

DEVELOPMENT ASSETS

Local Approaches from Syria

Issue 1 2021: January - April





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CommonSpace Initiative
for Shared Knowledge & Consensus Building

Development Assets:
Local Approaches from Syria

Supported by Common Space
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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.

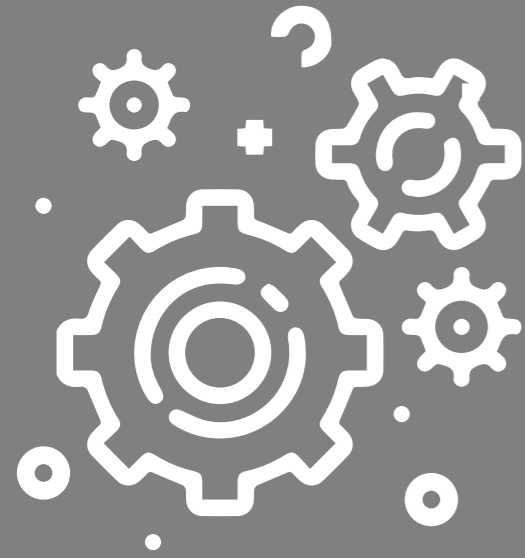
Furthermore, improving individual knowledge for citizens of various age groups provides an essential entry point to raising average community awareness and ability to invest, interact and evaluate on the basis of evidence and dialogues. This opens up new perspectives to view the same daily landscapes, 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

Building a deeper understanding of the diverse surrounding resources and enhancing interaction among these resources generates a positive community-oriented energy and a better awareness of the community's environment and its needs



Methodology

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

- A survey of a sample of 763 activists across Syria.
- The Syrian Official Gazette, parts I and II.
- Syrian state media sources.
- Syrian private media outlets.

In an attempt to cover the Syrian geography in the period between late March and mid-April 2021, an online survey was distributed to 763 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 56% male and 44% female; their ages ranged from 16 to 74, and those older than 40 years amounted to 22% of the sample. Around 77% of respondents had completed their undergraduate or postgraduate studies, while 15% had only completed secondary school, and 8% had not completed secondary school. With regard to marital status, 49% of the respondents were single, 47% were married, and a small percentage was divorced or widowed.

As for job sectors, 22% of respondents indicated that they worked in education, and 15% 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 20% of respondents were

employed in non-profit organizations, 23% worked in the public sector, 11% in the private sector, 14% were business owners, 12% were self-employed and 18% were unemployed.

Around 82% of respondents had been living in the same governorate for more than 10 years, 7% had been living in their current governorate for 5 to 10 years, and 9% 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 January and the end of April 2021. 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 Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Tishreen daily newspaper and the Official Gazette. Data were classified according to sector, governorate and government level.

