



Department
for International
Development

Operational Plan 2011-2016

Syria

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Introduction

In 2013 the UK became the first G7 country to meet the United Nations target of spending 0.7% of gross national income on international development. The Department for International Development (DFID) uses that investment to help countries to lift themselves out of poverty and leave poverty behind. Operational plans set out to the public how we plan to deliver results across policy areas and for every country we work in. These plans clearly explain why, and how, DFID is targeting its resources and what we expect to achieve; covering the period up until March 2016.

DFID is focused on spending in the right ways, on the right things, in the right places. The portfolio of our projects is already shifting to deliver a more coherent, focused and ambitious approach to economic development. We are helping to build strong and investable business environments in developing countries and improving access to finance for entrepreneurs.

Improving the prospects for girls and women in developing countries is a priority. Investing in girls and women is the smart thing to do, as well as the right thing to do. By unleashing their potential, we see returns for girls and women themselves, their families and communities, and for their economies and countries. No country can successfully develop if it leaves half its population behind.

Life-saving humanitarian assistance remains one of DFID's most fundamental responsibilities. When disaster strikes or conflict erupts we are first on the ground to support the most vulnerable people. We are also increasing our efforts to help those countries that are at higher risk of natural disasters to become more resilient in the first place.

DFID continues to drive value for money in everything we do on behalf of the British taxpayer. We have improved our procurement and programme management, increased our internal audit oversight and we are ensuring that staff have the skills to deliver the Department's priorities.

On the international stage we are working hard to agree a new set of global development goals to replace the Millennium Development Goals when they expire next year. We are determined to secure a clear and inspiring set of goals for the post 2015 development framework that leave no one behind.

Increasingly we will take new and innovative approaches and we will work with new partners. This will include businesses who are increasingly major development players. During Secretary of State's time as co-chair of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, DFID played a key role in encouraging different development actors to work together and use internationally agreed principles for aid and development effectiveness.

As our operational plans set out, our approach to international development is ambitious and innovative. We are determined to ensure that every pound DFID spends has the biggest possible impact on the ground. Ultimately by investing in developing countries, we can end aid dependency for good and build a better, more prosperous world for us all.

Context

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has experienced unprecedented change since the start of the Arab Spring in 2010. The vision of political and economic reform held out by the Arab revolutions flared briefly but was quickly followed by widespread instability and conflict, and the rise of violent extremism particularly in the Syria-Iraq neighbourhood. Several countries in MENA remain at severe risk of instability and in danger of moving into deeper crisis. The immense costs of growing instability in the region, and increased risks to the UK of further deterioration, justify upfront engagement by the UK and international partners with MENA countries, focused on dealing with ongoing crises, addressing the drivers of conflict, and tackling longer-term causes of poverty.

In the space of three years Syria has changed from a relatively stable country to an active and intense conflict with multiple competing armed actors, resulting in a heavy humanitarian impact. The conflict started in March 2011, in the context of the Arab Spring, with protests demanding the release of political prisoners which quickly spread nationwide and turned into calls for democratic change. Peaceful protests were brutally repressed by the regime transforming the clashes into a full blown militarised armed conflict of increasing intensity including a proliferation of armed groups, including extremists. The conflict has impacted heavily on the civilian population, leading to a total death toll of over 191,000 civilians and gross, widespread and systematic human rights violations. Of the estimated 22.85 million population in 2013, 3 million are now refugees in neighbouring countries with an additional 10.8 million in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria. The economy has been devastated; latest estimates put the economic loss from the conflict at \$143.6 billion, and some areas have seen up to 90% destruction of public infrastructure – 61 out of 91 public hospitals have been damaged and 4,000 schools are not functioning

Protection of civilians and access to those in need of assistance are the two biggest humanitarian concerns in Syria. The regime has arbitrarily denied humanitarian access and has used indiscriminate barrel bombing and siege and surrender tactics as a weapon of war. Humanitarian workers have been targeted and 63 have lost their lives. The number of people in hard-to-reach areas now stands at 4.7 million– and there are approximately 241,000 in besieged areas whom the international system is unable to reach with even basic assistance. The advancement of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has also inhibited the delivery of humanitarian aid in parts of the north and east of the country. No full independent humanitarian assessment of the country has taken place which means it is difficult to get an overview of the most pressing needs, capacity to address them and gaps¹..

