respondents said that it does (Figure 3.26).

This is yet another clear indication of how the regime treats international and local humanitarian and civil organizations as peripheral devices to survive more normal over the Syrian people and manipulate their affairs through multiple layers of corruption and extortion.



"I think that the regime provides a lot of good facilities for international employees, but still there are shortcomings. There are some sort of administrative difficulties for international organisations and not enough things like having a short entry procedure of their own government granted to continue their work... this can only be solved easily by making the border work more easy."

Interviewee - HR Agency - Manager

"The Syrian regime has withdrawn most of the international organisations operating in Syria by forcing employees within these organisations to monitor and follow up on all their activities."

Interviewee - Syrian NGO - Manager

"None of the conditions for allowing organisations to work in Syria that the regime imposed for protection of employees that it demands and within important administrative practices."

Interviewee - Syrian NGO - Manager

"International, local and even international organisations have been forced to submit the security and guard departments in the employ security companies based in their offices with their own intelligence services (in Beirut)... (in Syria)".

Interviewee - Syrian NGO - Manager

"The Syrian regime has stopped working, as there are building relationships with various offices in the Ministry including foreign, as their regime made by itself to them as a democratic institution study. The fact that there are allowed to enter groups and liberation centers after international pressure, allowing another group was another another proposal to give the regime to keep another agreement to the type of staff."

Interviewee - International humanitarian organisation - Manager

"The situation of workers of international organisations has changed significantly since the conflict started. Most of the employees now follow the system in one way or another. It being in alignment especially among senior management, as that would employees are 'expected'. This happened with a change of roles and the one eventually forced to quit the job."

Interviewee - HR Agency - Manager

"The case is the through the course of the senior employees of these organisations in Syria and that security aspects of background."

Interviewee - International humanitarian organisation - Employee

Figure 18: Regime Control of Civil Society Sector



Note: The figure depicts answers to the question: "Do you think the regime exerts the expectation that they will fully control and govern their civil society sector using representatives in the political realm?"

One of the most relevant issues discussed with participants further has significant impact on Western policies and perceptions regarding organizations based in regime-controlled areas: was whether participants believed the regime purposely funds or facilitates the establishment of NGOs to use them as an "independent" front to represent civil society in the political realm. Around 64 per cent believed that this is the case (Figure 18).

"Basically, there are many organizations whose names are in international public sphere, such as the State Building Movement or the Peace Building Forum or even organizations. Others are known relatively directly affiliated with the regime or they are government-owned and state-backed organizations."

Interviewee 1 (NGO Agency) – Manager

"They think as many organizations are close to the regime, and they feel not honest of their actions. From their view they were born from the moment to be a representation of Syrian society and to represent the regime, as happened in the conference."

Interviewee 2 (Syrian NGO) – Manager

"There were many organizations that the Syrian State has discovered, which presented itself as an independent opposition party, but in fact these participants in many conferences in which I supported the government's economy, security, and policies. There are many examples, but I mentioned this party because of my personal knowledge of some of its members."

Interviewee 3 (Syrian NGO) – Manager

"The Syrian regime actually controls a different Syrian nation, a different ruling, a different language."

Source: SyriaWatch - Damascus

"Many of the personalities and organizations that work under the name of civil society are different with the Syrian government and promote the nationalist authority and national identity. They try to present the regime and Damascus government that allows and not justice work in Syria."

Source: SyriaWatch - Damascus

"The State Building Agreement is one of the parties that maintain itself politically as representing the position of the Syrian government and presents itself as representing and security in Syria. In fact it is one arm of the regime and supports its extensive involvement in the war, the most important reason for the State Building this agreement is for the regime's position that it will be a party in the future, and for other political positions, such as women's membership in the regime's authority and other positions that have become clear to most people."

Source: SyriaWatch - Damascus

Conclusions

International and IHL agencies have a crucial role to play in Syria in association with local humanitarian and aid organisations, but the regime has a tight grip on their assets and operations.

The vast majority of international organisations claim to play a positive role in regime-controlled areas, but are subject to extortion and are forced to accept various levels of corruption and harassment in order to continue operating.

Local organisations exhibit a much higher level of corruption than international and IHL organisations; the government uses them as intermediaries to receive funds and control project delivery and beneficiaries.

Employment is the key practice through which control is exercised by appointing managers and workers; the regime can monitor and control the organisations' operations and spy on their employees.

Humanitarian and aid organisations are under regime control from their inception; the entire cycle is fully controlled and monitored.

Beneficiaries of the aid and projects delivered by these organisations are determined in a discriminatory way based on political affiliation and sectarian considerations.

Some of the aid and services delivered by international and IHL organisations directly or through their local partners is directed to the regime's military branch and sectarian militias.

The regime classifies aid organisations operating in regime-controlled areas as instruments with which to advance its policies and practices.

The UNHCR should be considered a local organisation that is heavily controlled by the Syrian regime and exercises control from security branches.

A high percentage of NGOs in regime-held areas are used as fronts; theoretically they represent civil society in the political realm but in practice they are managing the regime's agenda.

Recommendations

- International donors, especially the European Union and the United States, must:
 - thoroughly examine the settings process for any humanitarian aid bill operating in Syria, including UN and international organizations that support such work;
 - conduct a transparent and professional audit of the aid organizations they fund to verify it is being controlled by the regime, including their funding processes, financial policies and practices that may have led to the diversion of humanitarian aid and appropriation of aid by the regime;
 - conduct transparent reviews of this human rights they fund and the institutions under regime control, including through individual appointments, use of funds and other relevant processes. Such appointments cannot be regarded as independent in the context of representation in the political process.
- Cross-border aid and all delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria must be dignified and transparent. The regime must not be permitted to distribute aid to Syria given the practices described in this report. There is a legal basis to legally deliver aid across borders without UNHCR approval, which, relevant states and humanitarian actors can utilize to prevent reappropriation of aid by the Syrian regime and Russia.
- Institute an effective oversight mechanism to conduct a thorough review of practices and policies related to humanitarian aid delivery in Syria with a view to develop corruption-free, legitimate mechanisms for aid distribution before any plans for an organized safe, voluntary and dignified return are enacted as part of a comprehensive political solution with minimum conditions guaranteed by the international community.
- International donors should pressure the Syrian regime to allow:
 - UN and international organizations to operate directly using their own personnel without having to go through armed parties;
 - their own monitoring and verification teams and processes to be implemented on the ground.



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Weaponization of Aid **Interference and Corruption**

*Syrian Regime's Methods of
Control of Humanitarian Sector*



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Interference and Corruption

*Syrian Regime's Methods of Control
of Humanitarian Sector*