

DEVELOPMENT ASSETS

Local Approaches from Syria

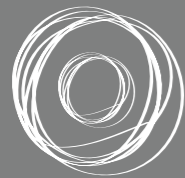
Issue 2 2021: May - August





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CommonSpace Initiative
for Shared Knowledge & Consensus Building

Development Assets:
Local Approaches from Syria

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About

Development Assets is an attempt to influence the local development process in Syria today and to transcend from local initiatives to a new level of cooperation among stakeholders. Such endeavor is backdropped against explorable local and national resources, with a comprehensive vision rising above war and its geographic ramifications.

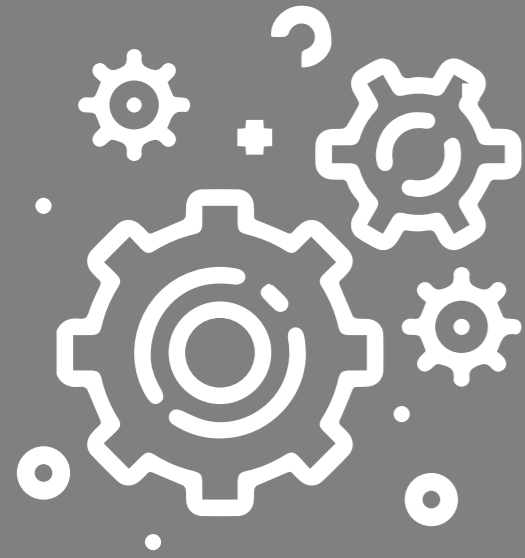
Expanding our perception of diverse surrounding resources and enhancing interaction among these resources generates a positive community-oriented energy that is fully aware of its environment and its needs, drawing on new quantitative and qualitative value chains for the development process. Community capital emerges locally and interconnects nationally and internationally, encompassing Syrian migrants, expatriates and refugees. This opens up opportunities for investing such a community capital in an integrated process of re-development and reconstruction.

Furthermore, improving individual knowledge for citizens of various age groups provides an essential entry point to raising average community awareness and ability to invest, interact and evaluate on the basis of evidence and dialogues. This opens up new perspectives to view the same daily landscapes, allowing synergies among different stakeholders' efforts, and regenerating realistic hopes for local communities.

Development Assets does not offer conclusions and judgements; it rather helps rearrange the landscape along with its resources and dynamics in a constructive manner. It would therefore enhance the ability to create opportunities by understanding local interactions among stakeholders and presenting them in a comparative way to help narrow the gaps between our communities in terms of services, economy, society, environment and space.

Development Assets could be systematically replicated at the level of each neighborhood, village, municipality, city and country.

Development Assets Team



Methodology

The data presented in this issue were mainly obtained from primary sources, and were obtained from:

- A survey of a sample of 558 activists across Syria.
- The Official Gazette of Syria, parts I and II.
- Syrian governmental media sources.
- Various Syrian private media outlets.

In an attempt to cover the Syrian geography in the period between late June and early August 2021, an online survey was distributed to 558 activists across the country. Respondents were spread across 60 different regions, and the sample was weighted according to population distribution within Syrian governorates, as per the estimates of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Respondents were 53% male and 47% female; their ages ranged from 18 to 90, and those older than 40 years amounted to 29% of the sample. Around 73% of respondents had completed their undergraduate or postgraduate studies, while 19% had only completed secondary school, and 8% had not completed secondary school. With regard to marital status, 44% of the respondents were single, 51% were married, and a small percentage was divorced or widowed.

As for job sectors, 21% of respondents indicated that they worked in education, and 13% worked in social support. Some of the most prominent sectors were trade, healthcare, IT services, professional and scientific services, arts and entertainment, and manufacturing. Some 22% of respondents were employed in non-profit organizations, 24% worked

in the public sector, 10% in the private sector, 10% were business owners, 14% were self-employed and 18% were unemployed.

Around 78% of respondents had been living in the same governorate for more than 10 years, 8% had been living in their current governorate for 5 to 10 years, and 11% for 1 to 5 years, while only 2% had moved to a new governorate less than a year ago.

Respondents answered questions regarding services, community participation, and the future prospects of development. Most questions could be answered on a gradual scale, where responses were converted into numerical values from 1 to 5 in order to calculate the mean and standard deviation. In addition to surveying local activists, the Official Gazette was used to collect data on NGOs and their scopes of work for the ones licensed in the period between the beginning of May and the end of August. Data on governmental decisions, statements and applications related to development and service sectors were gathered from the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), as well as the official website of the Syrian Prime Ministry, Tishreen daily newspaper and the Official Gazette. Data were classified according to sector, governorate, and government level.

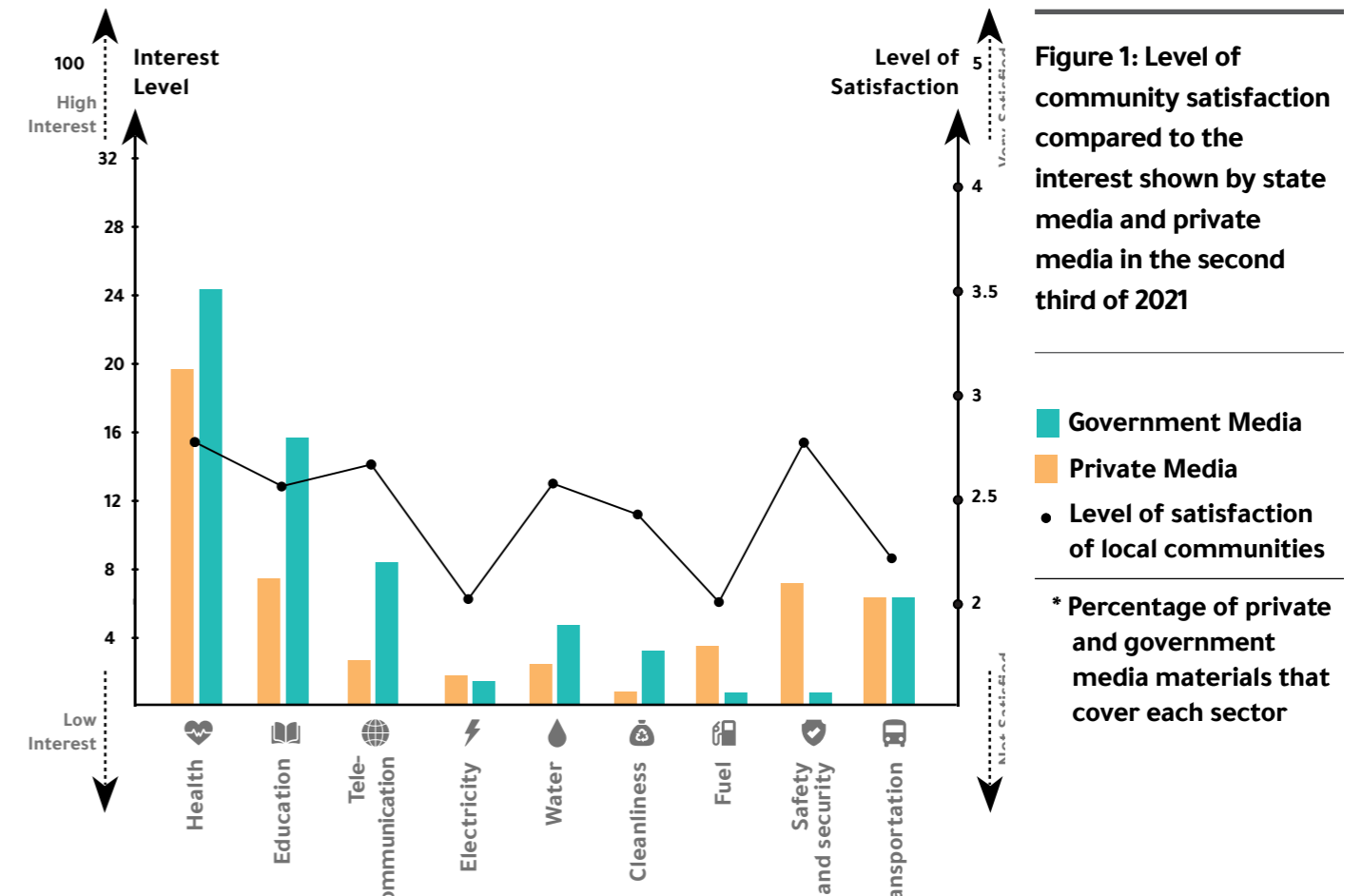
With regard to private media, news and materials on development were collected from 16 private Syrian media outlets during the second third of 2021. The sample gathered in this period consisted of 1,136 pieces, which were obtained from media websites by utilizing automated searches based on categories and keywords. These were classified according to sector and governorate through an algorithm built by the team.

This report takes into consideration the fact that data were taken from preliminary statistics without in-depth analysis. It is worth noting that there are undocumented aspects of civil work and commercial activity, which makes it difficult to envision the bigger picture in an integrated fashion.



Development Interactions: Factors/ Stakeholders

Satisfaction with electricity and fuel is still minimal according to Development Assets respondents. Furthermore, these two services are still not receiving any attention from private and state media. Daraa and Quneitrah recorded a further decline in overall satisfaction rates. Satisfaction with telecommunications and internet across Syria has slightly improved, but is still below average. During this third, there was a slight increase in the interest of private media in covering matters related to health, while the interest of state media slightly dropped in this regard. Meanwhile, respondents' satisfaction with health services remained constant. Families' ability to sustain food and other living needs decreased in Daraa, Sweida, Quneitrah, Idlib, Damascus and Hama.

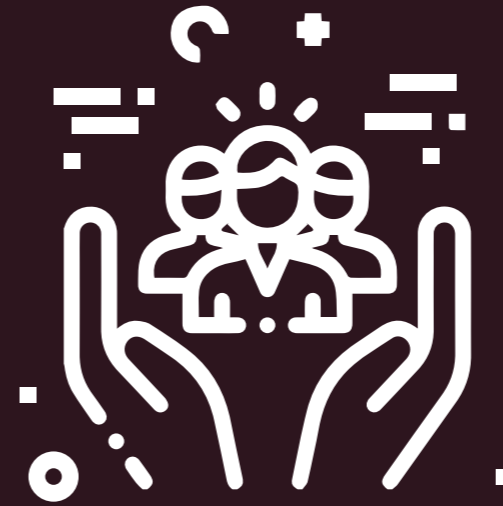
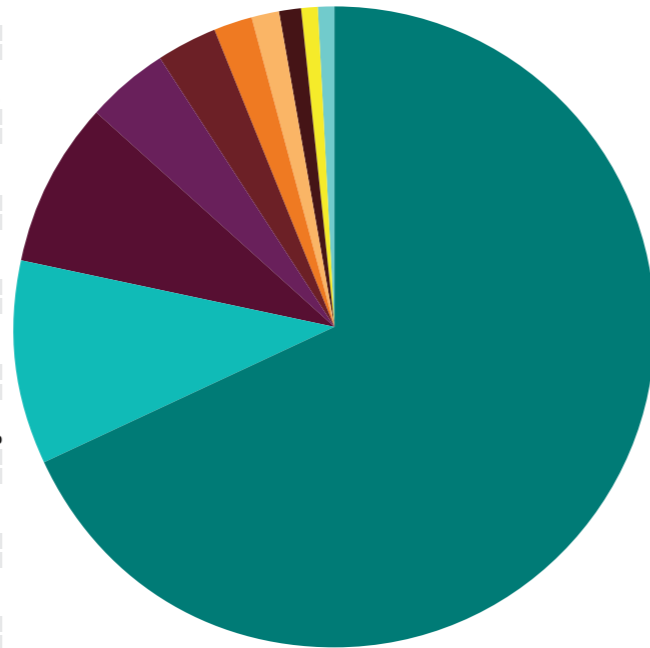
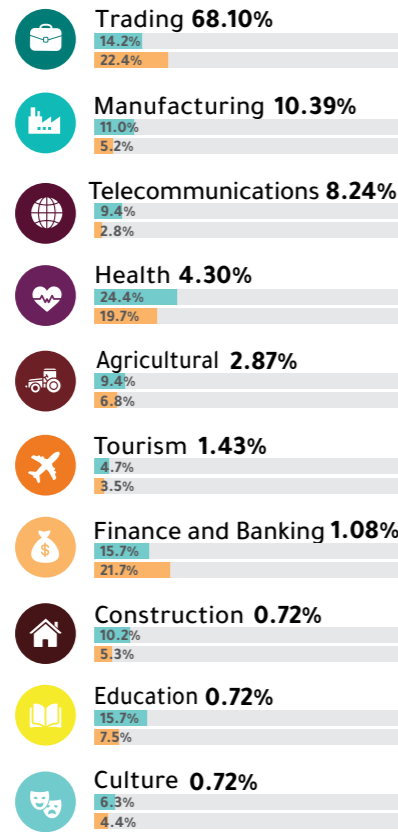


The number of new registered companies multiplied during this third, compared to the previous third. There was a significant increase in investment in telecommunications, both in the number of companies and the amount of capital invested. The wholesale trade, import and export sector is still the most attractive to new investors as indicated by the number of companies in the field. There was an increase in the number of private companies that actively work in the health sector during this third, matched with an increase in private media's interest in this regard, while many public hospitals were newly opened or renovated. The ability to find work that suits one's educational background and experience has slightly improved, but the indicator still points to a difficulty in finding work, according to Development Assets respondents.