The situation for many Syrians is therefore desperate. A political solution is needed to pave the way for a democratic post-Assad Syria. But the prospects for a peaceful settlement of the crisis in the near term are bleak. Conflict lines have become more complex with the regime, ISIL and other extremist groups in control of large swathes of Syria, and the moderate opposition largely confined to rural areas of Northern Syria and some parts in the South. ISIL poses a threat not only to regional stability, but is also a direct threat to UK security. The humanitarian situation is likely to worsen with displacement continuing in Syria and to the region.

However despite challenges humanitarian aid has prevented much greater suffering and loss of life. This is now the biggest humanitarian operation ever. The UK is the second biggest bilateral donor, having committed £700 million to respond to this crisis and has played a key role in fundraising efforts helping to mobilise over \$6 billion in funding from the international community. This has provided millions with desperately needed food, water and sanitation facilities; shelter and medical supplies. Large-scale immunisation campaigns appear to have successfully contained a polio outbreak and prevented the mass outbreak of other diseases. Levels of malnutrition, while hard to verify, remain relatively low. And whilst political agreement in the UN Security Council (UNSC) is blocked, UK lobbying helped deliver two UNSC Resolutions demanding urgent action to address the humanitarian situation and enabling the UN and its implementing partners to deliver aid across borders without the consent of the regime to the most hard to reach. The UK has also championed the “No Lost Generation Initiative”, which is helping meet the needs of children affected by the crisis through education, protection and psycho-social care. This Operational plan covers DFID’s work in Syria 2011/12–2015/16. Syria was originally included within the MENAD Regional Operational Plan. There are now separate Operational Plans for Jordan and Lebanon, and a MENAD Regional Plan which includes humanitarian support to Syrian refugees in Iraq and Turkey.

¹ Figures from UN estimates October 2014

Vision

Overview

The UK Government's long-term vision for MENA is a prosperous, stable region based on open, democratic societies with greater social, economic and political participation of its people. In support of this goal over the short to medium term, DFID is working to promote regional stability in line with the UK government's Building Stability Overseas Strategy. Across the region DFID is supporting countries to manage current conflict and crises, tackling the drivers of instability and conflict, and where possible, supporting political and economic reform alongside longer term development.

In line with this, the UK's vision for Syria is an open, democratic society, with greater social, economic and political participation in which violent extremism does not have a place, and where refugees feel safe to return. In the short term we want to keep people alive, give them hope and an alternative vision to those of Assad and ISIL, and help create a political space in which they can safely flourish.

In order to maximise our impact, DFID will need to work closely with others including the UNSC, Gulf States and traditional donors, recognising their key role in providing development and humanitarian support in the region. In the short/medium term DFID is focused on four high level objectives:

- (i) Meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups including in hard-to-reach areas;**
- (ii) Build resilience at the individual, community and institutional level to enable people to cope in the short term and to provide the foundation for a future political transition;**
- (iii) Strengthen the moderate opposition's capacity to provide governance and services – and thereby provide an alternative to extremist groups and Assad;**
- (iv) Improve the effectiveness of the overall international community's response to the crisis.**

We will deliver this through:

- **Humanitarian assistance** – Continuing a large-scale humanitarian programme in line with humanitarian principles to meet the most urgent needs. Recognising the protracted nature of the crisis, we will increasingly look to build resilience into our programming, and seek to deliver our programme through cost-effective and sustainable mechanisms.
- **Governance and basic service delivery** - We will help to improve governance and service delivery in opposition-held areas, working closely with the moderate opposition. This will build local level resilience and provide an alternative to the regime and extremists. This will include supporting local level peacebuilding initiatives and institutions to establish the building blocks for future transition.
- **International Engagement** – Working with partners and through international institutions to advocate for improved protection for civilians and humanitarian access; stronger leadership, coordination and effectiveness of the UN-led response and resource mobilisation.

