

## Emigration Dynamics in the Context of the Syrian Crisis: Exploring Economic Inequality, Class Power, and the Impact of Capitalism on the Syrian Uprising

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### Abstract

The crisis in Syria, characterized by widespread conflict, displacement, and socio-economic disruption, has led to one of the largest waves of migration in modern history. This paper explores the emigration dynamics within the context of the Syrian crisis, focusing on the interplay between economic inequality, class power, and the influence of capitalism on the uprising and subsequent migration patterns. By examining the pre-crisis neoliberal reforms that deepened socio-economic inequalities, the study highlights how structural inequalities and class stratification shaped both the trajectory of the uprising and the varied migration experiences of different social groups. The analysis shows that neoliberal economic policies disproportionately affected marginalized rural populations and the working class, exacerbating the economic grievances that underpinned the revolutionary fervor. These protests, coupled with the collapse of public services and widespread violence, forced millions of people to migrate, with wealthier classes accessing safer, structured migration routes while poorer groups faced risky and perilous journeys. The paper also addresses the role of capitalism as a structural force in the crisis and shows how global and regional capitalist dynamics have exacerbated vulnerabilities and influenced migration trends. As well, the article also investigates the socio-economic impact of Syrian migration on host countries, particularly through remittances and the integration of refugee labor, reshaping local economies and social dynamics. By situating Syrian emigration within broader theoretical frameworks of inequality, class, and capitalism, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of forced migration in the context of conflict and systemic economic dislocation. The findings underscore the need for comprehensive policy interventions that address the root causes of displacement while fostering equitable support mechanisms for refugees and host communities.

**Keywords:** Migration, Emigration Dynamics, Syrian Crisis, Economic Inequality, Neoliberal Policies.

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## Suriye Krizi Bağlamında Göç Dinamikleri: Ekonomik Eşitsizlik, Sınıf Gücü ve Kapitalizmin Suriye İsyanı Üzerindeki Etkisi

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### Özet

2011 yılında başlayan Suriye krizi, modern tarihin en büyük zorunlu göç hareketlerinden birine yol açmış ve milyonlarca Suriyeli hem ülke içinde hem de uluslararası sınırlar ötesinde yerinden edilmiştir. Bu araştırma, Suriye krizi bağlamında göç dinamiklerini incelemekte ve ekonomik eşitsizlik, sınıf gücü ve kapitalizmin etkileşiminin Suriye ayaklanması ve sonrasında göç modelleri üzerindeki etkisine odaklanmaktadır. Çalışmada, krize katkıda bulunan yapısal faktörleri incelenerek, küresel ve bölgesel ekonomik sistemlerin yanı sıra yerel mücadelelerin, Suriye çatışmasının seyrini ve göç sonuçlarını nasıl şekillendirdiğine yönelik bir bakış açısı sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Başlangıçta siyasi reform ve sosyal adalet talepleriyle ortaya çıkan Suriye ayaklanması, hızla bölgesel ve uluslararası boyutları olan karmaşık bir iç savaşa dönüştü. Çatışmanın temel nedenleri olarak genellikle siyasi baskı ve otoriter yönetim gösterilse de, bu araştırma, altta yatan ekonomik eşitsizliklerin ve seçkin sınıflardan duyulan hoşnutsuzluğunda kritik bir rol oynadığını savunmaktadır. Suriye hükümetinin 2000'li yılların başında benimsediği neoliberal ekonomik politikalar, sosyal ve ekonomik eşitsizlikleri şiddetlendirerek nüfusun büyük bir kesimini marjinalleştirdi ve huzursuzluk için verimli bir zemin yarattı. Küresel kapitalist yapıların etkisi altında şekillenen bu politikalar, özelleştirme, deregülasyon ve sosyal refahın azaltılmasına sebep oldu. Bu yapı, yönetici seçkinler ve müttefiklerini orantısız bir şekilde zenginleştirirken, Suriyelilerin çoğunluğunu ekonomik çalkantılara karşı savunmasız bıraktı.

Suriye krizinde sınıf gücünün önemli bir rolünün bulunduğu bir gerçekliktir. Esed rejimi, askeri, iş dünyası ve siyasi seçkinlerden oluşan bir ağ tarafından desteklenmiş, kendi yandaşlarını destekleyen kapitalist bir sistem kullanarak egemenliğini sürdürmüştür. Bu sistem, zenginlik ve mali kaynakların bazı seçkin kişilerin elinde toplanmasını sağlamış, Suriyelilerin çoğunluğu işsizlik, yoksulluk ve temel hizmetlere sınırlı erişimle karşı karşıya kalmıştır. Orta sınıfın aşınması ve zengin seçkinler ile yoksul kitleler arasındaki artan uçurum, patlamaya hazır bir sosyal ortam yaratmıştır. Arap Baharı Ortadoğu'yu kasıp kavurduğunda, bu ekonomik şikayetler, Suriye ayaklanmasının arkasındaki itici güç haline geldi ve protestocular yalnızca siyasi özgürlük değil, aynı zamanda ekonomik adalet ve yolsuzluğun sona ermesini talep ettiler.

Hem küresel bir ekonomik sistem hem de yerel politikada uygulanan kapitalist davranışlar, krizi daha da şiddetlendirdi. Suriye'nin ticari liberalleşme ve yabancı yatırım yoluyla küresel kapitalist ekonomiye entegrasyonu, ekonomik kırılganlığını derinleştirdi. Ülkenin petrol ihracatına olan bağımlılığı ve küresel piyasa dalgalanmalarına maruz kalması, 2008 küresel finansal krizi gibi dış şoklarla başa çıkma konusunda onu yetersiz hale getirdi. Ayrıca, kamu varlıklarının özelleştirilmesi ve tarımsal sübvansiyonların kaldırılması, kırsal kesimi orantısız bir şekilde etkiledi ve buralarda yaşayan halkın birçoğu daha sonra muhalefetin büyük destekçisi haline geldi. Kapitalist sistem tarafından yönetilen toprak ve kaynakların metalaştırılması, çevresel bozulma ve kaynak kıtlığına da katkıda bulunarak sosyal gerilimleri daha da artırdı.

Suriye krizinden kaynaklanan göç dinamikleri, bu ekonomik ve sınıf temelli faktörlerle iç içe geçmiştir. Çatışma şiddetlendikçe, milyonlarca Suriyeli evlerini terk etmek zorunda kalmış ve komşu ülkelerde ve ötesinde sığınak aramıştır. Yerinden edilme, yalnızca şiddetin değil, aynı zamanda savaşa eşlik eden ekonomik çöküşün de bir sonucuydu. Altyapının tahrip olması, Suriye lirasının çökmesi ve geçim kaynaklarının kaybı, birçok Suriyeliye göç etmekten başka seçenek bırakmadı. Göç sürecinin kendisi de sınıfsal eşitsizliklerle şekillendi, çünkü daha zengin Suriyeliler daha güvenli yerlere ve yasal yollarla çıkarken, daha yoksul bireyler genellikle tehlikeli ve düzensiz hareket etmek zorunda kaldı.

Suriyeli mülteci krizine uluslararası tepkiler kapitalist ve jeopolitik çıkarlardan etkilendiği anlaşılmaktadır. Özellikle zengin Kuzey ülkeleri, insani kaygılar yerine ekonomik verimlilik ve ulusal güvenliği önceleyen, neoliberal eğilimini yansıtan kısıtlayıcı göç politikalar uygulamıştır. Öte yandan, Suriye'ye komşu olan Türkiye ve diğer Güney ülkeleri, genellikle yeterli uluslararası destek olmaksızın mülteci yükünü taşımıştır. Bu sorumluluğun eşit olmayan dağılımı, kapitalist sistem içinde gömülü olan küresel eşitsizlikleri ortaya koymaktadır.

Suriye krizi ve buna bağlı göç dinamiklerini, ekonomik eşitsizlik, sınıf gücü ve kapitalizmin rolü incelenmeden tam olarak anlaşılamaz. Bu faktörlerin etkileşimi, ayaklanma için gerekli koşulları yarattı, çatışmanın seyrini şekillendirdi ve yerinden edilme ile göçü etkiledi. Makalede Suriye krizi, küresel kapitalizm ve yerel sınıf mücadeleleri dikkate alınarak, göçü tetikleyen yapısal problemlere ışık tutulmaya gayret edilmiştir. Bu, adil ve eşit bir küresel ekonomik sistem ihtiyacının ne denli önemli olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Zorunlu göç probleminin çözülmesi için yalnızca insani yardım düzeyinde hareket edilmesi yeterli değildir. Bilakis ekonomik eşitsizlikleri makul bir düzeye çeken ve marjinalleşmiş halkı maddi açıdan güçlendiren bir sistem değişikliği açıkça kendisini göstermektedir.

Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, Suriye krizinin ekonomik boyutlarını ve bu krizin göç dinamikleri üzerindeki etkilerini ele alarak, göç literatürüne anlamlı bir katkı sunmayı hedeflemiştir. Geleneksel göç yaklaşımlarının çoğunlukla siyasî ve güvenlik odaklı çerçevelerle sınırlı kaldığı tespitine yer verilen çalışmada, ekonomik adalet ve sınıf temelli analizlerin göç araştırmalarında merkeze alınması gerektiğini savunmuştur. Bu bağlamda, Suriye krizinin ekonomik eşitsizlik ve kapitalist düzen perspektifinden değerlendirilmesi, zorunlu göçün yapısal nedenlerini daha iyi anlamaya katkı sağlayacaktır. Yapılan bu tespitlerin sürdürülebilir çözüm önerileri geliştirmek isteyen politikacılar, akademisyenler ve sivil toplum aktörleri için dikkate alınması gerektiği söylenebilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Göç, Göç Nedenleri, Suriye Krizi, Ekonomik Eşitsizlik, Neoliberal Politikalar.

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## Introduction

The Syrian crisis has reshaped the socio-political and economic landscape of the Middle East, leaving a permanent mark on global migration patterns. Since the outbreak of the uprising in 2011, millions of Syrians have been displaced within the Syrian borders or they are forced to search for harbors in nearby countries and elsewhere. While the direct causes of this displacement are rooted in the violent conflict, the underlying dynamics are far more complex, reflecting deep-seated economic inequalities, class struggles, and the systemic effects of global capitalism.

This study critically examines the intersection of class, power, and displacement within the context of the Syrian crisis. It explores how class-based economic inequalities under the Assad regime influenced migration trajectories, the extent to which global capitalism deepened preexisting socio-economic weaknesses, and how class power shaped the variance outcomes facing the Syrian refugees. By trying to answer these questions among many

- How did class-based economic disparities under Assad's regime shape migration pathways?
- What role did global capitalism play in exacerbating pre-crisis vulnerabilities?
- How did class power determine differential outcomes for Syrian refugees?

Methodologically, the study is established as a critical review of scholarly literature on Syria's political economy from 2010 to 2023 and is supported by both quantitative and qualitative data sources. The Quantitative analysis draws from UNDP poverty indices, Gini coefficients, and displacement figures. Qualitative insights are derived from case studies examining elite networks, as well as real lived refugee experiences. The theoretical framework integrates Weberian notions of power, Marxist class analysis, and critical perspectives on neoliberalism, offering a multidimensional lens through which to understand the basic forces behind migration.

### 1. Historical Context and Pre-Crisis Conditions

Before the crisis, the Syrian economy underwent significant neoliberal transformations under the leadership of Bashar al-Assad. Since the early 2000s, the government implemented a series of reforms to integrate Syria into the global economy. These reforms prioritized privatization, market liberalization, and the dismantling of state subsidies for essential goods and services such as food, fuel, and healthcare. While these policies attracted foreign investment and boosted the wealth of urban elites, they had devastating effects on rural communities and the working class. Agricultural production declined due to reduced state support, forcing many rural families into urban areas in

search of employment. Alongside, rising costs of living coupled with ridiculously low wages diminished the purchasing power of ordinary citizens. This economic restructuring created a gap between the rich and the poor, with the top elite class enjoying the benefits of liberalization while the majority faced increasing poverty. By the time the uprising began, unemployment rates were rising, and nearly one-third of the population was living below the poverty line. These conditions fostered widespread discontent and laid the foundation for the socio-economic discontent that would later lead to mass protests.

As the Syrian uprising escalated into a full-scale civil war, the conflict's effects had greater magnitude on some social classes than other class. Wealthier families, particularly those with links to the Assad regime or international networks, were better able to flee the country and settle in a relatively safe environment. These individuals often migrated to Europe, North America, or Gulf states, where their financial resources facilitated access to visas, housing, and economic opportunities. In contrast, middle-classes professionals, such as doctors, engineers, and teachers, faced a different set of challenges. Many sought asylums in European countries, contributing to a significant "brain drain" that further weakened Syria's infrastructure. Meanwhile, the poorest sections of society, who lacked financial resources or social capital, endured the harshest realities of displacement. Many were forced into overcrowded refugee camps in neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, where they faced limited access to employment, education, and healthcare. Others remained internally displaced, often trapped in overwhelmed areas with little hope of escape.

## **2. The Influence of Global Capitalism on the Syrian Crisis**

The influence of global capitalism on the crisis in Syria goes beyond the immediate economic policy in the country. Regional and international capitalist systems played a critical role in exacerbating vulnerabilities and shaping migration trends. Foreign investment in Syria's pre-crisis economy was heavily focused on the real estate and luxury sectors, serving the interests of the elite, while broader development needs were neglected. This focus on profit over inclusion contributed to the marginalization of large segments of the population. During the conflict, the exploitation of displacement became evident as international organizations and private enterprises sought to profit from the refugee crisis. Refugee camps became sites of exploitation, with residents often employed in low-wage, informal labor markets under precarious conditions. At the same time, remittances sent by Syrian migrants became a critical lifeline for families left behind, indicating how migration can simultaneously alleviate and spread economic inequalities.

The influx of Syrian refugees has had profound socio-economic and political effects on host countries. In Lebanon, for example, the refugees now make up almost a quarter of the population and are putting a huge strain on infrastructure and public services. The arrival of millions of Syrians has also changed the labor markets in Turkey and Jordan. Refugees are often employed in informal sectors where they are exploited and have no legal protection. While some host communities have benefited from the economic contributions of refugees, such as increased demand for goods and services, the overall impact varied, this variation led to public tensions and policy mis implementation.

In recent times, the world has been increasingly plagued by wars and widespread conflicts that have an impact on the whole earth. Existing policies are proving inadequate to address the multifaceted challenges posed by such crises, especially regarding migration and displacement. To successfully approach these topics, policymakers must have an inclusive understanding of the main underlying reasons, as well as to be aware of the connected risk factors. The understanding and empathy will enable them to some rate to draft strong crisis management plans that defends human rights and endorse the welfare of refugees. Using Syrian emigration as an example underscores the importance of addressing both immediate needs and the root causes of displacement, such as economic inequality and systemic exploitation. This approach emphasizes the necessity of developing equitable support mechanisms that empower refugees and encouraging resilience in addition to reducing tensions within host communities. By adopting such strategies, policymakers can create more sustainable and inclusive responses to global displacement challenges.

### **3. Causes of the Syrian Crisis**

The crisis in Syria is a complex and multi-layered conflict that has been influenced by a variety of factors, including the global capitalist system and the actions of foreign governments and corporations. At the same time, it is important to note that the crisis has multiple causes that can be generally categorized into political, social, and economic factors. “A revolution is a people's uprising that overthrows the existing state power and establishes a new state power”<sup>1</sup>. In this quote, Lenin defines a revolution as an uprising by the people that results in the establishment of a new form of government. The political factors include the authoritarian nature of the Syrian regime, the lack of democratic institutions, and the suppression of political freedoms.

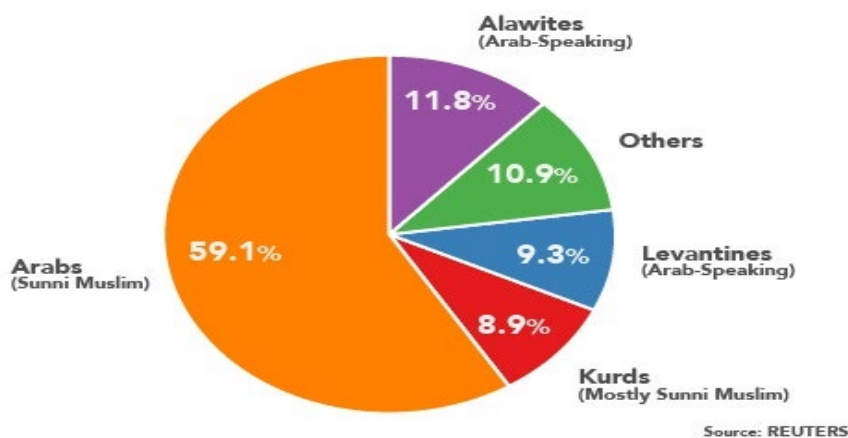
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<sup>1</sup> Lenin, *V.I. State and Revolution*. (Petrograd: Zhizn' i Znanie, 1917), 22.

