

The Youth Situation in NES

- Security Challenges
- Political Challenges
- Economic Challenges
- Education



ASO Center for Consultancy and Strategic Studies

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Introduction:

The **youth** group is considered one of the most significant groups in society, in the political, social and economic sectors, and others. It attracts the interest of all governments to invest them optimally, as they are the driving and effective force in their programs, projects and strategic plans, whether with regard to preparation and rehabilitation or change and development. It is considered a double-edged sword, since it is a powerful force and a vital source of energy. The matter is related to the mechanism by which this power can be dealt with and how it is established, directed and invested, to be a factor in construction or destruction.

This group has suffered many difficulties and obstacles and has been subjected to many restrictions and marginalization in Syria, in the educational, economic and political sectors, under the Ba'athist regime. As all youth organizations were contained in Al-Ba'ath regime, in terms of thought and practice. It also, imposed restrictions through its security grip in all fields, preventing the youth from achieving their visions, aspirations and goals. Gradually, this transformed them into a passive and hopeless force, or a secret force subject to prosecution and arrest.

The suffering was greater in northern Syria, which is predominantly Kurdish and the security grip was even more severe. As they were the most dangerous areas and a threat to the Syrian regime, which used to devote particular policies, procedures and laws to them. As well as, it worked to marginalize them and not develop them, to make them the most inaccessible to services, infrastructure and educational institutions. They were the poorest and most unemployed, despite having all of the underground and agricultural Syrian wealth and livestock.

After 2011, the youth held high hopes for the Syrian revolution and had the most prominent role in organizing and leading demonstrations, calling for freedom and the overthrow of the regime. However, those hopes were soon dashed after the revolution outcome and the undertaken failures and divisions. Moreover, Syria's transformation into an open arena for international and regional conflict.

The Youth Situation in NES:

The **youth** in NES were the most active and participating group in the popular protests, since their launch in March 2011. They raised great expectations for the revolution in order to break out of the oppression and marginalization. Moreover, to bring about a radical change in all institutions and structures and to transform into a democratic system that guarantees all civil and political freedoms and rights. These elements that did not exist under the Ba'athist regime, of which did not hesitate to confront those peaceful demonstrations with weapons and fire.

The revolution gradually stripped of its peaceful aspect and became an armed one. Also, many divisions took place within the opposition ranks. The youth aspirations were quickly dispelled

after the change in the revolution context and the intervention of many regional and international parties in the Syrian conflict. In addition to its attraction and support of many groups and movements, which became a means to achieve its interests and agendas.

After the emergence of the Islamic State (ISIS) in NES areas, many sacrifices were made, most of which were from the youth, who were able to defeat the organization and liberate the areas that were under its control. In spite of this, neither NES nor its youth enjoyed stability, this was a result of Turkish threats and Turkey's repeated military attacks, along with the armed opposition factions, or the so-called "Free Syrian Army", on the border cities and towns in the Self-Administration areas. They, consequently occupied Afrin and the cities of Ras Al-Ain and Tell Abyad, committing many crimes and violations against civilians, such as looting and seizing property, carrying out extrajudicial executions and preventing IDPs return. This is according to the Human Rights Organization report, which was issued on November 27, 2019.¹

Challenges Facing the Youth in NES:

The youth in NES face many economic, political, security and educational challenges in the course of their daily life. This negatively, reflects on their reality and future at the same time. These challenges are the outcome of the Syrian government systematic policies in the past. Their repercussions have been exacerbated in the disastrous context of the Syrian revolution since the start of the popular protests in March 2011, of which the youth were the essential support and motive. They have carried the greatest burden and responsibility for 9 years, which resulted in severe devastation on all institutions, structures and all segments and sections of society. The ongoing conflict for more than 9 years, the interference of local, regional and international parties and the absence of political agreements, have contributed in increasing the magnitude of these challenges, the most prominent of which are:

1- Security Challenges:

The lack of security is a common feature among the majority of areas throughout the Syrian territories, which has become an open arena for political and military conflicts between various local, regional and international forces. The youth group are among the groups most affected by the poor security conditions. As they were always on the wanted list for arrest, which constituted an impediment to continuing their studies and forced many of them to travel or seek asylum outside the country. The lack of security also affected the economic situation and the commercial movement and was a main cause of the migration of many workforces and those with experience and expertise.

