

Ex-post evaluation

UNDP Employment Promotion Phase V, Syria

Title	Employment promotion through rehabilitation of basic infrastructure and income-generating measures V.
Sector and CRS code	Short-term reconstruction and rehabilitation (730 10)
BMZ number	2020 40 640
Commissioned by	BMZ
Recipient and executing agency	United Nations Development Programme/UNDP
FC financing volume and instrument	EUR 10 million / SI Refugees and host countries
Project duration	2020–2023
Reporting year	2025
Year of random sample	2025

Project objectives and implementation

The underlying objective at the outcome level was to create short- to medium-term income opportunities that could be used by internally displaced persons and the local population in selected locations. The underlying objective at the impact level was to improve the economic and social living conditions of internally displaced persons and the local population in the short to medium term and to strengthen social cohesion between host communities and internally displaced persons. Cash-for-work (CfW) measures, in-kind payments, training and counselling were implemented to create short-term employment opportunities and to strengthen and expand existing employment.

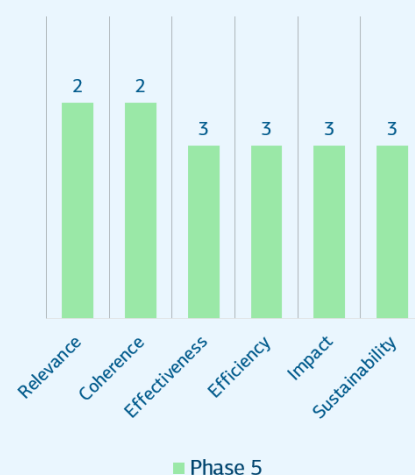
Key findings

The project is appraised as "partially successful" because it was only partially efficient and its impact could only be demonstrated to a limited extent, with its sustainability also dependent on further external financial support.

- The results in terms of relevance were successful, among other things, because the differentiated selection process for beneficiaries, which encompassed several criteria, ensured that the needs of particularly disadvantaged or vulnerable population groups were adequately addressed.
- The income generation objective was achieved in particular through CfW measures that are effective in terms of development policy, as they strengthen the role of women or the economic integration of people with disabilities, for example.
- It was not possible to verify whether the sometimes small-scale and selective training and counselling measures and contributions in kind contributed to the achievement of the objectives. In any case, the project lacked an adequate M&E system to conduct an appraisal of the objectives of SI GA, through which it was financed.
- Despite high inflation rates and the fluctuating exchange rate of the Syrian currency, the actual costs of implementation were roughly in line with the target costs of the project proposal, albeit with very high costs for individual activities such as training and consulting.
- Gender-specific beneficiary figures and the proportion of people with disabilities indicate that the project executing agency responded appropriately to the access barriers for these population groups evaluated in previous phases and implemented the project with the necessary sensitivity.

Overall rating

Moderately successful



1: very successful – 6: completely unsuccessful

Conclusions

- Early coordination and approval of intervention locations by the BMZ and AA are essential for adhering to the schedule and ensuring reliable cooperation with implementation partners.
- The measures implemented by UNDP in Syria remain highly relevant even after the end of the civil war, as they can make a decisive contribution to economic reconstruction and the restoration of the social fabric.
- Under more stable conditions, integrated approaches that closely link the creation of short-term jobs with vocational training are preferable to CfW measures that only aim to clear rubble and debris or restore infrastructure.

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Abbreviations

AA	Federal Foreign Office
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CfW	Cash for Work
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
3RP	Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan
EPE	Ex-post evaluation
EUR	Euro
FC	Financial cooperation
FC E	FC Evaluation
GDP	Gross domestic product
HDI	Human Development Index
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overviews
HTS	Hayat Tahrir al-Sham
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
PA	Project appraisal
PAR	Project appraisal report
PCR	Project completion report
PP	Project proposal
SI GA	Special Initiative for Refugees and Host Countries
SNA	Syrian National Army
SOHR	Syrian Observatory for Human Rights
SYP	Syrian pound
TC	Technical cooperation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN-HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USD	US dollar
WFP	World Food Programme

Overview

General conditions and classification of the project

With the Islamist militia Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) taking power and President Bashar al-Assad fleeing to Russia, more than five decades of dictatorship by the Assad family and 14 years of civil war came to an end in Syria on 8 December 2024. According to an estimate by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), the civil war claimed more than 606,000 lives.¹ At the end of 2024, UNHCR registered 6.1 million Syrians as refugees and asylum seekers in other countries, with a further 7.4 million as internally displaced persons.² However, the number of returnees to and within Syria has risen since the regime change in Damascus, and compared to previous years, more refugees and internally displaced persons have expressed their intention to return.³

After HTS took power, its leader Ahmad al-Sharaa was appointed transitional president by acclamation by the rebel groups at the end of January 2025. He promised elections and a new constitution, as well as the disarmament and integration of all militias into the Syrian army, which is to be restructured. However, the transitional government has not yet succeeded in controlling the entire territory of the country and creating a unified army to ensure security.⁴ In March 2025, the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) attacked Kurdish territory in the north of the country, forcing 100,000 people to flee.⁵ In northern and north-eastern Syria, clashes between armed groups continued, killing more than 1,000 people, after Assad loyalists in southern Syria attacked government security forces who, with the support of Sunni militias, carried out massacres against the Alawite religious minority.⁶ The transitional government of interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa faces the daunting challenge of improving the precarious living conditions of many people in Syria, guaranteeing the country's territorial unity, ensuring internal security, delivering on the promise of political participation, and addressing the injustices of the past with the decades of crimes committed by the Assad regime.⁷ In addition, the Syrian transitional government faces the task of mobilising international support for the reconstruction of the country in order to improve the catastrophic economic and social situation.⁸ Overcoming the multiple challenges facing interim president al-Sharaa appears to be an almost impossible task⁹; the process of social reconciliation between ethnic and religious groups in Syria is proving to be at risk, and the country's future development currently remains fragile.

The Syrian economy is in ruins, the supply situation for the population is catastrophic, and the poverty rate has been rising for years.¹⁰ The social situation of large sections of the population deteriorated in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the cholera outbreak in 2022 and the severe earthquake in north-western Syria in February 2023. The country's real GDP has stagnated since the outbreak of the civil war or even contracted¹¹, and there are currently no signs of a revival in overall economic value added.¹² The inflation rate reached 114% in 2020, its highest level in decades, but fell to 58% by 2024 and is estimated at just under 20% for 2025.¹³ Two-thirds of households in Syria are unable to meet their basic needs,¹⁴ 12.9 million people do not have secure access to

¹ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/217360/> (accessed: 16 June 2025).

² UNHCR (2025): Global Trends. Forced Displacement in 2024, Copenhagen, p. 14.

³ Ibid., p. 8.

⁴ This task is hampered by regional political interests, the deterioration of the internal security situation and opaque decision-making processes; see Aldoughli, Rahaf (2025): Syria needs security – can Al-Sharaa build a united army to provide it?, The World Today: The Middle East's Great Realignment, 10 March. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/the-world-today/2025-03/syria-needs-security-can-al-sharaa-build-united-army-provide> (accessed: 22 May 2025).

⁵ <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/syrien-kurden-tuerkei-rojava-sdf-erdogan-100.html#Milizen-staerke> (accessed: 22 May 2025).

⁶ Süddeutsche Zeitung, No. 57, 10 March 2025, p. 7. Alawites, who make up around ten per cent of Syria's total population, formed the country's political and military elite under the Assad family regime.

⁷ Helberg, Kristin (2025): Syria's fragile transition – coming to terms with the past and a new beginning. Federal Agency for Civic Education. <https://www.bpb.de/themen/kriege-konflikte/dossier-kriege-konflikte/562105/syriens-fragiler-uebergang/> (accessed on 2 June 2025).

⁸ Both the EU and the US have largely lifted economic sanctions against Syria; <https://www.zdfheute.de/politik/ausland/syrien-sanktionen-aufhebung-eu-100.html> (accessed: 04.06.2025); <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sb0148> (accessed: 04.06.2025).

⁹ Lamont, Matthew (2025): Uniting Syria: An Impossible Task for al-Sharaa?, Foreign Affairs Review, 26 April. <https://www.foreignaffairsreview.com/home/uniting-syria-an-impossible-task-for-al-sharaa> (accessed: 18 August 2025).

¹⁰ According to UNDP data, the poverty rate rose to 90% in 2024. <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/impact-conflict-syria-devastated-economy-pervasive-poverty-and-challenging-road-ahead-social-and-economic-recovery-enarp>. 30. (Accessed 18 August 2025).

¹¹ Econometric estimates indicate a conflict-related decline in GDP of 12% on average between 2011 and 2018, with production falling to around one third of its 2010 level. Devadas, Sharmila/Elbadawi, Ibrahim/Loayza, Norman V. (2021): Growth in Syria: Losses from the War and Potential Recovery in the Aftermath, World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/a9ae34dc-b9b8-5b7b-b9fc-120ad89f0438/content> (accessed: 4 June 2025).

¹² The World Bank estimates a decline in Syria's total economic value added of 1.0% for 2025, following -1.5% in the previous year; World Bank (2025): Syrian Arab Republic, 10 April. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-syr.pdf> (accessed on 4 June 2025).

¹³ <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/po-syr.pdf> (accessed: 4 June 2025)

¹⁴ World Bank (2024): Syria Economic Monitor. Conflict, Crises, and the Collapse of Household Welfare, Washington DC, p. 24.

food, and more than half of the population lacks a stable water supply.¹⁵ Rapidly rising food and fuel prices, exacerbated by the war in Ukraine, and ongoing conflict in parts of the country are having devastating consequences for Syria's most vulnerable populations, while fewer people are receiving subsidised food and fuel through national programmes. Basic social services are only being maintained with the help of the international community.

According to the World Food Programme (WFP), 16.7 million people – more than two-thirds of Syria's population – were dependent on humanitarian aid in mid-2024.¹⁶ The most important donors were the European Union and its member states.¹⁷ Germany suspended bilateral development cooperation with Syria after the outbreak of the civil war, but continued to support the Syrian population in all parts of the country. There was no cooperation with the government in Damascus or with de facto authorities in north-western and north-eastern Syria. An expansion of Germany's development policy engagement in Syria after the fall of the Assad regime depends, among other things, on the willingness of the new government to include all population groups and civil society in the political process.¹⁸ Existing cooperation with UN organisations (UNICEF, UNDP, UN-Habitat) and non-governmental organisations is being used to support Syria in its peaceful transition to an inclusive political system that grants rights and participation to all groups.