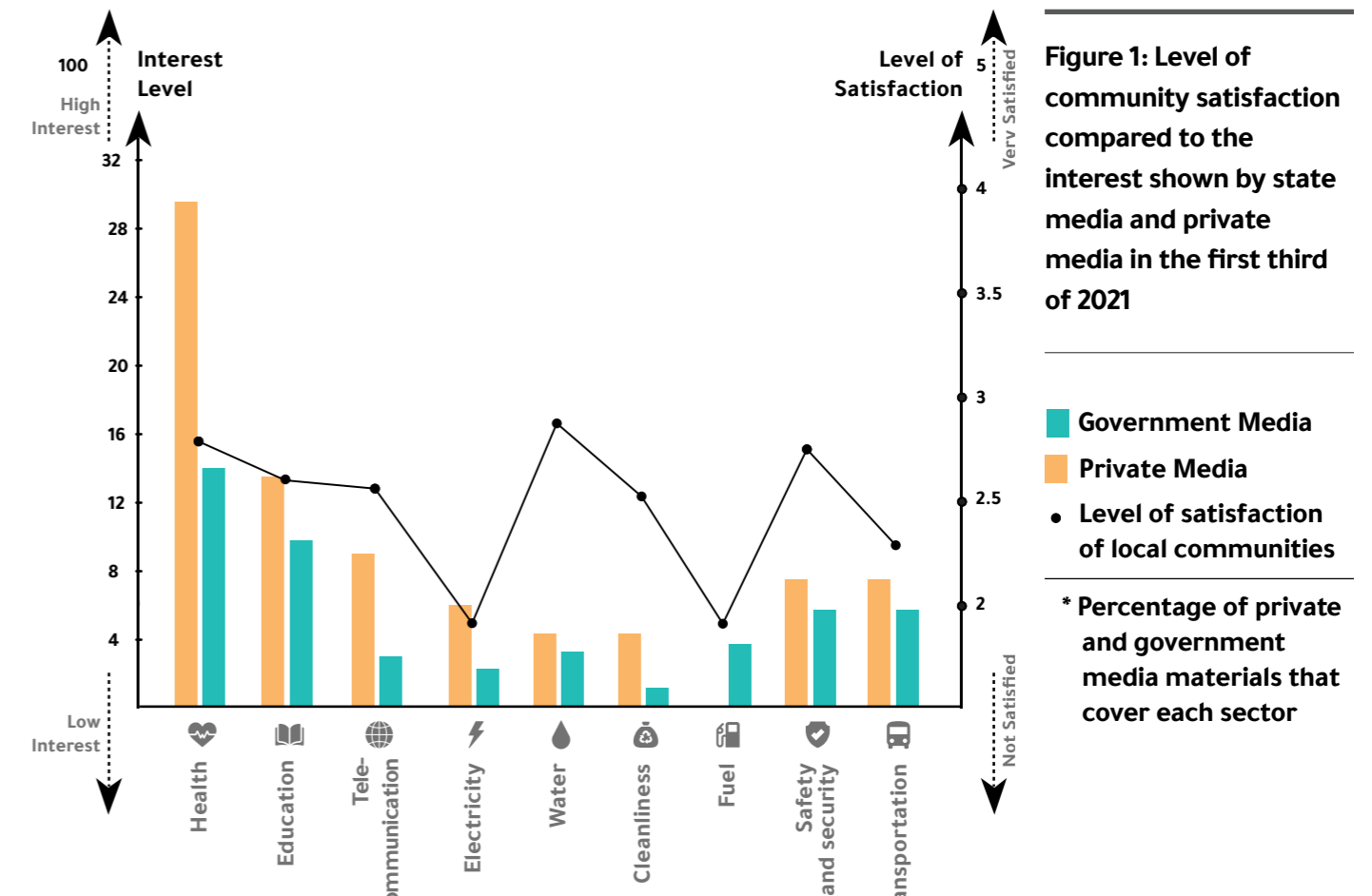
With regard to private media, news and materials on development were collected from 19 private Syrian media outlets during the first third of 2021. The sample gathered in this period consisted of 1,198 pieces, which were obtained from media websites in automated searches based on categories and keywords. 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

During this third, respondents to the Development Assets survey across Syria showed a slightly lower level of satisfaction with services. However, Quneitrah, Daraa, Deir Al-Zur and Raqqah recorded a great decline in satisfaction rates. Satisfaction with electricity still ranks the lowest compared to other services, while satisfaction with safety and security has dropped significantly between the final third of 2020 and the first third of 2021. Satisfaction with health services has somewhat increased, yet it is still below average. Meanwhile, there was a noticeable increase in the interest of state media in covering matters related to health and safety and security. However, electricity and fuel have not yet received any attention from private media and state media, despite the dissatisfaction indicated by activists. Families' ability to sustain food and other living needs continued to decrease during this third, while there was an increase in the number of activists who indicated their desire to travel and settle abroad within the coming two years.