The United States has been involved in the Syrian crisis in various capacities. Initially, the U.S. supported opposition groups seeking to overthrow the Syrian government, providing them with training, equipment, and limited military assistance. This support, along with the influx of arms into the region, fueled the escalation of the conflict. Russia has also been a significant player in the Syrian crisis, providing military support to the Syrian government. In 2015, Russia intervened militarily to support the government of President Bashar al-Assad, which was facing significant challenges from opposition groups. Russian military assistance, including airstrikes, weapons, and training, shifted the balance of power in favor of the Syrian government. Russia's involvement has not only helped the government maintain its hold on power but has also allowed Russia to expand its influence in the region and protect its strategic interests, such as access to naval bases in Syria. Iran is a staunch ally of the Syrian government and provides financial and military support, including weapons, training and, deployment of military advisers and proxy militias. Iran views Syria as crucial to its regional strategy and uses the conflict to expand its influence and counter Saudi Arabia's influence in the region. "People's uprisings are often accompanied by demands for greater democracy, social justice, and individual freedoms" (Huntington, 1991.p266). Huntington suggests that uprisings are often driven by demands for greater political participation and expanded civil liberties. The social factors that contributed to the Syrian crisis include sectarianism, regional disparities, and the rise of fundamentalism. Syria is a country with a diverse population that includes various ethnic and religious groups.

Graphic 1: Major Ethnic Groups in Syria

## Major Ethnic Groups in Syria



The Assad regime had played the denominational card, preferred the Alawi minority and marginalized the Sunni majority.

“In Syria, the regime’s reliance on the military-security apparatus, coupled with the privatization of key state resources, has created a class of regime loyalists who are financially dependent on the regime and are therefore committed to its survival.”<sup>2</sup>

Political Economy of Authoritarian Resilience created tensions between various groups and contributed to the rise of sectarianism. The regional gaps in Syria were also a factor, with the capital Damascus, and its surroundings flourishing, while other regions remained underdeveloped and underprivileged. Also, Gurr suggests that uprisings are a response to perceived injustices or a lack of responsiveness by the government. This created resentment and discontent among the population, particularly in the underprivileged regions. Furthermore, the rise of fundamentalism, particularly in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq, contributed to the growth of extremist groups such as Al Qaeda and the Islamic State (ISIS), who took advantage of the political and social vacuum in Syria to establish a foothold. “People’s uprisings occur when individuals feel that they are not being treated fairly and that the government is not meeting their needs”<sup>3</sup>

#### **4. Income Inequality and its Influence on Migration Patterns**

Migration driven by income inequality reshapes demographics, economies, and social structures. Income inequality, measured using indices such as the Gini coefficient, quantifies income inequality on a scale from 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (maximum inequality). Various factors contribute to income inequality, including differences in education, skills, employment opportunities, access to resources, and social policies. These disparities drive migration in several ways, influenced by both push and pull factors. In regions with elevated income inequality, individuals in the lower-income brackets may face limited economic opportunities, low wages, and poor working conditions, pushing them to migrate in search of better prospects. Conversely, regions with lower income inequality and higher average incomes attract migrants seeking better job opportunities, higher wages, and improved living standards. as for Syria's economic and social development has been significantly impacted by the ongoing conflict. According to the UNDP's 2020 Human Development Report, Syria received a grade of 0.567, ranking it 152nd out of 189 evaluated countries. This is relatively coherent with its grades in recent years, such as 0.556 in 2014, 0.528 in 2016, and 0.563 in 2018. Notably, Syria had previously shown steady progress, with its Human Development Index (HDI) improving from 0.550

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<sup>2</sup> Bassam Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria: The Political Economy of Authoritarian Resilience*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 72; Based on field research and confidential government documents (Damascus, 2006-2010).

<sup>3</sup> Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 22.

in 1990 to 0.672 in 2010. However, the initial years of the conflict undid two decades of human development. Likely, the situation has further worsened due to the 2020 economic crisis resulting from the freezing of Syrian assets in Lebanese banks and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Regarding economic exclusion, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) estimates that in 2019, 77.2% of Syrians lived below the poverty line of \$3.50 per day, compared to 13.0% in 2010. Additionally, 40.0% lived in extreme poverty, defined as below the \$1.90 poverty line, in contrast to only 0.7% in 2010 (based on 2011 PPP \$). While the 2017 Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report lacked data on Syria, the 2020 ESCWA estimates suggest a multidimensional poverty rate of 50% and an acute poverty rate of 15% in 2017, indicating a worsening situation compared to 2006. Assessing inequality in Syria is challenging due to limited data, and the UNDP does not currently calculate the country's Gini index or inequality-adjusted HDI. However, it is likely that the gap between a small group of war profiteers and affluent individuals connected to the regime, and the majority facing increasing poverty, has widened. A study conducted by economist Raslan Khadour from Damascus University in 2019 highlighted severe problems contributing to the decline of the middle class.

Table 1: Distribution of consumption expenditure by region in Syria (Decile shares in percentages), 1997

Region	Sector	Deciles										Gini Coefficient (%)
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Southern	Urban	3.5	4.8	5.7	6.5	7.5	8.6	10	11.8	15	26.8	32.3
	Rural	3.4	4.7	5.6	6.6	7.5	8.5	10	12	14.9	27	32.8
	Total	3.4	4.8	5.7	6.5	7.5	8.6	10	11.9	14.9	26.8	32.5
North-Eastern	Urban	3.4	4.7	5.5	6.4	7.4	8.5	9.9	11.9	15	27.3	33.3
	Rural	3.3	4.7	5.7	6.7	7.7	8.8	10.3	12.1	15.1	25.6	31.8
	Total	3.4	4.7	5.6	6.5	7.4	8.5	9.9	11.8	15	27	32.8
Central	Urban	3.6	4.8	5.8	6.7	7.5	8.5	9.8	11.7	14.8	26.8	31.8
	Rural	3.4	4.7	5.6	6.8	7.7	8.8	10.3	11.8	14.8	26.2	31.9
	Total	3.4	4.7	5.6	6.6	7.5	8.6	10.1	11.9	15.1	26.6	32.6
Coastal	Urban	3.1	4.4	5.3	6.2	7.1	8.2	9.6	11.4	14.7	30.1	35.6
	Rural	3.5	4.8	5.6	6.6	7.3	8.6	10	11.7	14.8	27.1	33.4
	Total	3.6	4.8	5.8	6.7	7.5	8.6	9.9	11.7	14.8	26.7	31.8
Syria	Urban	3.5	4.8	5.7	6.6	7.5	8.6	10	11.9	14.9	26.7	32.2
	Rural	3.4	4.7	5.6	6.5	7.5	8.5	10	11.9	15	27	32.9
	Total	3.4	4.7	5.6	6.5	7.5	8.6	10	11.9	15	26.8	32.6

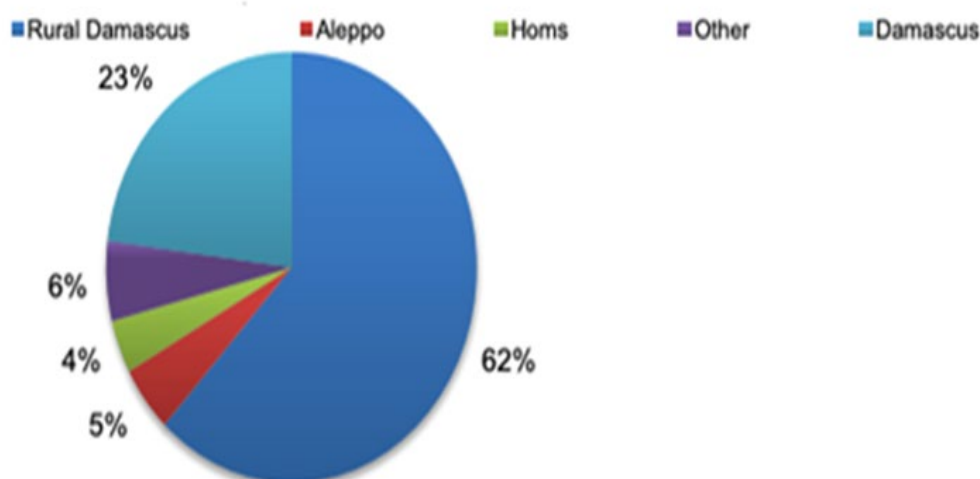
Source: UNDP Calculations based on the unit data record

The ruling elite in Syria consists of a small group of wealthy businessmen and political figures who control the country's major industries, and hold key positions in the government. They can use their power and influence to shape economic policies that favor their interests, often at the expense of the country's lower classes. "The probability that a command will be obeyed by a given group of

persons is a function of the relationship between the commander and the commanded”<sup>4</sup> Weber highlights the importance of the relationship between those in power and those subject to that power. It suggests that power is not just a matter of an individual or group having a particular position or resource, but also of their ability to effectively command and influence others.

Syria's middle and lower classes are marginalized, and have limited access to education, healthcare and, job opportunities. The fragile economy imposed low-wage jobs that provided little legal protection and limited opportunities for upward mobility. Many were forced to work in such jobs. The year 2010 saw a significant decrease in primary education enrollment, particularly among women, in rural areas of Deir Ezzor, Raqqa, and Aleppo due to economic, and social factors such as child labor, high education costs, or traditional practices that make it difficult to educate girls. The decline in educational results has led to a lack of financial incentives for students and their families to continue their education, and to the inability to adapt educational results to the needs of the labor market. This imbalance increases skills and job opportunities. According to the book *Poverty and Inequality in Syria (1997-2007)* by *Khalid Abu-Ismaïl, Ali Abdel-Gadir and Heba El-Laithy*, the distribution of government resources was unfair, further aggravating the inequality.