The project provided FC funds to UNDP Syria. The measures were financed by the Special Initiative on Refugees and Host Countries (SI GA), which supports countries in refugee contexts in their capacity and willingness to receive refugees and in mitigating the associated challenges.

Brief description

The FC project implemented in the fifth phase served in particular to finance cash-for-work (CfW) measures for the short-term creation of jobs (component 1) and measures to empower and train the target group for medium-term employment, improve economic conditions and promote micro-enterprises (component 2). In addition to the CfW measures, the specific measures included equipping small agricultural businesses with means of production, training and financial support for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. The target group included poor households, internally displaced persons and people with disabilities. The measures in component 1 benefited a total of almost 7,000 people, and those in component 2 around 4,000 people. The project was implemented from December 2020 to December 2023 in eight of Syria's 14 governorates (see project location map). The beneficiary and implementing agency for the programme was UNDP, the United Nations Development Programme.

Breakdown of total costs

	Phase 1 (plan)	Phase 1 (actual)
Investment costs (total) in million EUR	10.0	10.0
Own contribution in EUR million	0	0
External financing in EUR million	10.0	10.0
of which BMZ funds* in EUR million	10.0	10.0

Table 1: Breakdown of costs.

* SI GA

¹⁵ https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/syria_en and <https://www.wfp.org/countries/syrian-arab-republic> (accessed on 4 June 2025).

¹⁶ World Food Programme (2025): Syrian Arab Republic Annual Country Report 2024, p. 9. https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000165380/download/?_ga=2.60043182.268581510.1750760216-313935595.1750760216.06.2025.

¹⁷ https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/syria_en#how-are-we-helping (accessed: 04.06.2025).

¹⁸ <https://www.bmz.de/de/laender/syrien> (accessed: 04.06.2025).

Map of the project region

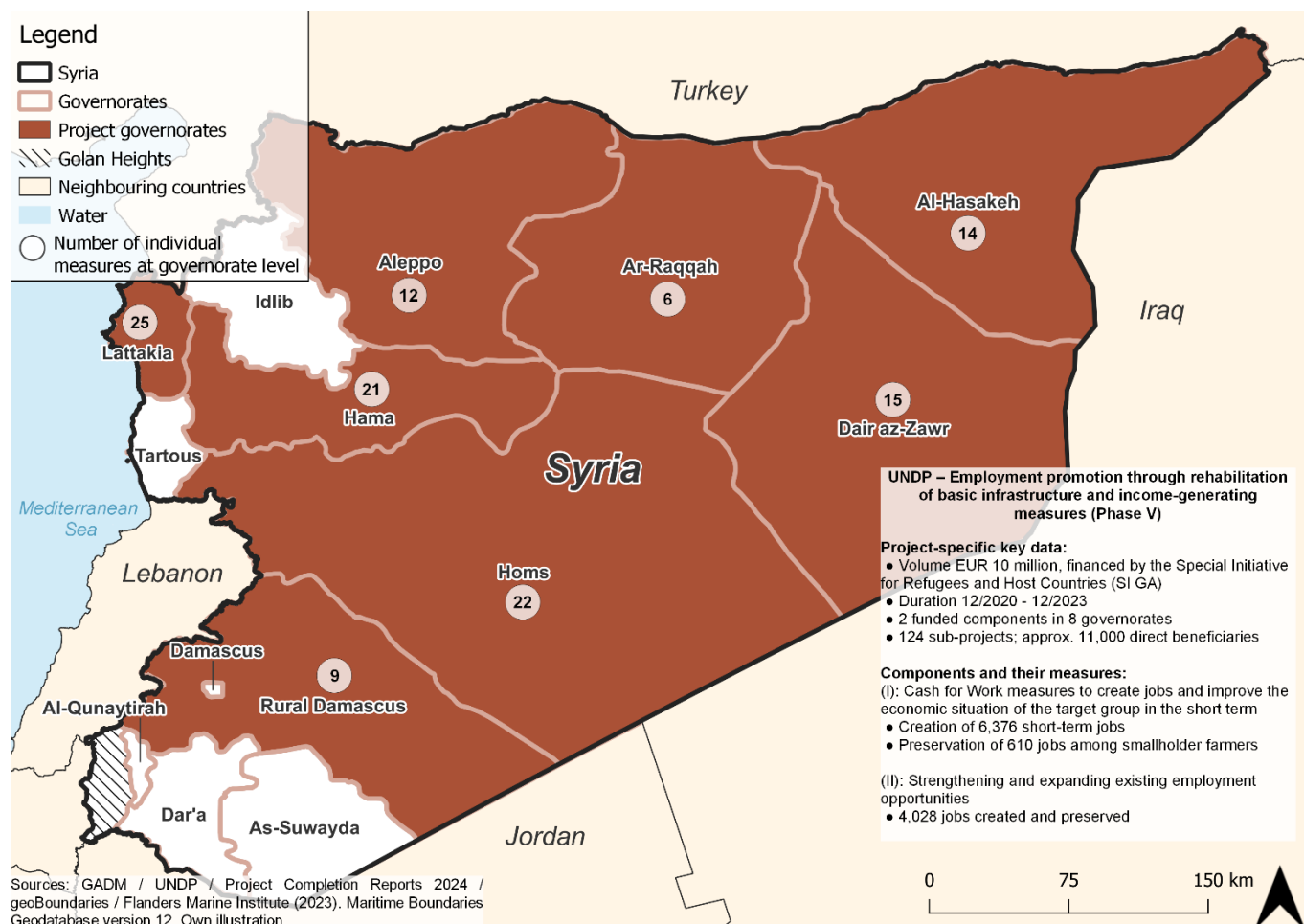


Figure 1: Map of the project regions.

Source: Own illustration.

Project-specific strengths and weaknesses

The strengths include in particular:

- As the project executing agency, UNDP had cross-country experience in implementing programmes under conditions of crisis, war and displacement, and, in consultation with the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), responded flexibly and appropriately to context-driven adjustments to measures, budget lines and timelines, as well as to necessary adjustments resulting from the coronavirus pandemic.
- A significant proportion of the project measures, particularly in Component 2, were implemented by partners commissioned by UNDP, which made it possible to effectively implement the Whole of Syria approach. There were no indications in the EPE that partners were not sufficiently qualified to implement the measures in the various components.
- The gender-specific number of beneficiaries for the measures indicates that they were designed to be gender-sensitive, although women benefited to a lesser extent.
- The EPE found no evidence of ethnic-religious conflicts or conflicts between refugees and the local population induced by the project, which is also attributable to the do no harm approach implemented as part of the FC programme.

The weaknesses include in particular:

- The UNDP project proposal was largely adopted, meaning that FC's sector-specific expertise was only taken into account to a limited extent.
- The project implementation schedule had to be extended due to delays in the approval of the intervention locations by the BMZ and AA.
- No monitoring or evaluation was carried out to determine how many internally displaced persons were among the beneficiaries of the project, although this would have been appropriate given the funding provided by SI GA. As a result, it was not possible to make sufficiently empirically based statements about social cohesion between internally displaced persons and the population of host communities.
- The project's fragmented catalogue of measures at a large number of intervention sites presumably resulted in high coordination and monitoring costs for the project executing agency, although these could not be specifically verified.
- The effects at the outcome and impact level of many measures in Component 2 (strengthening sustainability of value chains, implementing vocational and training measures, promoting the capacities of micro and small enterprises) were hardly detectable. In addition, qualitative aspects of the measures could only be assessed incompletely, as direct contact with the target group was not possible during the evaluation.

General conclusions/lessons learned

- In fragile contexts, directly demonstrable effects are achieved primarily by short-term measures, such as CfW measures. However, under more stable conditions, multifocal approaches with integrated measures – such as vocational training (skills development) and support for small businesses – are preferable to measures aimed purely at restoring infrastructure or clearing rubble and debris. This will require closer integration of both components of the programme in future.
- In order to achieve sustainability and development policy impacts, conceptual connectivity is particularly important for FC programmes that have to be implemented under difficult socio-economic and socio-political conditions.
- The appropriateness of an exit strategy should be reviewed again for follow-up projects.
- For FC projects in a country where external actors exert influence on political developments, it is essential to have an experienced project executing agency committed to neutrality who can also draw on relevant experience in countries particularly affected by the Syrian crisis.
- Where, as in Syria, state structures are weak or bilateral cooperation is not possible, selecting a UN organisation such as UNDP as the project executing agency offers at least a limited guarantee of effectiveness and efficiency in the implementation of the planned measures.

- If the measures implemented as part of the programme continue to be implemented under the current conditions in Syria, they can not only make a decisive contribution to Syria's economic reconstruction, but also have the potential to restore the social fabric and trust.

Rating according to OECD DAC criteria

Relevance

1. Alignment with policies and priorities

The project was aligned with the 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan for Syria, which provided the framework for the policies and priorities of humanitarian actors and their partners.¹⁹ The strategic objective formulated therein, "Increase resilience, livelihoods and access to basic services", was decisive for the commitment of the project executing agency, UNDP. This aimed to improve the economic and social situation of internally displaced persons and the population of host communities in the short to medium term, in particular by creating short-term employment opportunities and by strengthening and expanding existing employment. At the same time, the objectives of the project and the commitment of the project executing agency were in line with the BMZ's priorities. In crisis and refugee contexts such as Syria, these include creating access to basic services by rehabilitating the relevant infrastructure, creating employment opportunities and strengthening the resilience of vulnerable population groups. Relevant BMZ quality criteria were also reflected, such as respect for human rights, poverty reduction and reduction of inequality, and conflict sensitivity.

On the Syrian side, the UNDP cooperated with local and regional authorities, as they had to approve access to project sites and cooperation with NGOs that were designated as implementing partners in some areas. In addition, the UNDP, as the project executing agency committed to impartiality, independence and neutrality, also had to obtain the necessary approvals for activities that were planned in all parts of Syria in line with the Whole of Syria approach, regardless of the political and ethnic-religious power relations.

