SAEA | SYRIAN AMERICAN ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION

Rebuilding Syria: Recommendations for Establishing Engineering Services Business in Syria's Transitional Economy

Executive Summary

Syria's post-conflict landscape presents a monumental, albeit complex, opportunity for engineering services. Decades of devastating conflict have resulted in catastrophic infrastructure damage, with approximately 50% of basic infrastructure destroyed and over 70% of the population reliant on aid.[1] However, recent geopolitical shifts and the lifting of international sanctions by the European Union and the United States have opened critical avenues for foreign investment and private sector engagement, signaling a pivotal shift from emergency relief to sustainable development.[2]

High-demand areas for engineering services include the urgent rehabilitation and modernization of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) systems, critical energy infrastructure with significant focus on renewable energy systems and transmission and distribution networks, extensive housing and urban reconstruction, vital transportation networks, and foundational digital infrastructure.[5] Success for foreign engineering firms will necessitate a nuanced understanding of the evolving regulatory environment, strategic partnerships with local entities and international organizations, a steadfast commitment to sustainable and community-centered practices, and proactive engagement with emerging funding mechanisms like Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs).[8]

1. Introduction: The Syrian Context for Engineering Services

1.1 Overview of Syria's Post-Conflict Landscape

Syria is currently navigating a profoundly fragile transition after years of extraordinary conflict, confronting immense challenges that include a broken economy, widespread poverty affecting 90% of its population, and a severe humanitarian crisis where 70% of Syrians rely on aid.[1] The economic devastation has been staggering, with costs estimated to have reached US$923 billion by the end of 2024, a figure that highlights the immense scale of recovery required.[5]

Despite lingering sociopolitical and sectarian tensions, major spikes in violence have been short-lived, offering a fragile hope for gradual stabilization.[1] The fall of the former regime in December 2024 marked a significant turning point, with the new leadership outlining a five-year roadmap focused on restoring essential state functions and actively engaging international partners for the country's recovery.[6] This situation presents a compelling paradox: while the political transition remains delicate, the sheer magnitude of destruction and humanitarian need creates an undeniable imperative for reconstruction. This dynamic implies that investment opportunities, though inherently high-risk due to the ongoing fragility, also carry the potential for high-impact and substantial returns, driven by both humanitarian necessity and the new government's declared intent to rebuild. The severity of infrastructure destruction and the ongoing humanitarian crisis directly necessitate urgent engineering interventions, making these services a priority even amidst the prevailing political uncertainties. The fragile stabilization, while a risk factor, simultaneously offers a crucial window to address these critical needs.

1.2 The Strategic Opportunity for Engineering Services in Rebuilding a Post-Conflict Economy

The conflict has inflicted monumental damage on Syria's physical infrastructure, with an estimated US$118 billion in destruction by 2020 and reconstruction costs estimated over US$400 billion, underscoring the vast scope for reconstruction efforts.[5] This extensive damage positions infrastructure rebuilding as a primary engine for the country's economic recovery.

The current government's pivot towards a liberal economic model, coupled with stated plans to privatize state-owned assets such as ports and factories, signals a strong push to attract private-sector investment in infrastructure.[8] This strategic shift is anticipated to generate substantial foreign direct investment (FDI), with projections indicating a surge from $500 million in 2025 to $15 billion by 2030.[8] The scale of destruction, while tragic, thus paradoxically provides the foundation for future economic growth. Engineering services are not merely a supporting industry in this context; they are a central, driving force for this projected economic surge. The immense need for reconstruction acts as a powerful economic catalyst, attracting significant capital and potentially reshaping Syria's economic structure for decades to come. Engineering firms entering Syria are positioned not just as contractors but as foundational partners in the nation's economic rebirth, necessitating a long-term strategic vision that aligns with the country's projected growth trajectory.

2. Current State of Infrastructure and Economic Landscape

2.1 Infrastructure Damage Assessment

The conflict has left Syria's infrastructure in a state of severe disrepair, presenting a colossal challenge for recovery. Approximately 50% of the country's basic infrastructure is destroyed [1] A 2022 assessment by the World Bank and the European Union estimated total damage across 14 selected cities at US$8.7–11.4 billion, with 6.8–7.8 billion, attributed specifically to physical infrastructure.[21]

- **Housing:** The housing sector has been profoundly impacted, with an estimated 328,000 homes completely destroyed and another million housing units moderately or minorly damaged. This totals nearly one-third of Syria's housing stock (1.3 million units).[5] In areas like Rural Damascus, up to 70% of homes were reduced to rubble.[6] This widespread destruction has fueled the growth of informal settlements, which now account for over 60% of urban housing, and has created an urgent need for shelter assistance for 5.7 million people.[5] A significant challenge for rebuilding efforts is the pervasive lack of ownership documents, affecting 40% of returnees surveyed.[6]
- **Water and Sanitation (WASH):** More than 50% of Syria's water treatment plants and sewerage systems are either damaged or non-functional, leading to a critical situation where 14 million people (more than half the population) lack adequate access to essential WASH services.[5] The country's water supply has decreased by 40% compared to pre-war levels, and an estimated 50% of the country's water is no longer being treated safely, contributing to severe environmental and health risks.[5] There is an urgent need to rehabilitate drinking water treatment plants and main power stations to restore services.[7] Access to water remains "equally scant" in many areas, with recent hostilities threatening to deprive hundreds of thousands more of clean water.[6]
- **Energy and Electricity:** The energy and electricity sector is severely degraded, with over 70% of power plants and transmission lines sustaining significant damage.[5] This has reduced

the national grid's capacity by more than 75% and energy production by 80% since the onset of the conflict, resulting in widespread and prolonged power outages that hinder economic activity and welfare.[5] While rehabilitated power stations currently have a capacity of 5,000 MW, the actual demand is estimated at approximately 7,000 MW, indicating a substantial shortfall.[24] Fuel supplies have also dropped to nearly zero.[1]