Graphic 2: Distribution of Iraqis by Governorate as of July 2007(the graphic is taking as it is in the source but the writer has mysticality wrote Iraqi instead of Syria’s)



Source: Abu-Ismaïl et. all (2008)

<sup>4</sup> Max Weber, *Wirt Schaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehen den Sociology*, (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1922), 212 (English edition: *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 212).

The economic and social progress in Syria has been severely impacted by the prolonged conflict. According to the UNDP's 2020 Human Development Report, Syria ranks 152 out of 189 countries with a score of 0.567. This is similar to scores in recent years, including 0.556 in 2014, 0.528 in 2016, and 0.563 in 2018. Syria has already shown progress, with its Human Development Index (HDI) rising from 0.550 in 1990 to 0.672 in 2010. twenty years of progress was demolished due to war. The situation has worsened due to the economic crisis of 2020 and the outbreak of COVID-19. The UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) estimated that 77.2% of Syrians lived below the poverty line of \$3.50 a day in 2019, up from 13.0% in 2010. In addition, 40.0% lived in extreme poverty. (less than \$1.90 per day) This is a significant increase from 0.7% in 2010. According to ESCWA 2020 estimates, the poverty rate in 2017 was 50%, and the poverty rate is 15%. The poverty line seems to be rising. Raslan Khadour, an economist at the University of Damascus, highlighted the serious problems facing the decline of the middle class. Although economic factors were important in the Syrian conflict, other factors promoted participation. A strong desire for power becomes a characteristic of the uprising. Syrians are frustrated by living with fear and humiliation on a daily basis, including denying basic services or employment opportunities supported by the government and relying on rarely available support for important needs such as health care and education.

Table 2: Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index in 2015

Inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI)		Coefficient of human inequality	Inequality in life expectancy	Inequality-adjusted life expectancy index	Inequality in education	Inequality-adjusted education index	Inequality in income	Inequality-adjusted income index
Value	Overall loss (%)		(%)	Value	(%)	Value	(%)	Value
0.419	21.7	21.4	14.5	0.653	31.5	0.286	18.3	0.394

Source: United Nations Development Program. (2013). Human Development Report 2013: The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World. Retrieved from

<https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/me/HDR-2013-Report-ENG.pdf>

The concentration of power in the hands of a small elite perpetuated Syria's class system and lack of political and civil rights.

“Power is not simply distributed across social classes; rather, it plays a significant role in shaping and perpetuating class divisions. Power asymmetries, both economic and political, contribute to the maintenance of class hierarchies, as those with greater power can assert their interests and maintain their privileged positions”<sup>5</sup>

In this citation, sociologist Erik Olin Wright highlights how power dynamics, encompassing both economic and political spheres, influence and reinforce social class divisions within society. The citation supports the argument that power has a substantial impact on the configuration and perpetuation of social classes. The consolidation of power in the hands of a small ruling elite has had a significant impact on social classes in Syria, contributing to economic inequality, political repression, and social unrest.

The Syrian crisis has highlighted the deep-rooted inequality, class, and power structures in the country. The Assad regime created a system of patronage and crony capitalism that benefited a small elite while marginalizing the broader population.

“The Syrian regime’s crony capitalism and its monopolization of the economy alienated a significant portion of the population from the state, resulting in widespread discontent and anger that ultimately fueled the uprising.”<sup>6</sup>

The economic power is controlled by small elite that utilizes the country's resources and benefits from the crony capitalism that pervades the economy. The social power is constructed on sectarian and tribal affiliations, which create divisions and tensions among the population.

“Ethnic nationalism is often seen as the main source of group consolidation and intergroup war, In this view, ethnic groups rebel because they feel exclusion arising from discrimination by ethnic majorities. We see that “modernist” theories highlight this point of view and emphasize that ethnic conflicts arise when these groups are socially and politically excluded from economic modernization.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Erik Olin Wright, *Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 25.

<sup>6</sup> Ziad Majed, *Crony Capitalism and the Syrian Uprising*. (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2014), 97.

<sup>7</sup> Karimi, Mahdi, and Sayed Masoud Mousavi Shafae, *Ethnic Conflict and Modernization: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives*, (Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 2018), 53.

In order for a society to thrive, it is crucial that every individual feels a sense of inclusion and does not experience exclusion from the broader social fabric. This necessitates providing opportunities for all groups, especially those who are most vulnerable, to enhance or sustain their well-being.

Class hierarchies offer a perspective for understanding the Syrian immigrant experience. People at the top tend to experience better migration and resettlement, benefiting from better education, professional skills and financial resources. However, minorities often do not have a place, are more vulnerable to exploitation, and find it difficult to build their lives abroad. These class differences show the disproportionate impact of the Syrian crisis on different social classes. Class classification, defined by different levels of wealth, education, and social status, can have a significant impact on the immigrant experience. This not only determines migration decisions, but also the routes chosen, the risks involved, and the outcomes in destination countries. This exploration provides insight into how different social classes experience migration, using the Syrian crisis as a case study to illustrate these dynamics.

Class hierarchies in every society reflect access to resources, opportunities, and power. The majority of the upper class enjoys better financial security, better education, and wider social connections, while the lower class often struggles with economic hardship, less access to quality education, and fewer social connections. These areas are even more pronounced in crisis environments such as the Syrian conflict, where migratory forces and migratory experiences are strongly influenced by class status. People from higher economic strata who have more financial resources find immigration a viable option when faced with political or economic problems. Their decisions are influenced by their ability to ensure a safe and comfortable outdoor life.

The upper classes have access to better communications and international networks, making it easier for them to navigate the complexities of immigration. They can often rely on their contacts in other countries for help and support. Given economic pressures and declining living standards, the middle class may consider emigration as a way to maintain or improve their economic situation. They carefully weigh the risks, benefits and often focus on countries that offer professional development opportunities. For the lower classes, immigration decisions are often driven by necessity. Poor economic conditions, lack of employment opportunities and lack of access to basic needs make migration a survival strategy. Unlike the upper and middle classes, where their decisions are often made, they have fewer choices and greater risks.

Although upper-class immigrants have fewer problems, they still have difficulty adapting to new cultural and environmental environments. However, financial resources, and social networks mitigate these challenges. It is difficult to maintain your socioeconomic status in your destination country. You may encounter legal and bureaucratic restrictions related to the transfer of assets, and investments. Middle-class migrants often struggle to find jobs that match their skills, and qualifications. Regardless of your education and experience, you may accept lower-paying jobs. Adapting to a new culture and social system can be difficult, especially when moving to a country with a different cultural background. Lower-class migrants run a higher level of physical risk on their journeys. The trauma of migration and the harsh conditions in refugee camps and informal settlements pose a serious threat to mental health. In destination countries, lower-class migrants often face social exclusion, discrimination and abuse. Their scarce resources hinder access to basic services, the search for stable employment and their integration into society.

Wealthy immigrants can contribute significantly to the local economy through investment, entrepreneurship, and consumption. They often bring skills and knowledge that will benefit their host countries. With sufficient resources, upper-class immigrants can integrate and maintain a high standard of living more easily by living in affluent areas and sending their children to private schools. Middle-class immigrants often enter the labor market, especially in skilled occupations. Your successful integration depends on your understanding of your symptoms and your ability to overcome initial obstacles. Many middle-class immigrants enjoy a sense of community, contributing to cultural diversity and social cohesion in their new surroundings. Low-income immigrants can strain public services and resources, especially in host countries with large refugee populations, but they also contribute to the economy by filling job vacancies in low-cost jobs. This can cause social problems, especially in economically difficult areas. Effective inclusion policies are essential to reduce these problems and promote social well-being.

Class astrology significantly shapes a person's immigration experience, influencing their immigration decisions, the route they take, the risks they face, and the consequences in the destination country. The migration of skilled and educated people from middle and upper socio-economic classes often results in a 'brain drain,' which can significantly weaken the economic development and social stability of the countries or regions of origin, mainly in developing contexts. This outflow denies these regions of critical human capital needed for innovation, governance, and service delivery. Lower-class immigrants often send remittances to their home countries, which can greatly support

the local economy and improve the lives of their families. Immigrants contribute to the economy of their destination by supplying labor shortages, starting businesses and increasing the demand for goods and services. Upper- and middle-class immigrants often bring skills, and capital. The presence of immigrants can enhance cultural diversity and enrich the social fabric of a destination. However, this also leads to social problems, especially if inclusion policies are not appropriate. Class hierarchy plays an important role in shaping the dynamics of migration. Immigrants have different experiences depending on their class, which influences their motivations, approaches, challenges, and outcomes.