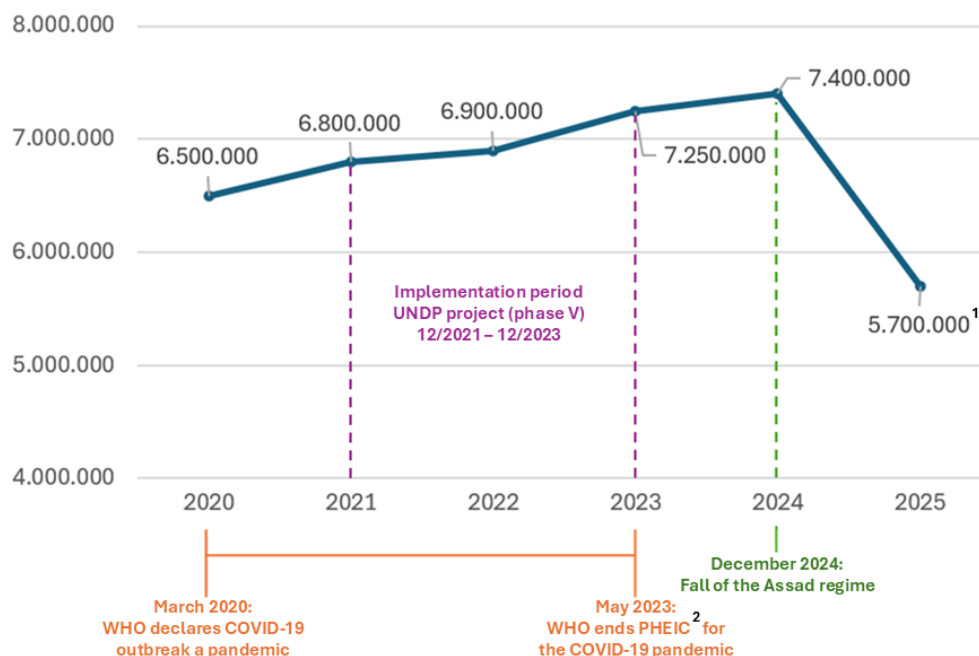
2. Alignment with the needs and capacities of stakeholders and beneficiaries

At the time of the project review and the start of implementation at the end of 2020, there was a reduction in the intensity of the conflict, but at the same time the economic and social situation of the population had deteriorated. According to estimates, 8 out of 10 people in Syria were poor in 2020, large sections of the population suffered from food insecurity, unemployment was high, especially among young people, and more than 6 million people were displaced within Syria (core problem).²⁰ Figure 1 clearly illustrates that the number of internally displaced persons rose continuously during the implementation period, reaching its peak only with the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024. Against this backdrop, the project's target group included, in particular, internally displaced persons, who, alongside host communities and people with disabilities, were to benefit explicitly from the project's measures. These population groups were also characterised by a high proportion of poor households and individuals with little access to and ownership of assets, who were employed in the informal sector, were low-skilled, unemployed or resorted to negative coping strategies, such as taking out loans or reducing meals. This focus of the project was appraised as appropriate and relevant both at the time of the appraisal and at the time of the evaluation.

¹⁹ Syrian Arab Republic: 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan (December 2020) - Syrian Arab Republic | ReliefWeb (accessed: 23.09.2025).

²⁰ Ibid.

Total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Syria 2020-2025



¹ Due to the poor data situation, IDP returnees since December 2024 were subtracted from the total number of IDPs in December 2024 to calculate the total number of IDPs for 2025. This therefore represents only an approximate figure.
² PHEIC = public health emergency of international concern

Figure 2: Total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Syria 2020-2025.

Sources: various UN surveys. 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024

An initial selection of beneficiaries for the project was made in the pre-selected areas on the basis of a community-based selection process involving non-governmental organisations and local committees. A subsequent survey conducted by the UNDP and local committees was then used to make the final selection of adults who had been unemployed for at least three months and were registered in the selected districts, with a focus on particularly vulnerable individuals such as people with disabilities or female-headed households. In addition, individuals were selected who belonged to households with an income of less than USD 100 per month, who did not receive cash support from other projects, or who were particularly affected by the socio-economic consequences of the coronavirus pandemic. A quota of 35-45% women and 4% persons with disabilities was also set.

Socio-cultural characteristics, characteristics of religious minorities or existing lines of conflict between beneficiaries were not explicitly taken into account in the design. Nor were any special measures planned for girls or women. However, the evaluation team considered that the differentiated selection process, which encompassed several criteria, the diverse and balanced composition of the committees, and the quota for women ensured that the needs of particularly disadvantaged or vulnerable population groups were adequately addressed.

3. Appropriateness of design

Conceptually, the selection of project locations was based on four criteria, including the number of internally displaced persons, secure access for UNDP and partners, the UNDP Severity Scale, which ranks areas according to the severity of the impact of the war, and complementarity within the UN portfolio. The selection of project locations was submitted to the BMZ for approval after the financing agreement was signed and before implementation began, and the BMZ coordinated with the Federal Foreign Office and KfW on this matter.²¹ As with other projects, project locations were excluded where the security situation was unstable, the property rights of the population were violated, the areas were controlled by EU-sanctioned terrorist groups, or the population was forcibly displaced and prevented from returning.

With regard to the activities planned at the project locations, the measures under Component 1 were intended to address the acute needs of the target group, while the expected effects of the measures under Component 2 were predominantly medium to

²¹ This list of planned project locations was not available to the evaluation team, which is why it is not possible to say whether measures were actually implemented at all planned project locations.

long-term. The measures planned under Component 1 included, in particular, the rapidly effective, temporary CfW activities in the area of rubble and waste removal. To a lesser extent, component 1 provided for CfW measures for smaller rehabilitation measures, e.g. in schools or hospitals and the electricity, water and sewage networks, as well as the creation of short-term jobs for young people in their communities. In addition, component 1 planned support measures for small farmers in the form of contributions in kind. Component 2 provided for the distribution of agricultural inputs in combination with training, financial support for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and the provision of various training measures. These were to include training in the agricultural sector, vocational training in crafts and technical fields, and targeted courses for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises or young people. The training courses for young people were also intended to benefit the beneficiaries of CfW measures for young people in local communities under Component 1.²²

The small-scale orientation of the training measures under Component 2 was based on the project executing agency's evaluation of local demand for labour market-relevant skills. However, from today's perspective, it is questionable whether, at the time the concept was drawn up at the end of 2020, the Syrian economy was actually in a position to absorb the training measures under Component 2, despite a reduction in the intensity of the conflict at the time the concept was drawn up. The appraisals of the measures under Component 2 are also sometimes too fragmented and too selective to be effective, and often prove to be cost-intensive (see efficiency).

However, it makes fundamental sense from a development policy perspective that measures were implemented not only to create jobs, but also to preserve them. While the CfW measures under Component 1 in particular served to create jobs, the other measures under Components 1 and 2 were also aimed at preserving jobs in some cases. This circumstance is also reflected to a certain extent in the formulation of the target system in the project proposal and the final review. Outcome 1, for example, was intended to achieve job creation and short-term improvement in the economic situation of the target group. Outcome 2 aimed to empower and train the target group for medium-term employment, improve economic conditions and promote micro-enterprises. The aim was to achieve an impact at the impact level, with the FC project contributing to improving the economic and social living conditions of internally displaced persons and the local population.

However, the formulation of this system of objectives lacks a focus on the selected project locations and, in some cases, a realistic time frame. Furthermore, at the outcome level, the use of the measures by the target group is not reflected and is formulated in relatively vague terms, stating that the employment opportunities should ultimately serve to generate income. Furthermore, many of the measures did not actually create or maintain jobs, but rather represented potential employment opportunities or opportunities to generate income.

For this reason, the objective in this EPE is specified as follows: At the outcome level, the objective was to create short- to medium-term income opportunities that could be exploited by internally displaced persons and the local population at selected project locations. At the impact level, the objective was to improve the economic and social living conditions of internally displaced persons and the local population at selected project sites in the short to medium term. As the measures are also expected to contribute to social cohesion between internally displaced persons and the population of host communities in a fragile context, the target system is supplemented by the following dual objective: The project should also strengthen social cohesion between the population of host communities and internally displaced persons.

Impact-level indicators were not specified in the design and were therefore added as part of the EPE (see Overarching developmental impact). Outcome-level indicators were available, but tended to reflect the output level. However, given the difficulties in collecting data and the data situation, their appraisal is considered appropriate, as is their weighting (see Effectiveness | Achievement of (intended) objectives).

Conceptually, there was no intention to link components 1 and 2, even though the project pursued a more holistic development policy approach by differentiating measures and implementing two components.²³ Such integration of, for example, CfW measures in the area of infrastructure rehabilitation and training measures to expand relevant skills and abilities (skills development) creates significant development policy added value for the target group under stable framework conditions (.).²⁴ In Syria, however, the situation at the time the project was designed and implemented was still extremely precarious from the evaluation team's point of view and was characterised above all by the destruction of houses and infrastructure. For this reason, the focus of the temporary employment opportunities was primarily on labour-intensive rubble and waste removal – without accompanying training measures. However, given the ongoing civil war during the planning and implementation period, it is reasonable to conclude that CfW measures under Component 1, in combination with skills development, were intended only for young people and

²² In addition to these two components, there were plans to strengthen the capacities of local NGOs that were already working with UNDP or were eligible for cooperation due to their technical expertise and access to implementation locations. The aim was to ensure that NGOs would be available in the medium term as effective and efficient implementation partners at the local level.

²³ The project was not part of a development cooperation programme.

²⁴ The integration of CfW measures with skills development is discussed in the study "How can Public Works programmes create Sustainable Employment?" among others; https://www.idos-research.de/fileadmin/migratedNewsAssets/Files/DP_11.2015.pdf (accessed on 6 August 2025).

not for other participants in the CfW measures. It is also reasonable to conclude that the rehabilitation of social infrastructure was not implemented as a priority.