■ Government Media
■ Private Media

Figure 2: Distribution of new private companies over different sectors compared to state media interest and private media interest in the second third of 2021

* The size of each slice reflects the number of new companies registered in each sector.



Local Communities

Local development must begin by forming a good understanding of the relationships and roles within the local community, as the efforts of local stakeholders are foundational to the success of the development process and to fulfilling its needs. Equally important are the relationships between the community and official and non-official institutions and among these institutions themselves. Uniting the efforts of the community and providing a clear understanding of the resources available will lay the foundation for successfully building and investing in community capital.

The Condition of Services

Compared to the first third of 2021, the condition of services worsened notably in Quneitrah and Daraa, and to a lesser extent, in Hasakeh and Hama during the second third. Satisfaction with telecommunications has slightly improved across the board but remains below average. Satisfaction with electricity and fuel remains the lowest amongst other services, while satisfaction with water dropped significantly over the last third.



¹ From 5 to 1: very satisfied - satisfied - neither satisfied nor dissatisfied - not satisfied - not satisfied at all - I don't know

During the second third of 2021, satisfaction with **water** decreased from 2.8 to 2.6 on a gradual scale¹, which is the most significant drop in services during this period. At the governorate level, activists grew more dissatisfied with water services in Hasakeh, Idlib, Homs, Hama, Damascus, Sweida, Quneitrah, and Daraa, while the greatest drop in satisfaction rates was recorded in Latakia, from 2.9 to 1.9. The lowest satisfaction rate remains in Daraa, at 1.2. Concurrently, satisfaction with **cleanliness** decreased slightly across Syria, from 2.5 to 2.4.

Satisfaction with **internet** services increased slightly from 2.5 to 2.6 and that with **telecommunications** from 2.6 to 2.7. The highest satisfaction rates related to telecommunications and internet were recorded in Idlib at 3.3 and 3.2 respectively, while the lowest were in Daraa, Deir Al-Zur, Quneitrah, and Sweida. In Homs, Deir Al-Zur, and Quneitrah, activists complained especially of poor internet services.

Satisfaction with **electricity** is still the lowest among the services, indicted by a score of 2.0. The lowest satisfaction rates were in Daraa, at 1.2, and in Tartus, Latakia, and Deir Al-Zur at 1.5. On the other hand, the highest satisfaction rates did not exceed 2.4, and they were recorded in Damascus and Aleppo. At the sub-governorate level, the least satisfaction rates were recorded in cities of Deir Al-Zur and Mayadeen, in addition to most small towns and rural areas in the governorate of Daraa. Respondents in most governorates indicated great dissatisfaction with long power cuts, and many indicated that poor electricity and internet are interfering with their work.

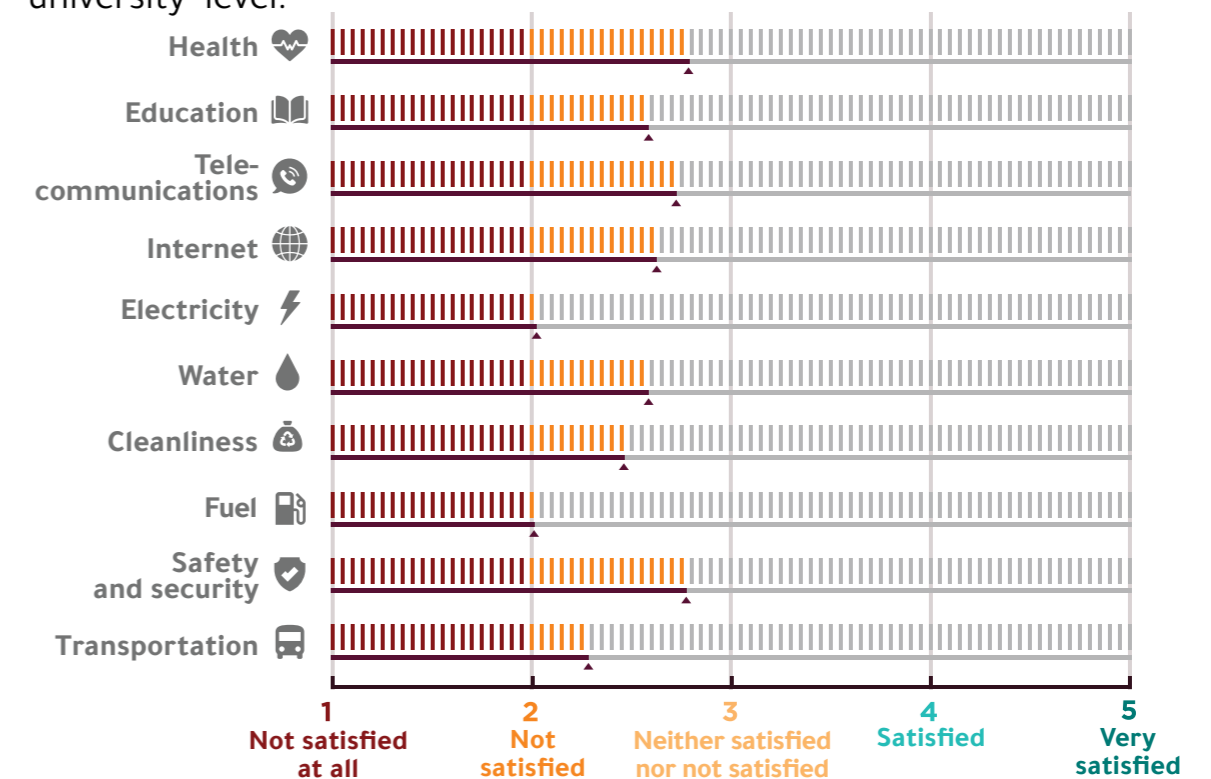
Satisfaction with **fuel** was also rated at 2.0, with no significant disparities across governorates. The lowest satisfaction rate in this regard during this third was recorded in Daraa, at 1.3, and the highest in Damascus, at 2.5. Satisfaction with **transportation** remained at 2.3, with the most notable change in Hasakeh (from 3.1 to 2.6), Daraa (from 2.0 to 1.5), and Quneitrah (from 1.8 to 1.0).

Satisfaction with **safety and security** increased slightly across Syria, from 2.7 to 2.8. While satisfaction with security increased in Homs, Sweida, Damascus, Raqqah, Deir Al-Zur, and Tartus, it decreased remarkably in Idlib, Hama, Quneitrah, and Daraa as well where the lowest rate was recorded at 1.4. Respondents in Idlib, Sarmada (Idlib governorate), Aleppo, Jarablus (Aleppo governorate), Ain Issa (Raqqah governorate), expressed concern regarding safety and security in their areas.

Satisfaction with health and education did not change significantly. Satisfaction with **health** remained at 2.8. Activists' satisfaction with health services decreased in Daraa, Aleppo, and Homs, while it increased in Damascus and Rural Damascus. Respondents from Idlib expressed a need for better staff in the field of reproductive health, while respondents from Qamishli mentioned the need for making health insurance available, especially to the elderly.

Satisfaction with **education** remained at 2.6. Respondents saw a need for restructuring early-stage education, in addition to improving the quality of scientific research and higher studies. Activists in Raqqah pointed out the need for activating education through governmental curricula to facilitate students' transition into later stages of education, particularly university level.

Figure 3: Activists' average satisfaction with basic services provided in their areas in the second third of 2021



Damascus	3.2	2.8	2.9	2.8	2.4	3.1	2.6	2.5	3.2	2.5
Homs	2.8	2.8	2.9	2.7	2.2	2.9	2.6	2.1	3.4	2.4
Aleppo	2.8	2.6	2.9	2.9	2.4	3.3	2.9	2.0	2.7	2.2
Hasakeh	3.0	2.6	2.9	2.9	1.8	2.4	2.5	2.3	3.1	2.6
Idlib	3.1	2.5	3.2	3.3	2.3	2.2	2.4	2.0	2.4	2.5
Rural Damascus	2.9	2.8	3.0	3.0	2.0	2.4	2.4	2.0	3.1	2.1
Hama	3.1	2.7	2.5	2.4	2.0	2.4	2.4	2.1	2.9	2.6
Tartus	3.2	2.7	2.5	2.1	1.5	3.0	2.4	1.7	3.3	2.1
Raqqah	2.2	2.0	2.6	2.7	1.9	2.8	2.6	2.3	2.2	2.7
Latakia	2.9	2.4	2.5	2.3	1.5	1.9	2.1	1.7	2.7	2.0
Sweida	2.5	2.5	2.3	1.9	1.9	2.5	2.3	1.9	2.0	1.9
Quneitrah	3.0	1.3	2.0	1.8	1.8	2.3	3.3	2.3	1.8	1.0
Deir Al-Zur	1.8	2.4	1.8	1.6	1.5	2.2	1.9	1.8	2.2	2.1
Daraa	1.6	1.7	1.5	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.5	1.3	1.4	1.5
Syria	2.8	2.6	2.7	2.6	2.0	2.6	2.4	2.0	2.8	2.3
Governorate	Health	Education	Tele-communication	Internet	Electricity	Water	Cleanliness	Fuel	Safety and security	Transport



Figure 4: Activists' average satisfaction with basic services provided in their area classified by governorate in the second third of 2021

Living conditions

The ability of families to secure their livelihood, including food and other essentials, remained constant across Syria according to activists' responses, at a level of 2.3 on a gradual scale², which is the same as the last third. Nonetheless, this ability to secure livelihood has somewhat changed at the governorate level, decreasing in Daraa, from 1.6 to 1.2, in Sweida from 2.2 to 1.9, in Quneitrah from 2.7 to 1.8, in Idlib from 2.5 to 2.2, in Damascus from 2.6 to 2.4, and in Hama from 2.7 to 2.5. Contrastingly, the families' abilities to secure livelihood increased in Aleppo, from

² From 5 to 1: very capable - capable - sometimes capable and sometimes not capable - not capable - not capable at all - I do not know

2.2 to 2.6, in Raqqah from 2.3 to 2.6, in Hasakeh from 2.5 to 2.7, in Tartus from 2.3 to 2.6, in Homs from 2.6 to 2.8, and in Deir Al-Zur from 1.6 to 1.8. At the sub-governorate level, there were extremely low scores across Daraa, especially in the western rural area.

