Changing Contexts and Trends in Syrian Civil Society

A report based on the mapping of Syrian Civil Society Organizations

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IMPACT
Civil Society Research
and Development

This report is based on analysis of primary and secondary data. The facts and context analysis is a joint effort among the research team and experts to capture the most important aspects of the situation and doesn't necessarily reflect the organizations views. Although IMPACT exerted efforts to verify information, information in this research has relied on the perspectives of its participants.

IMPACT - Civil society research and development e.V. is a civil society organization established in Berlin in 2013 and has offices in Iraq, Turkey and Syria.

Supporting civil society is the core of IMPACT's mission. IMPACT is a cat¬alyst for cooperation and exchange of experiences and ideas between local civil society actors themselves and with their international peers. in addition to that, it offers support to civil society actors and activists with a local-sensitive and holistic approach including assessment, research, training, long-term coaching and financial support. To that end, IMPACT grows and sustain a network of civil society actors, to jointly advocate for democracy, human rights and diversity.

Contents

List of acronyms:

- **CBO** — Community-based Organization
- **CFS** — Citizens for Syria e.V.
- **CSO** — Civil Society Organization
- **CSSR** — Civil Society Support Room (EXPLAIN?)
- **DSA** — Democratic Self-Administration (EXPLAIN?)
- **DEZ** — De-Escalation Zones (EXPLAIN?)
- **GoS** — Government of Syria
- **HTS** — Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham
- **INGOs** — International Non-Governmental Organization
- **IDPs** — Internally Displaced Persons
- **ISIL** — Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant
- **LC** — Local Council
- **M&E** — Monitoring and Evaluation
- **PSS** — Psychosocial Support
- **SDF** — Syria Democratic Forces
- **SDC** — Syria Democratic Council
- **SIG** — Syrian Interim Government

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Executive Summary

In the period between 2017 and 2018, the controlling powers in Syria have been shifting dramatically. The government of Syria (GoS) reclaimed vast territories back from opposition forces. Simultaneously Syria Democratic Forces (SDF) supported by the US-international coalition in north east Syria expelled Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) from the region. Turkey and its allied opposition armed groups concluded two military operations to take control of northern parts of the country, specifically Aleppo northern countryside along the borders with Turkey. In the northwest, the establishment and expansion of Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) jihadist alliance of armed forces have led to a shift in the political and governance structures in the area. These developments have changed the control map of Syria drastically compared to the situation in 2016, with direct and indirect effects on the humanitarian, social, political and civic levels. Syrian civil society organizations operating in and outside Syria were affected by these changes.

This report sheds light into the status of Syrian CSOs in different areas of control based on the new geo-political lines formed as a result of the military developments. This report is based on data collated through a mapping of civil society organizations with active offices in Syria or neighboring countries conducted between August and November 2018. In total 514 CSOs were mapped during this exercise. While Syrian CSOs have been growing in number in certain areas, other regions witnessed a set-back in civic actions due to displacement or changes in the available space to operate. It is clear from our data that despite the higher tendency amongst CSOs towards professionalization and institutionalization in terms of seeking registration or expanding organizational structures, Syrian CSOs remain to a greater extent small in size and reactionary in their scope of work. A detailed look into the quantitative data produced through this mapping exercise shows that most of Syrian CSOs still operate with small teams as 77% of them have less than 50 staff members, and depending on short-term finances and emergency-triggered responses. Moreover, despite intensive efforts in fields of capacity building and civil society support, Syrian CSOs in general still lack needed capacities and qualifications to carry out interventions with optimal efficiency and effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

With the Syrian conflict entering its ninth year, Syrian CSOs remain a strong stakeholder on the map of civic actors in the war-torn country. Syrian civil society in its current wave is a direct product of the conflict that erupted in the country after 2011 uprising and is thus shaped and affected by changes in the geo-political context and the status of the conflict in each area.

This report is based on the analysis of the phase III of mapping Syrian civil society organizations conducted by IM-PACT (previously known as Citizens for Syria between August and November 2018) as a continuation of the previous mapping of Syrian civil society conducted in 2015 (phase I) and 2016 (Phase II). This report aims to capture changes in the map of Syrian civil society in the period between 2017 and 2018 by examining major trends and characteristics of Syrian civil society organizations in relation to contextual update during this period.

The findings of this report indicate a high level of correlation between external factors, such as changes in control powers and governance bodies and the structure of and role played by Syrian CSOs. The findings highlight discrepancies and variations in the scene of Syrian CSOs across conflict lines and areas of control. The report sets out recommendations for Syrian CSOs and international stakeholders to respond to identified gaps and contribute to the enhancement of effectiveness and presence of Syrian civil society actors.

Terminology

Civil society:

Despite its popularity, the term civil society has been defined and interpreted in various ways. While CIVICUS provides a broad definition that encapsulates all activities in "The arena, outside of the family, the state, and the market, which is created by individual and collective actions, organizations and institutions to advance shared interests," [1] the World Bank on the other hand focuses more on the organizational aspect and defines civil society as "to refer to the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations."[2]

For the purpose of this report we adopt the definition of the World Bank, as it suits the organizational focus of the mapped entities.

Civil Society Organizations CSOs:

in line with the World Bank established definition of civil society, this report follows the definition provided by the UN Guiding Principles Reporting Framework for Civil society organizations as "Non-State, not-for-profit, voluntary entities formed by people in the social sphere that are separate from the State and the market. CSOs represent a wide range of interests and ties. They can include community-based organizations as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In the context of the UN Guiding Principles Reporting Framework, CSOs do not include business or for-profit associations"[3].

Accordingly, we consider a Syrian CSO each CSO that meet the abovementioned definition, whose key members are Syrians or legally equal, and Its main activity is aimed towards the Syrian cause whether through lobbying or providing services to Syrians in Syria and neighboring countries or institutions that target a social or ethnic group of Syrians

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1   https://www.civicus.org/downloads/2013EEI%20REPORT.pdf

2   http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/CSO/0,,contentMDK:20101499~menuPK:244752~pagePK:220503~piPK:220476~theSitePK:228717,00.htm

3   ttps://www.ungpreporting.org/glossary/civil-society-organizations-csos/

Scope and methodology

This report comes as a follow up to "Syrian civil society organizations: reality and challenges" report published by CFS in early 2017. The aim of this report to provide a look onto the status of civil society at the end of 2018 in light of drastic military and political changes between 2017 and 2018. More specifically, the report investigates how changes in context are reflected on the shape and role played by CSOs, and what are the quantitative manifestations, such as the spread and size of CSOs, as well as the most prominent trends in the civil society scene as a result of these changes.

Following the above established terminology, the report studies CSOs as one main representative of civil society structures, excluding analysis of non-organized civil society forms such as grassroots initiatives, as well as government-alternative structures that emerged in areas outside of the central government control and are undertaking responsibilities traditionally associated with governmental organizations such as local council, health and education directorates and local courts. The report also excludes social media based organizations and traditional media organizations (newspapers, radios and televisions) as they usually follow different structures and mandates that require a stand-alone analysis.

The report relies primarily on data collected specifically for this purpose using a standardized mapping tool4, which was designed in the form of a questionnaire consisting of 90 close-ended or multiple choice questions that covers five main thematic areas as follows: location, structure, work domain, finances and funds, and needs and priorities. The tool was adapted from a capacity assessment tool used in CFS previous mappings, and adjusted in consultation with a number of Syrian CSO members to provide quantitative data with the goal of including as many Syrian CSOs as possible, and focusing on their organizational characteristics and internal structures.

The data included in this report was collected in the period between August and November 2018 by a field team consisting of over 30 enumerators spread across four main teams inside Syria based on area of control (GoS-controlled areas, opposition-controlled areas in northwest, Turkish-controlled areas and DSA-controlled areas), in addition to a field team in each of Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. All the enumerators were trained on data collection methods, informed about the purpose of this assignment and equipped with a detailed written guideline for the questionnaire. IMPACT field teams collected data using Kobo Toolbox online data collection platform, by interviewing key members of CSOs active in each one of the targeted areas. The collected data is thus based on self-reporting and reflects CSOs own assessment of their status.

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4   Please refer to Annex 1 for a shortened version of the tool's questions. Complete tool is accessible through the following link: https://ee.humanitarianresponse.info/x/#U98s6SRt

The data collection process was followed by manual data cleaning to remove duplicates and non-eligible entries, reducing the total number of entries from 544 to 514 that were included in the analysis. Quantitative data analysis was conducted using SPSS and MS-Excel to produce tables and charts for single or aggregated variables. The results of quantitative analysis were then cross-referenced with contextual updates, media reports, field team observations and qualitative input from interviews conducted formally or informally with members of CSO. The results of this process constitute the main findings presented in this report.

It is also worth mentioning that while this report includes the analysis of the originally collected data, the mapping exercise continued after the abovementioned period and additional CSOs were added and are to be included in an extended regularly updated database to be managed by IMPACT.

Limitations

- Changes in the security situations and control powers in different areas of Syria caused a delay in commencing the data collection. IMPACT delayed the activity several times until the situation was more stable to conduct the mapping.
- Due to security development in the former de-escalation zones (DEZ), mainly the collapse of the DEZ agreements and the subsequent control of GoS forces over these zones, some geographic areas were not included in the on-ground data collection. These areas include southern Syria (Dara'a and Quneitra), Damascus suburbs (eastern Ghouta, north Qalamoun and southern suburbs), and northern Homs countryside. CSOs operating in these areas were reached through offices or representatives present in other locations. Additionally, IMPACT's current and previous team members in these locations provided qualitative information about the status quo of civil society in these areas, which is incorporated into this report.
- There are a number of CSOs in the northwest working in areas under the control of the radical non-governmental armed group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), mainly in northwest Idlib. About 20 of these CSOs were not included due to lack of cooperation as they required that IMPACT to be registered with the NGO office of HTS in order to cooperate.
- Security concerns and tendency to work in small teams and a low profile in GoS controlled areas has hindered IMPACT's accessibility and reachability. IMPACT identified a number of CSOs in these areas that were either unreachable or unwilling to cooperate for security concerns. IMPACT relied on secondary sources to map CSOs in these areas and include them in the mapping database. However, due to the inability to conduct the full mapping tool with them, these CSOs are not included in the analysis presented in this report.