We will adopt a flexible regional approach which allows us to respond rapidly to changing needs, including advances and retreats of ISIL and other extremist groups. Whilst there are separate Operational Plans for Jordan, Lebanon and the region, we will ensure flexibility through our regional response to direct our funding according to evolving need. In developing our programming we will pay particular attention to ensuring that our programmes adequately meet the needs of women and girls, and support the "No Lost Generation Initiative".

What we will not be doing

To maximise efficiency we will strictly limit the number of partners we will work with and we will set a very high threshold for taking on new partners.

Alignment to DFID and wider UK government priorities

DFID's approach to Syria is aligned with the Building Stability Overseas Strategy, the Humanitarian Emergency Response Review and the UK government's Humanitarian Policy. Our work will be taken forward as part of the National Security Council strategy for Syria and we will play an active role in the delivery of the UK Conflict Security and Stability Fund (CSSF). DFID's programme in Syria is well aligned to DFID priorities of leading in emergencies and changing the lives of girls and women.

Results 2013/14-2015/16

Headline results (those with a * directly attributable to DFID. In all other cases, DFID is contributing to the results)

Pillar/Strategic	Indicator	Baseline (2013)	Expected (end year included)
Humanitarian - Poverty, hunger & vulnerability	Number of monthly food rations received**	3,900,000	N/A
Humanitarian - Poverty, hunger & vulnerability	Number of individuals benefiting from the distribution of relief packages*	434,000	N/A
Humanitarian - Poverty, hunger & vulnerability	Number of children supported by psycho-social interventions*	57,100	N/A
Humanitarian - Water, sanitation & hygiene	Number of people with access to clean water sources per month (peak month)*	1,460,000	N/A
Humanitarian – Health	Number of medical consultations for emergency trauma and primary healthcare cases*	482,000	N/A
Humanitarian - Education	Number of children supported in formal and non-formal education*	4,100	N/A

Notes: The results cover work in Syria. Separate Operational Plans cover work in Jordan and Lebanon and the MENAD Regional Plan covers Syrian refugees in Iraq and Turkey. We do not forecast results for humanitarian indicators, in line with DFID guidance. The baseline shows the results of DFID funded programmes delivered in 2013.

** Results for food include cash and vouchers which are provided for the purchase of food.

Headline Results

Responding to the Syria crisis involves a complex multi-country response working with a wide range of partner organisations. As we move into a long term protracted crisis we are developing multi-year programmes to provide predictable yet flexible funding. We are developing a longer term approach including making wider use of cash/vouchers which will help to make people more resilient to further shocks. Most of the programmes inside Syria are integrated programmes which allow the partner to use their access to a geographical area to then provide a range of support.

There are no milestones or targets for the humanitarian indicators as it is not possible to comprehensively anticipate needs. This is in line with DFID guidance. As this is a new Operational Plan progress against results will only be report from 2014/15 onwards.

Evidence supporting results

There is a mixed range of supporting evidence for this operational plan on which our core assumptions are based. Our assessment of humanitarian needs is based on the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan 2014 (SHARP 2014) and Syria Integrated Needs Assessment (SINA 2014). There has been no independent and full humanitarian needs assessment across the whole country. The planning figures in the SHARP are based on local-level assessments undertaken by humanitarian partners operating from Damascus as well as data gathered from a number of other sources (public and through informal contacts plus some NGOs including those operating cross-border although not all of the available information has been included).

There is a strong evidence base for the interventions themselves which are primarily standard humanitarian programmes delivering food, shelter, water and sanitation as well as medical interventions. Programmes without a strong evidence base will be designed to ensure that they contribute to building an evidence base for future interventions.