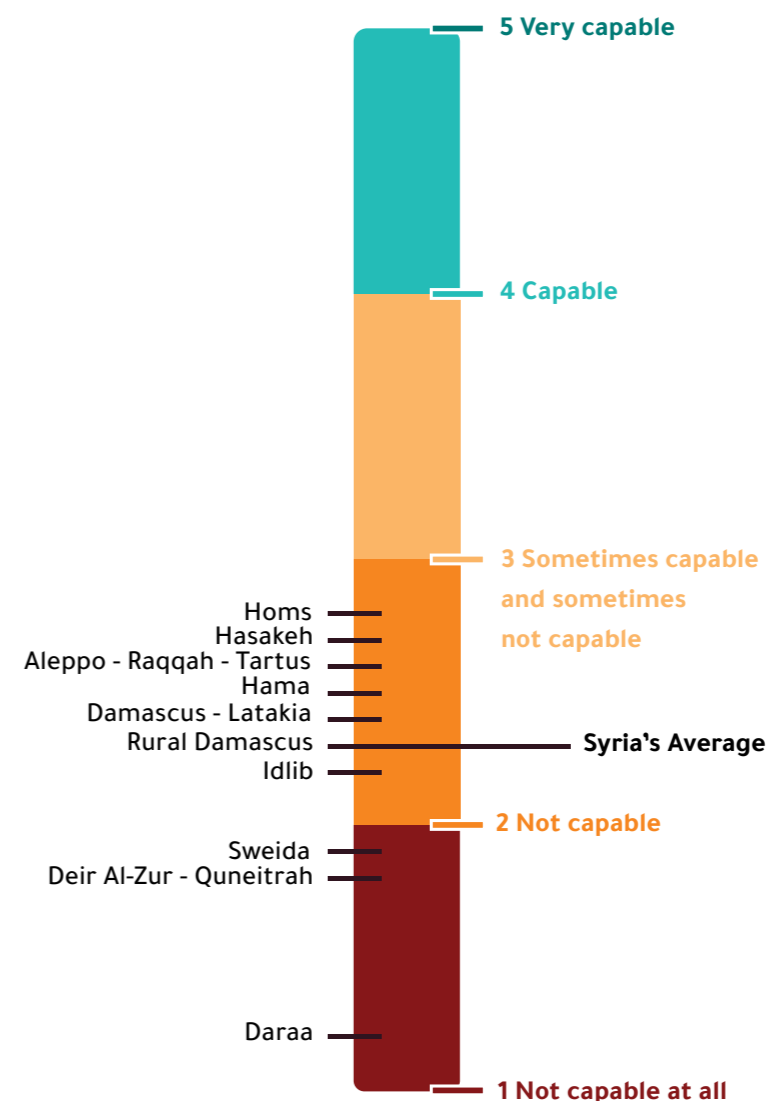


Figure 5: Families' ability to sustain food and other living needs in the second third of 2021, classified by governorate

Participation and Community Interaction

This section addresses respondents' perception of local institutions and authorities' interaction with community needs, using their own evaluation of the level of interaction on a gradual scale³. Municipalities have grown slightly more interactive with community needs, with the level increasing from 2.9 to 3.0 over the last third. Municipal interaction increased most significantly in the governorates of Damascus (from 2.9 to 3.3), Daraa (from 3.1 to 3.5), and Homs (2.7 to 3.1), while it decreased most significantly in Sweida (from 3.0 to 2.5). Neighborhood committees were

³ From 5 to 1: very interactive - interactive - neutral - not interactive - not interactive at all - I don't know

as interactive as they were during the last third, indicated by a level of 2.6, the interaction of Mokhtars also remained the same, at 2.9. The lowest levels of neighborhood committee interaction were in Daraa and Homs.

The interaction of associations remained constant at 2.6. Associations still play no role in Deir Al-Zur, where their interaction level is rated 1.1, meaning “not interactive at all”, while they were most interactive in Tartus and Hama, compared to other governorates. Service institutions became more interactive, going from 2.9 to 3.0; they seemed to be most interactive with local community needs in Tartus, Homs, and Damascus.

The interaction of NGOs (nonprofit and nongovernmental) with community needs increased from 3.3 to 3.4, remaining more interactive with local needs than most actors, according to social activists. The greatest interaction by NGOs was recorded in Aleppo, at 3.8, followed by Daraa at 3.7 and Hama at 3.6. During the same period, NGO interaction in Sweida decreased from 3.4 to 3.0, and in Latakia from 3.3 to 2.9. The lowest rate of interaction during this third was in Deir Al-Zur, however the interaction of NGOs there had increased from 2.2 to 2.5. The interaction of international organizations with the needs of local communities increased from 2.8 to 3.0, and they seem to have played a significant role during this third in Tartus and Hama, rated at 3.6 and 3.5 respectively.

Religious institutions have become slightly more interactive with local community needs, going from 2.9 to 3.0. The interaction of religious institutions increased most notably in Quneitrah, Daraa, and Tartus, while it decreased remarkably in Sweida and Aleppo.

The interaction of private companies with the needs of local communities across Syria remained at 2.6, ranging between 2.3 and 2.9 across all governorates except for Deir Al-Zur where interaction was very minimal, indicated by 1.2. Influential individuals grew less interactive with local needs, with their

rate of interaction dropping from 2.9 to 2.8. Such individuals were most interactive in Tartus, Daraa, Raqqah, and Hama.

With regard to media, the interaction of state media outlets with the needs of the local community increased from 2.6 to 2.7, while that of private media increased from 2.8 to 2.9. In most governorates, private media seemed to be more interactive than state media. The gap in interaction levels between state media and private media was biggest in Hasakeh, Raqqah, Idlib, and Sweida. Social media interaction remained at 3.7.

The community’s interaction with local activities increased from 3.0 to 3.2 according to activists, with the highest interaction in Quneitrah and Daraa, while the lowest was in Deir Al-Zur.

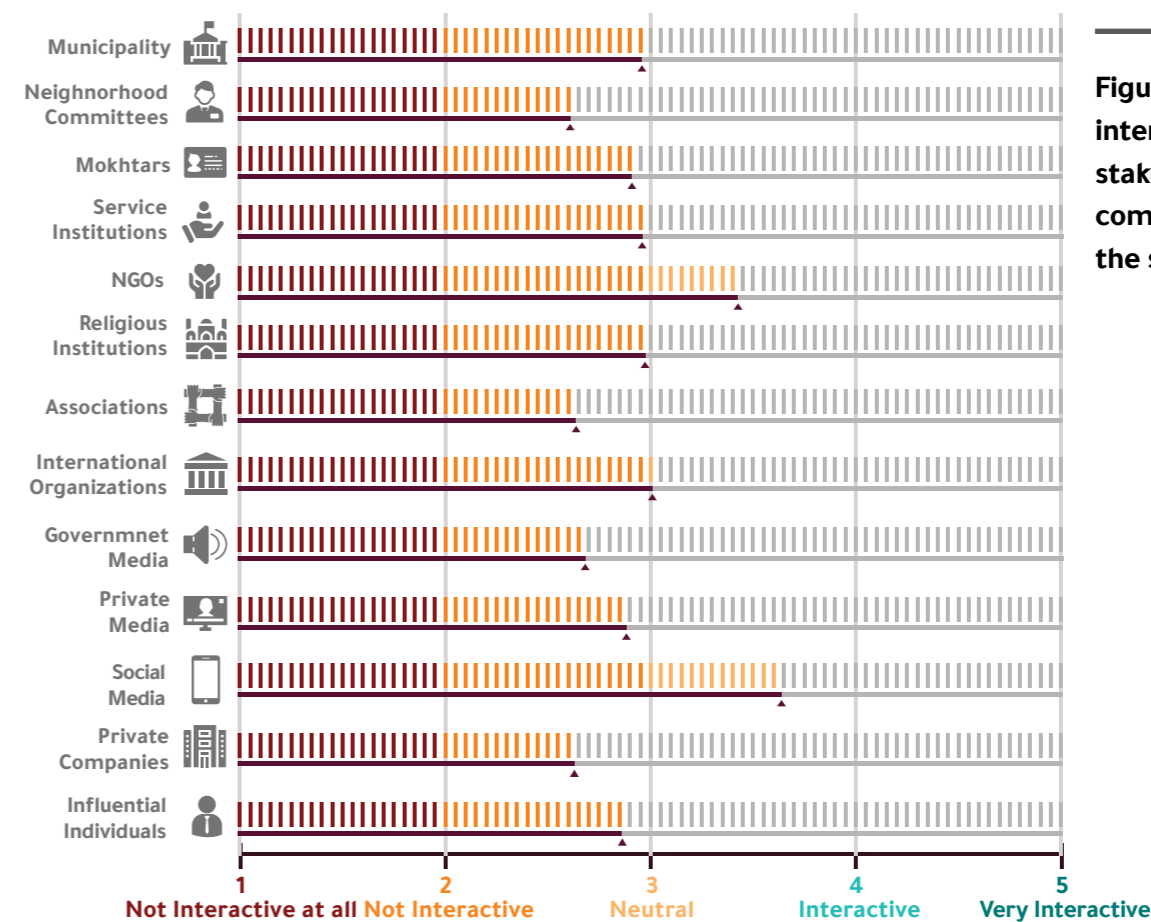


Figure 6: The levels of interaction of different stakeholders to local community needs in the second third of 2021

Non-governmental Organizations

Little has changed with regards to cooperation among community actors, such as NGOs and volunteer groups, which remained at 2.8 on a gradual scale⁴. Moreover, national donors granted the same degree of independence to the beneficiaries they supported over the past third, indicated by 2.3 on a gradual scale⁵. Similarly, the degree of independence granted by international donors remained at 2.5. The difference between the degree of independence granted by foreign donors compared to that granted by national donors seems to be most significant in the governorates of Sweida, Hasakeh, and Latakia.

As for newly licensed NGOs, data from the Official Gazette during the second third of 2021 indicates that one NGO and one association had been denied license while another 28 were licensed. The number of license approvals given has declined compared to the previous third, while the number of denied licenses remains the smallest in years. Associations that were denied a license were in Raqqah and Hasakeh, while the newly licensed NGOs were prominently active in Rural Damascus and Sweida in addition to those that cover the Syrian geography as a whole. Newly licensed NGOs were mostly operating within the sector of charity.

During this third, two branches of previously licensed NGOs were registered in two different governorates. In addition, all 12 applications by NGOs to amend their internal systems and regulations have been accepted. During this third, there was a notable decrease in the number of established NGOs that target certain villages or towns. The level of official interaction with community action remained at 2.9 on a gradual scale⁶.

According to respondents, the extent of gender equality in employment within the non-profit sector decreased from 2.9 to 2.7 on a gradual scale⁷. Employment opportunities were most equal in Tartus, and least equal in Deir Al-Zur.

⁴From 5 to 1: very cooperative - cooperative - neutral - not cooperative - not cooperative at all - I don't know

⁵From 5 to 1: very independent - independent - neutral - not independent - not independent at all - I don't know

⁶From 5 to 1: very supportive - supportive - neutral - not supportive - not supportive at all - I don't know

⁷From 5 to 1: very equal - equal - neither equal nor unequal - unequal - very unequal - I don't know