Syrian Civil society in context

The role and structure of civil society is not only a matter of terminology. Several contextual factors play major roles in shaping civil society and in giving it a specific function and/or structure, such as the relation to controlling authorities and governance structures, the socioeconomic situation, and the role of international stakeholders and donors. In the current Syrian civil society scene, the effects of such factors are more evident than ever and are without a doubt interrelated. At the same time, discrepancies across Syrian civil society are apparent and can be observed in four main geo-political areas: GoS-controlled areas, opposition-controlled areas in northwest Syria (Idlib and Aleppo western countryside), Turkish-controlled areas (areas know as Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch named after the military operations undertaken in these areas), and Democratic Self Administration-controlled areas (including post-ISIL regions and north east Syria).

The conflict that emerged after the uprising in Syria in 2011 has led to a shift in power relations and the role of the state in all Syria. With more and more regions falling outside government control up until 2016, alternative semi-governmental structures emerged on various levels. These structures included local entities represented by local councils and Sharia courts, to regional and national level entities such as the Syrian Interim Government (SIG) and its affiliated entities, including but not limited to health and education directorates, provincial councils and assistance coordination units, the Democratic Self-Administration (DSA) and its affiliated civic councils and committees. More recently, starting in early 2017, controlling powers in Syria have been shifting dramatically, with the GoS regaining control over vast areas of Syria, the civil society landscape started to reshape to according to changing control power dynamics, and to adapt to shifts in context. The most prominent examples of these shifts can be seen within the former De-Escalation Zones[5] after their collapse and the subsequent control of GoS forces over these areas. For instance, almost 50 CSOs were active in southern Syria in Dara'a and Quneitra provinces in

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5   A deal agreement signed in Astana, Kazakhstan in May 2017 to establish four zones of de-escalation of hostilities between GoS and opposition groups. https://bit.ly/2HLfEwl

late 2016. By late 2018, the number had dropped to 10 CSOs after GoS forces took control of the area. Most are branches for charities or development CSOs that operate mainly from Damascus, while local initiatives and CBOs are largely absent and affected by legal restrains regarding registration as well as fear of prosecution and detention for by GoS security forces. The example of southern Syria is not exclusive. Similar trends can be clearly seen in other parts such as Aleppo city, rural Damascus, northern Homs countryside, and northern Aleppo countryside.

The diminishing space available for CSOs to operate in GoS controlled areas is more evident in areas that were once outside of GoS control, even more than areas that remained under GoS control throughout the past six years such as Damascus, Latakia and Tartous cities. However, civil society in GoS controlled areas still faces the gruesome challenges of operating in a context with a low bar of freedom, including: (1) massive restraints on registration and obtaining legal status (2) lack of funding opportunities and fear of contact with foreign actors and (3) security concerns regarding personnel, beneficiaries and data security. As a result, CSOs in GoS areas mostly operate within a very low profile and take the form of volunteer teams and initiatives, underground activists' networks, or charities, with a higher tendency to work in fields related to social and economic development including but not limited to women empowerment, local initiatives, and small business, rather than domains traditionally associated with public government such as education and health.

On the other hand, areas that were under ISIL control up until early 2017, namely Raqqa and Deir Ezzor, had during ISIL control almost no presence of civil society action due to the persecution faced by activists working in these areas. By late 2017, as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) began to gain control over the region, and gradually drive out ISIL, the space was reopened for civil society actors to reemerge and reform. In May 2018, 20 CSOs were formed and registered in Raqqa province alone7, the number soared over 35 local CSOs by the end of the year, in addition to several Syrian CSOs who expanded their operations to Raqqa. Overwhelmed by the massive destruction in the province and the acute deficiency in essential services, newly established Raqqa CSOs demonstrate less capacity in terms of structure and strategic focus than those more experienced CSOs in other areas of Syria. Which is clearly manifested in the small size of these CSOs (don't exceed 25 staff members in most cases) and the low capacity of staff members, as 23 out of 35 CSOs in Raqqa stated having no trained employees in their field of work.

Similarly, the civil society in Deir Ezzor witnessed a rebirth after reclaiming parts of the province back from ISIL, with newly established CSOs in SDF controlled areas reached 11 CSOs by No-

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6   Citizens for Syria mapping of Syrian Civil society phase II, 2016

7   Civil society landscape in Raqqa and its surrounding, citizens for Syria, May 2018.

vember 2018 8, also focusing mostly on relief and essential services and operating with limited capacity and resources. CSOs in Deir Ezzor are however faced with additional challenges than their counterparts in Raqqa, such as 1, the rural environment of the SDF controlled parts of the province that imposes additional mobility, access and logistical challenges to active CSOs, 2, less-stable security situation due to continuity of active battels with ISIL remnants, and concerns over potential open frontline with GoS forces and 3, a subsequent reluctance amongst international donors to intervene in the area.

The change of control in the region was also manifested with the formation of new local governance structures, such as the Raqqa Civil Council RCC (May 20179) and Deir Ezzor Civil Council (September 201710). The two councils were brought under the direct administrative authority of the Syria Democratic Council (SDC) (first announced in 2015 in Al-Malikiyah/Dayrik, in Hasakeh province11), during SDC's third conference in July 2018 in Ain Aissa in Raqqa province. Ain Aissa is where the Autonomous Administration in North East Syria, also known as the Democratic Self-Administration (DSA), was officially announced12 as de facto authority of the area east of the Euphrates river. The SDC has a special unit known as the NGO office that regulates CSO affairs including registration and work permits. The SDC and the NGO office are the sole entities that control the activity of civil society including registration procedures, and formal and non-formal regulations of domains and fields of work allowed for civil society.

Opposition-held areas also witnessed changes in controlling powers since mid-2017, although to a lesser degree. The areas in the northern Aleppo countryside along the Turkish borders have been contested for several years. Control shifted in certain areas between GoS, ISIL and opposition forces until it fell to the control of Turkish forces and their allied armed opposition groups on what became known as the Euphrates Shield area. An area that compasses the northern countryside of Aleppo including major towns such as Jarablus, Albab, Alara'i and Azaz, except for Afrin district that was taken by the same forces in a separate operation known as "the Olive Branch operation in March 2018. The presence and the big influence exercised by Turkish forces, and the massive displacement waves and demographic changes from and to the area, have created a different context than that seen in the remaining opposition-controlled areas in the northwest. The civil society landscape in the region has shifted accordingly after the Euphrates shield and olive branch operations, as humanitarian efforts in the region are mostly coordinated by either Turkish

8   Civil society in Deir Ezzor, Reality and Challenges, Citizens for Syria, October 2018.

9   https://bit.ly/2FZUGIS

10   https://reut.rs/2xCV78q

11   http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/12/11/kurdish-arab-coalition-in-syria-forms-political-wing.html

12   https://bit.ly/2YEbnkn

or international humanitarian bodies, such as AFAD13, Turkish Red Crescent and UN agencies, who have partnerships with a handful of Syrian humanitarian NGOs. In addition, several charities which have been active in different geographical areas are expanding their operations, albeit not without limitations, to the Euphrates Shield area. Aside from provision of humanitarian aid, civil society actions are most prominent in the provision of services in the education and health sectors. However, most of these interventions are held by big well-known NGOs who operate remotely, mostly from Turkey. Out of the 514 mapped CSOs, 61 CSOs listed the Euphrates Shield area in their area of operations, the vast majority of them (53 CSOs) are based in Turkey. CSOs are only allowed to work in the area if they are officially registered in Turkey or possess a work permit that is specifically obtained for this purpose from the Wali14 of Hatay, Killis, or Gaziantep. The space for civil society work in this area has also been affected by a Turkish crackdown on international and Syrian CSOs operating from Turkey, mainly the southern province of Gaziantep in 201715. On the other hand, local grassroots CSOs are largely absent, except for a few voluntary teams and initiatives that operate on a small scale and without adequate support. This is highly attributed to the difficulties in obtaining the licenses or work permits mentioned above.

In the northwest, mainly Idlib province and western Aleppo countryside, CSOs are still present as a major actor in all fields. Out of the 514 mapped CSOs, 250 CSOs listed opposition control areas as their main geographical focus with 216 of them operating in Idlib province alone, in comparison to 62 CSOs that were operating in Idlib at the end of 2016 (CFS Mapping Phase II, 2016). Such increase can be attributed to several factors related to on-ground development. More specifically, this increase in number of active CSOs is highly influenced by the massive needs stemming from increased population. Idlib province remained, despite unstable security situation, a common destination area for IDPs from former opposition areas or from other active conflict lines, with 1.5 million IDPs living currently in Idlib province alone as per UNOCHA estimations16. In addition, many CSO's that halted their operations in other areas of Syria after it falls under GoS forces, have moved their operations to Idlib, contributing as well to the increase of CSO count in the area as a whole. The growing number of CSOs operating in Idlib and in neighboring opposition control areas such as the Aleppo western countryside and northern Hama countryside, is however not the standalone trend of civil society in this area, as changes in controlling armed factions, as well as in local civil administration entities had also their effects on the CSOs operating there. In early 2017, HTS was formed as an armed alliance from several Islamist and extremist

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13   The disaster and emergency management presidency of Turkey

14   The provincial governor in the Turkish local administrative system

15   https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/08/03/inside-turkeys-ngo-purge/