4. Adaptability – response to change

The measures implemented in the fifth phase of the programme were essentially the same as in the previous phases.²⁵ Unlike the first phases of the programme, the fifth phase was marked by the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, which required the measures to be adapted. For example, training had to be conducted online due to lockdown restrictions. The content of individual activities was also adapted, with young people being trained to carry out awareness campaigns on COVID-19.²⁶

Even more than the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, the lengthy coordination and approval processes made it necessary to adjust the measures, as in previous phases. Due to the lengthy coordination of project locations between KfW, the BMZ and the Federal Foreign Office, measures had to be paused or implementation partners were no longer available. In addition, there were delays or a lack of approvals from Syrian authorities regarding cooperation with individual NGOs. UNDP responded by implementing some measures directly in order to prevent further delays. At the same time, the actual implementation phase was extended to 36 months instead of the planned 24 months due to the delayed start of implementation.

Rating summary of relevance: **successful (2)**

While the project's adaptability – response to change, as well as its alignment with policies and priorities, as well as the needs and capacities of the beneficiaries and stakeholders, meet expectations and show no discernible shortcomings, there are minor weaknesses in the appropriateness of design and the division into two components. Overall, however, the positive appraisal of the individual aspects prevails, which is why the relevance of the project as a whole is still considered successful.

Coherence

5. Internal coherence

The focus of the project evaluated here on creating employment and readily available income for the local population and internally displaced persons was sensibly integrated into the objectives of the Special Initiative on Refugees and Host Countries (SI GA), through which it was financed, and the Middle East Employment Initiative (BONO), which is an essential part of the SI GA. At the same time, the project complemented other non-governmental projects of German FC, which, in addition to the Aga Khan Foundation, were implemented primarily with UN organisations in vital areas such as education, nutrition, water and sanitation.

In addition, the project was aligned with international norms and standards, such as the do no harm principles and the inclusion of disadvantaged groups. However, because the Syrian government simultaneously violated some of the international norms and standards to which German development cooperation is committed, bilateral projects that would have had the potential to meaningfully integrate German development cooperation instruments and exploit synergies were suspended. However, non-governmental development cooperation projects were also implemented by TC during the implementation period, such as the project to strengthen socio-economic resilience in north-eastern Syria to create income and employment opportunities (BMZ No. 2021 18 149).²⁷

However, the EPE did not find any evidence of double funding of the aforementioned TC project and the FC project evaluated here, partly due to the TC project's focus on north-eastern Syria. It remains unclear, however, whether all measures of the FC project evaluated here were clearly distinguished from humanitarian aid provided by the Federal Foreign Office, as sufficient information on the Federal Foreign Office's projects is not available.

6. External coherence

The project cooperated with Syrian government agencies in order to gain access to the project locations and ensure the coherence of activities carried out by various actors. However, there were no plans to strengthen Syrian authorities. Instead, the

²⁵ The first phase of the programme has already been appraised and was deemed unsuccessful overall. See EPE "UNDP Livelihoods and Basic Infrastructure".

²⁶ By July 2025, 57,423 new COVID-19 infections had been recorded in Syria, along with 3,153 deaths caused by the virus, making Syria one of the five countries with the highest COVID-19 mortality rates worldwide; however, given the state of the Syrian healthcare system, it is likely that the actual number of cases is much higher. <https://www.corona-in-zahlen.de/weltweit/> (accessed: 14 August 2025)

²⁷ <https://projectdata.giz.de/projektdaten/region/2/countries/SY> (accessed on 23 September 2025).

project also aimed to strengthen the capacities of local NGOs through workshops, mentoring and coaching so that they could be used as implementation partners beyond the scope of the project.

In addition to Germany, several other bilateral donors and international organisations supported UNDP during the implementation period. Other UN organisations, such as UNICEF and UN Habitat, also implemented their own projects in Syria. The EPE did not find any evidence of double funding or overlaps, even though UNICEF, for example, was also active in the area of youth development. For this reason, the Children's Fund would also have been a suitable project executing agency for some of the measures implemented by UNDP, but not for measures such as CfW measures.

The fact that the evaluation team assessed the measures of the various implementing organisations as complementary and coherent overall is also due to the fact that the UN organisations coordinated closely on the Humanitarian Response Plans. The organisation responsible for the "Early Recovery and Livelihoods" cluster was the project executing agency UNDP, which also co-chaired the Inter-Agency Monitoring and Evaluation Technical Working Group with the aim of strengthening the joint monitoring and evaluation system of the UN organisations.

Rating summary of coherence: **successful (2)**

There are no indications of shortcomings in terms of external coherence. Internal coherence also delivered results in line with expectations under the given circumstances, although the suspension of bilateral development cooperation with Syria limited the potential for meaningful interaction between instruments and the generation of synergy effects. Overall, coherence is appraised as successful.

Effectiveness

7. Achievement of objectives

The outcome-level objective adjusted within the framework of the EPE was to create short- to medium-term income opportunities that could be exploited by internally displaced persons and the local population at selected project locations.

Overall, more people than planned were reached under components 1 and 2, although some indicators fell short of their targets, including the creation of short-term jobs for young people as part of community-based initiatives.²⁸ During implementation, fewer young people than planned were needed due to the availability of volunteers. However, the fact that the targets were exceeded overall is primarily due to exchange rate fluctuations between the time the project was conceived and the implementation phase, which meant that more funds were available in Syrian pounds during implementation for individual measures, enabling more people to be reached.

The following indicators were used to measure the outcome target:

Indicator	Status at time of PA	Target value at EPE (PA)	Actual value at PCR	Actual value at EPE
Component 1				
(1) Creation of short-term jobs in the area of waste and debris removal and rehabilitation of basic infrastructure (Output 1.1a)	0	4,096 persons	5,782 persons (including 1,487 women) → achieved	Not included in the evaluation due to the one-off nature of the measure → Target achievement no longer measurable at the time of the EPE Insufficient data
(2) Creation of short-term jobs for young people (output 1.1b)	0	1,666 persons	594 persons (including 174 women) → Not achieved	Not included in the evaluation due to the one-off nature of the measure → Target achievement no longer measurable at the time of the EPE

²⁸ The indicators are output-level indicators, but due to the difficulty of collecting data and the situation on the ground, they are used as proxy indicators for the appraisal of effectiveness (see Relevance | Appropriateness of design).

				Insufficient data
(3) Provision of agricultural production resources in rural areas (livestock and simple equipment) (output 1.2)	0	665 persons	610 persons (no data available on proportion of women) → Not achieved	According to the project executing agency, predominantly in use
				Target value achieved
		Σ 6,411	Σ 6,986 → Achieved	
Component 2				
(4) Provision of agricultural production resources in rural areas, including training* (Output 2.1)	0	300 persons	416 persons (including 216 women) → Achieved	
(5) Training and specific advice				
(5.1) SMEs (Output 2.2)	0	465 people	872 persons (no data available on proportion of women) → Achieved	Target value achieved
(5.2) Continuing vocational training (output 2.3)	0	425 people	2,635 persons (no data available on proportion of women) → Achieved	Target value achieved
(5.3) People with disabilities (output 2.4)	0	100 persons	105 persons (no data available on proportion of women) → Achieved	Target value achieved
		Σ 1,290 persons	Σ 4,028 persons → Achieved	

Table 2: Outcome target achievement.

Source: Final review 2024; interview with project executing agency.

Note: * According to the impact matrix in the financing proposal and the final review, the indicator applies to both Component 1 (Indicator 3) and Component 2 (Indicator 4). However, in Component 2, the target group received additional training.

8. Contribution to the achievement of objectives

A total of over 100 individual activities were implemented in eight governorates and all funds earmarked for this purpose were spent.²⁹ In addition to the measures listed in the table above, the FC project also financed physical and psychological support for 120 people with disabilities in the form of prostheses, physiotherapy or psychosocial support, the training of 33 young people as peace mediators, the training of 1,385 young people in community initiative design and critical thinking skills, and the strengthening of NGO capacities (see Effectiveness | Quality of implementation).

With regard to the use of the measures, the provision of CfW measures was designed for immediate use by the target group. The short-term jobs were primarily implemented for the disposal of solid waste and rubble and for the rehabilitation of community infrastructure, with a focus on electricity, water and waste networks, schools and health centres. Five schools, two health centres and 24 km of electricity and sewage supply lines were repaired (see Overarching developmental impact | Overarching (intended) developmental changes). The repaired infrastructure is currently being used by the final beneficiaries, with the exception of the health centre in Hama, which is out of service due to a robbery during the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024. The small agricultural businesses and production resources provided to individual farmers in the form of livestock or simple equipment are also still in use.³⁰

To a certain extent, the training courses carried out as part of the programme are also still in place. Ex-post surveys conducted by UNDP after the end of the programme showed that 50-70% of the skills learned had been retained by the target group. A

²⁹ An overview of the specific measures financed by the FC project can be found in the appendix.

³⁰ Written information from the project executing agency dated 6 July 2025 and 24 August 2025.

further survey by the project executing agency shows that six months after completion of the training and specific consultations, 50% of the beneficiaries were employed, including 43% women.³¹

The EPE found no evidence that certain ethnic or religious groups were excluded from the measures. However, it was known from previous phases of the programme that people with disabilities, women and female adolescents in particular made less use of the measures due to mobility restrictions, social norms or security risks. UNDP responded to this by, for example, offering training directly in the affected communities, involving local actors to promote acceptance within the community for the participation of women, and setting quotas for the participation of women or people with disabilities (see Relevance | Alignment with the needs and capacities of the beneficiaries and stakeholders). According to the final review, this resulted in a total of 37% of women being reached³², while the proportion of people with disabilities was 6%.

However, no figures were collected on the proportion of internally displaced persons, which proves to be disadvantageous as the project was part of the SI GA, which was intended, among other things, to contribute to the support of refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees. As Figure 3 shows, various measures were implemented in project governorates with a high incidence of internally displaced persons, such as in the governorates of Aleppo and Latakia.³³ Overall, however, it is clear that the project focused more on implementing the principles of the Whole of Syria approach than on explicitly addressing internally displaced persons and host communities.