- **Transportation:** Roads, bridges, and public transport infrastructure are in disrepair across the country.[8] There is an urgent need for various service vehicles and equipment, including excavators, cranes, and heavy machinery for rubble removal, as well as buses for transportation.[7]
- **Digital Infrastructure:** Syria's digital backbone, encompassing fiber cables, cell towers, and data centers, lies largely in ruins. The internet landscape is fragmented, with communities in former opposition-held areas often relying on Turkish ISPs and a patchwork of local providers.[10] In May 2025, the newly appointed Minister of Communications unveiled a unification strategy, the SilkLink and Ugarit 2 initiatives, aimed at rebuilding the digital infrastructure and bridging these divided networks to create a modern, nationally integrated telecom system.[10]
- **Other Social Infrastructure:** Beyond core utilities, over 50% of Syria's education and healthcare facilities are non-functional.[5] Many schools are completely destroyed or require extensive renovation, incurring significant operational costs.[7] The healthcare system is severely degraded, with nearly 40% of its infrastructure non-functional and only about 2.4 doctors per 1,000 people remaining, far below international standards.[25] Homes, public institutions, and marketplaces across the country urgently need support for restoration and rehabilitation to encourage the dignified return of displaced people.[7]

The pervasive destruction of physical infrastructure, particularly in sectors like water, electricity, and housing, is not merely a structural problem; it directly exacerbates the humanitarian crisis. This widespread damage prevents the safe return of millions of displaced populations and perpetuates poverty for those who remain. This situation underscores that engineering solutions in Syria must be intrinsically linked with broader humanitarian and social recovery efforts to achieve lasting effectiveness and sustainability. The lack of functional infrastructure directly translates into a lack of basic services, which in turn traps the population in a cycle of poverty and hinders the return of refugees. Therefore, engineering is not just about constructing buildings and systems; it is about enabling human dignity and facilitating comprehensive recovery. This implies that engineering firms should consider a "nexus" approach, integrating humanitarian, development, and peace objectives into their projects.[15] Such an integrated approach can also open up crucial funding avenues from international donors who prioritize these holistic recovery strategies.[15]

Table 1: Key Infrastructure Damage Assessment (by Sector)

Sector	Extent of Damage	Key Needs	Relevant Sources
Housing	1.3 million units (approx. 1/3 of stock) destroyed/damaged; 328K completely destroyed; 70% destroyed in Rural Damascus; 40%	Rehabilitation, new construction, rubble removal, property rights restoration.	[5]

	returnees lack ownership documents.		
Water & Sanitation (WASH)	50%+ treatment plants/sewerage systems damaged/non-functional; 14 million people lack adequate access; 40% decrease in water supply; 50% untreated water.	Rehabilitation of water treatment plants, sewerage systems, main power stations for pumping; provision of clean water access.	[5]
Energy & Electricity	70%+ power plants/transmission lines damaged; 75%+ national grid capacity reduced; 80% drop in energy production; 2,000 MW deficit (5GW capacity vs 7GW demand); near-zero fuel supplies.	Rehabilitation of power plants and transmission lines; new power generation (especially renewables); secure fuel supply.	[1]
Transportation	Roads, bridges, utilities in disrepair; agri-food value chains distorted (82% markets damaged).	Upgrading railroads, highways, airports; road/sidewalk rehabilitation; debris removal; provision of service vehicles (excavators, cranes, buses).	[7]
Digital Infrastructure	Digital backbone (fiber cables, cell towers, data centers) in ruins; fragmented internet.	Rebuilding fiber networks, cell towers, data centers; network unification; smart city solutions.	[10]
Health Facilities	50%+ healthcare facilities non-functional; nearly 40% health infrastructure non-functional; only 2.4 doctors/1,000	Rehabilitation of hospitals/clinics; provision of medical equipment; establishing new specialized centers.	[5]

	people.		
Education Facilities	Many schools destroyed/require renovation; 2.4 million children out of school.	Repairing/renovating schools; expanding education opportunities; operational cost coverage.	[5]

2.2 Economic Overview and Investment Climate

Syria's economy is profoundly broken, having experienced a decline of over 70% from 2010 to 2017.[1] This economic collapse has resulted in severe social consequences, with unemployment reaching 50% in 2017 and 90% of Syrians living below the poverty line.[16] The Syrian pound has lost 99% of its value, further exacerbating the economic hardship.[1]

The country's economy in 2017 was largely service-oriented, with services contributing 60.4% of GDP, while industry accounted for 19.6%.[16] The Syrian government's capacity to fund large-scale reconstruction is severely limited; it has struggled with dwindling foreign exchange reserves, rising budget and trade deficits, and a dramatic reduction in public spending. Investment expenditures, which are vital for infrastructure development and economic recovery, plummeted from US

5.3 billion in 2010 to a mere US 0.3 billion in 2022.[5] This indicates that the government's budget alone cannot support the massive increases in infrastructure spending required.[13]

This severe depletion of government finances and capacity means that large-scale reconstruction cannot be solely state-funded. This creates a strong imperative for private sector involvement and Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), making foreign investment not just desirable but essential for Syria's recovery. The government's shift towards a liberal economic model and its pursuit of PPPs directly opens the door for private capital and expertise, positioning PPPs as a primary mechanism for undertaking large-scale projects. Despite these formidable challenges, Syria offers compelling investment advantages for those willing to engage. These include a strategic geographical location, a skilled workforce available at low operating costs, numerous underserved sectors with high growth potential, and increasing government incentives designed to attract foreign capital.[20]