Due to the ongoing conflict within Syria it is not possible for DFID staff to verify data from implementing partners. We will therefore continue to support trusted partners with a strong track record of delivering assistance in complex conflict situations. We are also developing an independent monitoring programme to provide further reassurance that our aid is getting to those who need it. This will also include regular assessments of partners monitoring systems, where necessary we will work with them to develop their capacity.

Delivery and Resources

Instruments of delivery

Given the difficult and unpredictable operating environment inside Syria and the high security risks, our strategy for delivery is to build a strong flexible portfolio which is able to respond to the changing needs and changing security context. We will continually challenge partners to reach those in hard-to-reach areas and will look to scale up our cross-border programme to support this. In all our programming we will build in flexibility to respond to changing needs including advances and retreats of the regime, ISIL and other extremist groups.

The security risks inside Syria are such that DFID staff are not able to visit and our partners are relying on remote management of their programmes. This increases the overall risk of the programme to deliver and for this reason we are limiting our range of partners to UN agencies, Red Cross/Crescent organisations, International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and private sector implementing partners with experience operating in fragile and conflict affected states. It is not possible to work with the Syrian regime. We will channel the majority of our support through:

- **UN agencies** such as World Food Programme and UNICEF, informed by the 2013 Multilateral Aid Review Update and the 2014 Annual Review of our humanitarian programming in Syria. Where organisational weaknesses have been identified, we will seek to mitigate these through programme design and influence our partners to address these weaknesses. We will push UN agencies to take a longer term approach and to prioritise support to those most in need; and the Humanitarian Pooled Fund (HPF) for Syria which disburses small grants to NGOs according to priorities.
- **International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs)**, who are able to deliver results inside Syria. We are moving from short term emergency support to longer term multi-year funding.
- **Red Cross/Crescent Movement (RCM)**, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) scores highly in the 2013 Multilateral Aid Review and its mandate in protection and assistance are crucial for the work inside Syria. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) is the main implementer of humanitarian assistance in the country. Supporting its operations and building its capacity through the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) is critical.

We will look to meet the most urgent needs inside Syria which are likely to worsen. We will prioritise protection and assistance for vulnerable groups including children, survivors of sexual and gender based violence and Palestinian refugees. We will seek opportunities to provide support for children, including their protection and education, in line with the “No Lost Generation Initiative”.

There are two mechanisms by which we will meet the needs of the most vulnerable:

- i. Operations run from within Syria, with the consent of the regime, mainly run by the UN; and
- ii. Operations run cross-border, by UN and NGOs, from the neighbouring countries, without the consent of the regime.

We will scale up our cross-border operations to meet the most urgent needs which cannot be met through programmes run from within Syria.

In moderate opposition held areas, we will use a blend of humanitarian and longer term support to promote inclusive political participation and service delivery to provide an alternative to ISIL and to the regime. Where possible we will look to incorporate education, livelihoods and early recovery activities into our programmes. This will include moving to more cash based programming which will improve people’s resilience to shocks.

Due to the high risk we do not work directly with local Syrian partners. However, we will continue to build capacity of local institutions, community organisations and NGOs through our partnerships with INGOs and the UN. We are also working to build a better evidence base of what works and what does not work as well as using political and economy analysis of conflict to inform our programming.

International Engagement

We are pushing the international community to move from an emergency response to one that plans and delivers for the longer term and for implementation of UNSCRs 2139 and 2165 to improve humanitarian access and protection inside Syria. This includes working with the UN, NGOs and other donors to implement a “whole of Syria” response, integrating operations run from inside Syria with those operating cross-border through joint needs assessments and response plans, including a single Syria appeal for 2015. We are working closely across Whitehall to ensure we have a joined-up coherent response to the Syria crisis.