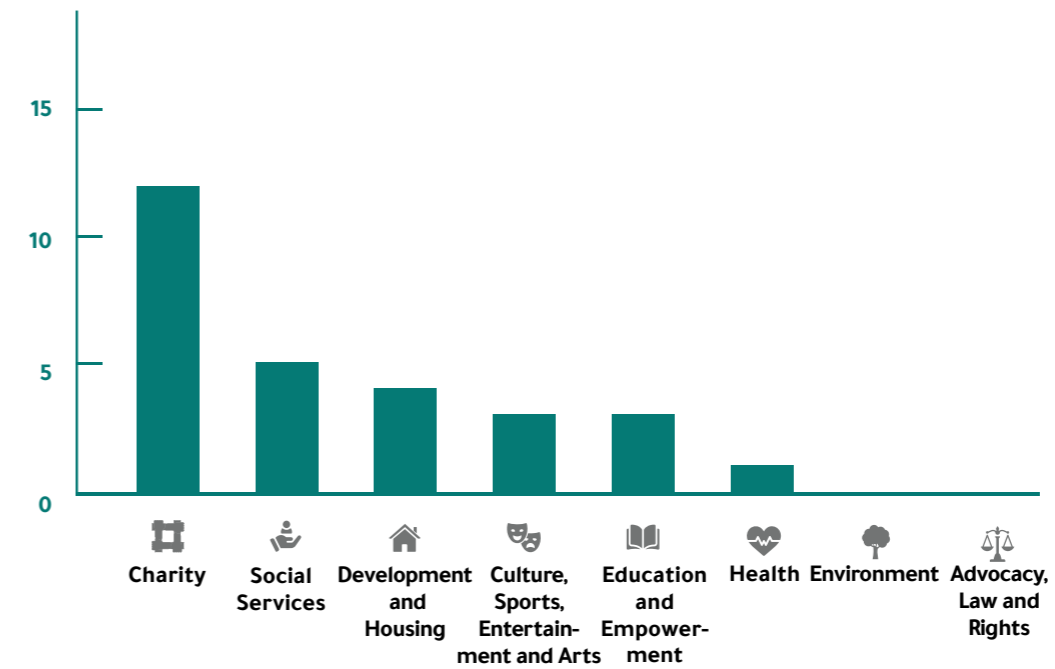


Figure 7: The number of newly licensed NGOs during the second third of 2021

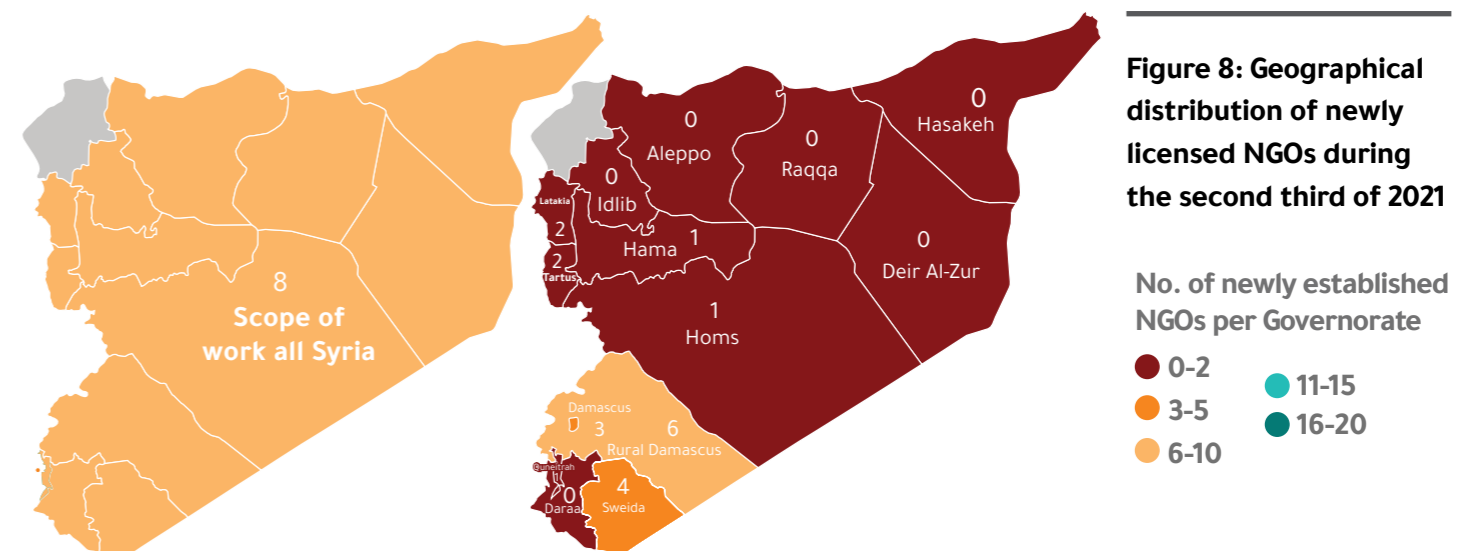


Figure 8: Geographical distribution of newly licensed NGOs during the second third of 2021

No. of newly established NGOs per Governorate

- 0-2
- 3-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20

Social Issues

This section measures the extent to which a number of social issues are locally common from the perspective of activists as indicated on a gradual scale⁸. During the past third, the indicator for child labor continued to decline, reaching 2.0 during this third, compared to 2.1 in the previous third and 2.2 in the one before that. According to activists' responses, child labor was most prevalent in the governorates of Daraa and Idlib. The indicator for child begging also declined for the second third in a row, reaching 2.1. This phenomenon seems to be most prevalent in northern and north-eastern governorates, with a rate of 1.5 recorded in Idlib, and 1.7 in each of Aleppo, Raqqah, and Hasakeh.

⁸From 5 to 1: very uncommon - uncommon - neither common nor uncommon - common - very common - I don't know

Child marriage, particularly for girls under the age of eighteen, became more common, with the indicator decreasing from 2.6 to 2.5. This phenomenon was most prevalent in Daraa and Idlib according to respondents. The prevalence of school dropout among males and females, remained the same, at 2.0 for males, and 2.4 for females.

As for domestic violence, 62% of the respondents reported that women mainly resort to their families or tribes, while 14% reported that women in their surrounding mainly resorted to the court, or local influential figures (according to 5%), or to police stations (3%), or non-governmental organizations (3%), while 14% responded with “I don’t know”.

Response to Covid-19

When asked to rate their satisfaction with the response of different actors to the Covid-19 pandemic, activists expressed an increased satisfaction with local authorities’ response indicated by a rise from 2.7 to 2.8 on a gradual scale⁹. The highest satisfaction with the response of local authorities was found in Damascus and Quneitrah, while the lowest was in Deir Al-Zur. In Aleppo, respondents’ satisfaction with local authorities’ response decreased from 3.3 to 2.5 over the past third. Respondents’ satisfaction with state media’s response to the pandemic remained at 2.9, while their satisfaction with private media increased from 2.9 to 3.0. Satisfaction with social media decreased slightly, from 3.4 to 3.3. The score for the response to Covid-19 by civil society and local associations increased from 2.9 to 3.0, and the highest interaction levels by those actors were in Idlib and Rural Damascus, while the lowest levels were found in Deir Al-Zur.

When asked whether they registered for the Covid-19 vaccine, 33% of respondents confirmed having already registered, while 30% indicated that they have not yet registered but would like to do so. Around 40% of respondents noted that they did not and will not register for the vaccine, and another 7% chose not to answer the question. When respondents were asked to rate, on a gradual

⁹From 5 to 1: very equal - equal - neither equal nor unequal - unequal - very unequal - I don’t know

scale¹⁰, the percentage of people in their social circles who have registered for the Covid-19 vaccine, the average answer across Syria was 2.2, meaning “few people”. The smallest vaccine registration rates were noted in Daraa, Quneitrah, and Raqqah.

Development Prospects

The extent to which activists believed in community work’s ability to influence development in Syria remained at 3.8 on a gradual scale¹¹. The belief in community work’s ability in this regard was highest among activists in Tartus, Homs, and Aleppo, while it decreased remarkably in Hama compared to the last third. Activists’ trust in the abilities of local administration personnel and elected officials to influence the local development process decreased from 2.9 to 2.8, and was highest in Idlib and Hama. The extent to which elected officials shared information with citizens remained at 2.1 on a gradual scale¹², which means they have a tendency not to share. The governorates with the least extent of information shared were Latakia, Daraa, Quneitrah, and Damascus.

In an optional question on the extent to which parliamentary electoral programs met voters’ aspirations, activists indicated such programs did not fulfill aspirations, as their answers averaged at 1.9 on a gradual scale¹³, which is the same as the score recorded in the previous third. Also indicated by activists’ responses is the fact that women have become less interested in political participation, be it through nomination, voting, or becoming member of a party; on a gradual scale¹⁴, interest levels dropped from 2.3 to 2.1. The highest level of interest was in Hasakeh, Tartus, and Daraa, however they did not exceed 2.5 in any of the governorates.

In another optional question on the impact of using smart cards on the fairness of state subsidy distribution, activists expressed that the use of smart cards did not affect the fairness of distribution, and the average of their answers was 3.0 on a gradual scale¹⁵, compared to 2.7 in the previous third. The fairest distribution was indicated by activists in Damascus, and the lowest in Quneitrah, Raqqah, and Deir Al-Zur.

¹⁰From 5 to 1: very committed - committed - neutral - not committed - not committed at all - I don’t know

¹¹From 5 to 1: very capable - capable - neutral - not capable - not capable at all - I don’t know

¹²From 5 to 1: share well - share - neutral - do not share - do not share at all - I don’t know

¹³From 5 to 1: met aspirations highly - met aspirations - neither met nor did not meet - did not meet aspirations - did not meet aspirations at all - I don’t know

¹⁴From 5 to 1: very interested - interested - neither interested nor not interested - not interested - not interested at all - I don’t know

¹⁵From 5 to 1: much fairer - fairer - neutral - less fair - much less fair - I don’t know

Activists' optimism about future prospects of development in Syria remained at 2.7 on a gradual scale¹⁶. A great decrease in optimism was noted in Hama, Idlib, and Quneitrah during this third, compared to the previous one. 56% of respondents expressed a desire to travel and live abroad within the next two years, compared to 52% in the previous third. This percentage has been increasing for five thirds in a row.

¹⁶From 5 to 1: very optimistic - optimistic - neutral - not optimistic - not optimistic at all - I don't know

Figure 9: Activists' belief in the ability of community action to influence the development process in the second third of 2021.

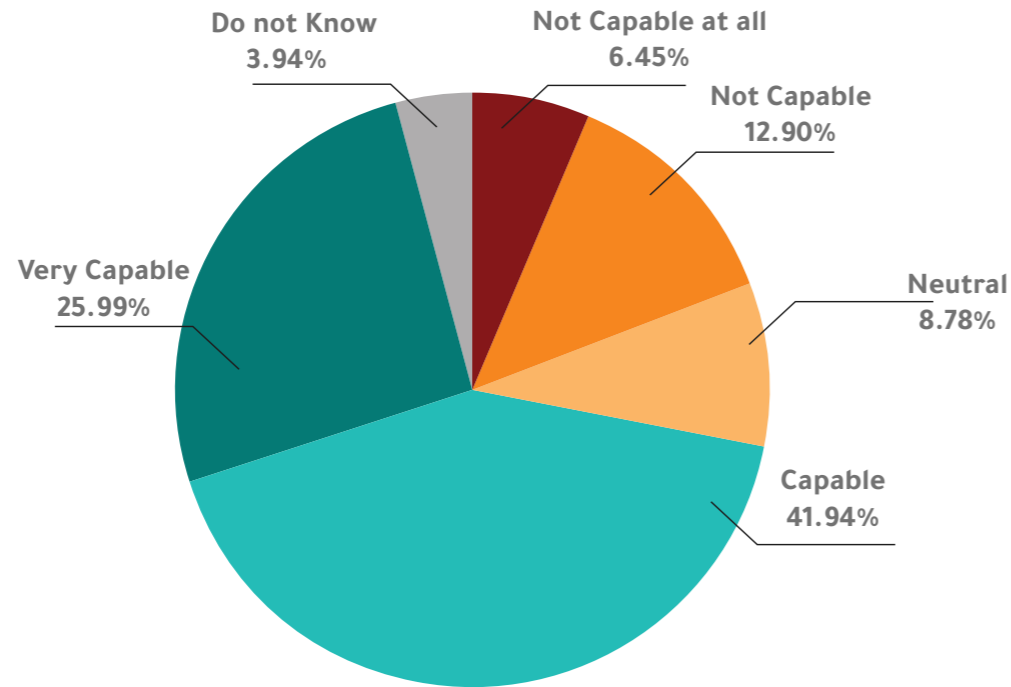


Figure 10: Activists' trust in the ability of local administration personnel and elected officials to influence local development in the second third of 2021