2.3 Sanctions and Foreign Investment Environment

A significant turning point for foreign investment occurred in May 2025 with the easing of international sanctions. The European Union formally adopted legal acts lifting nearly all remaining economic sanctions on Syria, including those impacting the energy, transport, and financial services sectors. Exceptions remain for measures related to security concerns, such as arms embargoes.[2] Concurrently, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) issued General License No. 25, which authorizes US persons to provide services, conduct new investments, import petroleum, and transact with the new Syrian government and certain state-owned enterprises.[2] While the US Caesar Act waiver is time-bound and full revocation requires Congressional action, these decisions are crucial for facilitating financial flows into Syria.[17]

Further catalyzing financial reintegration, Syria's banking sector reconnected to the SWIFT financial system in May 2025. This is a critical milestone, enabling cross-border transactions and attracting much-needed liquidity and expertise, and is widely seen as a "linchpin" for financial reintegration and foreign direct investment.[8]

Despite this significant sanctions relief, the Syrian banking sector continues to face deep-seated structural challenges. These include weak management, a lack of expertise, outdated software systems, limited capital, and low public trust, which has historically led to reliance on informal hawala networks for financial transfers.[17] To restore international trust, the banking system requires substantial modernization of its technical systems, strict compliance with international standards such as ISO 20022 for transfer messages, and adherence to anti-money laundering (AML) and counter-terrorism financing (CTF) regulations.[28] Foreign banks remain cautious due to perceived risks.[28] The Central Bank has also demonstrated active regulatory oversight by revoking licenses of some currency exchange companies due to compliance issues.[30] Furthermore, lingering sanctions on former regime figures (until June 2026) and US restrictions tied to counterterrorism efforts could still impede full normalization.[8]

The recent sanctions relief and SWIFT reintegration represent massive enablers for foreign investment, effectively removing many legal barriers to financial transactions. However, the underlying structural weaknesses and the prevailing lack of trust in Syria's financial institutions mean that financial operations will remain complex. This situation creates a strong need for specialized financial advisory services and emphasizes the importance for foreign engineering firms to conduct thorough due diligence and potentially seek robust financial guarantees or channel funds through international financial institutions. The removal of legal impediments does not automatically translate to frictionless financial operations; the pre-existing institutional weaknesses will limit the efficiency and safety of these flows, necessitating a parallel overhaul of the banking sector. Therefore, engineering firms should anticipate potential financial friction, factor in higher transaction costs, and explore alternative payment mechanisms where permissible. This also opens a niche for firms specializing in financial infrastructure modernization and compliance consulting.

The transitional government, aligning with the prescriptions of international financial institutions, has announced plans for rapid privatization of state assets, including ports and factories, and a move towards foreign currency liberalization.[18] World Bank staff are already reportedly conducting preliminary assessments of public infrastructure, indicating a readiness for significant private sector participation in these areas.[19]

3. Identification of High-Demand Engineering Service Sectors

The scale of destruction across Syria's infrastructure creates extensive opportunities for engineering services. Critical sectors for intervention include:

3.1 Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Engineering

The WASH sector faces immense needs, with over 50% of water treatment plants and sewerage systems damaged or non-functional, leaving 14 million people without adequate access to essential WASH services.[5] The country's water supply has decreased by 40% compared to pre-war levels, and the lack of safe wastewater treatment poses severe environmental and health risks.[5] There is an urgent need to rehabilitate drinking water treatment plants and main power stations to restore water services.[7] Access to water remains "equally scant" in many areas, with recent hostilities

threatening to deprive hundreds of thousands more of clean water.[6]

This pervasive lack of WASH services is a primary barrier to the safe return of displaced populations and a major public health risk.[5] This elevates WASH engineering from a mere infrastructure project to a critical humanitarian and social stability imperative, making it a high-priority sector likely to attract sustained international funding. Opportunities exist in the rehabilitation of water networks, solid waste systems, and sanitation facilities.[15] Projects like the ILO's work in Aleppo have already included the repair of sewage networks and clearing of manholes.[26] Specific tenders from organizations like UNHCR and UNDP are active for water projects, including "Rehabilitation of Water Network in Aleppo" and "Restoration of the Wastewater".[31] UNICEF also maintains a strong focus on WASH initiatives, indicating ongoing demand for related products and services.[25] Engineering firms specializing in WASH solutions are likely to find strong backing from humanitarian and development agencies such as UNICEF, UNHCR, IOM, UNDP, NRC, and the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) [15], making this a relatively stable entry point, particularly for those adept at working with international organizations.

3.2 Energy and Electricity Infrastructure

Syria's energy sector is in ruins, with over 70% of power plants and transmission lines significantly damaged.[5] This has reduced the national grid's capacity by more than 75% and energy production by 80%, leading to chronic electricity shortages that disrupt daily life and stifle economic growth.[5] The current demand for electricity, estimated at 7,000 MW, substantially outstrips the rehabilitated capacity of 5,000 MW, highlighting a critical deficit.[24] Fuel supplies are also nearly depleted.[1]

This energy crisis presents a unique dual opportunity: immediate rehabilitation of conventional grids to meet urgent demand, and a long-term strategic pivot towards renewable energy, driven by both necessity (due to fuel shortages) and significant private investment. Opportunities in traditional energy include the restoration of electricity grids and gas pipelines [8], and the rehabilitation of main power stations.[7] Regional cooperation, such as Turkey's pledge of 6 million cubic meters of gas daily, could also improve supply.[24]

A major area of growth is renewable energy. Syria possesses abundant renewable energy resources, particularly well-suited for solar and wind projects.[36] A landmark $7 billion investment agreement has been signed with a private company for the construction of 750 MW solar power plants (600 MW and 150 MW in Homs province), aiming to transform energy infrastructure and create jobs.[9] Additionally, two 100 MW solar projects and a wind energy project have already been initiated.[24] The European Union's recent lifting of sanctions on oil and telecommunications entities creates a clear path for renewed oil and gas extraction and accelerated renewable energy development.[3] This indicates a need for diverse engineering expertise, ranging from traditional power systems to specialized renewable energy solutions. Engineering firms should therefore build capabilities in both conventional power grid rehabilitation and renewable energy project development (solar, wind). Partnering with firms already involved in these large-scale renewable projects, such as the Qatari-based UCC Holding which signed an MOU for 4,000 MW gas power plants and a 1,000 MW solar plant [27], could offer a strategic entry point into this burgeoning sector.