Maximising the impact of our people

The programme is high risk as well as highly complex. To ensure we can continue to deliver a high quality programme our staff will need strong programme management skills with a focus on risk management and risk mitigation. As staff will also travel frequently to the region it is critical that all our staff are appropriately trained in personal security and safety, which we will continue to prioritise. We will continue to second consultants into strategic positions in key organisations as a means of strengthening these institutions, and will support staff to engage in key regional / international fora and strengthen advocacy skills in order to leverage support from key partners to further our objectives.

Planned Programme Spend

Sum of Actual	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16*
Pillars/Strategic Priority	Resource £'000	Resource £'000	Resource £'000	Resource £'000
Climate Change	189			
Conflict Pool	316	4,668	5,001	
Humanitarian	74,870	289,304	250,000	
Multiple Pillars		543		
Grand Total	75,375	294,515	255,001	144,000

* Expenditure figures for 2015/16 are indicative. DFID works in a variety of challenging environments, including fragile and conflict affected areas. Humanitarian work is often reactive and can be scaled up or down. An element of flexibility within funding allocations is necessary to ensure that we can balance the need for long term planning alongside the ability to respond where necessary to changing requirements.

From 2015/16 we are shifting to indicative country allocations for Lebanon and Jordan and a Regional allocation. These are captured in separate operational plans.

Planned Operating Costs

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16 (provisional*)
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Frontline Delivery Costs - Pay	315	875	
Frontline Delivery Costs - Non Pay	115	352	
Administrative Costs - Pay	162	414	
Administrative Costs - Non Pay	27	165	
Grand Total	619	1,806	1,806

* Expenditure figures for 2015/16 are indicative. DFID works in a variety of challenging environments, including fragile and conflict affected areas. Humanitarian work is often reactive and can be scaled up or down. An element of flexibility within funding allocations is necessary to ensure that we can balance the need for long term planning alongside the ability to respond where necessary to changing requirements.

The operating costs cover the cost of managing a portfolio of multi-country programmes which include work in Jordan and Lebanon as well as in Turkey, Iraq and in Syria.

Delivering Value for Money

Maximising the impact of every pound that we spend on poor people's lives.

The team is committed to delivering Value for Money (VfM) in all aspects of its work. Careful selection of partners is a key part of the approach to ensuring VfM. We will also maximise the impact of our programming while minimising the financial cost to the UK taxpayer, using the UK government 3E framework of effectiveness, efficiency and economy, in line with NAO guidance. Key to this will be ensuring that our implementing partners, primarily UN agencies, provide VfM in their operations and consistently demonstrate what they are doing to improve VfM. The Multilateral Aid Review (MAR) identifies areas where each UN agency needs to improve its VfM and the team developed priority areas for action based on performance in the Syria context. These areas will provide the basis for our institutional engagement with each UN agency. For NGO partners we will continue to agree VfM improvements as part of assessing proposals and monitoring programmes

The team has made good progress in ensuring VfM throughout its programme by:

- Developing a VfM approach paper which was agreed in February 2014;
- Ensuring agreement letters to UN agencies include MAR recommendations as well as priority Syria performance targets;
- Providing guidance to partners on DFID's expectations of VfM in programmes, covering all three dimensions of VfM based on the three Es;
- Embedding analysis of VfM in the programme approval processes;
- Monitoring VfM regularly as part of assessing programme performance, usually done six monthly;
- Ensuring that proposals are received in a format that allows scrutiny and monitoring of unit costs and cost drivers;
- Building on evidence where it exists and where it does not have process in place to generate high quality evidence;
- Ensuring all travel and job-related training are assessed based on their contribution to achieving DFID's business objectives;
- Supporting reform of the Conflict Pool, to ensure a more rigorous approach to allocation and results monitoring.

