A Research-Led Prioritization Framework to Align Gulf Investment and Diaspora Engagement with Syria's Recovery Needs

University of Cambridge

A Member of SAEA, Dr Mamoun Fahham has participated in the 16th Gulf Research Meeting at the University of Cambridge from July 21 to 23, 2026. The event brought together a distinguished group of researchers, academics, policy specialists, and practitioners to discuss a wide range of strategic, economic, political, social, and developmental issues concerning the Gulf region and its broader regional and international context.





- The meeting was organized around a series of parallel research workshops addressing diverse themes, including regional economic relations, geopolitical change, energy and climate challenges, emerging technologies, infrastructure and connectivity, humanitarian diplomacy, investment, and the evolving relationships between the Gulf countries and their regional and international partners.









He has participated in Workshop No. 10, entitled:

“Mobilizing Diasporas and Gulf Private Investors for the Reconstruction of Syria and Lebanon.”



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge

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GULF RESEARCH MEETING

16th Gulf Research Meeting

21-23 July 2026 – University of Cambridge

Workshop No. 10

Mobilizing Diasporas and Gulf Private Investors for the Reconstruction of Syria and Lebanon

Workshop Schedule

Workshop Directors

Giacomo Luciani & Samir Makdisi

Please note: each paper discussion will last a maximum of 45 minutes:

10 minutes for paper presentation

5 minutes for the discussant's comments

30 minutes for open discussion

These time limits will be strictly enforced for ensuring a productive discussion.

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Gulf Research Centre Cambridge

Workshop 10 / GRM 2026

Mobilizing Diasporas and Gulf Private Investors for the Reconstruction of Syria and Lebanon

The collapse of the regime of Bashar al Assad in Syria and the election of a new President and Prime Minister in Lebanon have opened a new political and possibly economic development phase in the two countries. In both cases, the Gulf countries are expected to respond rapidly with multiple cooperation initiatives.Beyond agreements at the governmental level, the workshop intends to focus on the potential role of Syrian and Lebanese diasporas, ...

Abstract

The collapse of the regime of Bashar al Assad in Syria and the election of a new President and Prime Minister in Lebanon have opened a new political and possibly economic development phase in the two countries. In both cases, the Gulf countries are expected to respond rapidly with multiple cooperation initiatives.Beyond agreements at the governmental level, the workshop intends to focus on the potential role of Syrian and Lebanese diasporas, in the Gulf as well as in Europe (including Turkey) and the rest of the world. These diasporas are numerically very large (in the case of Lebanon, larger than the resident population in the country itself; in the case of Syria equaling about 50% of the national population according to many estimates), and in many cases economically well integrated in their respective host countries.

Description and Rationale

Context

MENA has been a hotbed of regional conflicts almost without interruption since the end of World War II. Notwithstanding the launch of several regional integration schemes agreed at various points in time between all or some of the region's governments, very little regional trade integration has taken place. Integration approaches relying primarily on government-to-government agreements systematically fell foul to subsequent political conflicts and have failed to generate appreciable results.

At the beginning of the oil boom era (1970s) it appeared that closer regional integration might be brought about by movement of (largely professionals or skilled) people from the more densely inhabited, but less oil endowed countries to the oil-rich but population poorer countries, notably in the Gulf, in need of professional skills.

The GCC was formed as Gulf-only integration scheme, and its member countries have pursued closer economic ties with the United States, Europe and - increasingly important – Asia, rather than with regional neighbors. The growing influence of Iran over the Assad regime in Syria, the Hizballah in Lebanon, and on successive Iraqi governments after the demise of the Saddam Hussein regime further accentuated the difficulty in relations between the GCC countries and the Levant in particular.

The Syrian civil war that started in 2011 in the wake of the Arab Spring led to a major destruction of the country's economy and turned half of the population into refugees in neighboring or distant countries, or internally displaced persons. In Lebanon, inability to steer a nationally agreed political course has hindered economic development and led to progressive national decline, culminating in the disastrous explosion of 2'750 tons of ammonium nitrate in the port of Beirut in 2020 with consequent adverse economic repercussions.

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GULF RESEARCH MEETING

21-23 July 2026
University of Cambridge

Workshop 10
Mobilizing Diasporas and Gulf Private Investors for the Reconstruction of Syria and Lebanon

Workshop Directors

Prof. Giacomo Luciani
Sciences Po, Paris, France
Switzerland

Dr. Samir Makdisi
American University of Beirut
Lebanon

Paper Presenters

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Lebanese American University
France

Nawras Al Husein
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
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Damascus University
Syria

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Sabah Assi
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Meriem Bouzedif
Schiller International University
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Paris School of Economics
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Development Studies & Research Forum, Dubai
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Non-Paper Presenters

Fahd Al Shaghdari
International Islamic University
Malaysia

Simon Chamberlain
FCDO
United Kingdom

Faith Njagi
Private Sector
Kenya

The workshop was led by Professor Giacomo Luciani and brought together researchers and specialists working on different dimensions of recovery and reconstruction in Syria and Lebanon.

Discussions examined the potential contribution of diaspora communities, Gulf investment and finance, private-sector participation, institutional reform, sustainable development, human capital, and capacity building. Particular attention was given to how financial resources, professional expertise, and international partnerships could be better aligned with the actual priorities and long-term needs of recovery.

The workshop provided an important setting for considering reconstruction not simply as the physical rebuilding of damaged infrastructure, but within the broader challenges of economic recovery, institutional development, investment, social inclusion, and the creation of more sustainable development pathways.

He contribution to the workshop was a research paper entitled:

“A Research-Led Prioritization Framework to Align Gulf Investment and Diaspora Engagement with Syria’s Recovery Needs.”

The paper addresses the challenge of establishing and implementing priorities for Syria’s recovery and reconstruction. Its central perspective is that the coming phase should not be approached merely as a process of restoring what existed before the crisis, but as an opportunity for transformational recovery toward a more sustainable, resilient, and integrated development path.

The proposed approach emphasizes the importance of linking investment decisions and reconstruction interventions to clearly defined development outcomes, while considering their economic, social, environmental, institutional, and spatial implications. It also highlights the need to strengthen national and local capacities for strategic prioritization and implementation

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