3.3 Housing and Urban Reconstruction

The housing sector has been devastated, with nearly one-third of Syria's housing stock (1.3 million units) either completely destroyed or severely damaged.[5] This widespread destruction is a

significant impediment to the return of millions of displaced Syrians, with almost half of surveyed returnees finding their homes destroyed or uninhabitable.[6] The inability to fully rebuild homes and cities poses immense challenges, and restoring homes, public institutions, and marketplaces is an urgent priority.[6]

Rebuilding housing is not just about constructing structures; it is fundamental to enabling the safe return of millions of displaced Syrians.[5] This creates a massive, sustained demand for housing and urban planning services, with a strong emphasis on integrating sustainable and resilient practices given the history of conflict and environmental considerations. Opportunities abound in urban rebuilding, including the reconstruction of residential and commercial real estate in major cities like Damascus and Aleppo.[8] Initial steps involve comprehensive damage surveying and condition assessment of buildings to lay the groundwork for reconstruction.[36]

A significant opportunity lies in integrating sustainable construction practices. This includes recycling debris into new construction materials, as demonstrated by the ILO project in Aleppo [26], and utilizing traditional eco-friendly designs such as mindful orientation, natural ventilation, and insulation with local materials like clay and straw.[39] Modern green building elements like double glazing and solar heating can also be incorporated to repurpose damaged post-war buildings into smart, green spaces.[39] Engineering firms should specialize in rapid, large-scale, and sustainable housing solutions, including innovative material use (e.g., recycled debris), and potentially engage with organizations focused on property rights restoration [22] to navigate the legal complexities faced by returnees.

3.4 Transportation Network Development

Syria's transportation infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and utilities, is in disrepair, hindering connectivity and economic activity.[8] There is an urgent need for service vehicles and heavy machinery for rubble removal to clear pathways and facilitate reconstruction.[7]

Beyond immediate mobility, the rehabilitation and upgrade of transportation networks are crucial for reviving trade, facilitating the movement of goods and people, and enabling broader economic recovery. This makes transportation engineering a foundational service for long-term growth. Opportunities include upgrading railroads, highways, and airports to connect Syria with regional trade hubs.[8] Repairing key feeder roads is also essential for improving access to communities.[40] The ILO project in Aleppo demonstrated successful interventions in road and sidewalk rehabilitation, cleaning, and maintenance activities, which improved urban mobility and safety.[26] Engineering firms focusing on transportation should consider the broader regional connectivity goals and the potential for Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in large-scale projects like highways and airports, as these are often attractive to foreign investors.[8]

3.5 Digital Infrastructure Modernization

Syria's digital backbone, including fiber cables, cell towers, and data centers, lies largely in ruins, and the internet infrastructure is fragmented.[10] A significant challenge is the lack of digital infrastructure in rural areas and remote governorates.[11]

Digital infrastructure is not merely a sector in itself; it is a fundamental enabler for all other recovery efforts, from e-learning and digital health to modernizing financial services and e-commerce. This implies a high, sustained demand for telecommunications, network, and IT engineering services, with potential for rapid growth and integration across multiple sectors. The

new Minister of Communications unveiled a unification strategy (SilkLink and Ugarit 2 initiatives) in May 2025 to rebuild digital infrastructure and bridge divided networks.[10] The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) unprecedented $1.3 billion, three-year support package for Syria specifically targets digital transformation, including funding 200 technology startups and establishing tech innovation centers in Damascus and Aleppo.[4] Significant opportunities also exist in advanced technological fields such as artificial intelligence, financial technologies, and cybersecurity.[12] Digital transformation is viewed as crucial for strengthening the economy and improving the quality of both public and private services for citizens.[11] Engineering firms with expertise in fiber optics, wireless networks, data centers, and IT infrastructure, particularly those incorporating AI and cybersecurity solutions, will find substantial opportunities. Strategic partnerships with emerging tech startups and proactive engagement with government digital transformation initiatives will be key for success.

3.6 Other Critical Engineering Needs

Beyond the major sectors, several other areas present critical engineering needs that contribute significantly to overall recovery and human well-being. The failure of basic services like health and education has a cascading negative effect on human capital and long-term societal development. Investing in these areas provides not only immediate humanitarian relief but also lays the groundwork for a future skilled workforce and a healthier population, both essential for sustained reconstruction.

- **Health Sector:** All health services require immediate support, including the provision of ambulances for referral systems and essential drug kits for hospitals, particularly for chronic illnesses.[7] Over 50% of healthcare facilities are non-functional, and the country faces a severe shortage of medical professionals, with only 2.4 doctors per 1,000 people remaining.[5] Opportunities exist in establishing new hospitals, clinics, and specialized medical centers.[12]
- **Education Sector:** Many schools have been completely destroyed, while others require extensive renovation and operational funding for heating fuel and stationery.[7] At least 2.4 million children are currently out of school.[25] Opportunities include repairing and expanding education facilities.[23]
- **Waste Management:** There is an urgent need for various service vehicles, including solid waste collection vehicles, to support basic service delivery to vulnerable populations.[7] Opportunities also arise in improving environmental sustainability by recycling debris into construction materials, promoting green recovery and sustainable material use.[26]
- **Industrial and Agricultural Facilities:** The destruction has extended to critical infrastructure supporting economic sectors, including telecommunications, irrigation channels, sewage systems, and agricultural facilities.[41] Opportunities exist in industrial contraction and supporting sustainable agricultural practices.[16] Local engineering industries demonstrate competence in constructing buildings for industrial plants, such as solvent extraction plants, and in carrying out equipment installation, piping, and electrical work.[42]