Although areas of the Self-Administration are considered among the most secure areas, has a relative stability and is a destination for the displacement of thousands of families from other

¹ Human Rights Watch: Syria: Violations against civilians in "safe areas"
<https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2019/11/27/335938>

areas. However, military conflicts in many periods, have disturbed security and stability and sapped the strength of many young people in confrontations with the Syrian government and ISIS, especially in the cities of Raqqa and Deir Ezzor, and the Turkish forces and armed opposition factions supported by them. In addition to the presence of many armed forces and factions within the same geographical area, which reduced the security level in light of tensions and the consensus absence. Likewise, the underlying conflicts preparing to start, which many local and regional forces seek to fuel and intensify; in order to create more chaos and rivalry between the components that make up the social structure in NES.

2- Political Challenges:

Most of the political parties were seeking to attract the youth group and attract them to work in their ranks, however at the same time they were pursuing policies based on marginalizing them. As they did not have any leadership positions in these parties, and their activity, motivation and desire for change, in many cases, was viewed as a kind of political adolescence. This led to their ineffectiveness on the one hand and the reluctance of many to take political action on the other hand. One of the reasons for the reluctance was also the failure of the political parties to achieve any of their goals, or any achievement at the political or social level, which made them lose the masses' confidence. It also, made them feel the futility of political action under a security system that suppresses any civil or political activity and considers it a threat to its national security.

After March 2011, the youth found in the Syrian revolution a path towards freedom and change, during which they showed their potential energies and played the most prominent role in participation, organization and leadership, media coverage and violations documentation. However, due to the change of the context, external interventions and the absence of political consensus, the youth lost hope in resolving the crisis, amid the intense rivalry and divisions that made the revolution lose its content. Consequently, the youth once again found themselves in a vicious circle, facing a deliberate marginalization of participation in political life by local authorities on the one hand and the opposition political forces, most of which were from the older generation, on the other hand. Not to mention the intellectual and political heritage frailty that these forces presented to the youth groups, as their achievements are almost devoid of successful experiences.

The lack of political education and awareness among the majority of the youth has resulted in an intellectual and ideological loss and confusion that many still suffer from till this day.

3- Economic Challenges:

The deteriorating economic situation in NES is considered one of the most essential factors affecting the youth situation, including poor living conditions, lack of job opportunities, low wages and salaries and high rates of poverty and unemployment. Although the Self-

Administration has increased the salaries of workers and employees in its institutions by %150,² the sharp decline in the value of the Syrian pound against foreign currencies, especially after the Caesar Act came into force and the rise in the prices of goods and consumables, made this increase unable to meet the living requirements of many families. Not to mention the miserable circumstances of workers and employees in the Syrian government institutions, whose salaries do not exceed \$30. This fact forces many people to work in two or more jobs to cover basic expenses and needs.

This dire economic situation has forced many young people in NES to emigrate. It also led to the spread of single-people phenomenon among youths, as they are unable to bear marriage costs and housing. Moreover, high unemployment rates have, in turn, led to many psychological and social issues.

4- The Deterioration in the Education Sector:

The education sector is one of the sectors most affected during the 9 years of the Syrian revolution. It has witnessed significant damage and decline, whether at the level of structures and institutions or at the level of administrative and teaching staff and students. Even educational facilities were not spared from the military attacks, as many of them were destroyed and became out of service. Thousands of students were deprived of education at all levels of education, the rate of school dropout increased, and many university youths were unable to complete their university studies in cities of the interior and the Syrian coast. This was due to the security situation, students' fear of arrest campaigns and their forcible enrollment in the mandatory military service. In addition to the closure of roads leading to many of the universities, such as; Aleppo University and Euphrates University in Deir Ezzor.

The education sector has undertaken various stages throughout the Syrian geography during the war years, of complete suspension in the areas that suffered sieges and military battles. Residents of these areas were forced to settle in tents far from engagements' posts. They were distributed over agricultural lands, gardens, and buildings that are not proper for housing, thus children were completely deprived from education, especially those born after 2011. According to UNICEF estimates, the number of Syrian children not registered in schools in Syria and the neighboring countries is approximately 2.8 million one.³

Furthermore, there are two educational curricula in NES; the Self-Administration curriculum and the Syrian government curriculum of Syria's Ministry of Education. The recent Self-Administration curriculum, which requires a lot of experience in terms of its preparation or the teaching staff, is not recognized neither internationally nor by the Syrian regime. In addition, the difficult living conditions and the inability of many youth to handle studying expenses, as

² Hawar News Agency: The Self-Administration decides to increase the workers' salaries working in its institutions by %150. <https://cutt.us/AmvN2>

³ Education in NES (Response and Challenges in Light of COVID-19 Pandemic) <https://www.asocenter.org/ar/node/627>

they are forced to work, had a major role in school dropout and interruption of education, as well as failure to complete their education in advanced educational stages.