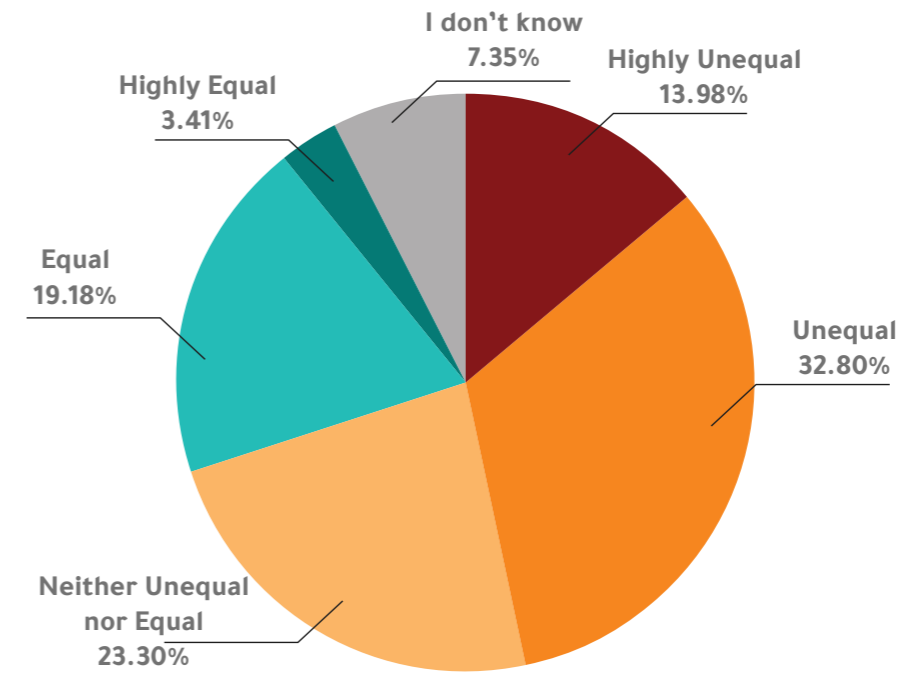
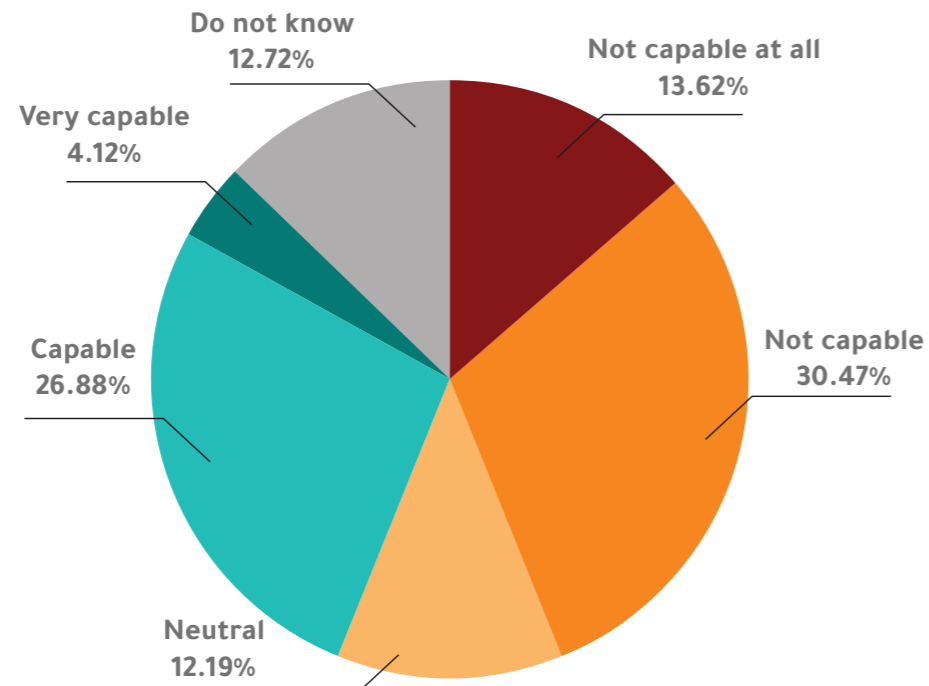


Figure 11: Activists' belief in equal employment opportunities for men and women in the non-profit sector in the first second of 2021

By comparing the results of the community activists' survey in first and second thirds of 2021, the following is observed:

- A continued decline in the level of satisfaction with services in Daraa and Quneitrah, and consistently low levels of satisfaction with electricity and fuel across the board.
- A decrease in families' ability to secure their livelihood, including food and other living essentials, in Daraa, Sweida, Quneitrah, Idlib, Damascus, and Hama.
- A decrease in the number of newly licensed NGOs.
- Some increase in the impact of using smart cards on the fairness of state subsidy distribution.



Information used in this section on the government's role in development is based on a review of legislations, decrees and decisions related to development and services during the second third of 2021. These materials were extracted from the Official Gazette, the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers' web portal.

Overview

With respect to the spread of Covid-19, the Ministry of Health announced the official count of cases for the end of the second third of 2021 as follows: 27,915 registered cases, 22,471 cured cases and 2013 deaths. These numbers may not reflect the actual number of cases or their distribution across different areas, given the deterioration of healthcare and the insufficient number of tests performed. As for the vaccination process, an electronic registration platform was launched and medical staff and the elderly started to get vaccinated after the arrival of vaccines from several countries after Syria joined the COVAX initiative for vaccines global access. The Minister of Health declared the vaccination of 219,500 people by the last week of August.

The Syrian presidential elections were held, with 3 candidates approved by the Supreme Constitutional Court. Opposition groups had called for boycotting the elections, however, according to the Syrian Ministry of Interior, the total number of voters who were eligible to vote inside and outside of Syria was 18,107,109, the number of voters who did actually vote inside and outside Syria was 14,239,140, i.e., at a rate of 78.64%. Invalid votes amounted to 14,000, representing 0.1% of total votes.

Many decrees and laws were issued during this third, most notably the amnesty decree for perpetrators of crimes and offences. The new investment law was issued, as well as a law protecting child rights in Syria. A grant of 50,000 Syrian Pounds was provided to employees, as well as another one of 40,000 Syrian Pounds, followed by a 50% increase in salaries for employees, and a 40% increase for pensioners. This was followed by an increase in compensations for injured members of the National Defence Forces.

Examinations were held for primary and secondary education certificates, in all available streams. Additionally, 3 new hospitals were opened: Al-Kindi in Tartus, Al-Baath University Hospital in Homs, as well as the renovated building of the Aleppo Eye Surgery Hospital. On another note, the condition of services has grown worse in various areas, especially when it comes to electricity, as the duration of power cuts has increased. Notification messages for receiving one's share of fuel and subsidized goods were sometimes weeks overdue.

New citizen service centers were opened in Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Quneitrah, and Tartus, in addition to more centers in Damascus. Moreover, there was an apparent interest in electronic payment methods, with the launch of mobile payment applications. Banks started offering various e-services, but they are still limited and exclusive to cities and large enterprises.

Eng. Hussein Arnous was assigned to form the cabinet again. The new cabinet came with minor adjustments to the previous one. Many conferences were held for the opposition inside and outside of Syria, while governmental organizations held the administrative reform conference, agricultural forums, and several conferences for research and science.

Syria accepted the diplomatic credentials for many new ambassadors, and it received delegations from Iraq, Iran, and Russia. The president of Abkhazia visited Syria, along with delegates of the government, and various cooperation agreements were signed. Syria won a bronze medal in Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games; the last medal it had won was in 2004.



Government Action

Governmental Institutions and Internal Regulations

The Presidency of the Council of Ministers issued organizational structures for the Ministries of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, Industry, Oil and Mineral Recourses, Tourism, and Internal Trade and Consumer Protection. Also issued was the organizational structure for the Public Establishment for Electricity Generation in Deir Ali.

After years of costly preparations, the Center for Blood Stem Cell Transplantation and Cellular Therapy for Children was opened. The Arab Federation for E-Commerce obtained a license to open a regional office in Syria. The Department of Confiscated and Seized Assets was transferred from the Central Treasury Directorate to the Directorate of Public Revenue.

The Ministry of Information issued the operations system for Al-Wahda Foundation for Press, Printing and Publication. The financial and accounting regulations for institutes affiliated with the higher council for intermediate institutes were adjusted. The system of the cooperative fund for workers at the National Institution of Insurance and Pensions was approved. In addition, financial and accounting regulations were approved for the cooperation fund for workers at the Ministry of Finance and the General Commission for Tax and Fees.

Productivity bonuses were given to workers at many public establishments, including the Damascus Water Supply and Sewerage Authority, the General Company of Iron and Steel Products in Hama, the General Foreign Trade Organization, the National Institution of Insurance and Pensions, the Syrian Civil Aviation Authority, the General Company for Inland Transport, the General Company for Bottling Water in Tartus, the General Company for Cable Industry Damascus, the General Establishment for Hijazi Railway, and

the Syrian Arab Company for Grape Processing in Sweida and Homs.

The cost for transferring employees within public departments was redefined, and payrolls were adjusted for officers and non-commissioned officers and members of internal security forces. The State Council deemed it permissible for the Minister of Finance to receive a share of collected tax and confiscated assets.

Focus Topics

Health

Health-related matters got the greatest share of state media coverage during this third. Many hospitals were opened, and the Syrian government received 40 equipped ambulances from the World Health Organization. Moreover, the curve for Covid-19 was on the rise, and while the vaccination process continued, the turnout was very small; the number of vaccinated people makes up only a small percentage of the population.

A dermatology unit was founded in Damascus Hospital. Pension scheme tiers were set for workers at the Children's Hospital. Amendments were made to medical service fees at Al-Assad University Hospital Damascus. The Ministry of Health fixed the cost of Covid-19 vaccine certificates at 20,000 Syrian Pounds. The cost of PCR tests was redefined, becoming \$50 for Syrians and \$100 for non-Syrians.

Inputs and raw materials required for manufacturing medicines have been exempted from customs tax for another year. It was also decided that graduates of bridging programs within the open education system will not receive their certificates until they demonstrate full commitment. The Ministry of Health issued guidelines for fertility clinics.

Local Community

Issues of the local community came next, as dozens of amendments were made to local councils. The Ministry of Culture decided on compensation values for teachers at art centers and cultural institutes. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor raised wages for workers at social welfare institutions. The Syrian Prime Ministry issued a system for using the transportation service application. The 16th of December was endorsed as the national early childhood literacy day.

A maximum tariff was set for transporting individuals in tourist cars that run on fuel. Fuel started to be distributed in batches for heating purposes. Prices have increased for food supplies, including bread, as well as for fuel.

A number of electronic services were launched, including online remote renewal for any vehicle's license. A law was issued to regularize vehicles, machines, engineering equipment and human crews that have been mobilized through the department of public mobilization to support war efforts and compensate for the damage incurred to machinery and the harm inflicted onto human crews.

The Ministry of Justice issued a circular on using national numbers, rather than names, for arrest and prosecution purposes, as different individuals may have the same namesake. A sub-operator was founded in the village of Shir in Latakia, supervised by the rural industries unit. A fee was determined for issuing a general category driver's license.

Economy

Economic issues came next in state media coverage, as they had a fair share of governmental decisions. The new investment law was issued. Several funds and bonuses were given to state workers and pensioners. Injured members of the National Defence Forces with 40-65% impairment were granted a monthly compensation of 50,000 Syrian Pounds for ten years. 30,000 Syrian Pounds were added to the monthly compensation for members of the National Defence Forces of different impairment rates.

The Ministry of Finance issued income tax guidelines related to rental contracts for residential real estate units. A procedure was set for registering and licensing financial leasing companies. Taxpaying shareholders in joint-stock companies, limited liability companies, and public establishments, organizations and companies, as well as senior taxpayers, were given a time extension for providing their data. Approvals and license renewals were granted to legal accounts. The general state budget for 2022 was fixed at a rate of 2,500 Syrian pounds to the US dollar.

Entering foreign currency notes into the country was allowed at a maximum equivalent to 500,000 USD. Public banks added more loan options and opened up new tiers. Damascus International Fair was indefinitely postponed.

The maximum profit margin for manufacturing or importing certain materials was decided. Also, the minimum wage for transporting commodities and materials in trucks was decided. The General Organization for Sugar specified the maximum selling price for yeast. The Ministry of Internal Trade and Consumer Protection identified perishable goods and set standards for sampling them.

Publications issued by internal trade managers were used to set the maximum price for fruits and vegetables. Net weights and other relevant qualities were set for manufacturers and importers of foodstuffs to abide by. The Ministry of Internal Trade had permitted the production of semi-dairy products, then it suspended it.

Comprehensive customs tax exemption was redefined. The tariff for transporting heavy oil between distribution centers was redefined, and a maximum profit margin was defined for manufacturing and importing basic commodities. The Ministry of Internal Trade set terms for replacing products and commodities and it identified the responsibilities borne by manufacturers and suppliers.

Education

Education followed in terms of state media focus. Fees for university services were redefined for enrolled graduate students. A decree granted monthly financial awards to top achievers in general certificates. Some financial regulations were amended at the Institut National d'Administration. Student salaries were standardized across all technical institutes. New departments were opened in many universities. Higher studies became accredited at the Faculty of Sharia at the University of Aleppo, and so did the Master of Qualification and Specialization at the Faculty of Education at Al-Baath University. A variety of masters and PhD programs were launched. A theological school was opened in Damascus, and a theology and religious studies program was opened at the Faculty of Sharia in Aleppo.

Housing and Construction

The law on real estate service fees was issued, in addition to executive directions. A number of properties were acquisitioned in Quneitrah, Tartus, Daraa, Latakia, Hama and Sweida. Legislations on

easements were brought about in Tartus. Real-estate registration and documentation in the city of Saraqib was considered paused since 18-3-2015. The selling price for black cement was determined.