16   https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/10-things-you-need-know-about-idlib-province-syria-today

armed groups including the previously named Nusra front [17]. Initially, HTS had control over Idlib city and the northern countryside up until the boarders with Turkey. Throughout 2017 HTS led a crackdown campaign against other remaining FSA groups in all opposition held areas, expanding its control and thus becoming one of the main dominating military power until it controlled Idlib and the western Aleppo countryside by January 2019. Concurring with the military advancement in November 2017, the Salvation government was announced as the administrative body to govern HTS areas18. The Salvation government consists of 11 ministries including education, health, IDPs and social affairs, justice, and local administration ministries amongst others. The Salvation government took administrative control over most of the LCs as well as borders crossings with Turkey, with only few LCs not recognizing the authority of the salvation government. This also presented new challenges for CSOs operating in the area on various levels, such as the effects of funding availability as well as on freedom of work for CSOs. More specifically, the office of NGO Affairs is the HTS affiliated entity that is responsible for regulating CSO and NGO work in the area. The Office of NGO Affairs maintains a high level of interference in the work of these CSOs, mainly those who operate in the humanitarian field. Examples of interference include frequent incidents of harassment and detention to CSO members, as well as the enforcement of high extortions19. The control of the salvation government over several LCs has had direct effects on the work of local CSOs. According to the executive director of one local CSO operating in Idlib interviewed by IMPACT, "Prior to HTS control we had very close relationships with the LCs including MoUs to regulate cooperation and facilitation of work, now we have no connection to local councils at all." The influence of these changes in the context of opposition-controlled areas can also be traced on the external front. Major international donors have been considered cutting funding to these areas under the pretext that the funding might go to support a terrorist group (HTS). This represents a major concern for CSOs operating in the region, especially with the absence of alternative funding options for most of them.

On another level, presence within the UN-led political process gave civil society, from the different areas of control, unique access but contributed to deepening discrepancies as those actors were directly or indirectly required to represent a clear political position (mainly toward the GoS or opposition). The challenged process and lack of political leadership made the role of civil society in presenting solutions, consulting decision makers and advocacy difficult and many times blurry. The venues offered a space among those who don't usually meet. while many CSOs

17   https://bit.ly/2k3JA9i

18   https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/275762

19   https://bit.ly/2MgmKJH

overcame their differences in those venues that offered a chance of face-to-face meeting, others whose mobility is restricted or ideologically biased remained largely within the conflict-imposed paradigms. The interaction among those actors added to the already vibrant civil society scene helped organizations to join in advocacy alliances and program consortia. The trend of depending mainly on representatives of CSOs in many international meetings gave the nascent and fast-growing civil society a strong presence on the international level and a role in shaping policies toward Syria, despite the limited impact on the local authorities and conflicting parties within the country. This exposure introduced new concepts of advocacy and peacebuilding. Some downsides of high exposure included creating an elitist behavior by some well-known activists, and in some occasions the public perception of civil society actors exceeded their actual roles and influence.

Syrian CSO characteristics and trends

1. Distribution:

The vast majority of the mapped CSOs have their main offices in Syria (224) or in Turkey (252), with only 23 holding their main offices in Lebanon and six in Jordan. The remaining nine CSOs have their main offices in other parts of the world. However, the number of CSOs operating remotely from all parts of the world might be higher as only CSOs with active offices in Syria or neighboring countries were included.

CSOs Geographic Distribution

252
Turkey

224
Syria

23
Lebanon

6
Jordan

9
Other

● Turkey ● Syria ● Lebanon ● Jordan ● Other
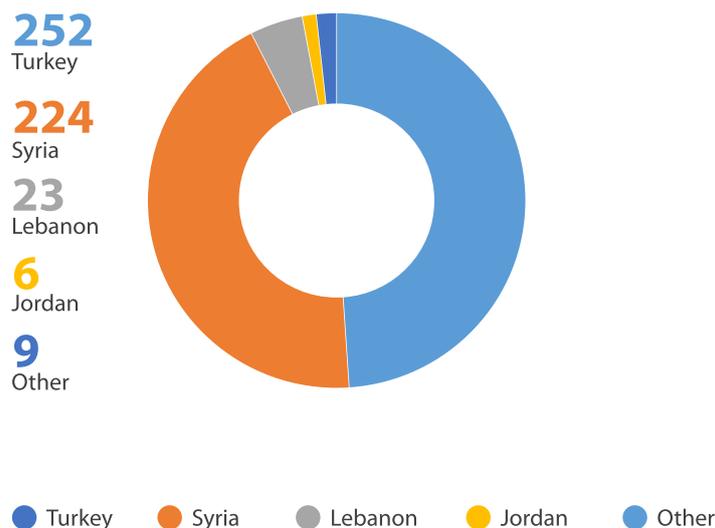
Figure 1: Count of mapped CSOs per geographical target.

The boom in Syrian civil society after the uprising in 2011 is clearly manifested in the number of CSOs established every year. The number of registered CSOs per year has been fairly stable throughout the past four years. Only 18 of the mapped CSOs were established before 2011, mostly charities active in fields of relief, social services or health) whereas 82 CSOs were established in 2018. A trend of professionalization of civil society actors is evident in the tendency to register and have a legal status as well as in the type of organizations active in the scene. Only 1% of the targeted sample define themselves as groups or committees, while 66% of them used organization/association to define their structure. 21% used the word initiative or team to describe their organization, while the remaining 12% used foundation or union.
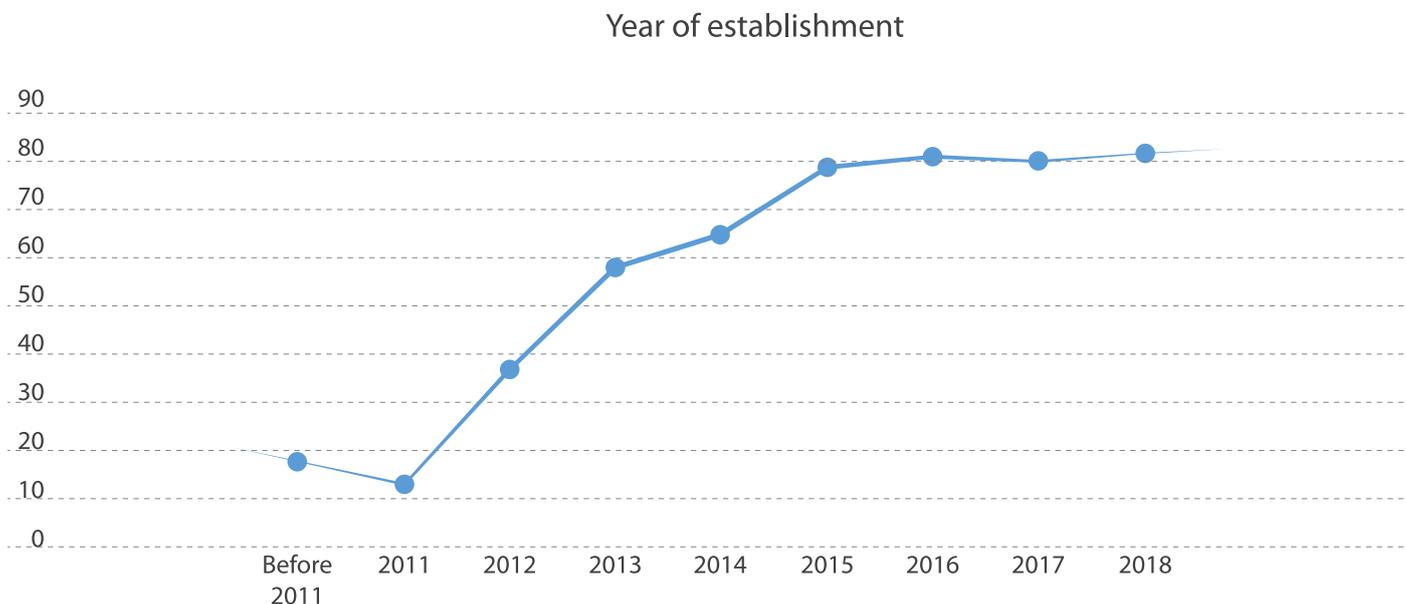
Figure 2: Count of CSOs per year of establishment.

Nevertheless, a good portion of Syrian CSOs operate without official registration, as 375 of the mapped CSOs (73%) stated that they are registered, while the remaining 139 work without official registration. Seeking registration outside of Syria has been a priority for Syrian CSOs, mainly those operating in opposition held areas. This can be attributed to: (1) difficulties in gaining access to funds and grants due to the absence of banking and reliable money transfer systems in opposition control areas, (2) the need for a legitimate legal status for the CSO and for employees and staff and (3) to facilitate access to goods and resources mainly for CSOs working in the development sector. A key member of a local CSO in Idlib mentioned that the lack of registration for the organization has been a major challenge in gaining access to international organizations and donors. In addition, registration rates vary across different control areas. For instance, almost half of the mapped CSOs in GoS areas operate without official registration, in comparison with only 10% of those operating in DSA areas. A justification for this tendency can be observed however in the type of CSO. More specifically, almost 70% of CSOs mapped in GoS areas operate without official registration and although they have a basic organizational structure, they still identify as teams or initiatives with small teams that consist of mostly volunteers and part-timers, and operate on a small scale in collaboration or under the umbrella of larger registered associations.

