

Enabling Social Innovation in Syrian Arab Republic



Country Snapshot

Social innovation: "the processes and outcomes of developing novel approaches to address societal challenges facing people and planet." ¹

This snapshot represents a descriptive, non-exhaustive overview of key highlights from Syria's social innovation ecosystem.

- ✓ Direct focus on social innovation
- ⌘ Connected but indirect focus on social innovation
- ✗ No focus on social innovation

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Official Definition of Social Innovation ⌘



No official Syrian government definition of social innovation exists. The most operational working definition in use comes from UNDP Syria's Idea Challenge (launched 2021) — the first social enterprise programme in Syria — which describes a social enterprise as "a business with specific social objectives that reinvests its profits back into the business or the local community." Adjacent terminology present in Syrian policy discourse includes cooperatives (تعاونيات), associations and private institutions, and social entrepreneurship — the latter used primarily by international actors rather than national government. ²

Government Body for Social Innovation ✓



Rather than a dedicated government body for social innovation, relevant responsibilities are spread across social affairs, labour, SME finance, investment and recovery institutions. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor leads related work on social services, NGO registration, labour-market platforms, social protection and youth employment; in 2025, it reported reviving the national labour market platform and registering 1,407 NGOs across Syrian provinces. ³

SME-related institutional support is also relevant. The Loan Risk Guarantee Corporation, established under Law No. 12 of 2016 with capital of SYP 5 billion, supports SME access to finance through participating public banks, private banks and microfinance institutions. ⁴

Government Strategy for Social Innovation ✓



While no standalone government strategy for social innovation was identified, related priorities appear in social protection, cash-transfer planning, youth employment, SME recovery, private-sector dialogue and socio-economic recovery programming in Syria's Five-Year Plans. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor has reported work on multidimensional poverty programmes, social protection and a national youth employment strategy. ³

UNDP's socio-economic recovery and social cohesion portfolio also supports connected goals, including livelihoods, local production, women's economic participation, returnees, displaced people, host communities and crisis-affected areas. ⁵

Policies, Laws & Regulations

No social innovation-specific law was found. Related enabling frameworks include:

- Law No. 93 of 1958 on Associations and Private Institutions: requires MoSAL approval for NGO registration, foreign funding, and fundraising; a revised NGO law has been under development since April 2025.
- Cooperatives legislation: originating with Legislative Decree 65/1950, updated through Law No. 17 of 2007, Decree 99/2011 (housing cooperatives), and Law No. 1 of 2021, which raised the financial ceiling for cooperatives.
- Law No. 12 of 2016 on SME loan-risk guarantees, which aims to improve access to finance, support entrepreneurship and strengthen SME contribution to economic and social development.⁴
- Investment Law No. 18 of 2021, amended by Decree No. 114 of 2025, is also relevant to the broader enabling environment.

The amended framework includes investor guarantees, tax and customs incentives, and provisions allowing full foreign ownership of projects, with exemptions and reductions in selected sectors such as agriculture, health and export-oriented industry.^{6,7}

Official Statistics

No official statistics specifically on social innovation, social enterprises or the social and solidarity economy were identified. Syria maintains a national statistical system through the Central Bureau of Statistics and the Annual Statistical Abstract, but public evidence of dedicated social innovation or social enterprise datasets was not found.⁸

Data availability remains an important constraint for ecosystem assessment. The World Bank's data profile reports a Statistical Performance Indicator score of 32.4 out of 100 for Syria in 2024.⁹

Government Programs

Public programmes most closely connected to social innovation focus on social services, labour-market reactivation, training and social protection rather than social innovation as a named category. In 2025, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor reported rehabilitating social centres, expanding capacity-building activities, drafting social protection and cash-transfer programmes, and strengthening labour-market services.³

A concrete inclusion-focused programme is the US\$2.5 million MoU with Al Habtoor Group to rehabilitate and equip the Institute for People with Multiple Disabilities in Dummar, establish vocational and educational centres, and support services for vulnerable children.³

A prominent example is the UNDP Idea Challenge (2021–ongoing), co-funded by Japan, Germany, Finland, Russia, and Denmark: the first social enterprise programme in Syria, it supported 26 women-led social enterprises with grants and mentorship across regions including Raqqa, Swaida, Lattakia, and Homs.²

ECOSYSTEM

Stakeholders

UNDP is the most visible actor using social enterprise and social innovation-adjacent language in Syria. Its work includes the Idea Challenge for women-led social enterprises, the Accelerator Lab, socio-economic recovery programming and women-led enterprise support.^{2,10}