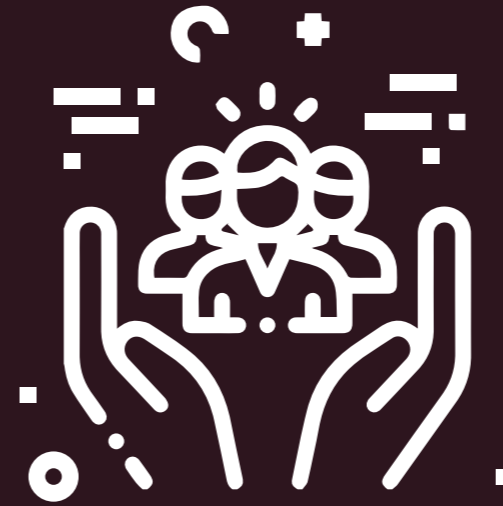
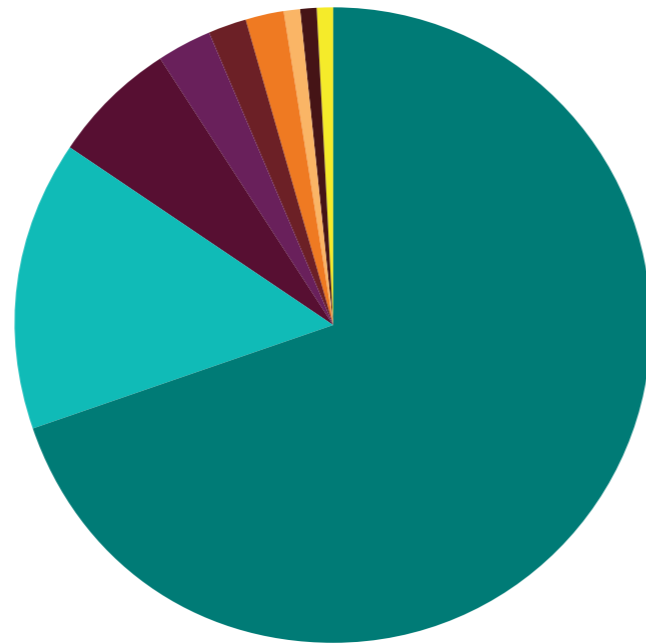
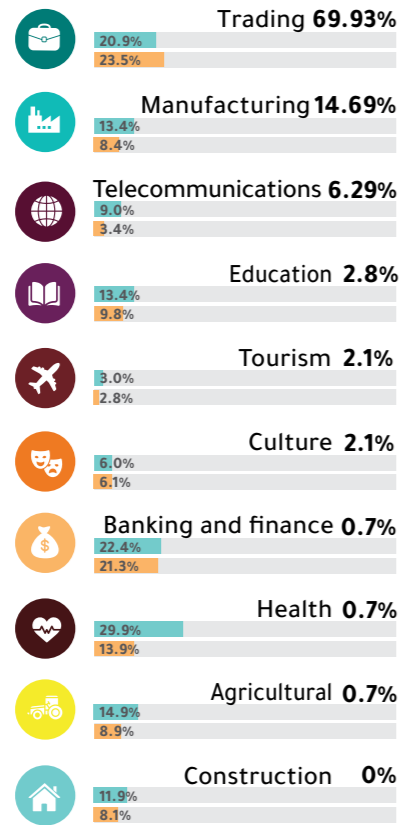


The number of new registered companies decreased during the past third. While the wholesale trade, import and export sector is still the most attractive to new investors, there was increased investment in finance and insurance and lodging and food services in the past third. Investment in health and finance and banking remains low, despite the relatively high interest dedicated to these two sectors by state media. However, this third witnessed an increase in foreign investors' contribution to establishing new companies, especially ones related to information technology, computing, and vocational, scientific and technical services.

■ 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 first 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

In general, the condition of services worsened notably in Quneitrah, Daraa, Deir Al-Zur and Raqqah during the past third. On the other hand, Hama and Idlib witnessed some improvements overall. Satisfaction with electricity and fuel remains the lowest amongst other services, while satisfaction with safety and security dropped significantly in the period between the final third of 2020 and the first third of 2021. Also, satisfaction decreased slightly in relation to telecommunications, internet and cleanliness. As for health services, satisfaction has somewhat improved, yet it remains below average.



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

In the first third of 2021, respondents indicated decreased satisfaction rates for **safety and security** in their areas, which decreased to 2.7 on a gradual scale¹, compared to 2.9 in the previous third. The greatest decrease in satisfaction with security was in Quneitrah from 4.0 to 2.4, in Raqqah from 2.7 to 2.0, in Tartus from 3.4 to 2.9 and in Daraa from 1.7 to 1.3, where levels neared “not satisfied at all”. Activists from Raqqah complained of increasing arrests, theft and murder. On the other hand, satisfaction with security increased in Idlib and Hama during this third.

Satisfaction with **electricity** remained the same, at 1.9. During this third, the lowest satisfaction rates at the governorate level were in Daraa and Deir Al-Zur, at 1.2. Satisfaction with electricity dropped notably in Raqqah, from 2.7 to 1.9, and in Quneitrah, from 3.3 to 2.2, while increasing in Damascus from 1.8 to 2.2. Activists across most governorates expressed their discontent with how poor electricity services were in this third. Satisfaction with **fuel** seems to be correlated with satisfaction with electricity at the governorate level, with a correlation coefficient of 0.82. Satisfaction with fuel continued to decrease during this third, reaching a level of 1.9, compared to 2.0 in the past third.