Engineering firms can contribute significantly by specializing in the design and construction of resilient, modern healthcare and educational facilities. This also ties into opportunities for specialized training and vocational programs aimed at building the workforce needed for these critical sectors.[37]

Table 2: High-Demand Engineering Services & Opportunities

Sector	Specific Engineering Services	Key Needs/Drivers	Relevant Sources
WASH	Water treatment plant design & rehabilitation, sewerage system repair, water network distribution, solid waste management, wastewater treatment.	50%+ plants non-functional, 14M lack access, health risks, returnee needs.	[5]
Energy	Power plant rehabilitation, transmission line repair, grid modernization, solar PV system installation, wind farm development, oil & gas extraction infrastructure.	70%+ power infrastructure damaged, 2GW deficit, $7B solar investment, EU sanctions lifted.	[3]
Housing & Urban	Residential & commercial building reconstruction, structural assessment & rehabilitation, urban planning, debris removal & recycling, sustainable building design.	1.3M units damaged/destroyed, returnee housing, green recovery, rubble utilization.	[5]
Transportation	Road & highway rehabilitation, bridge repair & construction, airport upgrades, railroad development, public transport infrastructure, heavy machinery operation.	Roads/bridges in disrepair, trade route restoration, need for transport vehicles.	[7]
Digital Infrastructure	Fiber optic network deployment, cellular tower installation,	Digital backbone in ruins, fragmentation, UNDP $1.3B digital	[4]

	data center construction, IT infrastructure, smart city solutions, cybersecurity systems.	plan, AI/FinTech opportunities.	
Other Social/Economic	Health facility construction/rehabilitation, school renovation, industrial plant installation, agricultural infrastructure (irrigation).	50%+ health/education facilities non-functional, industrial contraction, agricultural needs.	[5]
Consulting/Advisory	Feasibility studies, damage assessment, project management, technical consulting, capacity building, vocational training (engineering skills).	Need for strategic planning, project oversight, local capacity gaps, donor requirements.	[15]

4. Business Entry and Operational Considerations

4.1 Legal and Regulatory Framework

Establishing a business in Syria requires navigating a specific legal and regulatory framework. Company registration is primarily governed by the Syrian Commercial Code, Investment Law, and Companies Law.[48] Common steps include choosing a business structure, with a Limited Liability Company (LLC) being the most common, registering the company name, preparing incorporation documents (such as Articles of Association), opening a local bank account, submitting the application to the Ministry of Internal Trade and Consumer Protection, registering for taxes, and obtaining any necessary industry-specific licenses.[48] A physical office address is a mandatory requirement for registration.[48]

Regarding foreign ownership, Investment Law No. 18 (2021) provides incentives for both local and foreign investors, including tax exemptions and investment protections.[48] Foreign companies also have the option to operate as a branch without forming a new legal entity, provided they comply with local business regulations.[48]

However, investors may encounter challenges such as lengthy approval processes for licenses and permits, the need to interact with multiple regulatory bodies requiring separate documentation, and potential changes in legal requirements.[48] The recent political transition and the easing of sanctions indicate an evolving regulatory environment. While the government is keen to attract investment, the processes may still be bureaucratic and subject to change. This implies a critical

need for continuous legal due diligence and reliance on local expertise to adapt to the shifting landscape. To mitigate these challenges, it is highly recommended to work with experienced advisory firms and legal professionals who can streamline document preparation, ensure compliance, and effectively navigate regulatory changes.[48] Incorporating international arbitration clauses in contracts can also offer an added layer of legal protection.[48]

4.2 Financial Landscape and Funding Mechanisms

The financial landscape in Syria is in a state of flux. The reintegration into the SWIFT financial system in May 2025 is a significant development, enabling cross-border transactions and serving as a prerequisite for foreign direct investment.[8] However, the Syrian banking sector continues to suffer from deep-seated issues including weak management, a lack of expertise, outdated software systems, limited capital, and low public trust.[28] To restore international confidence, Syrian banks must undertake substantial modernization of their technical systems, comply with international standards such as ISO 20022 for transfer messages, and adhere to anti-money laundering (AML) and counter-terrorism financing (CTF) regulations.[28]

Currency fluctuations can significantly impact business costs, making it crucial to monitor exchange rates and plan accordingly.[49] The Central Bank is actively enforcing financial regulations, as evidenced by the recent revocation of licenses for some currency exchange companies due to compliance issues.[30] Post-SWIFT reintegration, the Syrian pound is on a path to stabilization via a managed float.[27]

Accessing funding for engineering projects will require navigating a complex, multi-layered financial ecosystem. Significant funding sources are emerging:

- **International Aid and Development Funds:** The European Union has pledged €2.5 billion for 2025-2026 specifically for Syria's transition and reconstruction.[3] The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has unveiled an unprecedented $1.3 billion, three-year support package targeting infrastructure, digital transformation, and social protection, with funding contributions from the World Bank, IMF (40%), European countries (30%), and private investments (30%).[4] The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) committed €60 million in December 2024 for projects, primarily channeled through UN organizations and non-governmental organizations [23] USAID used to also provided nearly $580 million for Syria in FY2024.[22]
- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** Given the government's limited budget, Syria is actively pursuing PPPs to deliver planned infrastructure investments.[8] However, challenges persist regarding financing, risk sharing, and arbitration within these partnerships.[13]
- **Private Investment:** Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is projected to surge significantly, from $500 million in 2025 to an estimated $15 billion by 2030.[8] Large-scale energy deals, such as a $7 billion investment and a consortium-led project for 4,000 MW gas plants and a 1,000 MW solar plant, are already being finalized.[9]

While significant international and private funding is becoming available, accessing it requires navigating a complex, multi-layered financial ecosystem that includes traditional aid, evolving PPP frameworks, and a still-recovering local banking sector. This implies that financial transactions will remain intricate, and firms must be agile in identifying and securing diverse funding streams while being prepared for potential financial friction. The government's financial constraints necessitate external funding. However, the complexity of these external funding mechanisms and the inherent weaknesses of the local banking system create a challenging, yet navigable, financial environment.