We will continue to improve VfM and our risk management and financial performance by:

- Embedding VfM at key steps in our project cycle management processes and ensuring that appropriate tools are used;
- Ensuring all staff make VfM considerations a priority in programme management;
- Monitoring and ensuring VfM through our implementing partners' systems, making sure that the benefits are captured and estimated in monetary terms in a cost effective way;
- Comparing the administrative and unit costs of our partners in order to identify best practice;
- Overcoming the scarcity of good quality data and evidence to assess VfM;
- Generating evidence on best practice in VfM work in fragile and conflict affected states;
- Ensuring all staff understand the latest corporate guidance on VfM, including thorough induction training;
- Improving risk management of financial performance and increased quality of forecasting and variance analysis through improved usage of systems;
- Using our quarterly risks and results portfolio review to ensure programme quality.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Delivering results through this complex programme in Syria with a mixture of partners, in a range of contexts, including fragile situations, is extremely challenging. The security threat in Syria means it is also impossible for DFID staff to monitor directly programme delivery. To increase our assurance of our programme delivery, we will be setting up an independent monitoring programme.

Monitoring

How – each programme will have a Monitoring and Evaluation (M and E) framework with robust quantifiable indicators and targets which are sex-disaggregated where appropriate and are monitored annually. Due to the high risk context of the work there will also be quarterly monitoring of both country level and specific programme level risks. In addition, all programmes scoring two consecutive B's or one C in their annual reviews will have a detailed Performance Improvement Plan.

Who – primary responsibility for monitoring will fall to programme partners. Wherever possible we will undertake joint monitoring with other donors to ensure harmonisation and reduce workloads. An M and E adviser will quality assure all new logframes to ensure accuracy and consistency across the department. DFID staff will assess performance in relation to the overall Operational Plan and make sure that all programmes deliver the information required to monitor the indicators in the results framework.

When – Programme level monitoring will be continuous with formal quarterly reporting as well as annual reviews. Partners will update their risk matrices quarterly and report these to DFID as part of their management reports which will also include progress on results and spend. Risks, results and performance across the programme will be monitored quarterly.

What – We will use a range of methodologies to monitor results depending on the particular programme. These will include quantitative surveys and qualitative information. A detailed results framework has been compiled from individual logframes and provides an overarching framework for the programme. This information will be used to both measure the impact of programmes and also to help determine the future direction of work. Where DFID staff are able to access programmes they will conduct field monitoring visits to complement informal monitoring.

Evaluation

We aim to conduct a joint donor evaluation of the Syria crisis response, subject to the agreement of other key donors. This will provide information for lesson learning and to improve future programming. This evaluation will be independent and will be published.

Building capacity of partners

We will support partners to develop robust logframes as well as to build up the evidence base in the region of what works and what doesn't work.

Transparency

Transparency is one of the top priorities for the UK government. It helps people see where money is going and for what purpose. It helps improve value for money and makes governments everywhere more accountable to their citizens. DFID is a world leader in aid transparency and has an ambitious vision for both DFID and its partners. We will ensure that we play our part in continuing to work towards that vision – set out in a suite of commitments the Aid Transparency Guarantee (ATG), Aid Transparency Challenge (ATC) and DFID's Open Data Strategy.

Actions to ensure DFID meets its commitments in the UK Aid Transparency Guarantee

We will support DFID's transparency commitments by:

- Ensuring that all information in the public domain is comprehensive, accessible, accurate, timely and written in plain English.
- Publishing a summary of this Operational Plan in English and Arabic on the DFID website.
- Ensuring the UN's Financial Tracking Service and DFID's Development Tracker are kept up to date.
- Continuing our efforts, in liaison with the DFID Press Office, to keep international and local journalists informed of our activity and results achieved.

Supporting transparency in our work

- We will increase opportunities for those directly affected by our projects to provide feedback on project performance.
- We will seek similar levels of transparency from our partners (civil society organisations, contractors, other donors)
- We will push other donors for transparency in their funding allocations towards the Syria crisis, in co-ordination with the UN.
- We will also work with others to push for improvements in UN reporting on needs, gaps and the response.

Many of our partners, including our cross-border partners are taking great personal risk working in Syria. We are fully committed to being transparent about our programmes and partners wherever we can – but not where this puts people at risk.