Agriculture and Rural Areas

The prohibition of continental shelf hunting was extended. Decisions were made to establish research stations and locations affiliated with the Ministry of Agriculture. The zeolite ore was defined and its properties and uses were identified. The Ministry also specified the official standards for wheat, during the 2021 harvest season, and it set terms for its delivery.

A forest nursery was opened in the village of Bsut in Qardaha. A decision prohibited labelling diabetic-friendly foods and substances as medical products. Terms were set for importing raw materials, and the technical condition of imported seed potatoes was specified. The General Organization of Tobacco was assigned to purchase the tobacco crops of 2021-2022.

Foreign Affairs

Syria accepted diplomatic credentials for new ambassadors. The agreement signed with Oman on mutual visa exemption for diplomatic passport holders was ratified. A non-resident ambassador to Nicaragua was accredited. The service of Walid Othman, ambassador to Romania, was extended for another year, since he turned 69. The service of Riyadh Haddad, ambassador to Russia, was extended for another year, since he turned 68.

Other Focus Topics

Objections to the Supreme Constitutional Court's decision on presidency candidates were formally accepted but then rejected for not meeting constitutional terms, according to the court transcript. An amnesty decree was issued for dozens of crimes. An administrative decision was made to terminate retention and recall for reserve officers and non-commissioned reserve officers,

according to terms specified for each category, depending on the number of years spent in service. Amendments were made to the military service act with relation to officers' duties.

The Ministry of Finance adjusted customs informants' share of collected tax, and it decided the salaries for members of the central committee for real estate valuation. The Ministry of Communications and Technology issued the Government Secure Network service system. Al-Sanobar Bridge in Latakia was listed as an archeological site, alongside the ruins of the temple of Concordia in Tartus, and Tal Ain Al-Basha in Quneitrah. In Damascus, the minaret of the Arbin Mosque, Yousef Al-Azma building, Al-Tajheez school, Khoban Al-Sakhaneh mosque, Tahounet El Zaeem building, and Al-Omari mosque were listed as archaeological sites.

The Ministry of Information decided the media coverage fees for private and joint-sector units' events, and displayed them on the information agency's website. Financial costs, including the fees of subscription to information agency services, were decided.

Interest by Government Level

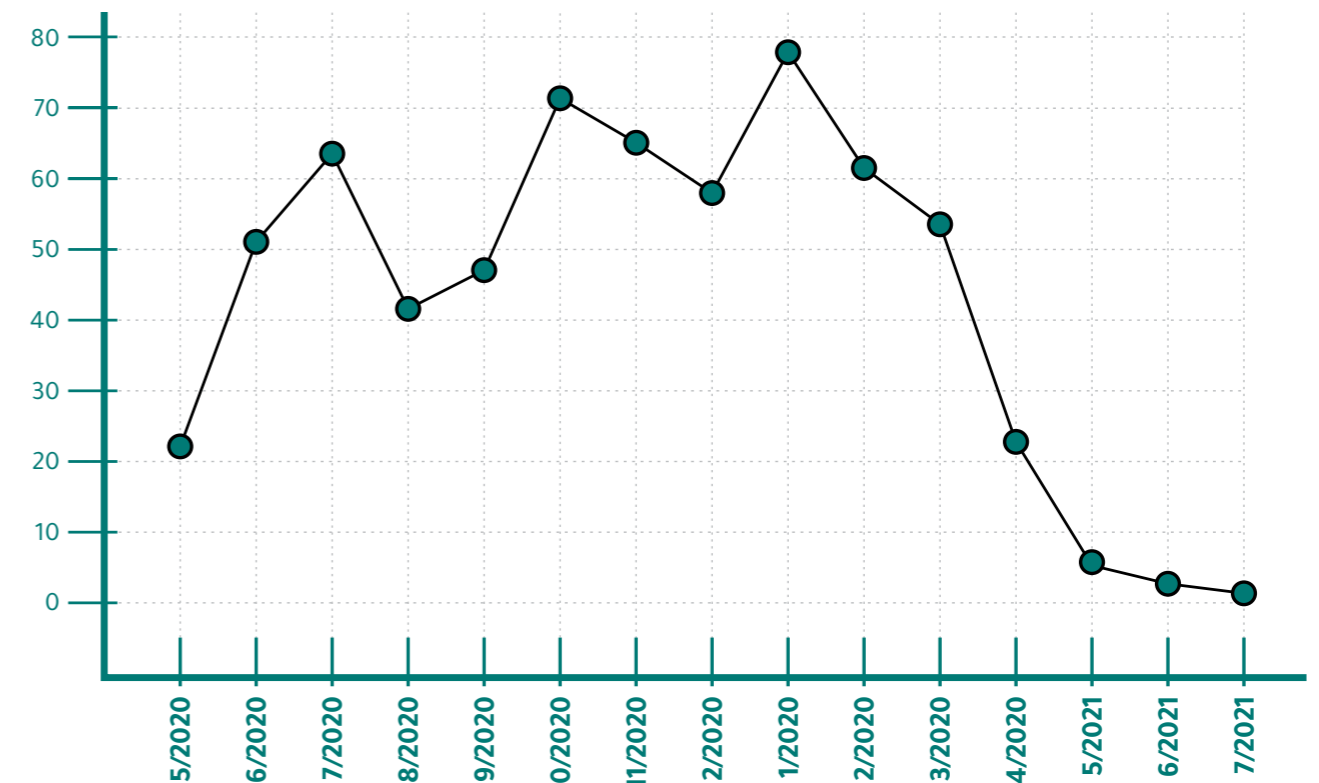
According to state media, different governmental levels showed different interest levels in various sectors and services. Directorates outperformed governorates and ministries in terms of state media coverage. Statements by governorates were significantly greater in number than ministerial statements. The ministerial level, however, had the most plans. The ministerial level also had the greatest share of governmental projects and services. Less than half of the reviewed materials were interactive at the level of daily events. Most interaction came from ministries and directorates, followed by governorates and local authorities.



Data on new companies is based on the official data published on registered companies in the Official Gazette from May to August 2021. Data regarding the labor market was extracted from a survey of community activists.

New Companies

During the second third of 2021, 321 new private companies were registered through official channels, which is double the number of companies registered in the previous third. The total capital deposited upon registering these new companies was estimated at 16.2 billion Syrian Pounds. This capital does not represent all investments, but rather what the partners chose to deposit as a declared initial investment upon establishment. Therefore, the actual size of investment exceeds the capital deposited upon establishment. It is worth noting that these numbers do not include unregistered commercial activities, let alone small ones. Hence, the scope of the informal sector is unknown and the data is fundamentally lacking in that regard. The numbers included in this section also do not include companies and investments in areas outside the control of the central government, since these are not registered through the channels in Damascus. In addition to the newly registered companies, the status of 25 companies was modified to comply with the Companies Provisions Act no. 29/2011.



Limited liability companies construed 98% of newly registered companies, while the remaining 2% consisted of private joint stock companies. Around 59% of new companies were active in the wholesale trade, import and export sector. The total capital of these companies represents only 7% of the capital invested in establishing companies during this period. During this third, information technology sector was prominent, where investments amounted to 68% of the total capital invested in establishing new companies. Focus on this sector is linked to the establishing of a new telecommunications operator during this period. There was an increase in the number of companies in most sectors during this third, but they tend to be of small to medium capital, except for those in the finance and insurance sector.

Figure 12: A timeline of the cumulative number of companies registered since May 2020, including those registered in the second third of 2021, including new and modified licenses



Private Sector and Job Market

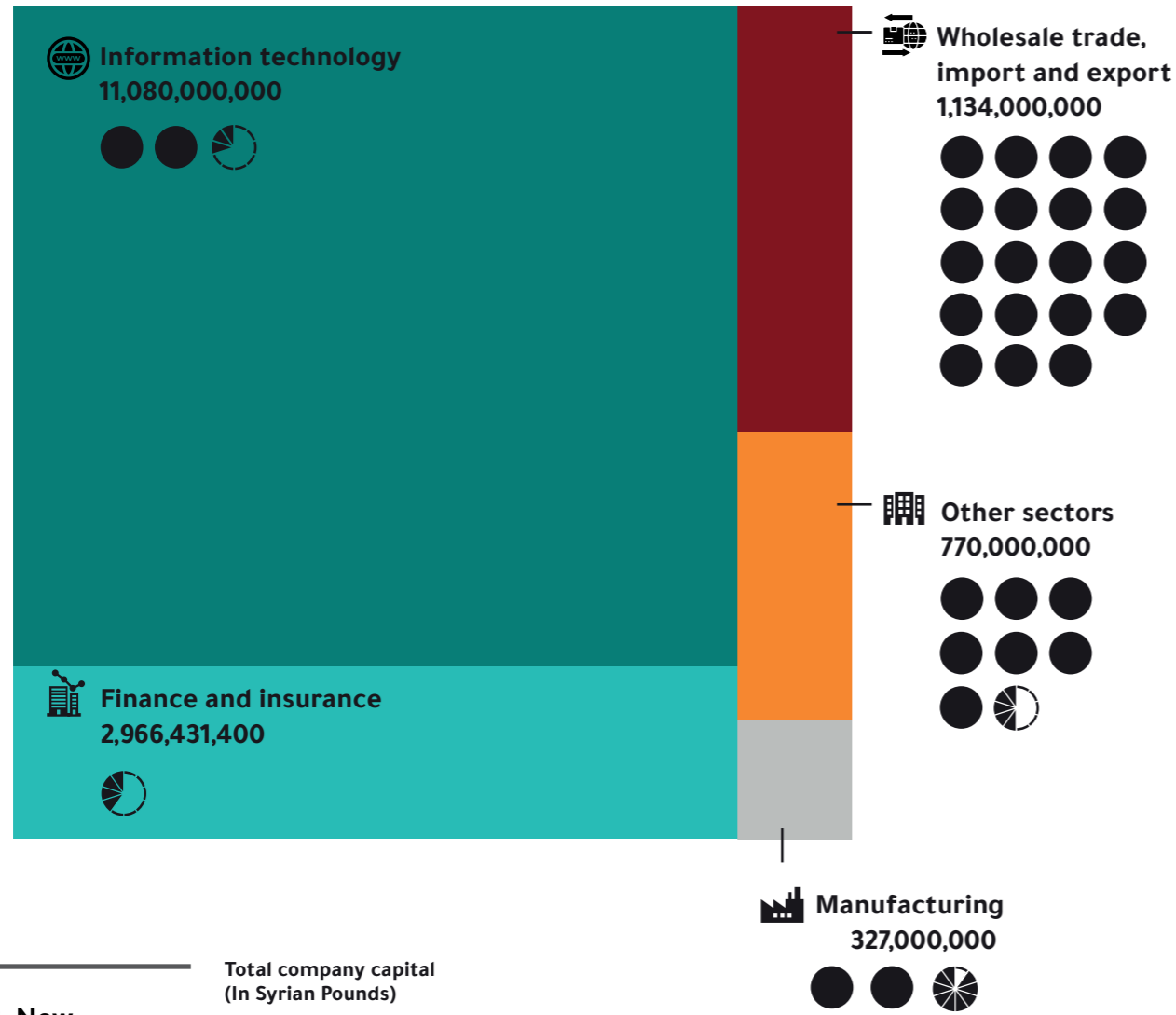


Figure 13: New companies registered in the second third of 2021 classified by sector and capital investment

Total company capital (In Syrian Pounds)

Number of new companies / sector

1 company

10 companies

Geographically speaking, the governorates with the largest share of newly registered companies were Damascus and Rural Damascus, where 82% of new companies were established; other governorates maintained a small number of newly registered companies during this third.