Class hierarchy influences the speed of economic development of immigrant communities by providing or limiting access to resources and opportunities. In host countries, upper-class immigrants can use their education, skills, and financial resources to achieve economic stability and social mobility. However, low-income immigrants often face systemic barriers, such as limited access to education, employment discrimination, and inadequate legal status, which hinder their economic mobility and sustain cycles of poverty and marginalization. Class dynamics affect the economic growth of individuals and communities of immigrant populations.

The role of class power in immigration, People from higher economic strata have more financial resources, advanced education, and wider social connections. These resources are of great benefit in speeding up the immigration process and settling in your host country. Middle-class immigrants tend to have more financial stability, professional skills, and educational qualifications. Although they have challenges, they are in a better position than lower-class immigrants to move up the socioeconomic ladder. Low-income immigrants lack economic resources and education. The limited participation in their countries forces them to emigrate in worse conditions, which hinders progress in the host country.

The power structure in Syria is characterized by extreme inequality, with a small elite controlling most of the country's wealth and resources. The Assad regime has created a system of patronage and crony capitalism that benefits a small group of individuals while marginalizing the broader population. This system has contributed to the deep-rooted inequality in the country and has fueled the grievances of the population, leading to the uprising that began in 2011. In Syria, the distribution of power is largely determined by one's social status, economic position, and political connections. "Class, status, and party are phenomena of the distribution of power within a community"<sup>8</sup>. In this

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<sup>8</sup> Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* Translated by A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), XX (Original German: *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 1922)

quote, Weber highlights the idea that power is a key factor in the distribution of social and economic resources. It suggests that class, status, and party (i.e., political affiliations) are all closely tied to the distribution of power within a given society or community.

The Baathist regime, which came to power in Syria in 1963, has had a significant impact on the country's power structure, consolidating power in the hands of the ruling elite and suppressing opposition voices. "The probability that a command will be obeyed by given group of persons is a function of the relationship between the commander and the commanded"<sup>9</sup>. In this quote, Weber highlights the importance of the relationship between those in power and those subject to that power. It suggests that power is not just a matter of an individual or group having a particular position or resource, but also of their ability to effectively command and influence others.

Social mobility, the ability of an individual or a family to move up or down the economic ladder, is strongly influenced by social class. Each class—upper, middle, and lower—faces unique challenges to overcome related to integration and success in their homes and host countries. Different social classes face different challenges in achieving economic mobility in immigrant communities. Upper- and middle-class immigrants have better education, professional connections, and economic resources, which facilitate integration and mobility. However, many lower-class immigrants face greater obstacles, including language barriers, lack of sign recognition, and limited access to employment opportunities. These problems hinder their ability to improve their economic situation in the host country.

Upper-class immigrants have large economic resources and find it difficult to maintain or increase their wealth in their new country due to different economic and investment systems. Opportunities, regulations. Adapting to a new cultural and social environment can be difficult for senior expats. This is especially true if your wealth and status are not recognized or respected in the host country. Experienced professionals may find it difficult to transfer their qualifications, and experience to a new country. For example, doctors, lawyers and other professionals need to re-certify or meet local standards, which is time-consuming and expensive. Building new professional networks is difficult, especially when previous expatriate networks do not extend internationally. This can hinder access to high-quality professional and business opportunities.

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<sup>9</sup> Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1922), 212.

As for the Syrian case, we can see that the middle class is relatively small and mainly comprised of urban professionals, including small-scale managers, tradesmen, and white-collar workers. On the other hand, the upper-middle class is made up of individuals who have ascended from the lower or middle classes by leveraging technical or secular higher education. This upper-middle class usually contains teachers, scientists, lawyers, technocrats, civil servants, doctors, and other professionals. This group has historically been politically passive, but the uprising against the Assad regime in 2011 saw many members of the middle class take to the streets to demand political change.

“Despite the rhetoric of the Syrian government about socialism and social justice, class-based inequalities have remained a key feature of Syrian society, with the urban middle class benefiting from government policies and the rural poor largely neglected”<sup>10</sup>.

The lower class in Syria is composed of manual laborers, rural farmers, and other marginalized groups. Syria didn't have a large number of the Laboring class we see that this class didn't have the power to induce changes or threaten the current ruling capitalists that may rather be connected to the fact that Syria has a slow shift to the industrial sector after been newly emerging from the burden of the ending Feudal class. This class has suffered disproportionately under the Assad regime's policies, which have favored the ruling elite at the expense of the poor, in terms of power, the Assad regime holds control of the political power and has maintained control through a combination of repression, co-optation, and patronage networks. “In Syria, political power has traditionally been concentrated in the hands of a narrow elite, composed of members of the ruling Ba'ath party and their allies, who have used their positions of power to reinforce existing class-based inequalities”<sup>11</sup>.

The regime's security apparatus is pervasive and has been responsible for widespread human rights abuses, including torture and extrajudicial killings. The Assad regime has maintained control through a combination of force and patronage, but the uprising in 2011 revealed widespread discontent with the regime and its policies.

“Syria's tentative program of economic liberalization was not as drastic as the more neoliberal paths followed elsewhere, but the acceleration of reform under Bashar al-Asad has decisively moved the country in that direction, despite the regime's talk of a 'social market' system. Neoliberalism is

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<sup>10</sup> Steven Heydemann, *Authoritarianism in Syria: Institutions and Social Conflict, 1946-1970*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Rana Khalaf, *Elite Capture and State Resilience in Contemporary Syria*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 112.

perhaps better understood not as a specific set of policies, but as a political project constructed in the interests of class-privileged sectors of society”<sup>12</sup>.

Middle-class immigrants continue to struggle to make their educational and professional credentials known. This may result in less work and may require certification or additional training. Finding a job that matches your skills and experience can be difficult. Many middle-class immigrants initially choose jobs that fall short of their qualifications, which can delay socioeconomic advancement. Mobility and social integration, adapting to a new language and culture is a big obstacle. Middle-class immigrants may experience marginalization or social exclusion, affecting their ability to fully integrate into the host society. Securing affordable housing is difficult, right in a safe neighborhood. Middle-class immigrants face a lot of competition for housing, which affects their livelihoods and stability.

Also, Syrian Lower-class immigrants are often confined to manual, low-wage jobs with limited security and benefits. These positions offer little opportunity for advancement and keep the economy unstable. Many lower-class migrants work in the informal economy, where they are vulnerable, have no legal protection and have limited access to social services. Access to education and skills development, Limited access to education and training opportunities hinders the ability of low-income immigrants to improve their skills and qualifications. This limits the ability to move up. The need to support themselves and their families and the high cost of education often prevent low-income immigrants from continuing their education or training. Lower-class immigrants often face social exclusion and marginalization, which can limit their access to essential services, community support, and opportunities for social and economic advancement. Navigating the legal and bureaucratic processes of the host country can be difficult, especially for people with limited literacy and language skills. This can limit their access to legal status, employment rights and social benefits. The social mobility challenges faced by different social classes highlight the gaps and barriers immigrants face. Upper-class migrants find it difficult to maintain their professional status and knowledge, while middle-class migrants find it difficult to enter the labor market and social mobility. Lower-class immigrants, on the other hand, struggle against precarious employment, educational barriers and social exclusion.

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Goulden, *Class and Clientelism in the Syrian Political Economy*, (London: Routledge, 2011), 196.

Power dynamics and class structures shape migration pathways by influencing the opportunities and resources available to migrants. Wealthier people and those with a higher social status can speed up the migration process and have better opportunities in host countries. In addition, people with less power and less social status often face significant barriers, including abuse, legal problems, and limited access to essential services. This dynamic was most evident in the Syrian crisis, where class played an important role in determining migration outcomes. In situations of forced migration, power dynamics, and class structures can determine who escapes conflict or persecution, and who endures it. Wealthy people can find safety and live in better conditions in host countries, while people from lower economic strata are stuck in overcrowded refugee camps or unable to go far from dangerous places. Moreover, class structures in countries of origin, and destination can influence the experiences and opportunities available to immigrants, shaping their long-term integration, and economic outcomes.

Capital structures have a significant impact on migration patterns, especially in times of crisis such as the Syrian uprising. The neoliberal economic policies that characterize Syria's pre-crisis economy have contributed to resource inequalities, and economic vulnerability. These policies focused on market efficiency, and privatization, often at the expense of social welfare. When the crisis broke out, existing economic vulnerabilities became apparent, resulting in unemployment, and poverty, which in turn led to migration. The Syrian conflict that began in 2011 sparked a massive civil war, and forced millions of Syrians to flee their homes.

The war caused extensive damage to infrastructure, including homes, schools, hospitals, and businesses. The disaster has devastated Syria's economy and left millions without livelihoods. Many industries, including agriculture, manufacturing, and services, were severely disrupted or destroyed due to unemployment and economic instability.