Engineering firms should therefore develop expertise in grant management, PPP structuring, and international finance. They might consider establishing robust financial controls and potentially working with international banks or specialized financial advisory firms to mitigate risks associated with the local banking sector.

4.3 Local Capacity, Workforce, and Training

Syria faces significant workforce challenges, including high unemployment (50% in 2017) and a shortage of teaching staff in specialized fields like engineering.[16] Millions of children have missed years of schooling, leading to academic gaps that complicate the development of a skilled labor force for reconstruction.[43]

Despite these challenges, Syria possesses existing engineering talent and local manufacturing capabilities. Established Syrian engineering firms, such as ACE Architects and Consulting Engineers in Damascus, offer a full range of architectural and engineering services and adhere to national and international standards.[50] ZAIM Engineering is an established leader in the HVAC sector, demonstrating local expertise in specialized areas.[51] Furthermore, local workshops have the capacity to manufacture up to 80% of spare parts, with some producing high-quality components at lower costs than imported alternatives.[42] The US-based **Syrian American Engineers Association (SAEA)**, a diaspora-led organization, aims to organize Syrian American engineers and architects to support rebuilding programs for Syria using global engineering and quality standards, offering a valuable resource for expertise and collaboration.[36]

There is an urgent need for vocational training and alternative educational pathways to equip Syrian youth with practical skills essential for recovery in construction, technology, and infrastructure repair.[43] SAEA actively offers technical/vocational career training, curriculum support, and aims to update engineers' skills in the latest technologies through seminars and courses.[37] The UNDP is also undertaking a strategic approach to capacity development, identifying gaps and developing comprehensive strategies to address them.[47] International organizations like UNESCO and the UN play a pivotal role in providing technical expertise and resources for rebuilding Syria's education system.[43]

While Syria possesses existing engineering talent and local manufacturing capacity, there is a significant skills gap, particularly in modern techniques and specialized fields, exacerbated by conflict and brain drain. This creates a dual opportunity for foreign firms: leveraging local expertise through partnerships and providing specialized training and workforce development programs to build long-term local capacity, which aligns with donor priorities. The conflict and subsequent brain drain have led to a skills deficit, which in turn creates a demand for both foreign expertise and local capacity building. Foreign engineering firms should actively seek local partnerships, as local firms often lack the capacity for large-scale projects.[13] Additionally, they should consider offering training programs, which not only address a critical need but also build goodwill, ensure local buy-in, and potentially reduce long-term operational costs by developing a local talent pool. This approach aligns with the "localization efforts" emphasized by organizations like IOM [15] and the BMZ's focus on income creation and civil society strengthening.[23]

4.4 Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) and International Tender

The Syrian government is actively pursuing Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) as a key mechanism for delivering planned infrastructure investments, particularly in areas such as urban rebuilding, transportation networks, and energy infrastructure.[8]

A significant portion of engineering work, particularly for immediate recovery and social infrastructure, is channeled through international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). UN agencies such as UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN-Habitat, UNIDO, FAO, and IOM, along with other international organizations like USAID, Global Communities, Caritas Austria, Welthungerhilfe, and Johanniter, are actively tendering for a wide range of services, goods, and works across Syria.[25] These tenders include construction, rehabilitation, consulting services, and the procurement of materials.[31] Prominent focus areas in these tenders include WASH (water network rehabilitation, sanitation facilities), education (school rehabilitation), health (oxygen stations, health infrastructure), and general infrastructure (roads, buildings, waste management).[31]

Many international organizations operate through NGOs and local partners, providing additional avenues for engagement.[23] Some NGOs are expanding their operations into newly accessible urban areas, indicating a growing need for support in these regions.[22] The Syrian market is not a single entry point but a multi-channel environment. While direct government engagement through PPPs is emerging, a significant portion of engineering work is channeled through international organizations and NGOs. This implies a need for diverse business development strategies, including direct government engagement, bidding on international tenders, and forging partnerships with NGOs. The scale of need and the limitations of government capacity necessitate a multi-donor, multi-implementer approach, creating diverse entry points for engineering firms. Firms should therefore not solely focus on large-scale government contracts but also dedicate resources to tracking and bidding on tenders from UN agencies and NGOs. Developing strong relationships with these organizations and understanding their specific procurement guidelines will be crucial for successful market penetration.[53] This also highlights the importance of compliance with international donor regulations.

4.5 Sustainable Engineering Practices

Given the immense scale of destruction and the imperative for efficient resource use, sustainable engineering practices are not just an ethical choice but a strategic necessity and a competitive advantage. Firms that can offer cost-effective, environmentally friendly, and resilient solutions will be better positioned for long-term success and alignment with international development goals.