CSO registered

27%
● No

73%
● Yes
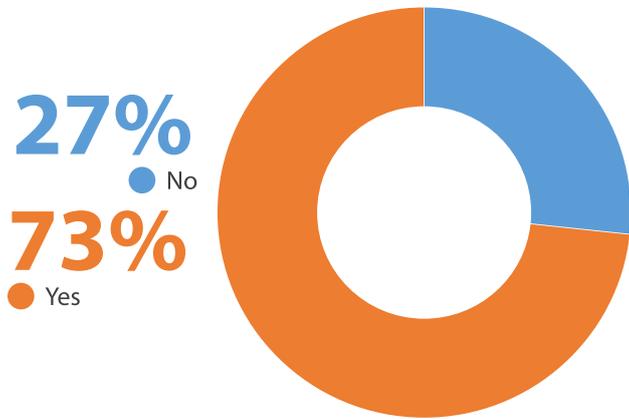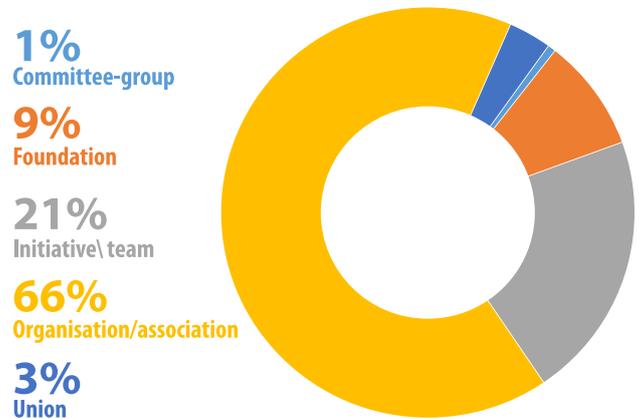
Figure 3: Percentage of mapped CSOs according to presence of official registration.

CSO Type

1%
Committee-group

9%
Foundation

21
Initiative\ team

66%
Organisation/association

3%
Union

Figure 4: Percentage of mapped CSOs per type of organization.

registeration rates per control area

120%
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%

GoS   DSA   opp   ES   Multi

● registered   ● No registered
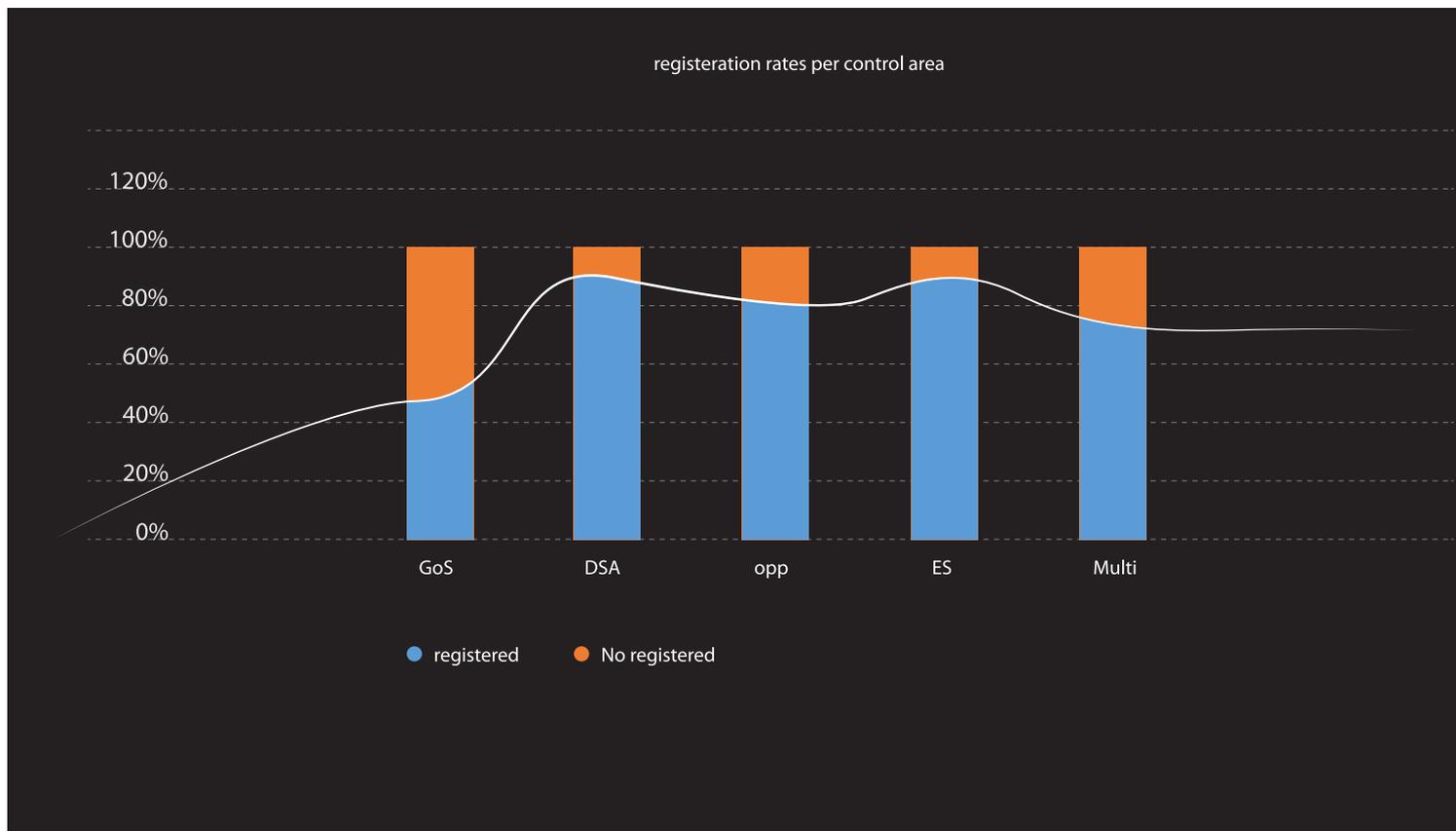
Figure 5: percentage of registered CSOs per area of control.

2. Size and structure:

Despite the growing number of CSOs and the professionalization trends amongst them, Syrian CSOs remain, to a larger extent, small in size, and subject to various influencing factors that hinder the development of organizational capacity and structure, as well as the capacity and type of deployed human resources. The relatively young age and surge in the number of Syrian CSOs suggests that most of them were created based on needs and to respond to increasingly societal, political and humanitarian demands triggered by the conflict. This in turn limited their ability to grow and develop organically and to secure funds that are necessary for organizational stability and growth. The mapping data shows that 77% of the mapped CSOs have less than 50 members in their staff, while only 8% have over 200 staff. Moreover, the employment type in these CSOs reflects their small size and youth as 22% of them reported having no full time employees in their staff. Volunteers and project-based staff on the other hand constitute a good portion of the human resources in Syrian CSOs, as 86% of mapped CSOs reported having unpaid volunteers in their staff, while almost 73% of them reported having project-based staff members.

CSO size: All staff

15%
medium 51-200

77%
Small<50

Big<200
8%
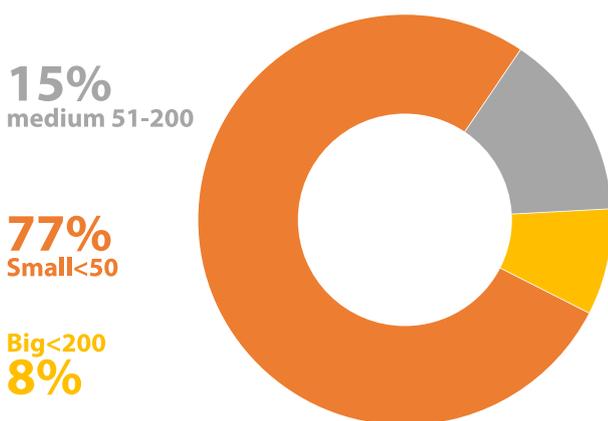
Figure 6: percentage of CSOs according to size of staff (Small = less than 50 staff members, Medium= 51-200 staff members, Big= more than 200 staff members)

Figure 7: staff size per employment type.

Gender quantitative representation manifested in number of women staff members, 6% of the CSOs reported having no women in their staff, while 82% have up to 50 women in their staff, and 2% having more than 200 women in their staff. This manifestation can be explained by several internal and external factors that were identified by another study by IMPACT that focused on the gender dynamics in Syrian Civil Society (IMPACT & CTDC, 2019)[20]. The security situation came as a main external factor that hinders women's involvement in Syrian civil society, the study shows that CSOs operating in more stable areas in Syria are more likely to be gender-inclusive, this observation also applies to neighboring countries.

According to same study internal factors included lack of gender awareness within CSOs; lack of gender-sensitive policies; immaturity of civil society organizations; financial and economic inequalities; in addition to the recreation of gendered hierarchies within the organizations' structures.

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20   https://www.impact-csrd.org/gender-dynamics-within-syrian-csos/

CSO size: women Staff

82%
Small <50

9%
Medium 50-200

6%
No women

2%
Big >200

1%
No answer

● Small <50 ● Medium 50-200 ● No women ● Big >200 ● No answer
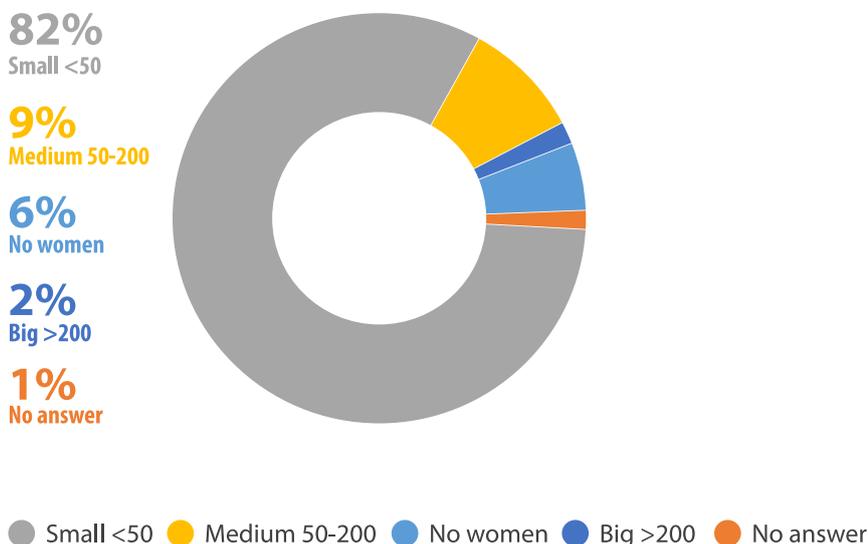
figure 8: Percentage of mapped CSOs per size of women staff (Small = less than 50 staff, Medium= 51-200 staff, Big= more than 200 staff).