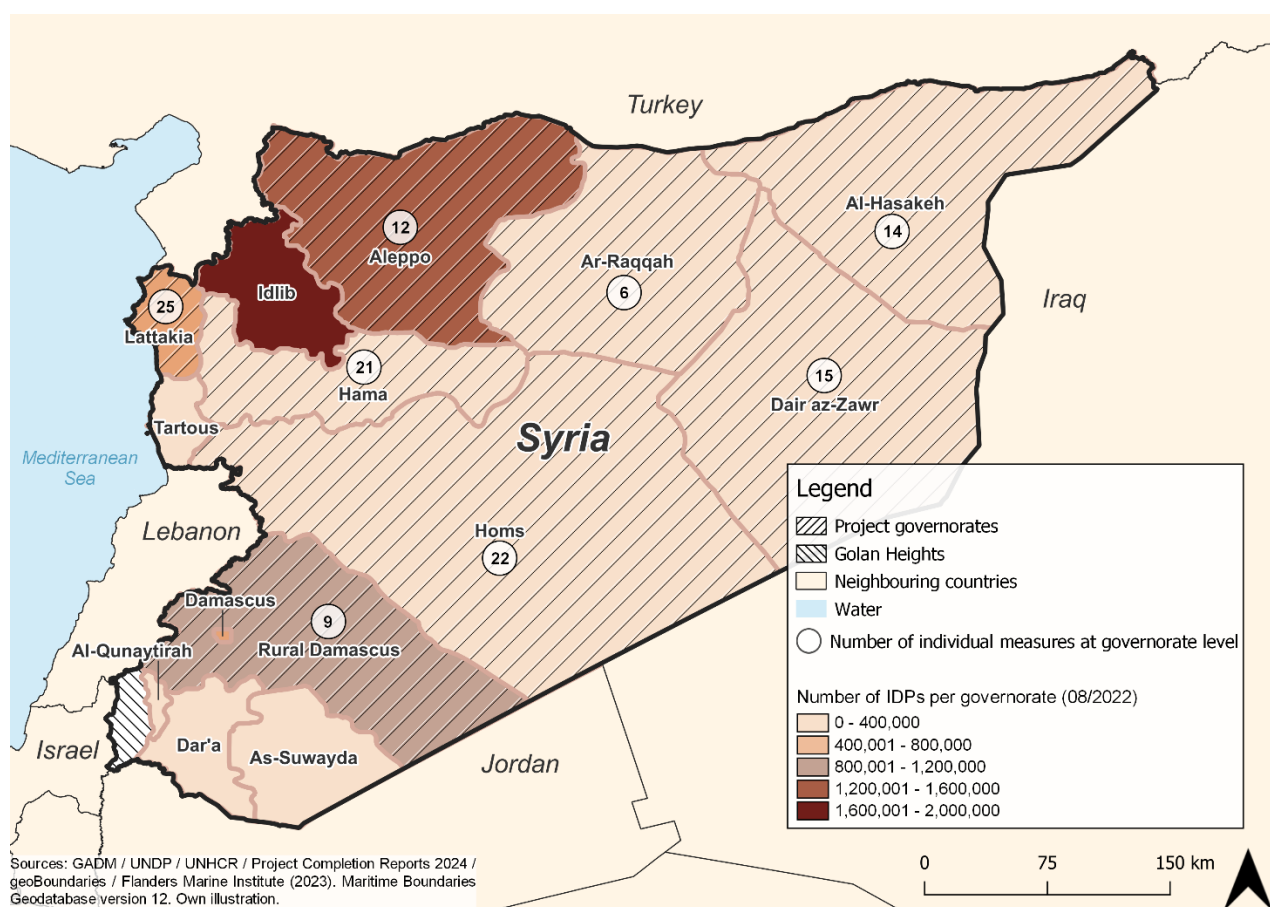


Figure 3: Concentration of internally displaced persons per governorate in Syria along quintiles and differentiated according to project governorates and non-project governorates.

Source: Own illustration.

With regard to the achievement of objectives, it is evident that the objective of the project used in the EPE, namely to generate income in the short to medium term, was achieved directly and immediately through the provision of short-term jobs under Component 1. This is because the short-term jobs contributed to short-term increases in income, which enabled participants to meet

³¹ Written information from the project executing agency dated 6 July 2025.

³² Overall, the proportion of women is higher than shown in the table above, as only those measures that serve as indicators for the appraisal of the achievement of objectives at the outcome level are listed there.

³³ The fact that no project measures were carried out in Idlib, the governorate with the highest number of internally displaced persons, was due, among other things, to the escalation of fighting during the implementation period and the associated inaccessibility of the area.

their basic needs. Whether and to what extent the other measures contributed to short- to medium-term income generation cannot be clearly appraised, as the relevant data is lacking and the target group could not be surveyed on this issue within the framework of the EPE. Nor is it possible to say to what extent the measures actually contributed to the creation or maintenance of employment, which was the aim of the target formulation used in the project proposal and the final review and the unit "employment" used as the basis for the target values. In any case, many of the measures did not actually create or maintain jobs, but rather potential employment opportunities (see relevance | Appropriateness of design).³⁴

However, during site visits carried out as part of a third-party monitoring consultancy after the end of the project, the support measures for micro-enterprises were assessed as effective because they enabled small entrepreneurs to maintain their businesses in the medium term. Nevertheless, the appraisal of the contribution of the measures under Component 2 is seen as being less significant overall in terms of achieving the objectives – both in terms of employment and income – than the measures under Component 1. This is because the fragile environment and the disastrous economic situation significantly limited the potential of training and specific counselling to maintain or take up employment and thus generate income, even though UNDP had sufficient financial resources and institutional expertise to implement the measures.

9. Quality of implementation

In addition to financial resources and institutional expertise, the local presence of UNDP in Syria was another advantage in selecting UNDP as the project executing agency for the FC project to implement the various measures. In addition to implementation by UNDP itself, individual measures were also carried out by NGOs in hard-to-reach locations or on the basis of relevant technical expertise. This enabled the Whole of Syria approach to be implemented satisfactorily overall (see Relevance | Alignment with policies and priorities).

The appropriate qualification of NGOs to implement the measures was ensured through the application of comprehensive guidelines and procedures for the selection and appraisal of NGO capacities by UNDP. In addition, UNDP also strengthened the capacities of NGOs with the aim of gaining them as implementation partners in the medium term (see Coherence | External coherence). Individual measures to strengthen the capacities of NGOs were financed through the FC project (see effectiveness | Contribution to the achievement of objectives).

The EPE found no evidence that the NGOs or the personnel deployed were insufficiently qualified. According to the UNDP, sufficient qualified personnel were generally available, although to a slightly lesser extent in locations in the north-east of the country and in Deir ez-Zor than in other locations. The implementation of the measures was hampered above all by the Syrian government's fundamentally unpredictable approval policy for the release of project locations and cooperation with NGOs. Despite the difficult conditions, the UNDP nevertheless succeeded in managing and implementing the measures in accordance with the "do no harm" principle in such a way that they could be implemented nationwide. In addition, UNDP pursued a gender-sensitive approach to minimise gender-related risks (see effectiveness | Contribution to the achievement of objectives).

10. Unintended effects (positive or negative)

The fact that no evidence of unintended negative effects, such as ethnic-religious or other conflicts attributable to the project, could be found in the EPE, nor any positive effects of an unintended nature, is due to the fact that the fragile context sometimes made it impossible to carry out the relevant monitoring and evaluation activities. For example, it was not possible to identify unintended effects on the basis of interviews with beneficiaries or to determine the contribution of the measures to the achievement of objectives, in particular the measures under Component 2. It is therefore also not possible to fully assess the qualitative aspects of the measures.

Rating summary of effectiveness: **moderately successful (3)**

Despite the targets being met, in some cases exceeded, and relatively few discernible shortcomings in terms of the Quality of implementation, the actual contribution of many measures to the achievement of the income generation target formulated in the EPE remains uncertain, as does the contribution to the employment target used in the project proposal and the final review. The overall effectiveness is therefore appraised as moderately successful.

³⁴ During the EPE, it was not possible to visit the site, and the originally planned deployment of a local TE could not be realised either.

Efficiency

When conducting the appraisal of efficiency, it is taken into account that UNDP, as the project executing agency, was not obliged to submit a detailed cost and performance account for the measures implemented. This was in line with standard procedure (single audit principle) when working with UN organisations. The available cost statements do not reveal whether and to what extent UNDP and/or Syrian government agencies made their own contributions to the financing of the project measures. With regard to the criterion of efficiency, the final report merely states that efficient implementation was ensured by the professional structures of UNDP, which was reflected in the cost-effective implementation of the measures.

11. Production efficiency

The assessment of production efficiency is based on project-specific UNDP data³⁵.

According to this, the total FC funds of EUR 10.0 million (USD 11.0 million) were used for the project as follows: EUR 4.0 million (40.3%) was allocated to component 1, while EUR 4.1 million (41.2%) was allocated to component 2, i.e. the funds were distributed almost equally between the two components.

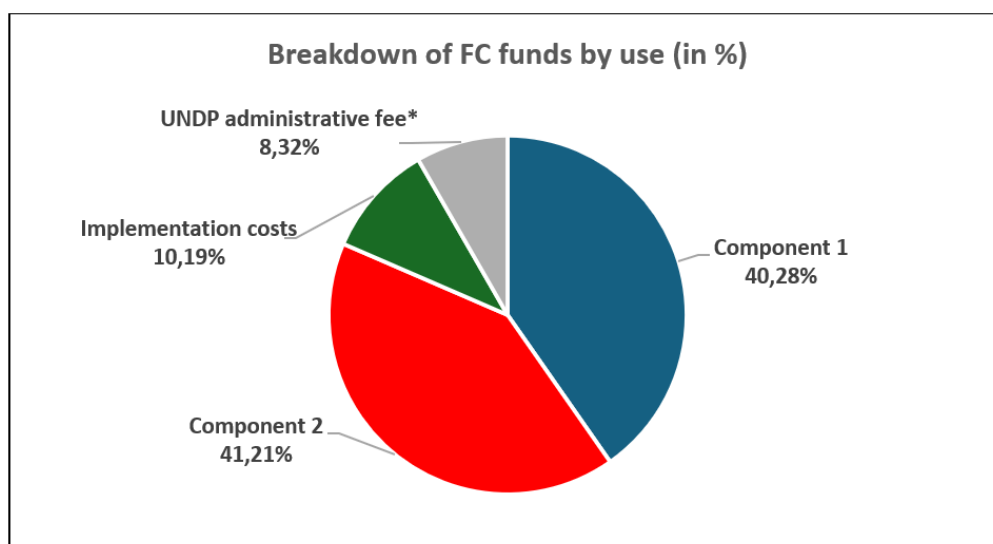


Figure 4: Structure of FC funds utilisation (in %).