Sustainable buildings are designed to minimize energy usage, reduce utility bills, and decrease environmental impact, aligning with Syria's need to conserve its natural resources, which have been heavily exploited during the conflict.[9] Effective methods include incorporating energy-efficient design elements such as double glazing, thermal insulation, and solar heating, as well as utilizing natural ventilation and mindful orientation in building design.[39] Critically, recycling debris into construction materials is a proven method for green recovery, demonstrated by projects like the ILO's work in Aleppo.[26] It is notable that traditional Syrian architecture already incorporated many sustainable practices, such as beehive-shaped mud brick structures that provide natural insulation and thermal regulation, and designs that leverage natural light and ventilation.[39] This existing heritage provides a cultural foundation for modern sustainable approaches. Opportunities specifically exist in repurposing damaged post-war buildings into smart, green spaces.[39] An engineer involved with the Syria Rebuilding Collective is actively focused on turning rubble into sustainable building materials, highlighting the local commitment to this approach.[14] The extensive destruction and resource scarcity necessitate efficient and sustainable rebuilding methods, making green engineering a high-value proposition. Engineering firms should therefore integrate sustainable design principles, material recycling, and energy efficiency into all proposed services. Highlighting these capabilities can attract international partners and align with global best

practices for post-conflict recovery.

Table 3: Key Regulatory and Financial Considerations for Foreign Businesses

Category	Key Consideration	Challenges/Risks	Mitigation Strategies	Relevant Sources
Business Registration	Choose appropriate business structure (LLC common); Register name; Prepare incorporation documents; Open local bank account; Obtain industry-specific licenses.	Lengthy approval processes; Multiple regulatory bodies; Changes in legal requirements.	Work with experienced advisory firms/legal professionals; Stay updated on regulatory changes; Engage local experts for compliance.	[48]
Foreign Investment	Investment Law No. 18 (2021) offers incentives (tax exemptions, protections); Option for branch operation.	Lingering sanctions on former regime figures; US Caesar Act waiver is time-bound.	Conduct thorough legal due diligence; Partner with legal consultants; Use international arbitration clauses.	[8]
Financial Operations	SWIFT reintegration enables cross-border transactions; Central Bank actively regulating currency exchange.	Weak management, lack of expertise, outdated software, limited capital in local banks; Low public trust; Currency fluctuations; Risk of informal networks.	Modernize technical systems; Comply with international financial standards (ISO 20022, AML/CTF); Seek robust financial guarantees; Explore diverse funding.	[17]
Workforce	High unemployment;	Academic gaps from missed	Invest in vocational	[16]

	Shortage of specialized engineering teaching staff.	schooling; Brain drain of skilled professionals.	training & skill-building programs; Collaborate with local associations (SAEA); Leverage local expertise through partnerships.	
Property Rights	Widespread destruction of homes; Lack of ownership documents for returnees.	Legal complexities for rebuilding/repatriation; Potential disputes.	Establish comprehensive mechanism for HLP rights restoration (UN agencies, Syrian NGOs, civil society); Targeted support for vulnerable groups.	[6]

Table 4: Overview of International Funding and Tender Opportunities

Funding Agency/Organization	Funding/Pledge Amount	Key Focus Areas/Project Types	Examples of Tenders/Projects	Relevant Sources
EU	€2.5 billion (2025-2026)	Transition, reconstruction, urgent humanitarian needs, economic recovery (energy, transport, financial services).	Lifting of sectoral sanctions.	[3]
UNDP	$1.3 billion (3-year package)	Comprehensive reconstruction (roads, bridges,	"Rehabilitation of Water Network in	[4]

		utilities), digital transformation, tech entrepreneurship, social protection.	Aleppo," "Rehabilitation of Schools," "Capacity Development for CSOs."	
USAID	~$580 million (FY2024)	Humanitarian assistance, stabilization, early recovery.	US Syria Recovery Trust Fund (SRTF) Contribution, Program Design and Learning.	[22]
BMZ (Germany)	€132 million (2024), €60 million (Dec 2024 pledge)	Education access (school repair), income creation, civil society strengthening, healthcare improvement.	Projects implemented via UN/NGOs.	[23]
UNHCR	N/A (Humanitarian response $2B unfunded)	Shelter, WASH, protection, border management, transport services.	"Solar System for Crossing Border," "Construction Works of Border Isolation Centres," "Rehabilitation Works in Civil Registry Centers."	[6]
ILO	N/A	Employment-intensive recovery, infrastructure restoration, livelihood support, recycling.	Aleppo project (debris removal, road/sidewalk rehab, sewage repair, material recycling).	[26]
IOM	N/A	Integrated humanitarian, development, peace	Support for water networks, solid waste systems,	[15]

		approach; shelter, WASH, capacity strengthening, infrastructure rehabilitation.	community-driven infrastructure rehab.	
UNICEF	N/A	Education, water, sanitation, child protection, health, nutrition.	WASH tender calendar, restoration of essential services.	[25]
Welthungerhilfe	N/A	Procurement of goods, services, works for humanitarian needs.	Procurement Officer roles in Damascus/Aleppo.	[53]
Johanniter	N/A	Post-disruption recovery, resilience building, infrastructure rehabilitation.	Water tank & artesian well rehab, feeder roads repair.	[40]

5. Strategic Recommendations for Service Selection

5.1 Prioritizing Services Based on Immediate Needs and Long-Term Recovery

The immense scale of needs in Syria suggests a phased approach to market entry for engineering services. This strategy allows for initial revenue generation and market understanding, followed by scaling into larger, long-term economic development projects as stability increases and private investment flows. This approach requires adaptability in service offerings.

- **Immediate Humanitarian & Early Recovery:** Services addressing critical humanitarian needs should be prioritized initially. This includes Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) engineering, focusing on the rehabilitation of water treatment plants, sewage systems, and distribution networks, which are vital for public health and preventing waterborne diseases.[5] Basic housing rehabilitation, encompassing debris removal, structural assessment, and urgent repairs to damaged homes, is also crucial to enable the dignified return of displaced

populations.[6] Rehabilitation of health and education facilities falls into this immediate category, as these are fundamental social services.[5] These projects often attract funding from humanitarian and development agencies, providing a relatively stable entry point.