Many activists complained of the costliness of fuel and the difficulty in obtaining it, which impacts heating and transport, including public transport. Satisfaction with **transportation** remained at 2.3 in this third, with the lowest levels of satisfaction noted in Quneitrah and Latakia. In rural areas and small urban areas in Rural Damascus, rural Homs, rural Idlib, Latakia and Tartus, activists indicated a shortage in public transportation means in their areas.

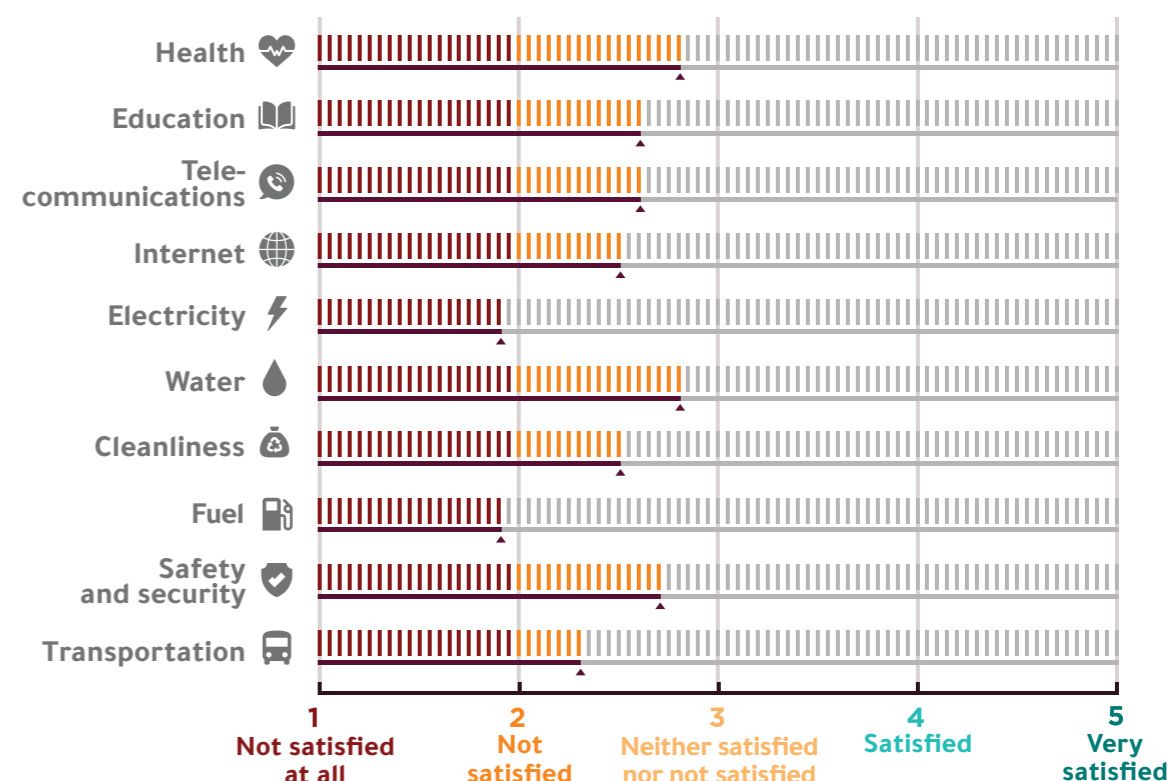
Satisfaction with **telecommunications** dropped from 2.7 to 2.6 and that with **internet** from 2.6 to 2.5. The highest satisfaction rates related to telecommunications and internet were registered in Hasakeh, and the lowest were in Deir Al-Zur. In Latakia, Tartus, Qusair and many areas in rural Homs, activists complained of a lack of telecommunications and internet services.

Satisfaction with **water** remained at 2.8. At the governorate level, satisfaction rates decreased greatly in Quneitrah, from 3.7 to 2.5, in Raqqah, from 3.5 to 2.9, in Daraa, from 2.2 to 1.4 and in Deir Al-Zur from 2.6 to 2.0. Contrastingly, satisfaction with water increased from 2.5 to 3.2 in Rural Damascus. As for **cleanliness**, satisfaction rates decreased slightly across Syria, from 2.6 to 2.5, while not exceeding 3.0 in any governorate. Activists in Afrin, Hama and Latakia complained of a lack of cleaning services in their areas.