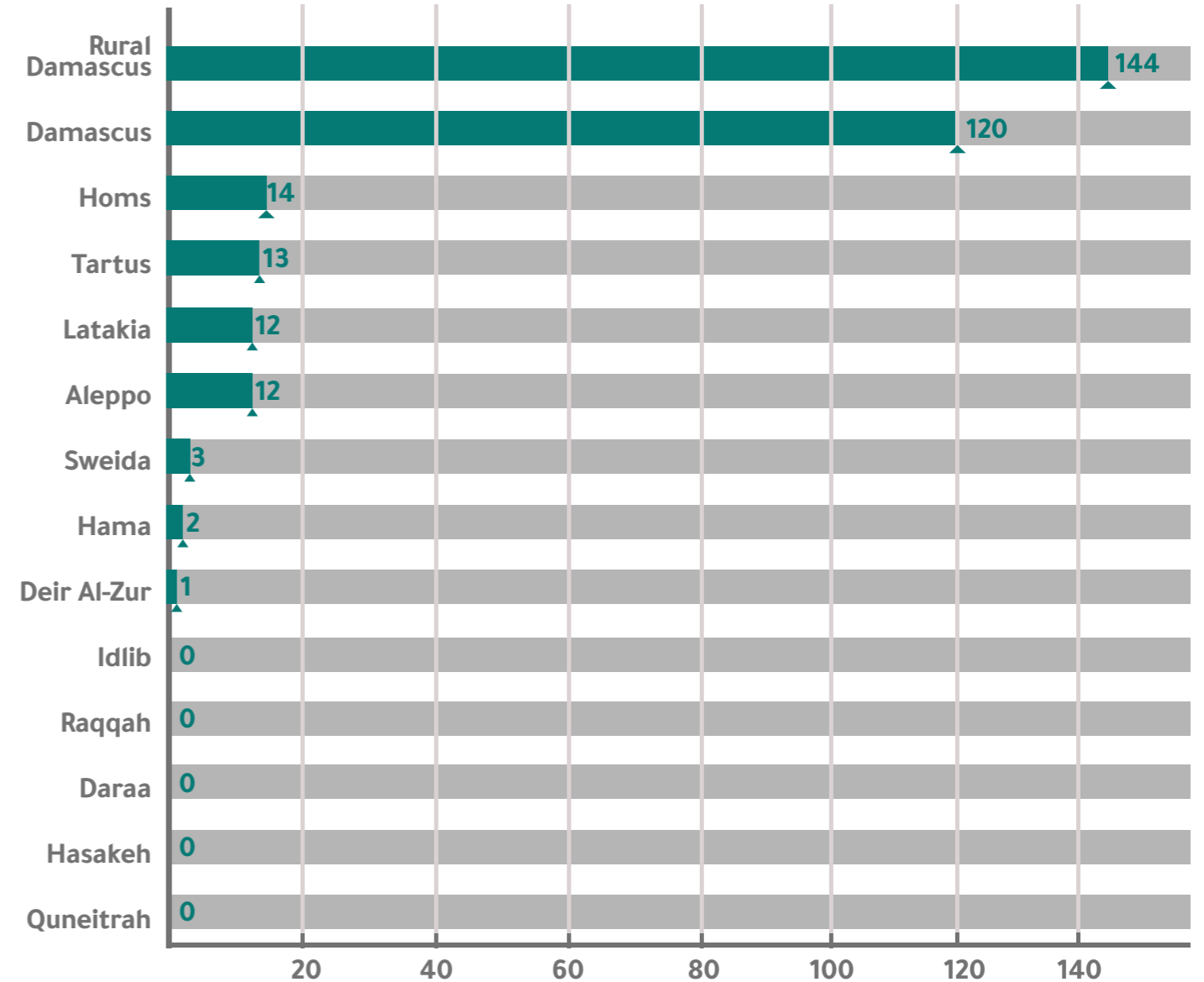


Figure 14: Number of new companies registered in the second third of 2021 by governorate

As for foreign investors, Iranian and Lebanese investors stood out during this third, followed by Palestinian investors. Most shareholders invested in the wholesale trade, import and export sector. 29% of the new companies included female shareholders, whose shares only amounted to 2% of the total capital of these companies..

Job Market

According to activists' responses to the Developmental Assets survey, finding suitable work that matches one's qualifications and experience has become slightly less difficult, indicated by a rise from of 2.1 to 2.2 on a gradual scale¹⁷. The best score in this regard was recorded in Rural Damascus, at 2.6, while the lowest levels (i.e., the greatest difficulties) were found in Deir Al-Zur, at 1.6, and in Idlib, at 1.7. The average for males increased from 2.0 to 2.2, while it remained at 2.1 for females. As for age groups, the answers of respondents above 50 indicate that it is easier for them to find suitable work compared to other age groups during this third. Respondents who have Master's or PhD degrees and those who only completed primary school, indicated that they could find work more easily compared to other categories.

¹⁷ From 5 to 1: very easy - easy - neither easy nor difficult - difficult - very difficult - I don't know

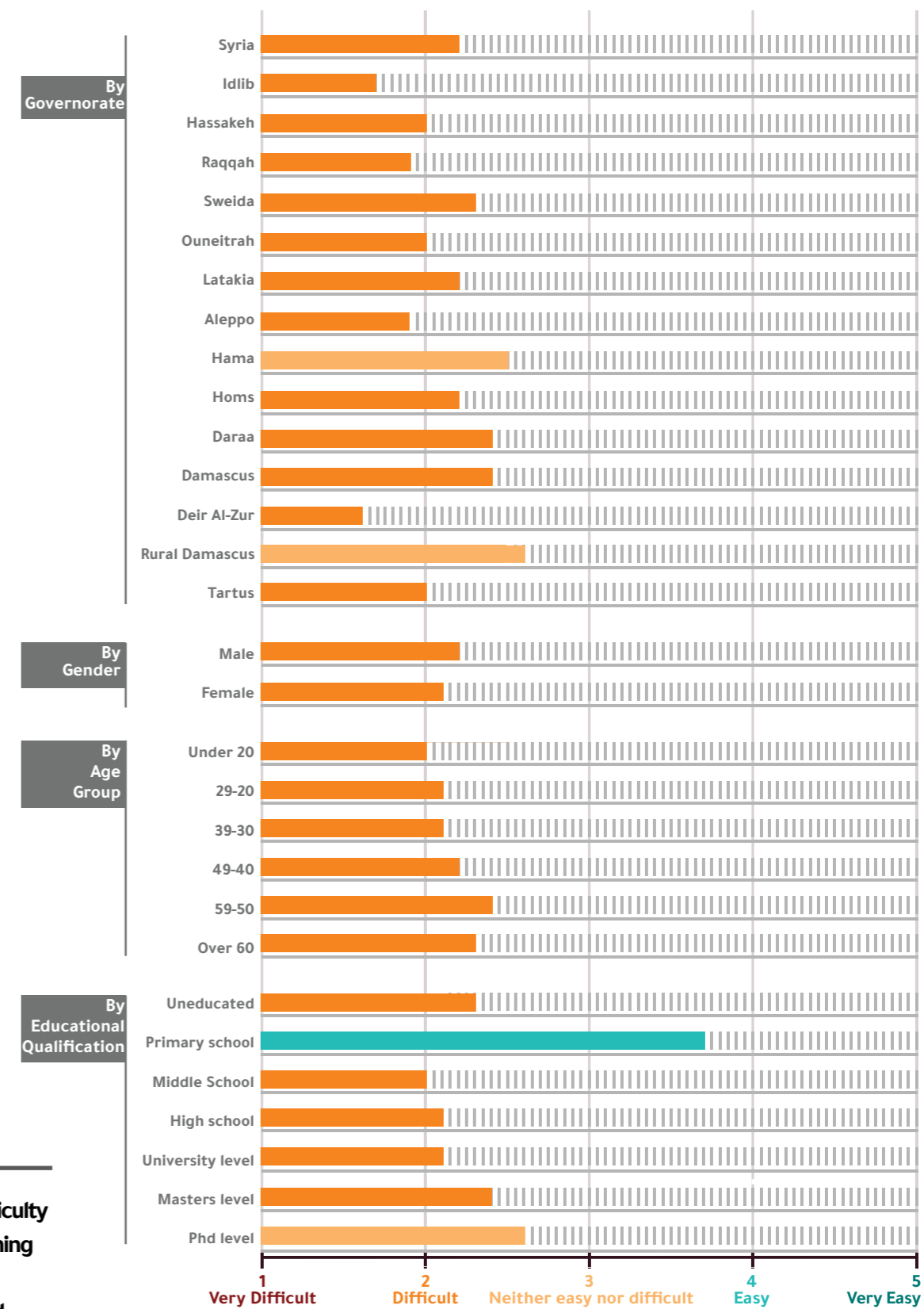
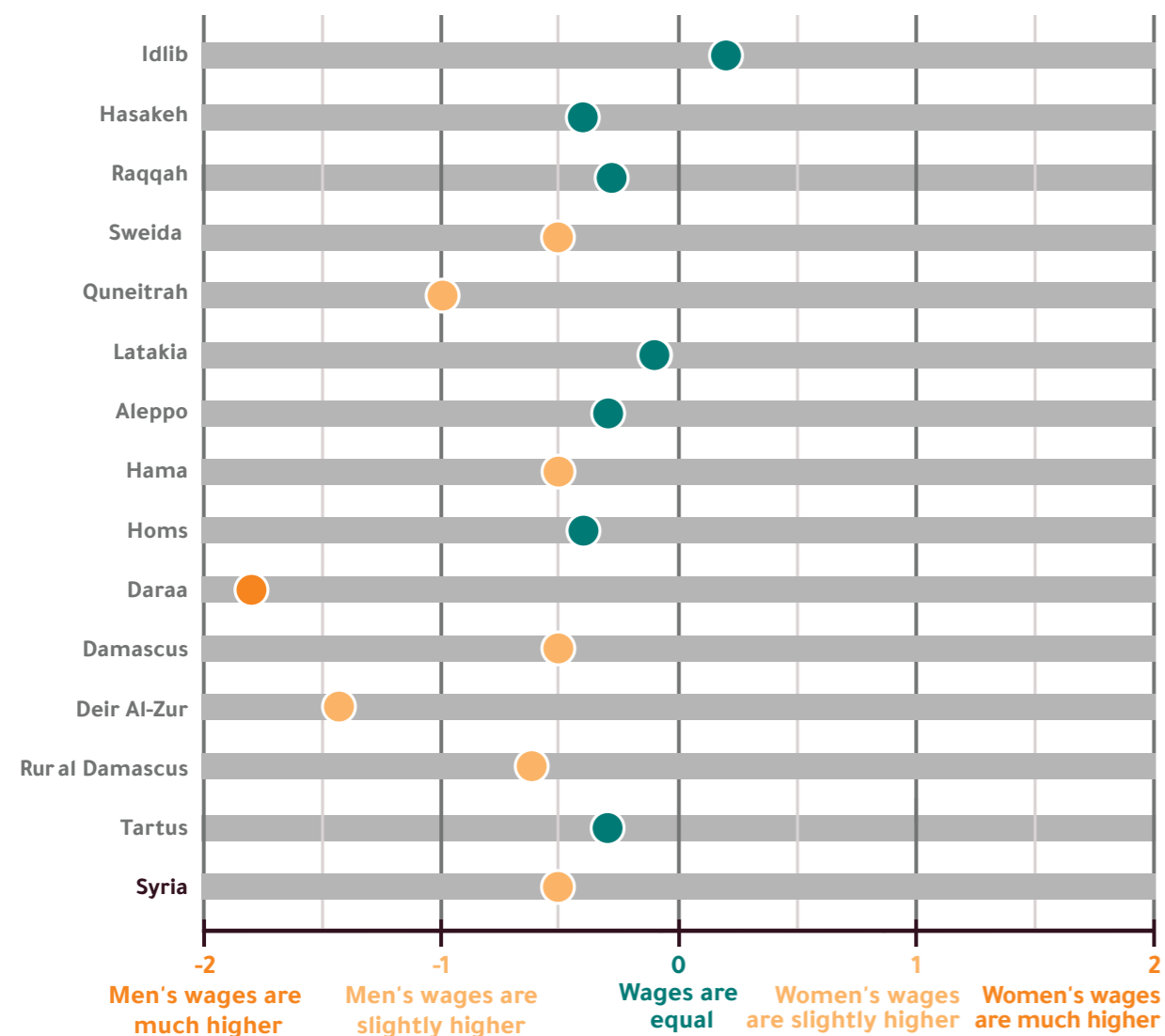


Figure 15: Level of difficulty of finding work matching the respondents' academic background and experience, classified by governorate, gender, age group, and academic qualifications in the second third of 2021

¹⁸ From 2 to -2: women's wages are much higher - women's wages are slightly higher - wages are equal - men's wages are slightly higher - men's wages are much higher - I don't know

Figure 16: The degree of equality in wages and incentives in the labor market between men and women who have similar qualifications, classified by governorate in the second third of 2021

With respect to the effect of gender on wages and incentives, for men and women who are equally qualified in the job market, pay tends to be a little higher for men, indicated by an average response of -0.5 on a gradual scale¹⁸, which is similar to the average in the previous third. On the governorate level, however, there have been significant changes to the situation. The gender gap remarkably decreased in Idlib, where the indicator rose from -0.3 to 0.2, while it rose from -0.3 to -0.4 in Rural Damascus. Contrastingly, the indicator dropped significantly in Quneitrah, from 0.0 to -1.0 and in Daraa from -1.2 to -1.8.