Source: UNDP Syria Financial Update 2023. * Including UN Coordination Levy. Own illustration.

Cross-component implementation costs totalled around EUR 1.02 million (10.2% of total costs);³⁶ of which EUR 833 thousand (8.3%) was for services provided by third parties on behalf of UNDP, a further EUR 160 thousand (1.6%) was for support and advice to NGOs working on the project, and EUR 26 thousand (0.26%) was for UNDP's information management.³⁷ The UNDP charged EUR 832,000 as a flat-rate administrative fee (including the UN Coordination Levy); this corresponded to the UNDP's standard administrative costs for comparable FC projects. Taking into account the difficult operating environment in Syria, the standard administrative costs of 8.32% of the total costs are considered reasonable. Despite high inflation rates during the implementation period and the fluctuating exchange rate of the Syrian currency, the actual costs for Component 1 and Component 2 at the time of the final report were approximately in line with the target costs of the project proposal. There were marginal percentage deviations of the actual costs from the target costs, both upwards and downwards, for some outputs; for output 2.4 (counselling and support for people with disabilities), the actual costs amounted to 102% of the target costs.

³⁵ Some of the information in the KfW final report (table of total costs and financing) is inconclusive and does not match the information provided by UNDP, so the original UNDP project data (financial update of 14 June 2023) was used for the efficiency assessment.

³⁶ By way of comparison, in the FC project "Transitional Assistance UNICEF Syria Education and Child Protection, Phase V, BMZ No. 2020 18 091", which was implemented at around the same time, the cross-component implementation costs amounted to 22%.

³⁷ This is remarkable insofar as information management is usually considered an integral part of a company's standard administrative tasks and would therefore be covered by the UNDP's flat-rate administrative fee.

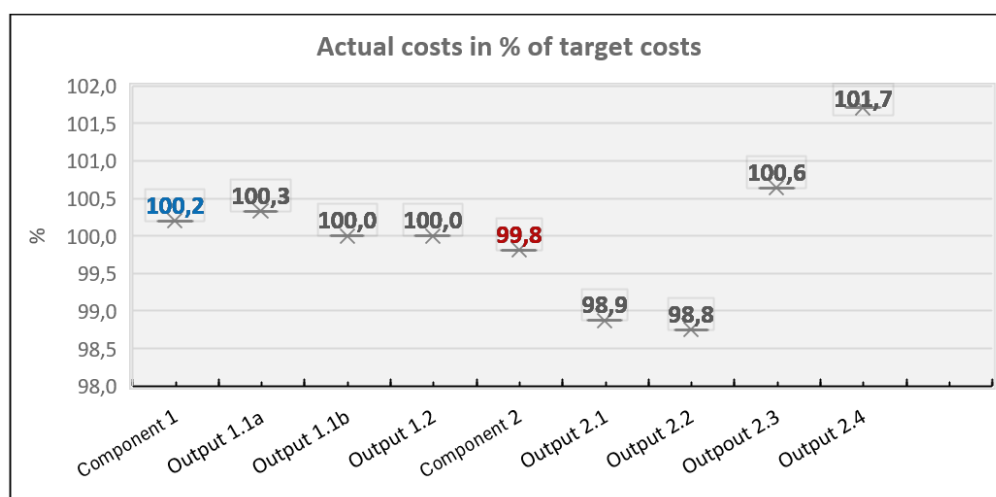


Figure 5: Actual costs as a percentage of target costs.

Source: KfW final report 2024. Own illustration.

After the financing agreement was signed on 16 December 2020, the project was scheduled to run for 24 months until December 2022. Due to the delayed start of implementation – caused by the late final approval of the intervention sites, the tense security situation and temporary access restrictions – two cost-neutral extensions until December 2023 were approved, so that the actual implementation phase lasted 36 months (cf. Relevance | Response to changes / Adaptability). Following a final progress report in May 2024, the final report was also submitted at the end of May 2024. When appraising the time efficiency of the project, it should be taken into account that restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic were in place during the implementation period, the volatile security situation in several regions of Syria was at times part of everyday life, and there were repeated clashes between the various actors. Against this background, the time efficiency of the project is appraised as moderately successful.

The cost-neutral adjustments to the schedule requested by UNDP were appropriate and had a strong rationale in the situation at the time. Insofar as UNDP's proof of use of funds for the project is comprehensible, the objectives were achieved economically.³⁸ Taking into account the extremely difficult conditions, the production efficiency of the project can be appraised as successful from today's perspective,³⁹ as the results are free of significant shortcomings and meet expectations. There were no indications of misuse of funds.⁴⁰ In the EPE for phase I of the programme, production efficiency was also appraised as good.

12. Allocation efficiency

No statements on allocation efficiency, i.e. the relationship between input and outcome, were made in the final report on the project. In the present EPE, the appraisal of allocation efficiency was therefore derived indirectly from the impact matrix by interpreting the number of beneficiaries as an indicator of outcome utilisation from the perspective of the target group and also assuming that the utilisation of the outputs had positive effects for the target group (cf. effectiveness and overarching developmental impacts). Input indicators are the FC funds used for the beneficiaries.

Overall, the project measures benefited 11,100 people⁴¹, although there may be double counting if identical persons benefited from several measures. Under Component 1, CfW measures to create jobs employed just under 7,000 people (83%). A comparatively small number of people were supported in the areas of cooperation with young people to promote social cohesion (8.5%) and support for small farms and individual farmers (8.7%).

³⁸ At 10.2% of total costs, cross-component implementation costs in phase V of the programme were lower than in phase I (11%); cf. EPE "UNDP Syria Employment Promotion through Rehabilitation of Basic Infrastructure and Income-Generating Measures (BMZ No. 2016 40 713), p. 11.

³⁹ Production efficiency was also appraised as good in the EPE for Phase I; *ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁰ However, corruption in Syria was perceived as endemic during the implementation phase of the project; the country ranked among the lowest in the Corruption Perceptions Index 2023, on a par with South Sudan and Venezuela; Transparency International (2024): Corruption Perceptions Index 2023, Berlin, p. 3.

⁴¹ The total number of beneficiaries here differs marginally from the figures given under effectiveness, as not all beneficiaries are included in the indicators there.

Under Component 1, the average direct costs per beneficiary amounted to EUR 577. Taking into account the proportionate cross-component implementation costs and the UNDP fee, the total costs per beneficiary rise to EUR 708.⁴² The costs per beneficiary for the capacity-building and training measures in Component 2 were significantly higher than in Component 1; the average direct costs here amounted to EUR 993 and EUR 1,219, taking into account implementation costs and the UNDP fee.

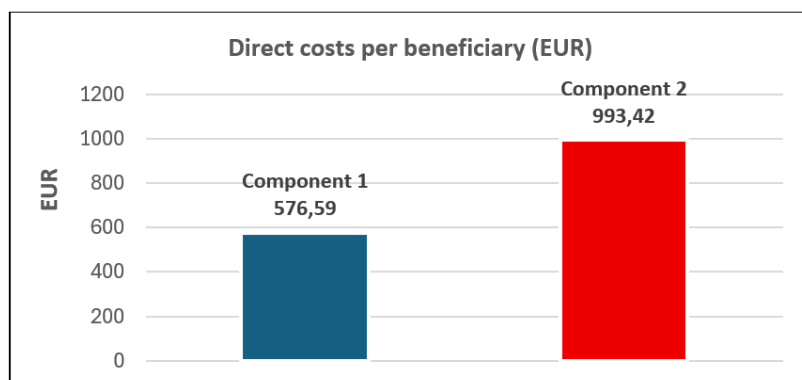


Figure 6: Direct costs per beneficiary (EUR).

Sources: KfW Final Report 2024; UNDP Syria Financial Update 2023. Own illustration.

The significant difference in per capita costs between the two components was due, among other things, to the large variation in average number of beneficiaries; because of the degression of fixed costs as participant numbers increase, ceteris paribus, the higher the number of beneficiaries, the lower the costs. While an average of 2,329 people benefited from the three outputs in Component 1, the four outputs in Component 2 benefited an average of 1,037 beneficiaries. From an efficiency perspective, small-scale measures with comparatively low numbers of beneficiaries are conceptually rather disadvantageous.

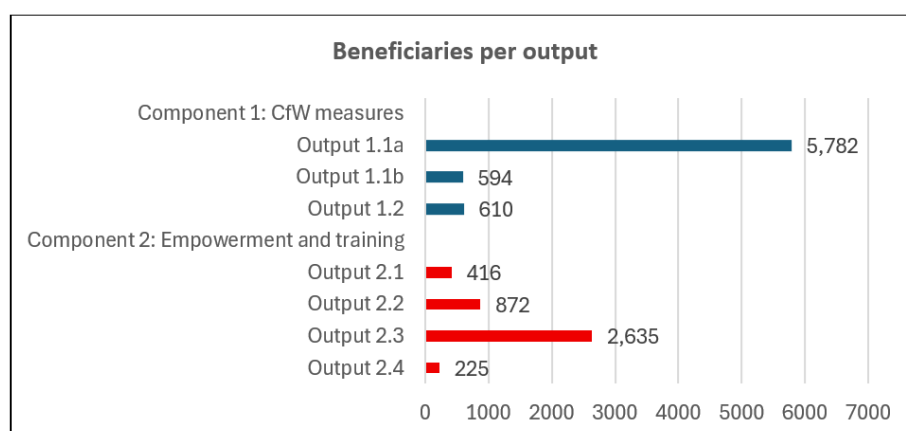


Figure 7: Beneficiaries per output.

Source: KfW final report 2024. Own illustration.

The highest direct costs per beneficiary were incurred in Component 1 for Output 1.1b (Cooperation with young people to promote social cohesion) with only 594 beneficiaries; at EUR 1,507.95, the per capita costs exceeded the average per capita costs for Component 1 by more than two and a half times.⁴³ The lowest per capita costs of EUR 422.78 were incurred in output 1.1a (removal of rubbish and debris and rehabilitation of basic infrastructure) with 5,782 people benefiting from the CfW measures. The correlation between the number of beneficiaries and direct costs is also evident for Component 2. The lowest per capita costs, at EUR 622, were incurred in the implementation of vocational training and job placement (Output 2.3) for around 2,600

⁴² The per capita costs are the direct costs of the measure, plus pro rata implementation costs and pro rata UNDP administrative fees; detailed information on the calculation can be found in Tables 3, 4 and 5 of the appendix "Total costs and financing" in the appendix volume.