- **Foundational Economic Enablers:** As early recovery progresses, the focus should expand to foundational economic enablers. This includes energy infrastructure, specifically the rehabilitation of existing power plants and transmission networks, and, crucially, the development of renewable energy projects like solar and wind farms.[8] These are essential for economic revival and attracting broader investment. Core transportation infrastructure, such as roads and bridges, is also vital for facilitating trade and the movement of goods and people.[8]
- **Future-Oriented Growth:** For long-term growth, engineering firms should target future-oriented sectors. Digital infrastructure modernization, including the deployment of fiber networks, construction of data centers, and development of smart city solutions, offers high-growth potential and cross-sectoral impact.[10] Specialized technical consulting services, such as those related to Building Information Modeling (BIM) adoption [46], Artificial Intelligence (AI) integration, and financial technology solutions for banking modernization, represent advanced opportunities that can drive efficiency and innovation across various sectors.[12] The transition from conflict to recovery creates a shifting demand curve for engineering services, moving from urgent repairs to strategic development. A static service offering might miss these evolving opportunities.

5.2 Recommendations for Leveraging Local Expertise and Adhering to International Standards

Integrating local expertise and adhering to international standards are crucial for building trust, enhancing local capacity, and ensuring the long-term viability of engineering operations in Syria.

- **Local Partnerships:** Partnering with established Syrian engineering firms, such as ACE Architects and Consulting Engineers [50] or ZAIM Engineering [51], or other firms listed in Syrian directories [56], can provide invaluable local market insights, help navigate complex regulatory environments, and build essential trust within communities. Such collaborations can also address the capacity gaps that local firms may face in undertaking large-scale projects.[13]
- **Workforce Development:** Investing in vocational training and skill-building programs for the Syrian workforce is paramount. This can be achieved through collaborations with local professional associations like the Syrian American Engineers Association (SAEA), which actively offers technical/vocational career training and aims to update engineers' skills in the latest technologies.[36] Aligning with international donor-funded initiatives focused on capacity building, such as those supported by UNDP, can also provide structured avenues for workforce development.[15] This approach not only addresses a critical skills gap but also fosters local ownership and contributes to sustainable recovery.
- **Adherence to Standards:** All engineering and construction work must consistently adhere to both Syrian building codes and recognized international standards (e.g., Fidic, IPC, IBC, NFPA, BS, ASHRAE).[50] For financial transactions, compliance with international banking standards such as ISO 20022 and anti-money laundering/counter-terrorism financing (AML/CTF) regulations is essential for restoring international trust in the banking sector.[28] Furthermore, the Syrian Engineers Syndicate's efforts to adopt Building Information Modeling (BIM) indicate a move towards modern project management and design standards, suggesting opportunities for firms with BIM expertise.[46] Adherence to these standards is not merely a compliance issue; it builds credibility, ensures quality, and facilitates integration with international projects and funding mechanisms.

5.3 Risk Mitigation Strategies

Operating in a post-conflict environment like Syria inherently involves significant risks. A proactive and multi-faceted risk management approach is essential for sustained and successful operations.

- **Political Instability:** While there is a fragile hope for stabilization, some instability continues.[1] Continuous monitoring of political developments and maintaining operational flexibility are crucial to adapt to potential shifts in governance or security dynamics.
- **Security Concerns:** Insecurity remains a challenge, and unexploded ordnance is a major problem in many areas.[6] Conducting thorough local security assessments and partnering with firms that have established security protocols and local knowledge can help mitigate these risks.
- **Financial Risks:** Despite sanctions relief, the Syrian banking sector's structural weaknesses, including limited capital and low public trust, pose challenges for financial transactions.[17] Conducting thorough due diligence on local financial institutions, exploring diverse funding mechanisms, and implementing robust internal financial controls are critical.
- **Regulatory Risks:** The evolving legal and regulatory environment can lead to lengthy approval processes, multiple bureaucratic hurdles, and changes in requirements.[48] Engaging expert legal advisory services, staying continuously updated on regulatory changes, and incorporating international arbitration clauses in contracts can provide crucial safeguards.[48]
- **Property Rights:** The widespread destruction of homes and the lack of ownership documents for many returnees present complex housing, land, and property (HLP) issues.[6] Awareness of these challenges and engagement with mechanisms aimed at restoring HLP rights are important to avoid legal disputes and ensure community acceptance of projects.

6. Conclusion

Syria's current state presents a unique and compelling, though challenging, landscape for engineering services. The catastrophic destruction of infrastructure across all sectors, from housing and WASH to energy and digital networks, creates an undeniable and urgent demand for reconstruction. This demand is further amplified by the imperative to facilitate the return of millions of displaced Syrians and to lay the groundwork for long-term economic recovery.

The recent easing of international sanctions by the EU and US, coupled with the reintegration of Syria's banking sector into SWIFT, marks a pivotal shift, opening critical avenues for foreign investment and private sector participation. The Syrian government's explicit pursuit of Public-Private Partnerships and its commitment to a liberal economic model underscore the strategic importance of private capital and expertise in the rebuilding process.

For engineering firms considering market entry, the most viable opportunities lie in addressing immediate humanitarian needs through WASH and basic housing rehabilitation, while simultaneously investing in foundational economic enablers like renewable energy, telecom systems, and transportation networks. Long-term success will also hinge on engaging with future-oriented sectors such as digital infrastructure and specialized technical consulting.

Success in this complex environment will require a multifaceted approach. This includes a deep understanding of the evolving legal and financial landscape, proactive risk mitigation strategies, and a strong commitment to local partnerships and workforce development. By leveraging local expertise, adhering to international standards, and integrating sustainable practices, foreign

engineering firms can not only capitalize on the immense market demand but also play a transformative role in rebuilding Syria's infrastructure, economy, and society. The time for strategic, patient capital is now, as Syria embarks on a high-reward, high-impact journey towards recovery.

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