Satisfaction with **health** increased from 2.7 to 2.8 between the past third and this one. The greatest increase at the governorate level was witnessed in Hama, from 2.6 to 3.2 and in Latakia, from 2.5 to 3.0. On the other hand, satisfaction with health decreased in Raqqah, Quneitrah, Daraa, Deir Al-Zur, Rural Damascus and Tartus. In rural Aleppo, rural Idlib, rural Latakia and many areas of Raqqah and Hasakeh, activists pointed to a shortage in health services.

Satisfaction with **education** remained at 2.6. Satisfaction with education decreased in Daraa, Aleppo, Raqqah, Deir Al-Zur, Latakia and Idlib, while increasing in Hama, Quneitrah and Tartus. Respondents from Hasakeh expressed their concern regarding accreditation, while activists from Raqqah and Homs complained of the poor quality of educational services.

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



Hasakeh	3.1	2.4	3.2	3.2	2.3	2.9	2.7	2.6	3.1	3.1
Hama	3.2	3.0	3.0	2.8	2.1	2.6	2.7	2.2	3.2	2.7
Idlib	3.1	2.5	2.7	3.0	2.0	2.6	2.6	2.4	2.7	2.8
Damascus	2.9	2.5	2.7	2.5	2.2	3.3	2.6	2.0	3.0	2.3
Quneitrah	2.8	3.5	2.7	3.1	2.2	2.5	2.9	1.8	2.4	1.8
Rural Damascus	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.7	2.1	3.2	2.5	1.9	3.2	2.0
Homs	3.0	2.7	2.6	2.2	1.8	3.1	2.7	1.8	2.9	2.5
Aleppo	3.1	2.6	2.4	2.5	2.1	3.0	2.8	1.8	2.6	2.0
Tartus	3.1	2.8	2.8	2.1	1.5	3.0	2.3	1.6	2.9	2.1
Raqqah	2.3	2.0	2.4	2.5	1.9	2.9	3.0	2.1	2.0	2.5
Latakia	3.0	2.4	2.5	2.4	1.6	2.9	2.0	1.6	2.8	1.9
Sweida	2.5	2.4	2.5	2.0	1.7	2.8	2.5	1.7	1.7	2.1
Daraa	2.1	2.5	2.1	2.1	1.2	1.4	1.7	1.2	1.3	2.0
Deir Al-Zur	1.7	2.3	1.7	1.3	1.2	2.0	1.8	1.2	1.9	2.3
Syria	2.8	2.6	2.6	2.5	1.9	2.8	2.5	1.9	2.7	2.3
Governorate	Health	Education	Tele-communication	Internet	Electricity	Water	Cleanliness	Fuel	Safety and security	Transport

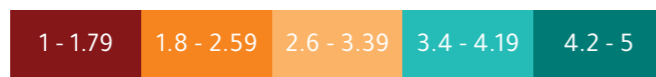


Figure 4: Activists' average satisfaction with basic services provided in their area classified by governorate in the first third of 2021

Living conditions

During this third, respondents' answers indicated a decrease in the ability of families to secure their livelihood, including food and other essentials, at the rate of 2.3 on a gradual scale² compared to 2.5 in the past third. The ability to secure livelihood has alarmingly decreased in Daraa, from 2.3 to 1.6, as well as in Deir Al-Zur, from 2.1 to 1.6. There was a slighter decrease in this aspect in Raqqah, Hasakeh, Hama, Damascus, Rural Damascus and Homs, while it did not change in Quneitrah, Latakia and Tartus. Contrastingly, the families' abilities to secure livelihood somewhat improved in Sweida, Idlib and Aleppo. On the sub-governorate level, there were extremely low scores in Daraa city and its suburbs, as well as in Deir Al-Zur, Mayadeen and Suwar (Deir Al-Zur governorate), Duma (Rural Damascus), Sfireh (Aleppo) and Tal Hamees (Hasakeh).