Annex A: Changes to Operational Plan

Page Number	Change made to operational Plan	Reason for change
	This is a new Syria Operational Plan. Syria was previously covered under the MENAD Regional Operational Plan. Part of the DFID Syria Crisis response is captured in the separate Jordan, Lebanon and MENAD Regional Operational Plans.	

Annex B: Human Rights Assessment

Human Rights Context: There are serious human rights violations inside Syria, amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Prior to the crisis serious human rights violations included severe restrictions on political freedom, rights of assembly, judicial independence and freedom of speech. Torture and enforced disappearances were used to intimidate political dissidents. There was, and continues to be, no prospect of any free and fair **elections** being held.

Since the crisis began conditions have continued to worsen:

- Large-scale use of chemical weapons against civilians, the indiscriminate and disproportionate bombardment (by air and artillery) of densely-populated civilian areas and infrastructure (schools, hospitals), the use of siege and starvation tactics against civilians, hostage taking and the recruitment and use of children in hostilities
- The use of murder and massacres, sexual violence, enforced disappearances, and torture and executions in detention amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity. The growth of Islamist extremist groups, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Al Nusrah Front, who have carried out their own human rights abuses in a systematic way
- **Access to justice and the rule of law are completely absent**. Most judges are members of, or linked to, the ruling Ba'ath party. The security forces have immunity from prosecution. Since the uprising, the regime has had a policy of arbitrarily detaining protestors and suspected opposition supporters. Syria has been a party to the UN Convention against Torture since 2004, however it is reported by the Commission of Inquiry (COI) that detainees are subjected to torture or other ill-treatment often culminating in their deaths.
- Whilst the Syrian constitution guarantees gender equality, this has little meaning for Syrian women. Syria has fallen down the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index and is ranked 133 out of 136 in their 2013 report. COI and others report that **sexual violence** has been systematically used by regime forces, most commonly in detention and during house raids.
- **Civil and political rights:** The guarantees in the Syrian constitution of **freedom of expression** and assembly have been systematically violated by the regime and the Syrian state media remains tightly controlled. Journalists have become a target of both regime and extremist groups with the Committee to Protect Journalists listing 29 journalists killed in Syria in 2013 and 60 who were kidnapped making Syria, in their judgment, the world's most dangerous place to be a journalist. The right to vote: on 3 June the Assad regime held presidential elections in areas under its control. No credible opposition candidates were allowed to stand and journalists on the ground reported widespread and obvious fraud
- **Human rights defenders** in Syria are severely restricted with a high risk of arbitrary arrest or detention, and no independent human rights monitoring body. In December 2013, the UN's Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Syrian human rights detailed a "widespread and systematic" campaign of enforced disappearances of those whom the regime considers to be its enemies.
- Since the beginning of the uprising in March 2011, **ethnic and sectarian tensions have been heightened** with perceptions that minorities support the regime. The regime has sought to exacerbate these divisions by claiming the majority Sunni opposition is opposed to a pluralistic Syria.

The COI has reported that the regime, Kurdish armed groups and some opposition armed groups have included teenage children within their ranks. COI reports children as young as 13 are being held and tortured or executed by the regime. **Direction of Travel:** The regime's tactics have become increasingly abhorrent. Human Rights Watch referred in April to the regime's "deliberate and indiscriminate" bombing of civilians. The regime and some opposition groups have deliberately obstructed the delivery of humanitarian aid to particular areas in what appears to be a deliberate attempt to starve people into submission, breaching international humanitarian law.

UK Approach and Focus to the Syria Crisis: The UK alongside international partners are working towards a political settlement; providing significant assistance to those with immediate humanitarian needs; and supporting projects to document and address violations of human rights and humanitarian law. This includes political and material support to the National Coalition, recognised as the sole legitimate, democratic and pluralistic representative of the Syrian people. The UK has also supported accountability for those responsible for violations and abuses of human rights and humanitarian law. The UK continues to believe that the Syrian crisis should be referred by the UN Security Council (UNSC) to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Source: [2013 Human Rights and Democracy Report](#).

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