Local and diaspora-linked ecosystem actors are also active. [Startup Syria](#) supports entrepreneurship and innovation through hackathons, pre-acceleration, Global Entrepreneurship Week Syria and community-building programmes for founders and ecosystem catalysts.¹¹

Support Initiatives



The UNDP Idea Challenge, launched in 2021, was described by UNDP as Syria's first social enterprise programme. It reached more than 200,000 people through its call for applications, received 359 team applications, and selected 50 teams for a four-day bootcamp on business models and business plans.² Other support includes:

- UNDP Accelerator Lab experimentation on farmer compost solutions, local waste, digital exclusion and grassroots learning, as well as Startup Syria's Hack for Syria, which has focused on themes including infrastructure, education, health care, food security, economic development and social cohesion.^{10 12}
- Jusoor: Syrian diaspora NGO running EFMD-accredited entrepreneurship programmes, competitions, and an online incubator; has supported 500+ entrepreneurs and disbursed USD 400,000+ in grants.²³

Collaboration



Collaboration is emerging through UNDP programmes, private-sector dialogue, ecosystem events and partnerships between public authorities, UN agencies, business associations and entrepreneurship organisations. The 2026 Syria Private Sector National Conference agenda includes sessions on women-led business, youth entrepreneurship, innovation for social impact, investment services, banking linkages and de-risking finance.¹³

FINANCE

Financing Schemes



No systematic estimate of social innovation-specific finance was identified. Syria is in the early stages of re-integrating into international development finance. Reconstruction costs are estimated at USD 216 billion, underscoring the scale of financing needed.²⁴ Available financing appears project-based and includes UNDP grants and mentoring, SME credit guarantees, development finance, investment incentives and recovery-related international funding.

Examples include the Idea Challenge, where 26 winning teams received financial support and mentorship with German funding; the SYP 5 billion Loan Risk Guarantee Corporation for SMEs; and the World Bank's US\$146 million IDA grant to improve electricity supply and support sector recovery.^{14 4 15}

Financing Inclusivity



Inclusive financing and support are most visible for women, youth, persons with disabilities, crisis-affected communities, displaced people, returnees and local MSMEs. UNDP's women-led social enterprise programming, for example, explicitly targets women's economic empowerment and community solidarity.²

Other examples include Warak Ateek, a social enterprise employing women with developmental disabilities, and UNDP's Women Safe Incubator Space in Deir ez-Zor, which supported 25 women with business development training and start-up grants.^{14 16}

SOCIETY

Public Awareness of Social Innovation



- Public use of the term "social innovation" remains limited. Related discourse is more often framed around social enterprise, inclusive growth, local recovery, entrepreneurship, social cohesion, women's economic empowerment and youth employment.^{2 13}
- The growing visibility of hackathons, entrepreneurship weeks and private-sector dialogue suggests increasing public attention to innovation and recovery, even where social innovation is not used as the main label.^{11 12}

Research ✓ 🔗



- No dedicated Syrian academic centre for social innovation was identified in public sources. Practitioner research and learning appear mainly through UNDP Accelerator Lab experimentation and ecosystem-building activities around entrepreneurship, recovery and grassroots solutions. ¹⁰

Education & Human Capital ✓ 🔗



- No formal social innovation degree or credential was identified. Related human-capital development is provided through entrepreneurship bootcamps, incubator training, labour-market platform services, hackathons, youth programmes and private-sector dialogue on skills, jobs and innovation for social impact. ^{2 3 13}

Entrepreneurship



Business Environment

Syria is listed for future B-READY 2027 coverage, but no current B-READY country results are yet available. ¹⁹



Innovation Capacity

Syria is not currently represented in several major global entrepreneurship and innovation datasets used for cross-country comparison. No Syria-specific Global Innovation Index 2025 rank was identified; the 2025 GII covers 139 economies. ¹⁷



Social entrepreneurship prevalence

Similarly, no Syria-specific GEM National Entrepreneurial Context Index or social entrepreneurship indicator was identified in the latest GEM global report, which draws on data from 53 economies. ¹⁸

Social & Environmental Consciousness



Comparable public indicators remain limited. No Syria-specific CAF 2025 volunteerism figure, World Values Survey solidarity indicator or EIU political participation score was identified in accessible current sources.



EU Climate Action Progress

World Bank data report CO₂ emissions of 1.3 tonnes per capita in 2024 and annual freshwater withdrawals equivalent to 196% of internal renewable resources in 2022, underlining acute water stress. ^{2 22}



Political participation



Volunteering



Sustainability

Environmental data also remains uneven. Syria is not clearly listed in the 2024 Environmental Performance Index ranking table