The educational process in NES was previously suspended more than once, due to the Turkish military attacks on Kurdish cities, the bombing of civilian houses and the displacement outside their cities. On October 9, 2019, the Turkish army and Syrian Islamist factions attacked the cities of Serêkaniyê/Ras Al-Ain and Tell Abyad, bombing all border cities in NES. This led to the suspension of the educational process completely, after the Turkish army targeted schools, educational institutions and civilian homes with artillery.⁴

Recommendations and Conclusions:

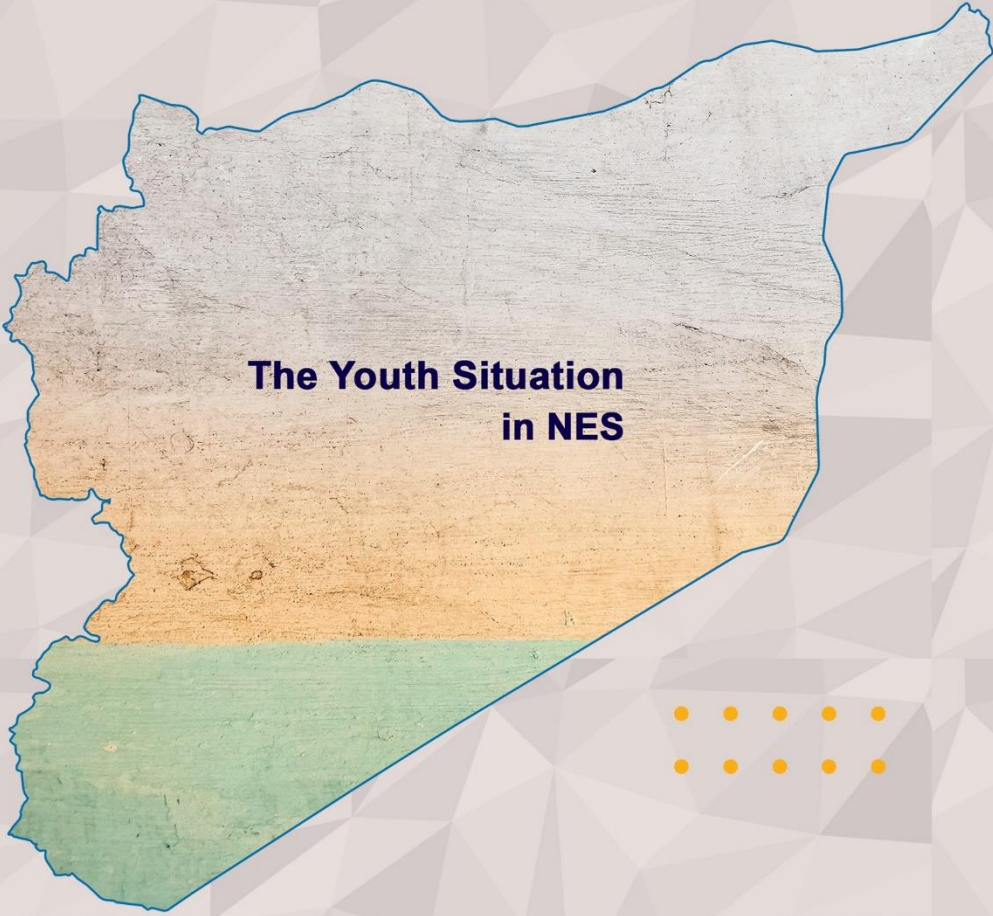
The general context in NES and in light of the absence of security, stability and political consensus, and the deterioration of economic conditions, especially in light of COVID-19 pandemic and the Caesar Act, creates a threat to the youth situation at all levels. It also, represents an exacerbation of the challenges and obstacles they face, which makes it imperative for the actors to further take responsibility for the youth's advancement and improving their conditions at all levels. They should as well, strive to create an encouraging environment; that is able to secure public services and optimally invest and activate their energies, through:

- Providing more job opportunities and increasing wages and salaries in a manner that commensurate with the requirements of a decent living.
- Supporting youth representation and participation in all institutions and bodies, in political life and decision-making.
- Attention to education, curriculum development and the teaching staff improvement.
- Opening vocational institutes for the youth who were unable to obtain a preparatory or high school certificate and have a desire to learn industrial, trade, or information professions.
- Reconsidering the recruitment law, reducing the period of compulsory service to 6 months or canceling it and considering volunteering only.
- Encouraging reading, sports, and music, and working on opening reading libraries, sports fields, well-equipped swimming pools and art galleries (for drawing and music).

⁴ Education in NES (Response and Challenges in Light of COVID-19 Pandemic)
<https://www.asocenter.org/ar/node/627>

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- 1- Human Rights Watch: Syria: Violations against civilians in "safe areas"
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