All mapped CSOs have some kind of organizational structure, however; the depth and complexity of this structure varies, mainly as a result of the size and work domain of the CSO. There are external factors such as donors' requirements, which is evident from the greater attention that is being paid to administrative departments. Over 83% of CSOs reported having a finance department and almost 60% have a dedicated human resources department. In terms of programming, almost 44% stated that they have a dedicated program management department, and 58% have an M&E department. More specialized departments are reported less frequently, such as research (13%) and engineering (7.2%). Although financial support, whether core or project fund, was a top priority for most of the CSOs (see 5. CSOs Needs and priorities), CSOs seem to direct little effort towards fundraising, with only 10% of them having dedicated department/personnel for fundraising. This allows the task of fundraising to mostly fall onto other departments, such as programs or management.

Executive Bureau
74,6%

Management
81,8%

Administration

Finance
83,8%

Human Resources
59,7%

Warehouse
Management
19,5%

Engineering
7,2%

Volunteer
Management
24,6%

Logistics
56,1%

Programs

Programm
Management
43,9%

Programm
Development
17,8%

Monitoring &
Evaluation
58,3%

Research
13,2%

Support

PR &
Communication
68,9%

Safety & Security
14,9%

Fundraising
10,5%

Technical
16%

Design
21,9%

Quality control
4,6%

Figure 9: Offices and departments: numbers refer to percentage of mapped CSOs reporting having each department.

3. Financial Structures and funding:

The financial structures and policies among Syrian CSOs represent another dimension in examining the characteristics of Syrian civil society. Although the vast majority (83%) of the mappe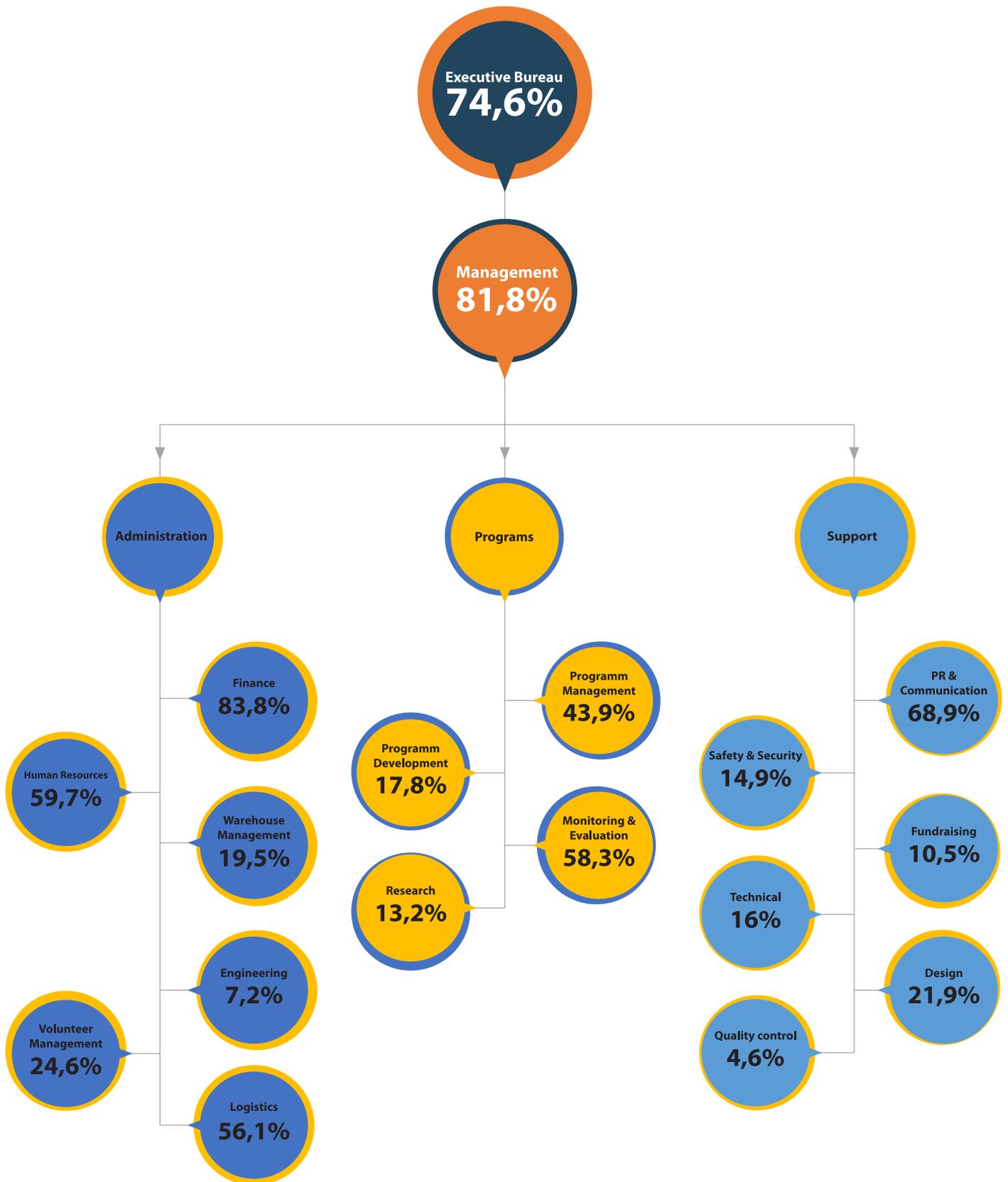d CSOs reported having a finance department, almost 25% of them have no financial policies and procedures in place, and almost 50% of them apply no salary scale.

Financial procedures

25%
● No
75%
● Yes

Salary scale

50%
● No
50%
● Yes
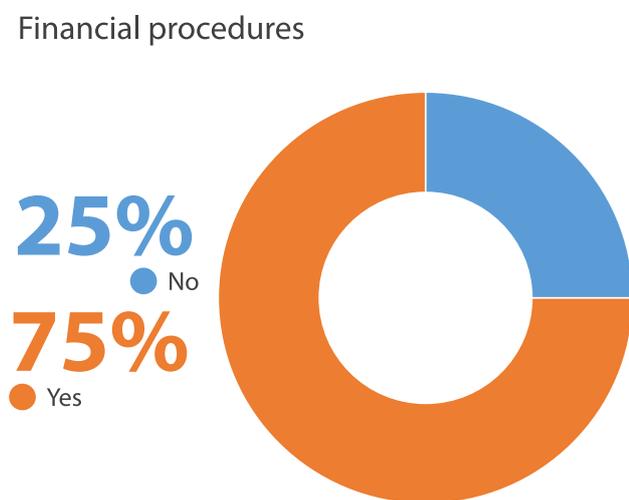
Figure 10: Percentage of mapped CSOs according to presence of applied financial procedures.
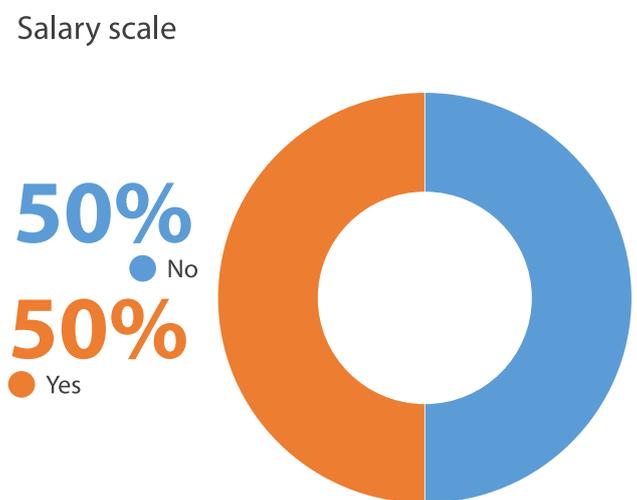
Figure 11: Percentage of mapped CSOs according to presence of applied salary scale.

Since 2011, Syria has been a major recipient of international aid and humanitarian funds. According to UNOCHA Financial Tracking Services (FTS)21, in 2018 alone Syria received more than six billion USD in international humanitarian aid. Additionally, according to the Brussels III financial tracking report, almost 2.6 billion USD of total grant contributions to Syria in 2018 were channeled through UN agencies, and 800 million USD were channeled through NGOs22. These figures that shed light onto the economics of Syrian civil society, as a good portion of aid provided to Syria is channeled through grants and funding to local CSOs to tackle the challenge of inaccessibility for INGOs and aid agencies to the country. Still, the financial profile of most Syrian

21   https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/629/summary

22   https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/38395/syria-report-seven.pdf

CSOs doesn't reflect these vast amounts of aid, as 40% of mapped CSOs reported having an annual budget of less than fifty thousand (50k) USD in 2017/2018, while only 15% of them reported an annual budget exceeding half a million (500K) USD. The economical dynamics of aid money and economics of Syrian civil society are far beyond the scope of this report, however; it is noteworthy here that funding trends have without a doubt influenced the size and structure of Syrian civil society, and contributed to some distinctive characteristics. These characteristics include the abovementioned dependency on project-based funds human resources and volunteers, as well as the emergence of, "Bridging," CSOs. Bridging CSOs are big, highly structured, and well developed CSOs/NGOs that are mostly operating from outside of Syria and acting as a channel of funds between international donors and local CSOs through sub-granting mechanisms, which are considered a main source of funding for 6.6% of mapped CSOs.