The global capitalist economy has created labor market demands that influence migration patterns. Many Syrian immigrants have found work opportunities in countries with unemployment, especially in Europe and the Gulf countries. The international economy facilitated the flow of remittances from Syrian migrants to their returning families. These funds have become an important source of income for many Syrian households and have helped alleviate the economic problems caused by the war.

The financial costs of migration, including travel, legal and settlement costs, have created barriers for many Syrians. People with financial resources or access to capital are better placed to migrate legally and safely. The authoritarian system often led to the abuse of Syrian immigrants, especially

those from low economic backgrounds. Many immigrants faced harsh working conditions, low wages and limited labor rights in their host countries.

### **5. Gender Social Integration and Migration Experience**

The upper and middle classes of Syrians have better access to financial resources, education and social connections, which has allowed them to migrate through law and security. They are better able to obtain a visa, have a secure job, and use social services in their host country. Many professionals, including doctors, engineers and businessmen, have migrated to countries where their skills are needed. These immigrants often find better job opportunities and living conditions than minority immigrants. Lack of financial and social capital, lower-class Syrians often resort to risky and precarious migration routes. They were more likely to become refugees, dependent on humanitarian aid and faced great difficulties in their journeys. Upon arrival in host countries, lower-class immigrants often find work in the informal economy, where they face unemployment, underemployment, and poverty. Working conditions. Their economic vulnerability exceeds their legal status.

Women and children face unique challenges during migration, including gender-based violence, trafficking and exploitation. The patriarchal structures of capitalist economies often marginalize women, limiting their access to employment and social services. Despite these challenges, many Syrian women have played an important role in supporting their families through remittances. Women who migrated to work as domestic workers and other low-paid jobs contributed significantly to household income.

Governing structures played an important role in shaping the migration patterns and experiences of Syrians during the uprising. Global, and local economic systems have influenced the opportunities and challenges immigrants face, as well as significant differences based on economic status. The authoritarian nature of government suppresses women's voices and reinforces traditional gender roles, resulting in bureaucratic marginalization. There are few women in decision-making positions and government abuses have led to economic and social decline. The rise of capitalism has left women behind, intensifying the struggle for rights and freedom in Syria.

The regime's policies have also caused a lack of opportunities for women in education and employment. "In Syria, women have long been relegated to second-class status, as the government has consistently failed to address deeply entrenched gender inequalities, such as discrimination in

personal status laws and limited access to education and employment opportunities.” (Human Rights Watch, “Syria,” 2022) <sup>13</sup> Women are often denied access to education and training programs, which limits their ability to participate in the workforce and advance their careers. Additionally, the regime's policies have led to the erosion of labor protections, leaving women vulnerable to exploitation and abuse in the workplace.

“Women have been particularly targeted by the Assad regime's brutal crackdown on dissent. Female activists have been arrested, tortured, and subjected to sexual violence in detention.” <sup>14</sup> .

Syrian women experience significant inequality, influenced by geography, ethnicity and sectarianism. The 2020 Human Development Report of the United Nations Program shows that in 2019, GDP per capita for women was only \$989, compared to \$6,225 for men, resulting in a gender ratio of 15.9 percent, compared to a global figure of 94.3 percent. Syria's Index of Gender Development was 0.829 (global value 0.943) and its Gender Inequality Index ranked 122nd out of 162 countries with a score of 0.482. According to the 2013 Human Development Report, the index value of gender inequality in 2012 was 0.551, ranking Syria in 118th place out of 148 countries. Women held 12 percent of parliamentary seats, and 27.4 percent of adult women had secondary or higher education, while men had the equivalent figure of 38.2 percent. The maternal mortality rate was 70 deaths per 100,000 live births, and the teenage birth rate was 36.5 births per 1,000 live births. The share of women in the workforce was 13.1%, while the share of men was 71.6%.

**Table3:** Syrian Arab Republic’s GII for 2012 relative to selected countries and groups

	GII value	GII Rank	Maternal mortality ratio	Adolescent fertility rate	Female seats in parliament (%)	Population with at least secondary education (%)		Labour force participation rate (%)	
						Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>Syrian Arab Republic</b>	0.551	118	70	36.5	12	27.4	38.2	13.1	71.6
<b>Egypt</b>	0.59	126	66	40.6	2.2	43.4	59.3	23.7	74.3
<b>Morocco</b>	0.444	84	100	10.8	11	20.1	36.3	26.2	74.7
<b>Arab States</b>	0.555	—	176	39.2	13	31.8	44.7	22.8	74.1
<b>Medium HDI</b>	0.457	—	121	44.7	18.2	42.1	58.8	50.5	79.9

<sup>13</sup> Human Rights Watch, "We Are Dead Souls": *Women's Rights Under Syria's Personal Status Laws*, (New York: HRW, 2022).

<sup>14</sup> International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), *Syria: A Human Rights Crisis - Gender-Based Repression Under the Assad Regime*, (Paris: FIDH, 2019), (Report No. 723SYR).

The ongoing conflict in Syria has further exacerbated the situation for women. Women have been disproportionately affected by the conflict, with many losing their homes, livelihoods, and loved ones. They have also been subjected to sexual violence and exploitation by both the regime's forces and armed groups.

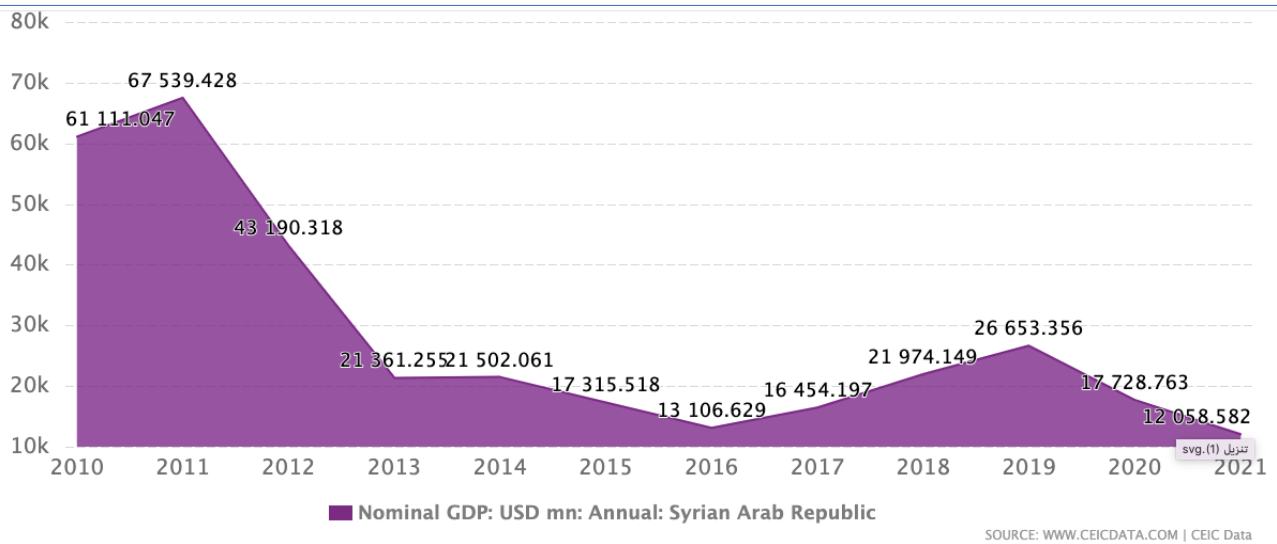
The Assad regime's crony capitalism and the ongoing conflict have had a significant negative impact on women's rights in Syria, exacerbating pre-existing discrimination and limiting women's opportunities for economic and social advancement. The Assad regime's neoliberal economic policies, including privatization, deregulation and liberalization, benefited wealthy elites and foreign investors, but ignored the needs of the wider population.

The global financial crisis of 2008 weakened economic conditions, especially in disadvantaged areas. Syria's corrupt capitalist economy has concentrated wealth among a small elite, increasing social tensions and grievances. A report by Ziad Majed (2015)<sup>15</sup> highlighted that Bashar al-Assad's policies have increased wealth inequality and unprecedented poverty. Despite annual GDP growth of 4.3 percent, the benefits were limited to the economic elite, but the poverty rate remained high. The poorest 20 percent received only 7 percent of total spending, while the richest 20 percent accounted for 45 percent. In 2007, approximately seven million Syrians (33 percent of the population) lived below the poverty line and 30 percent above it. The labor force share of people aged 15 and over declined from 52.3 percent in 2001 to about 42.7–43.5 percent in 2010, especially in rural areas. This decline was caused by the failed neoliberal policies of the Assad regime, which created only 400,000 net jobs between 2001 and 2010. The employment rate fell from 47 percent in 2001 to 39 percent in 2010, which significantly affected women, whose share of the labor force fell from approximately 20.4 to 21 percent, 12.7-13.2 percent, making Syria one of the countries with the lowest female labor force participation. The participation rate of men also fell from 81 percent to 72.2 percent.