⁴³ In the FC project "Syria Education and Child Protection Phase V" with UNICEF as the programme carrier (BMZ No. 2020 18 09), the direct per capita costs of supporting youth initiatives at the community level were also significantly higher than the average costs per beneficiary for the other activities in this project. Although these measures are important for social cohesion at the municipal level, the comparatively high costs of youth support mean that systematic monitoring and evaluation are particularly important for these measures.

participants.⁴⁴ Output 2.4 is a special case with above-average direct costs of EUR 2,142 per beneficiary; cost-intensive specific counselling and support was provided for people with physical disabilities to reintegrate into the labour market, such as the provision of prostheses, targeted vocational training opportunities and internships.

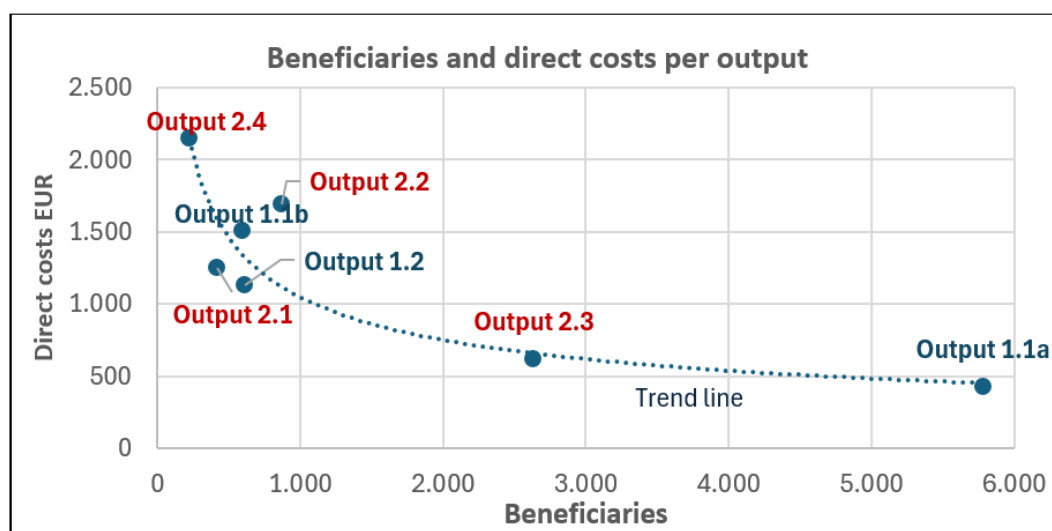


Figure 8: Beneficiaries and direct costs per output.

Sources: KfW Final Report 2024; UNDP Syria Financial Update 2023. Own illustration.

As statements on the relationship between input and outcome for the FC project could only be derived indirectly, partly due to the limited significance of the beneficiary figures per measure, allocation efficiency is appraised as limited success.⁴⁵

Rating summary of efficiency: **moderately successful (3)**

In view of the difficult conditions under which UNDP had to operate in Syria and the results that met expectations, the production efficiency of the project is appraised as successful from the perspective of the project executing agency.⁴⁶ The allocation efficiency of the project is appraised as limited success from the perspective of the target group. Time efficiency is also rated as limited success. Taking all evaluation dimensions into account, we rate the overall efficiency of the project as moderately successful.

Impact

13. Overarching developmental changes

The impact-level objective adjusted within the framework of the EPE was to improve the economic and social living conditions of internally displaced persons and the local population at selected project locations in the short to medium term. In addition, the project was intended to strengthen social cohesion between the population of host communities and internally displaced persons.

Measured against the indicators listed in the table, the impact-level targets were achieved.⁴⁷ However, this appraisal must take into account that no data was available for the indicators added as part of the EPE, namely 'increase in consumer spending' and 'reduction of conflicts between internally displaced persons and the population of host communities', although these would have been more appropriate for a more comprehensive assessment of target achievement at the impact level (see relevance | Appropriateness of

⁴⁴ A survey conducted by UNDP after the project was completed showed that approximately 50 to 70 per cent of the skills acquired through the training measures were retained by the target group, regardless of whether the participants were self-employed or permanently employed; written information from UNDP Syria dated 6 July 2025.

⁴⁵ A direct comparison of per capita costs with Phase I is not possible; the EPE for Phase I does not contain any quantitative data on unit costs, but made an appraisal of them as reasonable overall, albeit with reduced Allocation efficiency due to earmarking; see EPE "UNDP Syria Employment promotion through rehabilitation of basic infrastructure and income-generating measures (BMZ No. 2016 40 713)", p. 13.

⁴⁶ In the EPE for Phase I, production efficiency was also appraised as good; *ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁷ The indicators used in the following table have been shifted from the outcome to the impact level. Although they tend to reflect the output level, they are used due to a lack of available data and serve as proxy indicators, particularly for assessing improvements in social living conditions.

design). This is because the rehabilitation of facilities and supply lines achieved by the project only suggests an improvement in social living conditions.

The extent to which the other measures contributed to improving economic living conditions or social cohesion cannot be determined on the basis of the indicators listed in the table. Interviews with the project executing agency and empirical evidence do indicate a corresponding contribution for the target group, but due to a lack of available data and insufficient empirical evidence, this is only taken into account to a limited extent in the overall rating of the overarching developmental impact within the framework of the EPE.⁴⁸

The following indicators were used to measure the impact target/no indicators were specified.

Indicator	Status at time of PA	Target value in EPE (PA)	Actual value at PCR	Actual value at EPE
(1) Rehabilitation of facilities	0	3 facilities	7 facilities → Target achieved	7 facilities Target value achieved
(2) Rehabilitation of supply lines	0	22 km	24 km → Target achieved	22 km Target value achieved

Table 3: Impact target achievement.

Source: Final review 2024; interview with project executing agency. Own illustration.

Note: *The indicators "Increase in consumer spending" and "Reduction of conflicts between internally displaced persons and host communities", which were added retrospectively at the time of the EPE, are not included in the table due to unavailable data.

14. Contribution to overarching intended developmental changes

By rehabilitating social infrastructure and providing training and specific advice for poor households, internally displaced persons and people with disabilities, the project aimed to have a structural impact and build human capital. This also distinguished the project from humanitarian aid measures (see coherence | internal coherence).

However, relevant indicators of the socio-economic situation, such as the reduction of poverty and unemployment, did not improve during the implementation period and thereafter.⁴⁹ This means that no measurable development policy impacts can be demonstrated beyond the impacts described above (see Overarching developmental impacts | Overarching (intended) developmental changes). This is due, on the one hand, to the fragile context in which the project was implemented, which limited the monitoring and evaluation of the measures. On the other hand, it is also plausible that the serious socio-economic consequences of the civil war may have overshadowed the development policy changes achieved and that this is why no improvements in the relevant indicators were seen.

However, it is likely that without funding for the measures, the economic and social situation of the target group would have been worse. In this sense, the project also had an additional development policy impact. In addition, the skills and abilities acquired through training and counselling in particular can be expected to have development policy effects that have long been considered somewhat higher in development policy research than the development policy effects of short-term, temporary payments to households under CfW measures.⁵⁰ However, CfW measures are also effective in terms of development policy because they strengthen the role of women and the economic integration of people with disabilities, for example. They also have the potential to generate development dividends because they not only help to bridge emergencies and secure livelihoods in the short term, but also enable people to learn simple tasks and expand their skills and abilities when combined with skills development. In addition, they strengthen the local economy because the money is spent in local markets.

From a development policy perspective, both components are therefore suitable for transfer to other contexts. Particularly when rebuilding a country, participatory, conflict- and gender-sensitive CfW measures that are linked to skills development and

⁴⁸ Among others, CashforWork_EDPURapidProgrammaticReview_June22.pdf (accessed on 15 August 2024).

⁴⁹ The impact of the conflict in Syria: a devastated economy, pervasive poverty and a challenging road ahead to social and economic recovery [EN/AR] - Syrian Arab Republic | ReliefWeb (accessed: 15 August 2025).

⁵⁰ It has long been known in development theory that investment in education increases individual income, cf. Schultz, Theodore W. (1961): Investment in Human Capital, American Economic Review, vol. 51, pp. 7–11. On the social and individual returns on investment in education, see Weiß, Manfred (1993): Bildung als Investition, Forum E 46, 2. DOI: 10.25656/01:1918 (accessed on 25 June 2025).

integrated into local structures can make a decisive contribution to economic reconstruction and the economic and social participation of vulnerable population groups.

15. Contribution to overarching unintended developmental changes

No unintended development policy effects were identified in the evaluation for either Component 1 or Component 2, even though the measures under both components were implemented in an extremely conflict-ridden environment. In the evaluation team's view, the implementation of do no harm principles by the project executing agency and its partners contributed to the avoidance of unintended changes based on current knowledge. This is because UNDP analysed local conflict dynamics, social tensions and needs in advance through conflict analyses, studies and outcome harvesting reports, and derived appropriate target group-specific measures. In Aleppo and Hama, for example, CfW measures were planned in a participatory manner to prevent potential conflicts between internally displaced persons and the population of host communities.⁵¹ In addition, employees and partners were trained in conflict-sensitive planning of CfW measures.

Rating summary of impact: **moderately successful (3)**

The project has had only a minor measurable impact on development policy. However, as no unintended development impacts can be identified and it is plausible that the economic and social living conditions of internally displaced persons and the local population at selected project locations would have deteriorated in the short to medium term without the project, the positive results predominate and the project is appraised as satisfactory overall.

Sustainability

The FC project primarily served as a crisis-related emergency aid project, which largely financed fast-acting individual measures in an acute conflict context. The predominantly short-term expectation regarding the durability of the project's effects in terms of limited sustainability was explicitly stated at the time of the project review and at the time of the final inspection. **In retrospect, we also consider the limited sustainability requirement to be appropriate, which is why the sustainability of the projects is considered, but the appraisal is not taken into account in the overall rating.**

16. Capacities of the beneficiaries and stakeholders

Under the conditions prevailing in Syria, the target group – internally displaced persons and the population of the host communities in the intervention areas – did not have the necessary capacities to effectively organise measures for waste and debris removal and the rehabilitation of basic infrastructure. The responsible state authorities were also unable or unwilling to create and maintain jobs or bring about short-term improvements in the economic situation. The project executing agency was unable to implement such measures in certain parts of Syria due to security problems or a lack of approval from state authorities. This finding still applies to large parts of Syria even after the regime change in December 2024.