Our data has also showed a significant tendency to treat financial data of CSOs with confidentiality. In around 8% of the mapped CSOs, key members who were interviewed weren't able to provide data on the financials of their organizations and responded with, "I don't know," to questions regarding the annual budget. In addition, a striking 20% refused to provide information about their financials and annual budgets even in wide ranges, labeling this kind of information as, "sensitive," and, "confidential," which raises further questions about the actual financial size of this growing sector.

CSO annual budget in USD - 2017/2018

⬤ <50K ⬤ 50K-500K ⬤ 500K ⬤ DON'T KNOW ⬤ No answer
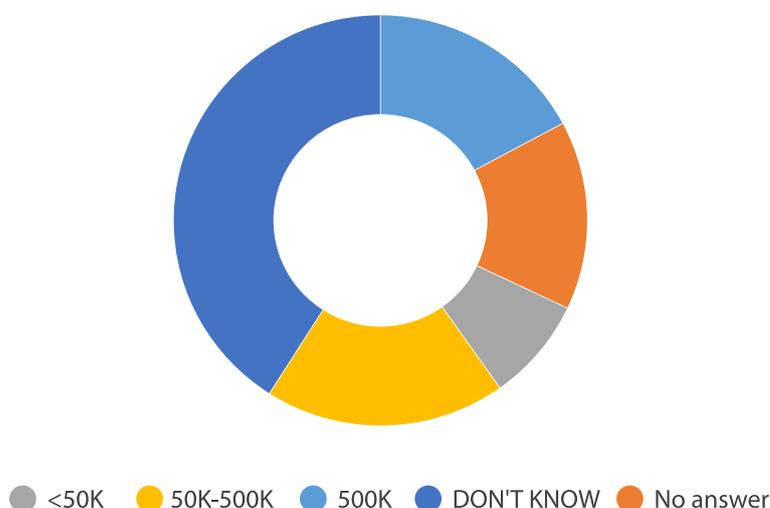
Figure 12: Percentage of mapped CSOs per annual budged in 2017/2018.

Source of funding
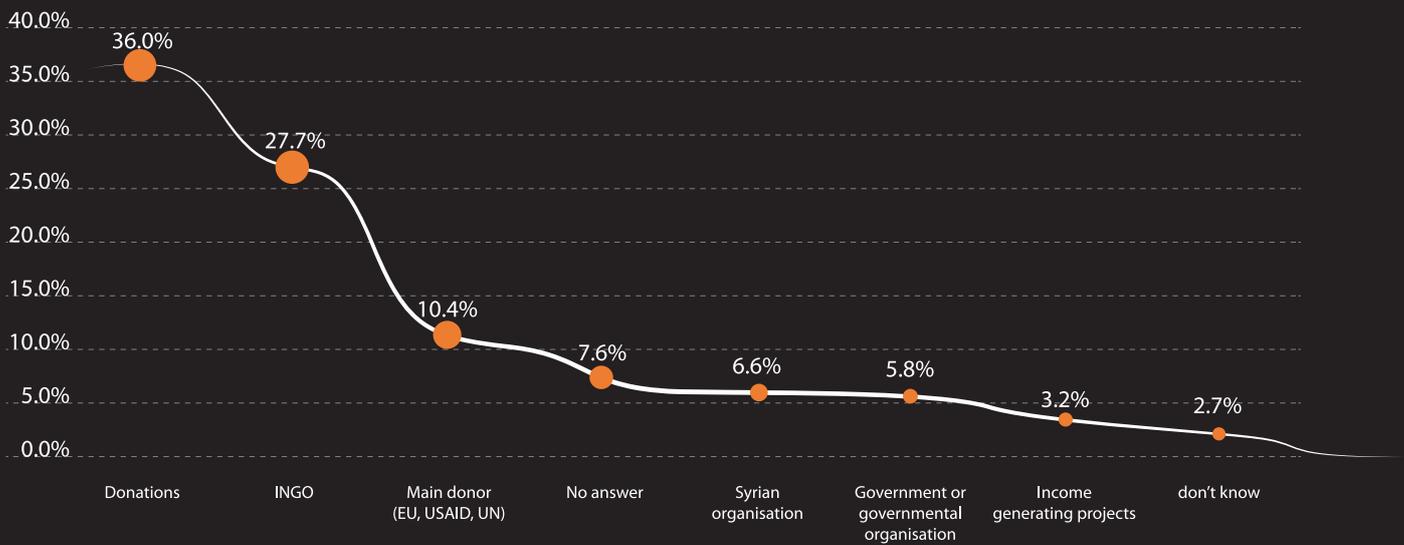
Figure 13: percentage of CSOs per reported source of funding.

On another note, donations constitute a main source of financing for Syrian CSOs as 36% of the mapped CSOs listed donations as a main source of income, compared to a 38% who receive funds from whether INGOs or main donors such as USAID, EU or UN entities. On the other hand, self-sustained or income generating projects are less common with only 3.2% of mapped CSOs considering it a main source of funding.

4. Missions and Work Domains:

Two factors that have shaped the culture and identity of Syrian CSOs in general is the rapidly-changing context in which they operate and the presence of conflict. These factors were main drivers for the establishment of many CSOs as short-term reactionary responses to the context rather than to pursue a sustainable long-term vision. The effects of these main factors are evident in the data when looking into the work domains of these CSOs and their target groups, as many of them fail to identify or choose not to target a specific group of beneficiaries. A notable 232 out of the 514 mapped CSOs reported having no specific target group, while the remaining CSOs identified at least one target group for their activities and programs, with women and children being the most targeted groups across the sample, which goes in line with the most common work domains.
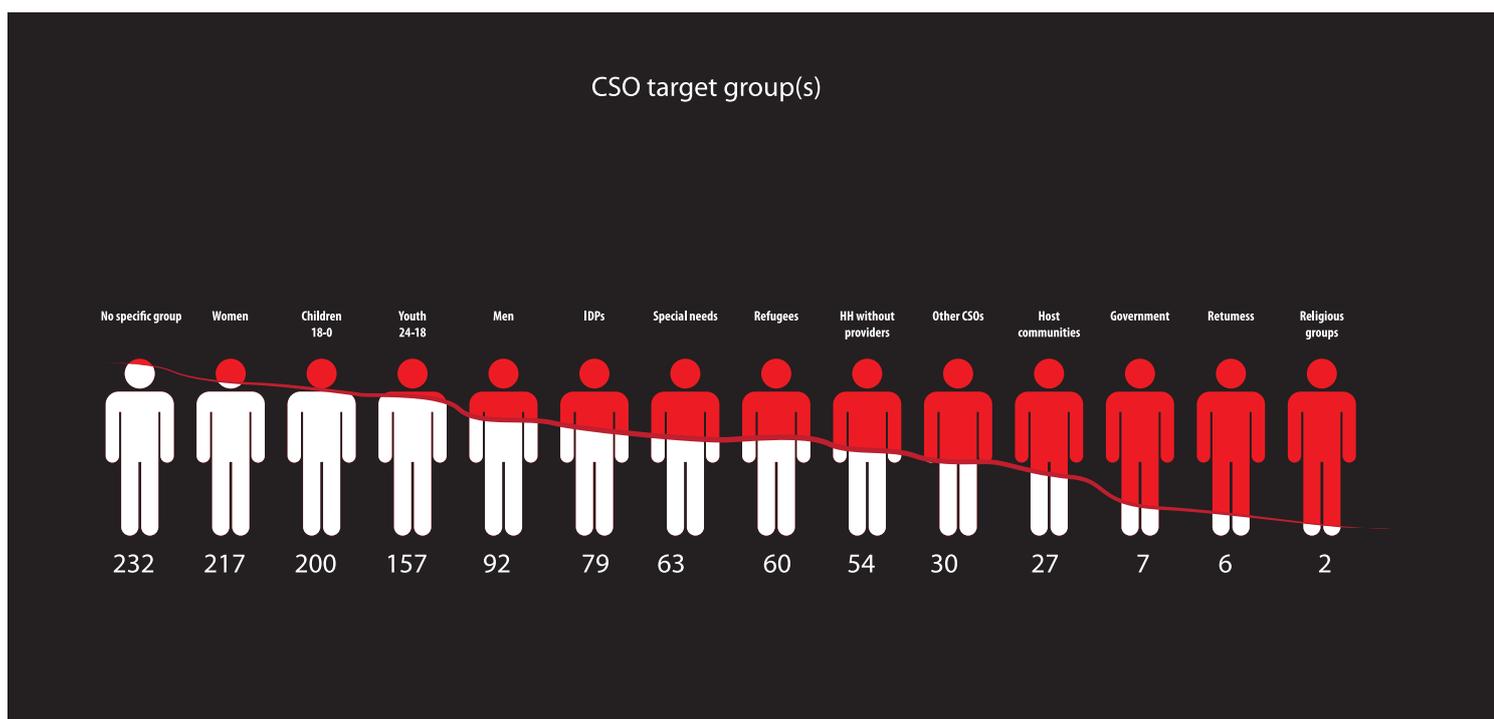
Figure 14: Count of mapped CSOs per target group of beneficiaries.

Out of 514 mapped CSOs, 266 (51.8%) listed relief and social services as one of their main work domains23 with child services or women-related services as main sub-domains, followed by 262 (51%) who work in development with women empowerment as a major sub-domain, and 233 (45.3%) in education and research spread over schooling, alternative education and psycho-

23   For the full list of included work domain please refer to annex 2

CSOs Main Work Domain

Relief and social sirvices	Development	Education and research	Health	Law, advocacy and politics	Culture and media	environment	Donors and voluntarism	Unions and syndicates	Religious groups
266	262	233	112	103	100	36	21	18	7

Figure 15: Count of mapped CSOs per main domain of work.