Graphic 3: Syria's Yearly Nominal GDP 1990 – 2021 (\$ Million)

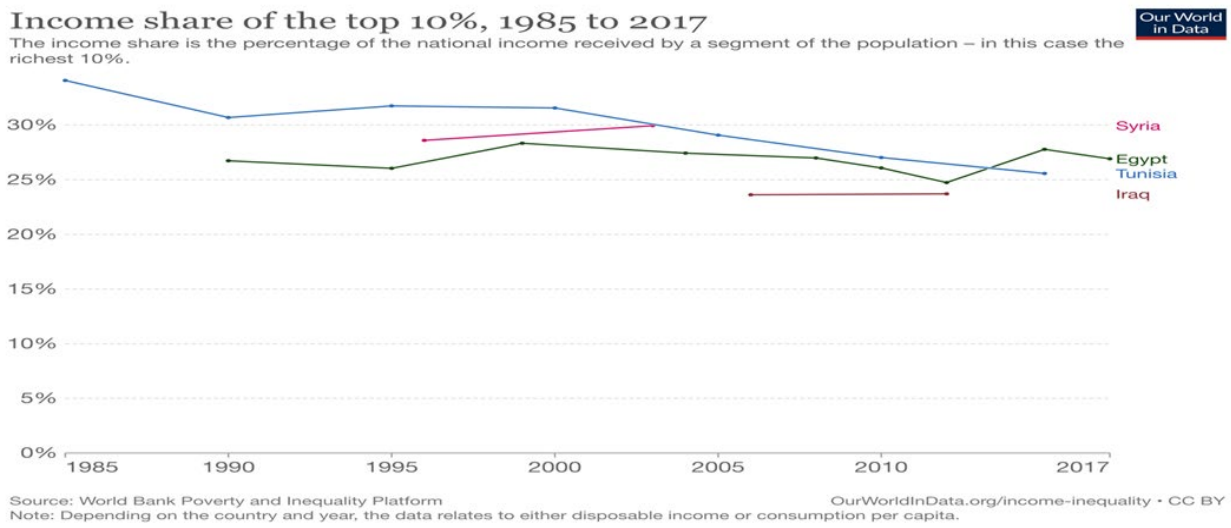
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<sup>15</sup> Ziad Majed, *Syria's War Economy: Inequality, Poverty and Elite Capture*, (Beirut: Carnegie Middle East Center, 2015), (Carnegie Paper No. SYR/2015/03)



As we see from the Gini coefficient measures inequalities compared with other countries in the Middle East there is an increase in income and at the same time an elevated increase in inequality,

Graphic 4: Income Share of the Top 10 %, 1985 to 2017



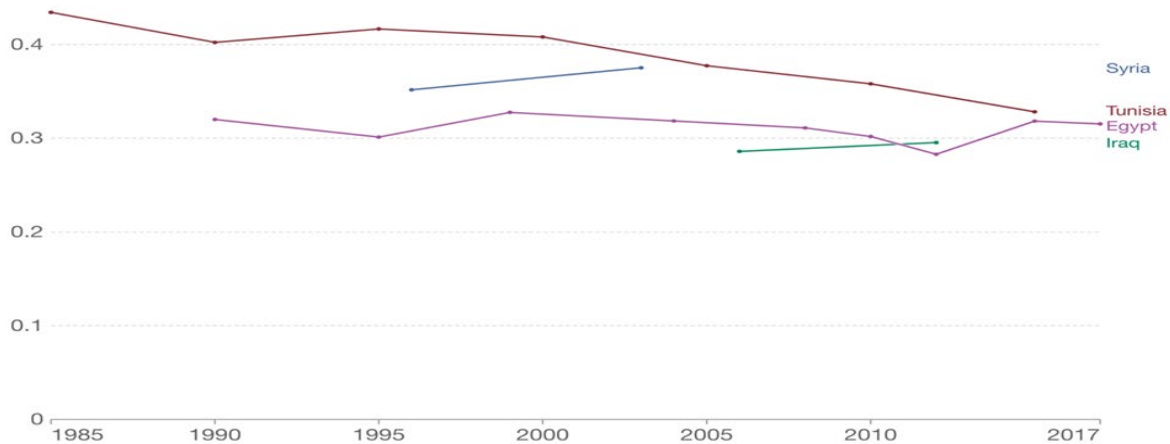
Graphic 5: Income Inequality: Gini coefficient, 1985 to 2017

## Emigration Dynamics in the Context of the Syrian Crisis: Exploring Economic Inequality, Class Power, and the Impact of Capitalism on the Syrian Uprising

### Income inequality: Gini coefficient, 1985 to 2017

The Gini coefficient is a measure of the inequality of the income distribution in a population. Higher values indicate a higher level of inequality.

Our World  
in Data



Source: World Bank Poverty and Inequality Platform

OurWorldinData.org/income-inequality/ • CC BY

Note: Depending on the country and year, the data relates to either disposable income or consumption per capita.

Cronyism has also damaged the infrastructure in Syria. Government contracts are often awarded to businesses with close ties to the regime, regardless of their qualifications or ability to complete projects on time and within budget. This has led to poorly executed projects and a lack of investment in critical infrastructure, such as water and sanitation systems, transportation, and healthcare facilities. The focus on short-term gains for a select few has also resulted in a lack of investment in long-term infrastructure development that could benefit the entire population. In addition, government corruption and cronyism have undermined public trust in institutions and deterred foreign investment, making infrastructure development and improving the living conditions of Syrians even more difficult. The crony capitalism in Syria was characterized by the concentration of wealth and resources in the hands of a small elite, corruption, and a lack of transparency in the decision-making process.

The uprising was an expression of general dissatisfaction with the authoritarian regime and the crony capitalism that pervades the Syrian economy. The Assad regime's crony capitalist policies created a system of patronage that rewarded those with political connections, while ordinary citizens were left struggling to make ends meet. This blatant inequality was a major factor in the Syrian uprising" (Saleh, 2017). Rami Makhoulf, who is the cousin of Bashar al-Assad, symbolized the regime's mafia-style approach to privatization. He amassed a vast economic empire that spanned various sectors, including telecommunications, oil and gas, construction, banking, airlines, and retail. Makhoulf held significant influence as the main shareholder of Cham Holding Company, the second-largest holding company in Syria, and he operated as an agent for numerous international companies, holding over 300 licenses. His personal fortune was estimated to be around 6 billion dollars. Interestingly, a British

magazine called "World Finance" even praised Makhlouf's leadership qualities in early 2011, describing him as a symbol of positive change in the Syrian economy. According to sources, he directly or indirectly controlled nearly 60 percent of the country's economy through a complex network of holdings. 40% of the Syrian economy is left to be shared with the total of other crony elites and the Syrian citizens. You can imagine what percentage of the public will be shared from the Syrian economy all of this forced the protesters to demand political reforms, an end to corruption, and greater economic opportunities for the underprivileged regions.

"The Assad regime's crony capitalism not only created a system of corruption and economic inequality but also undermined the rule of law and eroded trust in government institutions. This created a fertile ground for the uprising to take root"<sup>16</sup>.

Global capital influences migration patterns through its impact on local economies and labor markets. The integration of the Syrian economy into international markets has made it vulnerable to global economic trends and shocks. For example, the global financial crisis of 2008 had a devastating impact on Syria, leading to deteriorating economic conditions and social unrest. As the world capital shifts, many Syrians will look to their economic situation and look for a better way abroad. This international relationship shows that regional migration patterns are a direct result of elite dynamics. The globalization of capitalism, characterized by interconnected markets, free trade, and economic activity across borders, has a profound effect on migration patterns around the world. Cross-border flows of capital, goods and services create opportunities and constraints for migrants and generate complex dynamics that drive people to migrate in search of better economic prospects, security and quality of life.

## 6. Economic Inequality and Migration

Global capitalism often leads to disproportionate economic growth that benefits the rich and deepens income inequality. This large economic gap forces people from poor areas to migrate in search of better opportunities. In many developing countries, capital infrastructure does not provide adequate employment opportunities, leading to high levels of poverty and unemployment. As a result, people are forced to look for work abroad for better wages and living conditions. Developed **countries** with aging populations and shrinking workforces rely on low-skilled migrant workers to fill jobs in agriculture, construction, among others. This application is an attractive reason for

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<sup>16</sup> Aron Lund, *The Political Economy of the Syrian Conflict*, (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2017), 12.

immigrants from developing countries. Global capital is driving demand for highly skilled professionals in technology, health, engineering and finance. This demand leads to the migration of skilled workers from developing countries to industrialized countries, known as the "brain drain".