By comparing data from the first and second thirds of 2021, the following is observed:

- **The number of newly registered companies has doubled.**
- **Investment in the telecommunications sector has increased following the establishment of a new telecommunication operator.**
- **There has been a slight improvement in the indicator for the extent to which it is difficult to find work that suits one's expertise and educational background.**



During the second third of 2021, more than 1,136 materials related to development and services in Syria were reviewed. These were gathered online from 16 different private Syrian media outlets, and then analyzed in terms of topical focus and geographical coverage.

Focus Topics

Similar to the previous third, **trade, finance and banking issues** had the largest share of media coverage. A considerable amount of this coverage was dedicated to commodity markets and the daily price fluctuations. The new electronic payment services also received some coverage. Some materials focused on the falling exchange rate of the Syrian pound. The new investment law got some attention in articles and analytical pieces, which failed to create dialogue around this law that was mostly ignored by the media. Coverage also included the activities of governmental organizations and banks, and the executive orders and decisions they issued from time to time in attempt to regulate the exchange rate of the Syrian pound.

Health issues ranked second. Covid-19 coverage is still prominent in light of the increasing number of coronavirus cases due to new waves of the pandemic. The media also discussed the national vaccination scheme. The newly-opened hospitals and university hospitals also received a share of coverage, in addition newly opened infirmaries or newly introduced health services in different governorates. There was also some coverage of food poisoning cases in some areas. As usual, the reopening of schools was preceded by media

discussions around the spread of Covid-19 and the steps undertaken by the Ministry of Education to prepare in that regard.

Next came issues of **refugees and return**, which got ahead in media coverage during this third. Dozens of materials focused on the living conditions of Palestinian refugees in Syria, discussing the reconstruction of Al-Yarmouk camp and their return to it. The media also covered the humanitarian situation in Al-Hawl camp in Hasakeh. Some materials tackled monetary funds and emergency aid provided to refugees in neighboring countries to help them face health-related challenges in addition to the cost of living. The media also referred to the relations between refugees and host communities in light of recent tensions.

Education came next in media coverage priorities this third. The media focused on the preparations for opening and renovating schools. Much of local media coverage tackled the Ministry of Education's decision to introduce Social and Emotional Intelligence as a subject, including Syrians' comments and reactions on social media. Some materials covered university examinations, and the fact that some of them were postponed due to the security situation in Daraa. The media also covered teacher recruitment competitions as well as the constantly increasing tuition fees of private schools. Also covered by the media were teachers' strikes in northeast Syria, and the poor education conditions in refugee and displaced communities inside and outside of Syria. Some materials interacted with ethical issues concerning professors at Syrian universities and the ways in which they are being formally handled.

Safety and security matters also got ahead in media coverage during this third. The recent events in Daraa and the constant tension received a lot of attention from the media, especially with many parties becoming involved and the negotiations stretching for weeks. Dozens of materials were dedicated to areas in northeast Syria and to some of the demonstrations and security-related



Syrian Private Media

incidents in different areas. The media also covered the security situation of Syrians in neighboring countries as well.

Next in line was coverage of **agriculture and rural areas**. The national strategy for agricultural development was launched. Various forums were held to discuss the agricultural situation as well as agricultural and livestock production projects and the conditions of rural unites and the marketing of wheat. Media coverage also featured decisions to set specifications for some crops. The media also addressed agricultural loans, and it covered discussions of the procedural manual for agriculture, and poultry farmers' support. Response to wildfires in woodlands and agrarian lands also received a share of the media's attention.

Transportation followed, especially with the growing complication in transportation issues and fuel shortage in different areas. In terms of **law**, the media covered some circulations and decisions, explaining many articles of decrees and laws and highlighting new ones. **Housing and construction** came next, falling much later in the media's priorities, whereby materials focused on some areas that are currently undergoing infrastructure reconstruction in preparation for inhabitants' return. With regards to **manufacturing**, some materials focused on the situation in industrial cities, including the relevant struggles and decisions. Despite dire circumstances, there was barely any media coverage on matters of **cleanliness, women's issues, administrative reform, and electricity**.

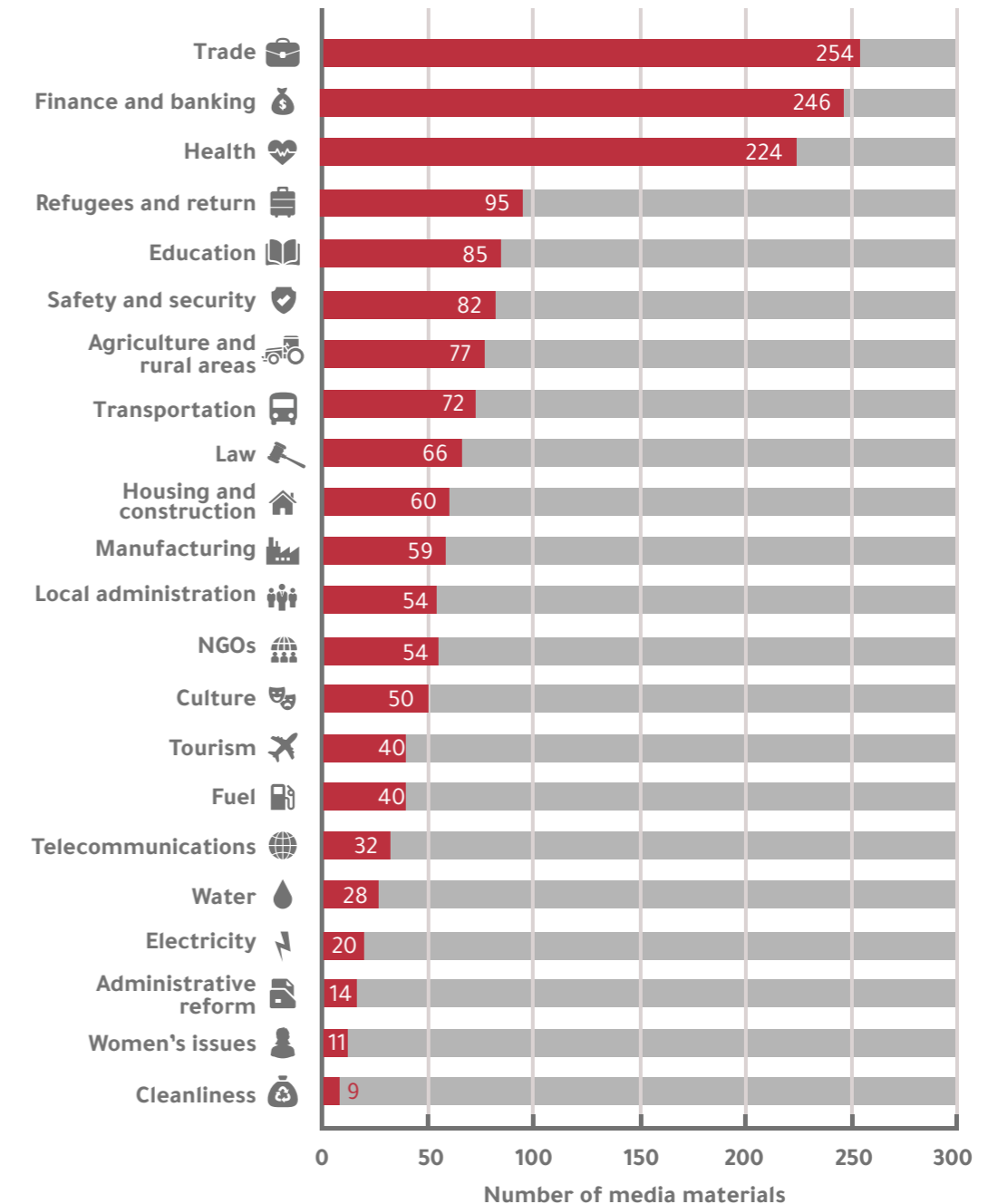


Figure 17: Level of private media coverage of development issues by topic in the second third of 2021.

Coverage by Region

The Syrian geography as a whole received about half of the media coverage during this third. As usual, Damascus got the largest share of media coverage, followed by Aleppo and Hasakeh. There was very limited coverage of the issues of Syrians abroad or Syria's participation in international arenas. Raqqah and Quneitrah remained the least covered by Syrian private media according to the reviewed samples.

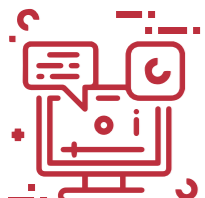
By comparing media coverage between the first and second thirds of 2021, the following is observed:

- **Economy and health are still the most widely covered sectors.**
- **There is a notable increase in the coverage concerned with refugees and their return.**



Community development is considered a voluntary process resulting in a qualitative outcome. Communities are the source of development, which involves other parties and creates an impact on both national and global levels in a connected world. Development could also be defined as a cumulative, complementary, and participatory process of developing and growing the capacity of resources and assets available in communities and linking such resources and assets through joint collective action to generate community capital and substantially improve the quality of life economically, socially, politically, culturally and environmentally.

This process arises and evolves from **developmental agents** that may be initiatives, pilot projects, or community centers, and which become influential in the formulation of public policies and creating and maintaining peace. A developmental agent could also be defined as an interactive platform for a social force driving social, economic, environmental, cultural and political initiatives and dialogues. It further focuses on the structure of local governance and the investment of community capital generated therein by monitoring existing resources and developing their capacities. This includes team building, identifying possibilities, understanding challenges, and building networks and solutions that establish a flexible system that balances the varying capacities of its components and develops them in a way that fits the surrounding context. These platforms would then interconnect, improving their ability to anticipate and respond to needs for the sake of a better quality of life at the local and national levels.



On the other hand, in the process of redevelopment, mechanisms for accountability and monitoring of the agents involved in community development are often lacking. It is increasingly important that this lack is clearly understood and that methods be developed to ensure participation and avoid any exclusion of Syrian men and women. In this way, their status will be improved within the context of conciliatory efforts, and the ongoing challenges of development will be addressed.

Founded on fully integrated interactions, **development assets** are an essential contributor to understanding the components of the value chain pertaining to the development process. The spectrum of these components includes daily data sources as well as **common spaces** set up to cater to an ever-increasing number of **community dialogues** established in hopes of reaching all the following actors: governmental institutions (and their positive and negative bureaucracies), local communities and their social capital (both full-fledged and developing social capital), non-governmental organizations, and civil society institutions which gained significant expertise and alliances within the past few years. To these components we shall add the private sector as an economic player assuming a social responsibility, and last but not least the media as a key partner in monitoring trends and gaps and in developing diversified tools to measure them as well as **identifying areas of potential and needed intervention in development** at each stage. Ultimately, such a process would grant an opportunity to compare and address situations across regions and restore balance to community efforts and lessons learned.

Based on the preceding information, compiling assessments of the previously mentioned development assets on a regular basis and presenting them to relevant actors would create great opportunities to efficiently invest in and rebuild important value chains. It would also be a good entry point for improving the quality of dialogues and building supporting arguments for such action. Furthermore, it would improve the

average societal intelligence of the development process, going beyond individual knowledge by experts to a collective knowledge. This would allow communities to get beyond short-sighted criticism and reach a more mindful process that would be capable of navigating rapid changes and overcoming their risks, especially in a war-dominated environment with the consequences of the war on the general environment in our local communities.

This accumulated knowledge could play a role in the formulation of the terms that will shape the developmental discourse of the Syrian society in the course of its redevelopment. It would be helpful in directing any course of action that recognizes the diversity of the Syrian social reality, not to mention that it will ensure that activities and initiatives are based on **socio-economic feasibility** and consider **national investors in the development process**, such that goals are clear and interrelated within the **national development ecosystem**.



What Comes Next?

Maintaining opportunities to establish a mutual space for all and to improve the capacity of resources and convert them into Syrian community capital is an endeavor that requires continuous effort, improved commitment, and an expanded circle of partners to monitor, share and use available data and to ensure qualitative and quantitative results of interactive development workshops and periodically provide reports for accountability regarding the development process throughout the year.

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