Besides the general focus on crisis-related and emergency response work domains such as relief, social services, development and basic services, growing attention to other domains of work can be noticed, mainly in the fields of law, advocacy and politics (103 CSOs) and culture and media (100 CSOs), accompanied by a bigger presence for Syrian civil society on the political arena especially on the international levels. Since 2012, multiple Track II and III[24] dialogue meetings have started around the Syrian conflict. The meetings included primarily civil society actors, CSO/NGO leaders and domain experts, with little presence of officials from political sides from different regions of Syria and neighboring countries. The purpose of the meetings is to analyze the volatile situation, propose solutions and lobby for those solutions. Direct engagement of civil society in the UN-led intra-Syrian political process was introduced by the UN Special Envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura in 2015, through the establishment of a Civil Society Support Room (CSSR) and Women Advisory Board (WAB) in addition to experts' groups (such as the constitution experts group) and individual consultations on the regional and local levels.

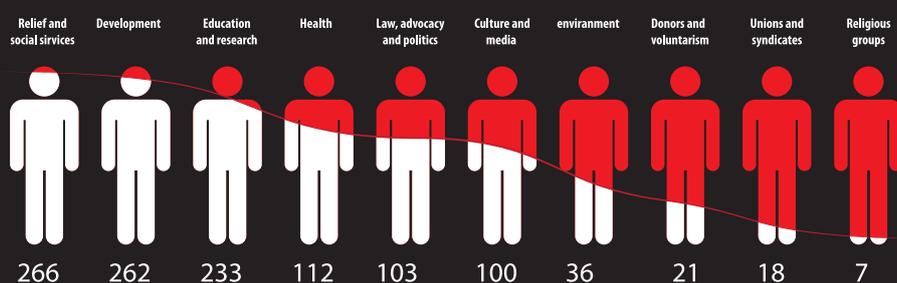24   In multiple-track diplomacy, Track II and Track III refer to the unofficial, informal engagement of non-state actors in political processes, in contrast with Track I diplomacy which is exercised by official governmental actors. With track II being the "an unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations aiming to develop strategies, influence public opinion, and organize human and material resources in ways that might help resolve their conflict" (Montville, 1990: 162), while "In "track three diplomacy," unofficial third parties work with people from all walks of life and sectors of their society to find ways to promote peace in settings of violent conflict" (Chigas, D. ,2003)

More frequent

Media & Comms **16,6%**	Primary and secondary **14,2%**	Women & Family **10,4%**	Orphans'Care **10,2%**	Veterinary **15,8%**	Small Business **11,4%**	Civic rights **10,3%**
Social Media **18,9%**	Alternative & PSS **16,6%**	Other Services **11,6%**	Women & Services **10,4%**	Pollution management **34,2%**	Staff Training **11,0%**	Human rights **11,7%**
Culture Club or Center **21,1%**	Schools **17,1%**	Public health **15,1%**	Child care **11,7%**	Public spaces **50%**	Women empowerment **17,0%**	Women righs **14,3%**
Culture and media **8,6%**	Education & Research **20,1%**	Health **9,7%**	Relief & Social services **23,0%**	Environment **3,1%**	Development **22,6%**	Law, Advocacy and Politics **8,9%**
Consultaions **6%**	Higher Education **5,2%**	Field Hosdpitals **4,3%**	Shelters **1,0%**		Housing **2,3%**	Political org. **1,3%**
Service club **4,2%**	Political and social research **3,9%**	Specialized hospitals **4,0%**	Maintenanace **0,9%**		Reconstruction **2,2%**	Parties **1,3%**
Radio **3%**	Economic research **1%**	Rehabilitation **4,0%**	Civil defense **0,6%**		Infrastructure **1,9%**	Ethnic groups **0,5%**

Less frequent

Figure 16: CSOs per sub-domain of work (numbers refer to the most three frequent and less three frequent sub-domains of each main domain of work, presented in percentages of responses out of 1158 responses)

5. CSO Needs and Priorities:

The challenges and subsequent characteristics of Syrian civil society today are highly reflected in the most prioritized needs for these CSOs. Mapped CSOs were requested to identify the three most important needs for their organizations, and it became evident that financial support, whether as core or project-based funds, remains a high priority for the vast majority of CSOs. A great attention to core funds as a necessity (listed by 90 CSOs as first priority, by 106 as second and by 82 as third) indicates a growing awareness of the importance of internal financial stability for the growth and sustainability of CSOs. Surprisingly, and despite the small size of the CSOs as detailed above and the lack of sufficient qualified human resources, only 36 CSOs listed human resources as a prioritized need. More specifically, a little more than half of the mapped CSOs (56%) reported having none or fewer than 10 staff members trained in their field or specialization. Similarly, 53% of them have none or less than 10 staff trained in the CSO's work domain, which indicates a huge capacity gap in the work of these CSOs, however not adequately recognized as seen by the level of prioritization given to training and capacity building. 115 CSOs listed management and administrative training while 140 CSOs listed specialized training as one of their prioritized needs.

It is also worth mentioning that despite the tendency amongst Syrian CSOs to register and improve legal status whether inside or outside Syria, legal support occupies a lesser degree in the priorities list, with 145 CSOs listing it as one of their main three priorities.

Financial Support
- Core Fund
- Core salaries
- Project-Based salaries

PR and comms

Equipment

Capacity Building
- Administrative training
- Specialized trainings

Presmises

legal support

Languages

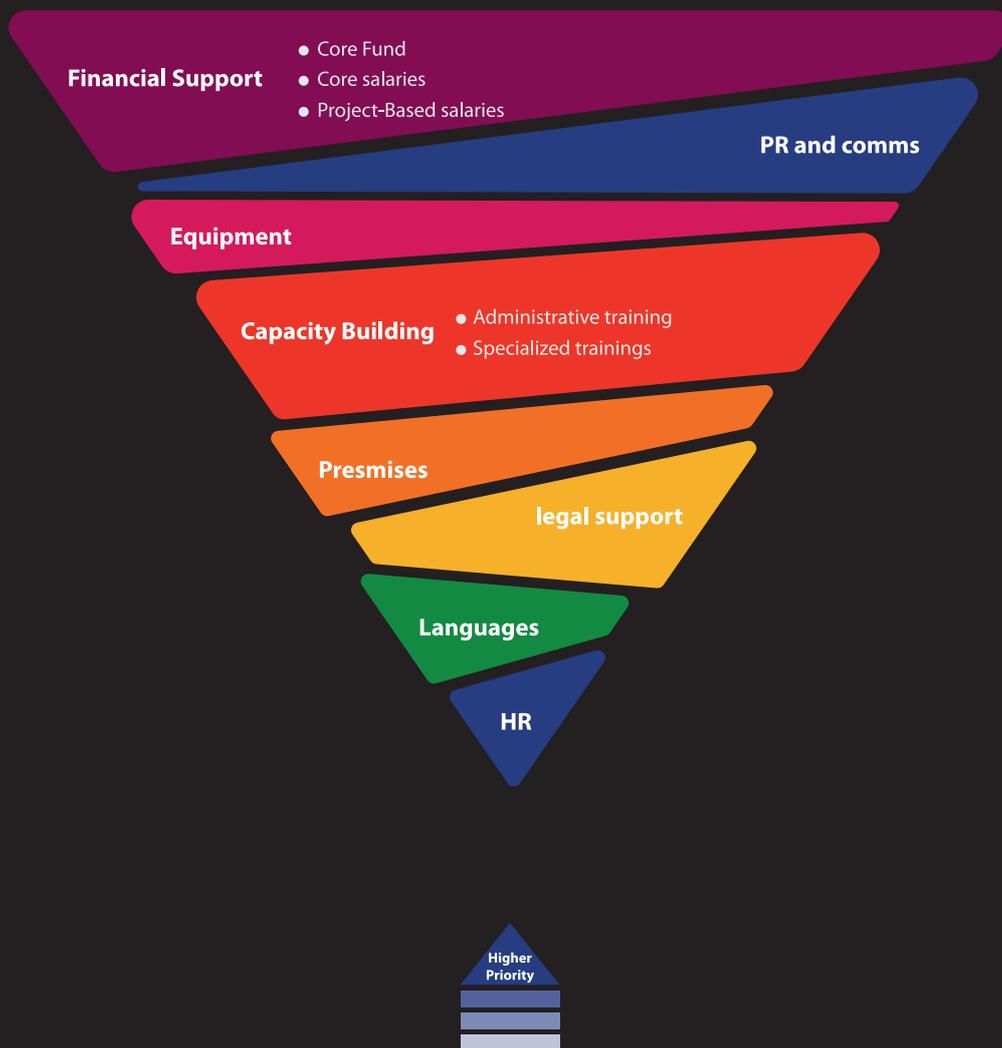**HR**

Higher Priority

Figure 17: CSOs most prioritized needs

Conclusion

The empirical data that constitutes the base of this report provides a snapshot of the Syrian civil society scene after seven years of its current wave, and indicates a high level of correlation to external factors such as shifting geo-political lines and changes in security situation and which powers or entities control what area, as well as the effects of these factors on the internal dynamics and characteristics of Syrian CSOs, which can be summarized as following:

- Tendency towards professionalization in terms of organizational structures and legal status, as the presence of registration and applied legal framework according to de facto authorities in work areas present the CSO with greater opportunities to access funds and resources and allows for a wider intervention capacity.
- High dependency on project-based, short term financing and lack of long-term vision: despite the growing number of CSOs and the tendency towards professionalization mentioned above. Syrian CSOs still operate mostly with small short-term project-based funds, with minimal efforts towards sustainable and strategic fundraising.
- Relatively small size in terms of human resources.: The effects of dependency on short term funding and small projects can be seen in the size of CSOs in terms of human resources, with most CSOs depending on part-timers, contractors or volunteers to implement and administer their projects. In addition, the lack of legal framework for many CSOs (registration and work permits in different areas) hinders CSOs ability to expand and grow in size.
- Lack of specialization and focus in mission and work, reactionary need-based actions: being a conflict civil society, Syrian CSOs operate with a high level of flexibility to adapt to a constantly changing context and humanitarian-disaster triggered needs. This flexibility is however linked to a level of ambiguity in terms of specializations. Most CSOs follow a broad scope of work covering a wide range of work domains and sectors, leaving them more susceptible to investing time and resources that might not support a strategic longer vision and also to operating according to donors' requirements and agendas.
- Deficiency in specialized personnel and human resources: changes in operation context accompanied by dependency on short-term project funding have also hindered CSOs ability to grow and develop in terms of capacities. Part-timers and project-based employees have rarely seen the chance to build their technical and specialized capacities whether in their own field of work, or in the CSO's work domain.