### **7. Role of Heavyweight Corporations**

(TNCs) Transnational corporation often move their operations overseas and outsource jobs to countries with lower labor costs. While this creates jobs at home, it can also lead to poor working conditions and low wages, forcing workers to seek better opportunities abroad. TNCs help create global supply chains that require a mobile workforce. Workers can migrate to other countries to work in various productive sectors based on the needs of international companies. The Impact on the local economy, the presence of TNCs can disrupt the local economy by competing with small businesses and controlling resources. This economic change forces people to migrate in search of alternative livelihoods. In some cases, TNCs invest in local infrastructure and development projects, creating new economic opportunities to reduce the need for immigration. However, the benefits of these investments are often unevenly distributed.

### **8. Financial Flows and Remittances**

Migrants working abroad send money back to their families. These financial flows provide important economic support that helps reduce poverty and improve living standards. Grants contribute to local economic development by funding education, health and small businesses. This can create a positive feedback loop, reducing the downward pressure on future generations. The international financial system facilitates the movement of money across borders, allowing immigrants to save and invest in their home countries. This financial inclusion can promote economic stability and growth in immigrant-sending regions. Overreliance on remittances can create economic dependency when local economies rely on external financial flows rather than developing sustainable local industries. These dependencies can support the migratory cycle.

### **9. Trade Policy and Economic Agreements**

Free Trade Agreements (FTA) create new economic opportunities by opening markets and reducing trade. But there may be job losses in industries that cannot compete with foreign imports, forcing workers to migrate in search of work. FTAs can have a significant impact on the agricultural sector in developing countries, where small farmers may not be able to compete with subsidized agricultural products from developed countries. FDI can promote economic development in host countries by

creating jobs and reducing poverty. Areas that attract significant investment become migration points as people move to take advantage of new opportunities. The unequal distribution of FDI can lead to regional inequalities within countries, causing internal migration from less developed to more developed regions. Migrants send remittances to their families, providing important financial support that can improve living conditions and reduce poverty in their home countries. These remittances affect migration patterns as families use remittances to invest in education and business opportunities. Remittances contribute to economic stability in migrant-sending countries and sometimes reduce migrant pressures. However, relying on remittances can also create dependency and prolong the cycle of migration.

Multinational corporations establish industrial estates and factories in developing countries, creating job centers that attract internal and international migrants. These zones become hotspots for migration as workers seek permanent employment. Special Economic Zones (SEZ) created to attract foreign investment offer tax breaks and incentives. These areas often attract migrants looking for job opportunities and better living conditions. Employees of multinational companies can move within a country or between countries for work. Relocation of businesses encourages skilled migration as professionals move to where their skills are needed. Employees in global supply chains may move to different countries to work at different stages of production. Such labor mobility supports the functioning of global supply chains and encourages migration.

Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) open markets and lower trade barriers, creating economic opportunities that attract immigrants. But they can also cause job losses in sectors that cannot compete with foreign imports, causing workers to look for work. Free trade agreements can affect agricultural sectors, where small farmers struggle with subsidized agricultural products from developed countries. These economic pressures drive rural-to-urban immigration and international migration. Economic integration through regional agreements facilitates labor mobility between member states. For example, the European Union allows workers to move freely within its member states by creating different migration routes. Despite economic integration, regional inequalities persist, causing migration from less developed regions to more developed regions in the integrated economic region.

The exploitation of natural resources often leads to environmental degradation and marginalization of local communities. Mining, logging and oil extraction can destroy ecosystems and force people to move. Capitalist economies contribute significantly to climate change, which leads to extreme weather events and environmental degradation. These changes displace communities and direct

migration to safer and more stable areas. Capitalist economic structures significantly shape migration routes and patterns, creating both opportunities and challenges. Job opportunities, wage differentials, global supply chains and trade policies influence where and why people move.

## **Conclusion**

The Syrian crisis has changed the global understanding of forced migration and highlighted the complex interplay of socioeconomic, political and structural forces. This article has examined the dynamics of Syrian emigration through the lenses of economic inequality, class power, and the pervasive influence of capitalism, shedding light on the underlying factors that have driven millions to leave their homes. The social power structures in Syria are heavily influenced by sectarian, and tribal alliances that create divisions and tensions among the diverse population. The Assad regime favored the Alawite minority while ostracizing the Sunni majority, fueling sectarianism and social tensions. The combination of regional differences and favoritism increased inequality and class inequality in Damascus and the surrounding regions, which became richer than other underdeveloped and impoverished areas. That economic divide fueled resentment, especially in disadvantaged areas, and contributed to the grievances that fueled the 2011 uprising.

The uprising demanded political reforms, an end to corruption and better economic opportunities for marginalized areas. The Assad government responded brutally, using the security apparatus to suppress dissent and turning the conflict into a full-blown civil war, with different factions and foreign powers vying for control. The government-maintained power through coercion, repression, and manipulation of sectarian and tribal relations. The regime, ruled by the Alawite minority, played the sectarian card, favoring this group and expelling the Sunni majority, increasing tensions, and contributing to the rise of sectarianism. The financial management of the government was an important factor in its power. Neoliberal economic policies preceding the crisis deepened systemic inequalities in Syria, disproportionately affecting rural, and working-class populations. These reforms, aimed at integrating Syria into the global economy, dismantled public support systems, marginalized traditional livelihoods, and concentrated wealth in the hands of a small elite. Neoliberal economic policies, including privatization and deregulation, were effective in attracting wealthy elites, and foreign investors, but they did not take into account the wider population. Modern capitalism has allowed a small group close to the regime to control most of the country's wealth, and resources, allowing the government to reward supporters and punish opponents. The

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government's economic policies increased inequality, and social unrest, causing widespread frustration and anger.

The government has also built a massive security apparatus, including the army, intelligence services and various paramilitary groups controlled by the Alawite minority. By suppressing the opposition, and regaining control, this apparatus played a crucial role in exacerbating the conflict during the 2011 rebellion. Other actors, including opposition groups, and foreign countries such as Russia, Iran, and the United States, also played a crucial role in the conflict, supporting various factions, and influencing the course of the war. The government's violent response to the protests, including the use of security forces to crush the opposition, only exacerbated the conflict, leading more people to join the protests, and demand change. As the civil war escalated, various opposition groups emerged, demanding an end to the system of crony capitalism. The government's economic policies have hindered social mobility, and economic opportunity, favoring the politically connected, and marginalizing the wider population struggling with rising inflation, unemployment and a lack of basic services.

Inequality, class and power are deeply intertwined in Syria. The Assad regime's manipulation of the economy, security apparatus, sects, and tribes has enabled it to stay in power. The 2011 uprising was fueled by the grievances of a population that was marginalized and excluded from the benefits of the government system. The conflict escalated into a complex, and unresolved civil war, with different parties competing for control. This system of crony capitalism resulted in the concentration of wealth and power in hands of an elite which dampened any economic, even political aspirations of the wider population, and ultimately led to popular uprisings. As socioeconomic grievances intensified, they became a critical catalyst for the Syrian uprising, with marginalized groups bearing the brunt of displacement and economic collapse as the conflict unfolded.

The Syrians' migration experiences reveal strong class-based inequalities. Wealthier people had access to safer migration routes, and were able to use their financial resources, and social connections to cross international borders. In contrast, economically vulnerable populations endured dangerous and exploitative journeys, often confined to refugee camps or informal labor markets where they faced further marginalization. These experiences underscore how class power shapes both the risks and opportunities associated with migration.

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<b>Class</b>	<b>Migration Routes</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
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## Emigration Dynamics in the Context of the Syrian Crisis: Exploring Economic Inequality, Class Power, and the Impact of Capitalism on the Syrian Uprising

<b>Elites</b>	Legal visas to Europe/Gulf	Resettlement in secure centers
<b>Middle Class</b>	Irregular routes to Europe	Brain drain
<b>Working Class</b>	Refugee camps	Exploitation in informal labor

Global capitalism has also played a significant role in this displacement crisis. Apart from its role in exacerbating Syria's pre-crisis vulnerability, the capitalist system has commodified refugee labor and integrated the displaced into the insecure low-wage markets of host countries. Meanwhile, humanitarian aid efforts, though critical, have often been unevenly distributed, reflecting broader inequalities in global systems of resource allocation, and power dynamics.

The socio-economic impact of Syrian emigration on host countries, including Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, further illustrates the complexity of the crisis. While refugee labor, and remittances have contributed to local economies, the influx of displaced populations has strained public resources, heightened unemployment, and fostered social tensions. These challenges underline the urgent need for equitable policies that balance the rights, and needs of refugees with those of host communities.

Addressing the Syrian emigration crisis requires more than humanitarian aid or temporary solutions. It is necessary to address the structural causes of emigration, including systemic inequality, and the exploitative dynamics of global capitalism. Policymakers must develop long-term strategies that address the socio-economic drivers of conflict, and immigration while fostering resilience in both source and host communities.

This analysis of Syrian emigration contributes to a deeper understanding of the broader phenomenon of forced migration in the context of socio-political upheaval and economic dislocation. By linking local dynamics to global systems, it offers important insights for scholars, practitioners and policy makers seeking to address the root causes of forced migration and develop sustainable solutions for displaced populations worldwide.

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