17. Contribution to supporting sustainability of capacities

The project helped to strengthen the capacities of UNDP Syria in the areas of administration, monitoring and evaluation of projects. Whether the positive effects achieved by the project can be maintained among the target group in subsequent phases depends on the target group remaining in the intervention areas and on further external financial support for the continuation of activities to create and maintain income-generating jobs and to qualify the target group for medium-term employment. The financial situation of UNDP remains highly dependent on donations from the international donor community, which also has consequences for the sustainability of UNDP's CfW and training programmes in Syria. Against this background, it was unrealistic to formulate a binding exit strategy for the FC project.

The FC programme enabled UNDP to rehabilitate basic infrastructure, contribute to the re-inhabitability of destroyed residential areas by clearing rubble, and finance temporary capacity-building and training measures. Without external financial support, neither the internally displaced persons in the project locations nor the population in the host communities would have been able to

⁵¹ The extent to which participatory planning and implementation would also have been necessary at other locations cannot be assessed within the framework of the EPE.

implement and continue the measures; this also applied to the project executing agency. In addition, the capacities of NGOs involved in the implementation of the measures on behalf of UNDP were strengthened. As far as possible under the conditions prevailing as a result of the civil war, the project's contribution to supporting sustainability was successful, and the capacities created by the project continued to be used after its completion.⁵²

18. Durability of impacts over time

At the time of the EPE, an evidence-based assessment of the project's sustainability was hampered primarily by uncertainty about further political, economic and social developments in the Syrian project locations. Despite the continuing high volatility in the Syrian intervention context, the continuation of the positive effects achieved with the FC funds was confirmed at the time of project completion (PCR) and evaluation. Although some individual results fell short of expectations, the overall picture is dominated by positive results. The UNDP has also already received funding commitments for follow-up projects in which measures will be continued within a conceptually partially adapted framework, so that the positive effects achieved with the measures of the evaluated project can be maintained *ceteris paribus* (connectivity). In particular, priority is to be given to women's access to income-generating opportunities, for example through permanent job creation programmes and the establishment of Women Safe Centres (WSC). While the measures of the evaluated project provided for a minimum participation of women of 35-45%, this share is to be increased to 60-65% in subsequent phases.⁵³

Rating summary of sustainability: moderately successful (3)

Overall, the sustainability criterion is appraised as limited success; although the results are below expectations, the positive results achieved predominate. However, it is not currently possible to make a well-founded assessment of the impact of changed socio-economic and socio-political contexts on the capacities of the target group and the project executing agency. However, UNDP has already received commitments for the necessary funding to continue the positive effects of the measures to generate income, preserve jobs and provide vocational training in Syria in follow-up projects.

Overall rating: moderately successful (3)

Results in line with expectations in terms of relevance and coherence, but below expectations in terms of effectiveness, efficiency and overarching developmental impact mean that the project is appraised as moderately successful overall. The project design, which had an alignment with the policies and priorities of the United Nations and German development cooperation, and its coherence with other FC projects in Syria are assessed positively. In addition, the project took into account the high level of need among the target group, although contributions to the achievement of objectives at the outcome and impact levels were not directly verifiable; this applies in particular to the training measures under Component 2, which were also very cost-intensive from an efficiency perspective. With regard to the efficient implementation of the project, there were positive results, but these fell short of expectations. Effects at the impact level have only occurred to a limited extent or are not directly attributable to the project. The sustainability of the project is assessed on the basis of measures primarily designed for the short term, applying a limited sustainability requirement, so that although the criterion is considered, the individual assessment is not taken into account in the Overall rating. Although the project contributed to supporting sustainability in the target group and among the project executing agencies, the durability of effects over time could only be appraised as limited at the time of the EPE due to the continuing uncertainty about further political and economic developments in the Syrian project locations, even though further external financial support for several follow-up phases had already been promised.

The overall rating is therefore "moderately successful". Taking into account the difficult implementation conditions of the project, positive results dominated in terms of relevance and coherence, while effectiveness and efficiency fell short of expectations; in addition, the project had only limited development policy impact, with ultimately uncertain sustainability due to contextual factors.

⁵² This statement is based, among other things, on detailed written responses from UNDP Syria to an extensive questionnaire and on interviews with the responsible KFW operational department.

⁵³ Written information from UNDP Syria dated 6 July 2025.

Contribution to Agenda 2030

The project made a contribution to the achievement of objectives for sustainability, including SDG 1 – No Poverty –, SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being –, SDG 5 – Gender Equality – and SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals.

Universal applicability, shared responsibility and accountability

The project was part of the Special Initiative on Refugees and Host Countries (SIGA), which aimed to contribute to reducing the acute causes of flight, stabilising host regions and communities, and supporting refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees.

The measures complemented FC projects in Syria with UNICEF and UN-Habitat. UNDP's accountability was in line with the United Nations' single audit principle.

Interplay between economic and social development

The rehabilitation and repair of basic social infrastructure in severely affected crisis areas, with a focus on electricity, water and waste networks, schools and health centres, and the involvement of local businesses, promoted positive interactions between social and economic impacts. The opportunity to generate income, particularly in the context of the CfW measures, also promoted the interaction between economic and social development.

Inclusiveness/leaving no one behind

The inclusive "Whole of Syria Approach" implemented the principle of "leave no one behind". Although only around 11,000 people (i.e. less than 1% of Syria's total population in 2020) benefited from the measures overall, priority was given to vulnerable people who were particularly affected by the economic crisis, people with disabilities and female-headed households.

Methodology

Evaluation methodology

The ex-post evaluation follows the methodology of a rapid appraisal, i.e. a data-based, qualitative contribution analysis, and represents an expert judgement. The project's impacts are attributed on the basis of plausibility considerations based on a careful analysis of documents, data, facts and impressions. Where possible, this also includes the use of digital data sources and modern techniques (e.g. satellite data, online surveys, geocoding). The causes of any contradictory information are investigated, attempts are made to resolve them, and the appraisal is based on statements that are confirmed by several sources of information (triangulation), where possible.

The analysis of the effects is based on assumed causal relationships, documented in the impact matrix developed during the project appraisal and updated during the ex-post evaluation, if necessary. The evaluation report sets out arguments as to why certain influencing factors were identified for the effects observed and why the project under review probably made a particular contribution (contribution analysis). The context of the development measure is taken into account in terms of its influence on the results. The conclusions are put into relation to the availability and quality of the data basis. An evaluation concept serves as the reference framework for the evaluation.

The method offers a balanced cost-benefit ratio for project evaluations, on average, with a balance between knowledge gain and evaluation effort, and allows for a systematic appraisal of the effectiveness of FC project programmes across all project evaluations. Individual ex-post evaluations cannot therefore meet the requirements of a scientific assessment in the sense of a clear causal analysis.

The main objective of the evaluations (knowledge interest) is to measure impacts, provide accountability, promote transparency and enable institutional learning.

Type of evaluation:

Remote without national experts (desk review).

Key questions of the evaluation according to the evaluation concept:

- What differences and similarities are evident in the evaluation results for Phase I and Phase V?
- Can short-term measures such as CfW be expected to have overarching developmental impacts?
- What structure-building measures/development policy effects underpin the project and are still in place? (Distinction from humanitarian aid).
- What impact did the fifth phase have on follow-up projects? Which components are given greater/lesser consideration?
- Did the allocation of FC funds to the two components of the project correspond to the core problem addressed?

Non-public (internal) documents

KfW project documents, UNDP reports, secondary specialist literature, analyses by the World Bank, IMF, OCHA and UNHCR, ex-post evaluations of comparable FC projects with UN organisations as project executing agencies.

List of public sources

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Data sources and analysis tools

UNHCR Refugee Data Finder; evaluation of secondary sources; satellite images; Health Nutrition and Population Statistics; World Development Indicators, media reports, Online Map of Syrian Civil War (<https://syria.liveuamap.com>)

Project sites visited

The ex-post evaluation was conducted as a desk review and no project sites were visited.

Interview partners and modality (in person, virtual/by telephone, in writing)

KfW employees in the operational area (in writing and virtually/by telephone), UNDP employees (in writing and virtually/by telephone)

The following aspects limited the evaluation

Due to the security situation in Syria, direct communication with the project executing agency during the evaluation was only possible digitally. It was also not possible to make direct contact with the implementation partners commissioned by UNDP, many of whom provided services for the project. Direct contact with the target group was also impossible due to the security situation and the massive internal migration of refugees in the intervention areas. The planned deployment of a local TE for on-site visits to rehabilitated infrastructure and to establish contact with the project executing agency and members of the target group failed due to a lack of TE availability. Due to limited data availability, statements could not be sufficiently substantiated empirically or could only be derived indirectly, for example with regard to efficiency and impact. This limited data basis also hinders the appraisal of any unintended effects that may have occurred.

Assessment methodology

A six-point scale is used to assess the project according to OECD DAC criteria, with the exception of the sustainability criterion. The scale values are as follows:

- Level 1** Very successful: results significantly above expectations
- Level 2** Successful: results fully in line with expectations, without significant shortcomings
- Level 3** Limited success: results below expectations, but positive results predominate
- Level 4** rather unsuccessful: significantly below expectations and negative results dominate despite recognisable positive results
- Level 5** predominantly unsuccessful: despite some positive partial results, the negative results clearly dominate
- Level 6** Completely unsuccessful: the project is useless or the situation has deteriorated

The overall rating on the six-point scale is based on a project-specific rationale for the weighting of the six individual criteria. Levels 1–3 of the overall rating indicate a 'successful' project, while levels 4–6 indicate an 'unsuccessful' project. It should be noted that a project can generally only be classified as "successful" in terms of development policy if both the achievement of objectives at the outcome level (effectiveness) and impact level, as well as sustainability, are appraised at least as "moderately successful" (level 3).

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Responsible: Evaluation Department of KfW Development Bank

FZ-Evaluierung@kfw.de

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KfW Bankengruppe
 Palmengartenstraße 5-9
 60325 Frankfurt am Main, Germany