- Increased presence in the political arena on the international stage, however with weaker relationships to local and sub-national governance structures: with increased activities on the international political level concerning Syrian conflict and the peace processes, Syrian civil society is becoming more present and active on the various levels of peace talks. The CSSR and CSO alliances and networks are constantly present in international settings. Nevertheless, on the ground, small local CSOs are struggling with relationships to local governance entities and administrative bodies, due to the continuous changes of control and subsequent legal and administrative frameworks for civil society activities in the different areas.

Recommendations

For Syrian CSOs

- **Internal development:** Syrian CSOs are highly recommended to prioritize internal development in accordance with principles of good governance. More specifically, Syrian CSOs are en-courages to seek opportunities and resources to define and develop their missions, strategies, organizational structure and scope of work to enhance their adaptability to contextual changes and intervention capacity.

- **Capacity building:** Syrian CSOs are encouraged to invest in systematic capacity building pro-grams on the individual and organizational level. This might include training for staff in their respective field of work as well as training in the CSO's field of work, accompanied with general trainings on organizational structures and management, development of customized policies and procedures for various departments,

- **Increase level of fundraising efforts, self-sufficiency policies:** Syrian CSOs are recommended to increase efforts on fundraising that consider sustainable funding approaches such as self-sufficiency policies, income-generating programs and funding source diversification.

- **Seek operational and core funds:** CSO's are encouraged to revisit their budgeting policies to account for internal needs and expenses. Syrian CSOs are recommended also to put more ef-forts into seeking operational and core funds where possible alongside project-based funds, that are directed to the internal development and sustainability for the CSO.

- **Increase media and outreach efforts:** CSOs are encouraged to put emphasis into their com-munication, outreach and media efforts to facilitate connection to their beneficiaries, local com-munities, local and national governance entities as well as other local and international CSOs and NGOs.

- **Enhance women participation and involvement:** Syrian CSOs are also encouraged to adapt measures and develop internal policies and procedures to ensure gender sensitive planning and projects design and to facilitate women's participation in decision making on the leadership levels.

- **Advocacy and alliances:** Syrian CSOs are encouraged to seek collaboration and coordination with their peers to foster knowledge and experience sharing and transfer. Advocacy and lob-bying efforts should then be directed towards joint works and forging of alliances to ensure greater benefit of available resources and higher impact of actions.

International stakeholders:

- **Direct funds according to needs:** we call upon international donors and NGO to prioritize local needs of Syrian civil society and local communities, and to refrain from adapting pre-set strategies and one-for-all approaches in their interventions.

- **Support internal development of CSOs:** international donors and INGOs are encouraged to consider capacity building support to CSOs in terms of technical support such as training, coaching and support for internal development. Donors and INGOs are also recommended to allocate funds for internal development of Syrian CSOs in the form or core fund and similar financial-support mechanisms, whether as an integral part of project-based funding or as stand-alone support.

- **Support for advocacy and political efforts of civil society:** International stakeholders are recommended to recognize and give more space to the voice of the Syrian civil society on the international political level, and ensuring that local CSOs are represented and that their voice is delivered to policy makers.

- **Support networking and communication amongst CSOs and with international actors:** international stakeholders are encouraged to take measures to ensure effective communication with local and regional civil society actors, to ensure that funds are directed efficiently and that local voices are accounted for and taken into consideration in designing intervention strategies and projects.

- **Support CBOs/initiatives in GoS, DSA and Turkish-controlled areas:** international stakeholders are encouraged to expand their support to local initiatives and grassroots civil society actions especially in areas where minimum support is provided such as GoS-controlled areas, post-ISIL areas and Turkish control areas.

- **Measures against NGOization of civil society:** international donors and stakeholders should as well allow the space for Syrian CSOs to reclaim the role of traditional civil society, and adapt measures against NGOization of civil society in Syria. These might include more support to social and political-driven projects rather than service provision projects.

- **Long term strategic support:** international donors and INGOs are recommended to prioritize long-term strategic support for Syrian CSOs and to refrain from short-term projects when possible.

- **Further research:** International donors are encouraged to fund and support more data-driven research on the dynamics of Syrian civil society and on thematic areas of relevance such as public perception of CSOs, relations to other stakeholders including governance entities and private sector, economics and financials of Syrian CSOs among other.

Annexes

1. Annex 1: mapping tool, list of questions

- **General information:**
  - Name of CSO:
  - Type of CSO:
  - Name of CSO in English:
  - Name of CSO in original language:
  - Name abbreviation or acronym:
  - Chair:
  - Executive director:

- **Contact information:**
  - Website:
  - Facebook account:
  - Twitter account:
  - CSO email:
  - CSO phone number:
  - Contact person:
  - Contact person email:
  - CSO logo:

- **Locations:**
  - Address of main office:
  - Areas of operation (country, province, city):
  - Areas of operation inside Syria (are of control, province):
  - Offices outside Syria:
  - Countries where CSO has projects:

- **Structure:**
  - Date of establishment:
  - Location of establishment:
  - Is the CSO registered? (Yes/No question)
  - Country/area where CSO is registered:
  - CSO work start date:
  - Current staff count: (select from pre-set ranges)

- Current count of women staff: (select from pre-set ranges)
- Current count of full-time employees: (select from pre-set ranges)
- Current count of part-time employees: (select from pre-set ranges)
- Current count of project-based employees: (select from pre-set ranges)
- Current count of volunteers: (select from pre-set ranges)
- Current count of staff trained in their field: (select from pre-set ranges)
- Current count of staff trained in the CSO field of work: (select from pre-set ranges)
- Departments and offices in CSO: (multiple selection from a pre-defined list)

- **Work domains and specialization:**
  - Main work domain: (select from pre-set list, detailed in annex 2)
  - Sub work domain: (select from pre-set list, detailed in annex 2)
  - CSO target group(s) of beneficiaries: multiple selection form pre-defined list)
  - Does the CSO have media and outreach policies? (yes/no question)
  - How many project has CSO implemented in the past year (2017)?
  - Is the CSO a part of alliance or coordination body? (yes/no question)

- **Financial structure and funding:**
  - what was the annual budget for CSO in the last year? (select from pre-set ranges)
  - What are the three main funding resources for the CSO? (multiple selection from pre-defined list)
  - What are the approximate percentage of each funding source?
  - Does CSO have a salary scale? (yes/no question)
  - Does the CSO have applied financial procedures? (yes/no question)

  Needs and priorities:
  - What are the top three prioritized needs for the CSO? (multiple selection from a pre-defined list)
  - What are the top prioritized training needs for the CSO? (multiple selection from a pre-defined list)
  - Is the CSO willing or interested in joining Syrian civil society support programs? (yes/no question)

- **Additional notes by CSO:**

- **Additional notes by enumerator:**

2. Annex 2: List of work domains

1. **Culture and media**
   1.1. media and communication
   1.2. publishing
   1.3. radio
   1.4. social media
   1.5. language
   1.6. social club
   1.7. culture club/center
   1.8. service club
   1.9. consultations

2. **Education and research**
   2.1. primary and secondary education
   2.2. schools
   2.3. daycare
   2.4. higher education
   2.5. vocational training
   2.6. alternative education and PSS
   2.7. literacy
   2.8. research
   2.9. political and social research
   2.10. financial and economic research
   2.11. statistics and mapping

3. **health**
   3.1. hospitals
   3.2. field hospitals
   3.3. specialized hospitals
   3.4. mental health centers
   3.5. other health services
   3.6. public health and awareness
   3.7. vaccines
   3.8. treatment and clinics
   3.9. health rehabilitation
   3.10. urgent health services
   3.11. emergency
   3.12. women and family health

4. **relief and social services**
   4.1. child care
   4.2. orphans' care
   4.3. youth affairs
   4.4. family care
   4.5. women services
   4.6. special needs care
   4.7. elderly care
   4.8. relief and emergencies
   4.9. emergency response and disasters management
   4.10. Food
   4.11. Non-Food-items
   4.12. cleaning, sanitation and waste management
   4.13. supply & storage
   4.14. civil defense
   4.15. shelters
   4.16. refugees' assistance
   4.17. camps management
   4.18. maintenance

5. **environment:**
   5.1. pollution management
   5.2. environment beautification and public spaces
   5.3. veterinary

6. development

    6.1. economic and social development

    6.2. local initiatives

    6.3. economic development

    6.4. reconstruction

    6.5. staff training

    6.6. infrastructure

    6.7. service restoration

    6.8. small business

    6.9. women empowerment

    6.10. housing

    6.11. housing committees

    6.12. housing assistance

    6.13. training and recruitment

    6.14. vocational training programs

    6.15. administrative training

    6.16. guidance and careers

    6.17. vocational rehabilitation

7. law, advocacy and politics

    7.1. civic organizations

    7.2. advocacy

    7.3. women rights and equality

    7.4. civic rights

    7.5. Human rights

    7.6. violations' documentation

    7.7. detainees defense

    7.8. public liberty

    7.9. ethnic groups

    7.10. civic groups

    7.11. transitional justice

    7.12. peace building

    7.13. legal services

    7.14. political organizations

    7.15. political groups and parties

8. donors and voluntarism

    8.1. donor institutions

    8.2. volunteerism support

    8.3. donation collection

9. religion

    9.1. religious groups

10. unions and syndicates

    10.1. syndicates

    10.2. vocational associations

    10.3. workers' union