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

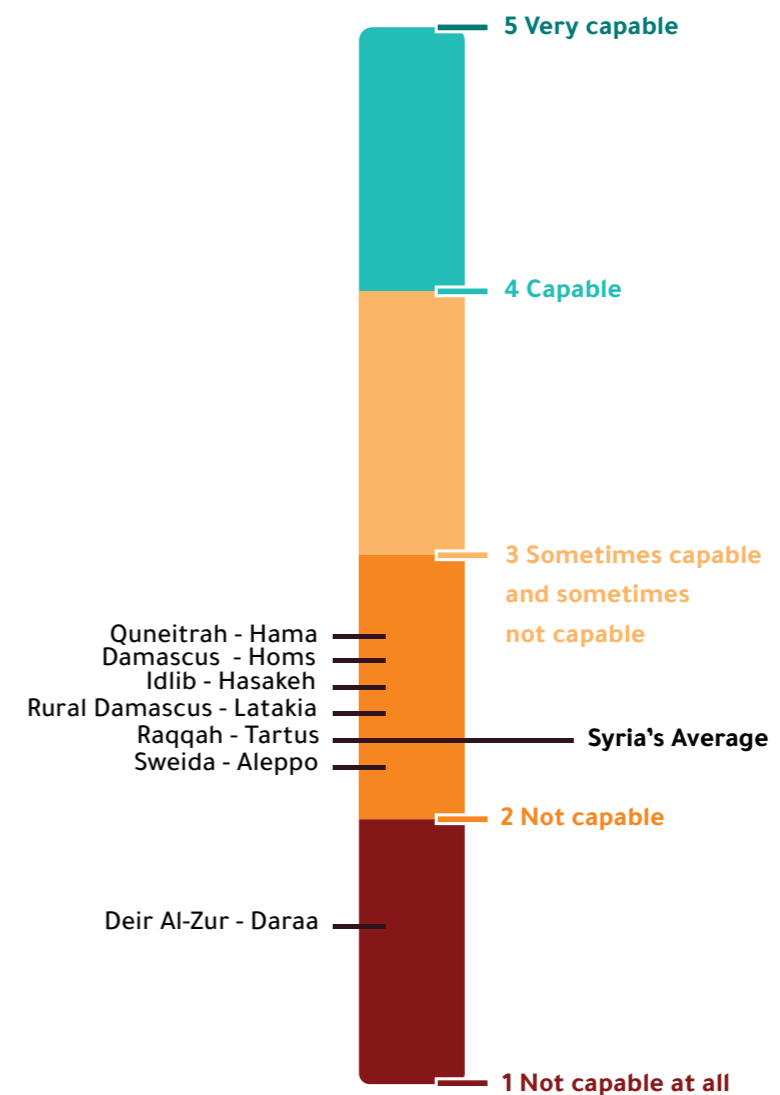


Figure 5: Families' ability to sustain food and other living needs in the first third of 2021, classified by governorate

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 less interactive with community needs, with the level decreasing from 3.0 to 2.9 over the last third. Municipal interaction decreased most significantly in the governorates of Daraa, Deir Al-Zur and Quneitrah, while it increased in Sweida and Damascus. On the other hand, neighborhood committees were more interactive in Daraa and Sweida, compared to other governorates. The interaction of Mokhtars also decreased from 3.0 to 2.9, with the lowest levels of interaction being in Aleppo and Daraa.

The interaction of associations remained constant at 2.6, and so did the interaction of service institutions, at 2.9. Associations seem to have no role in Deir Al-Zur, where their interaction was rated at 1.0, meaning "not interactive at all".

The interaction of NGOs (nonprofit and nongovernmental) with community needs remained at 3.3. Despite the fact that this interaction level is average, NGOs are more active than most actors. Sweida was still the governorate with most interactive NGOs, at 4.0, followed by Aleppo, Hama and Idlib respectively. The lowest rate of interaction during this third was in Deir Al-Zur. The interaction of international organizations with the needs of local communities decreased slightly, from 2.9 to 2.8. They were still least active in Deir Al-Zur compared to other governorates.

Religious institutions have become less interactive, going from 3.0 to 2.9. On the governorate level, religious institutions were most interactive in Sweida and Hama, and least in Deir Al-Zur.

The interaction of private companies with the needs of local communities across Syria remained at 2.6. The interaction of companies in Tartus decreased from 3.1 to 2.6, and in Deir Al-Zur from 1.7 to 1.2.

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

Influential individuals grew less interactive with local needs, with their rate of interaction dropping from 3.0 to 2.9. Such individuals were most interactive in Aleppo across all governorates.

With regard to media, the interaction of several media outlets with the needs of the local community decreased from 2.7 to 2.6, while that of private media decreased from 3.0 to 2.8. According to the responses of activists, private media seems to be more interactive than state media in Hasakeh, Raqqah and Sweida. Social media interaction dropped from 3.8 to 3.7.

The community's interaction with local activities decreased from 3.3 to 3.0 according to activists, with the highest interaction in Quneitrah and the lowest in Deir Al-Zur.

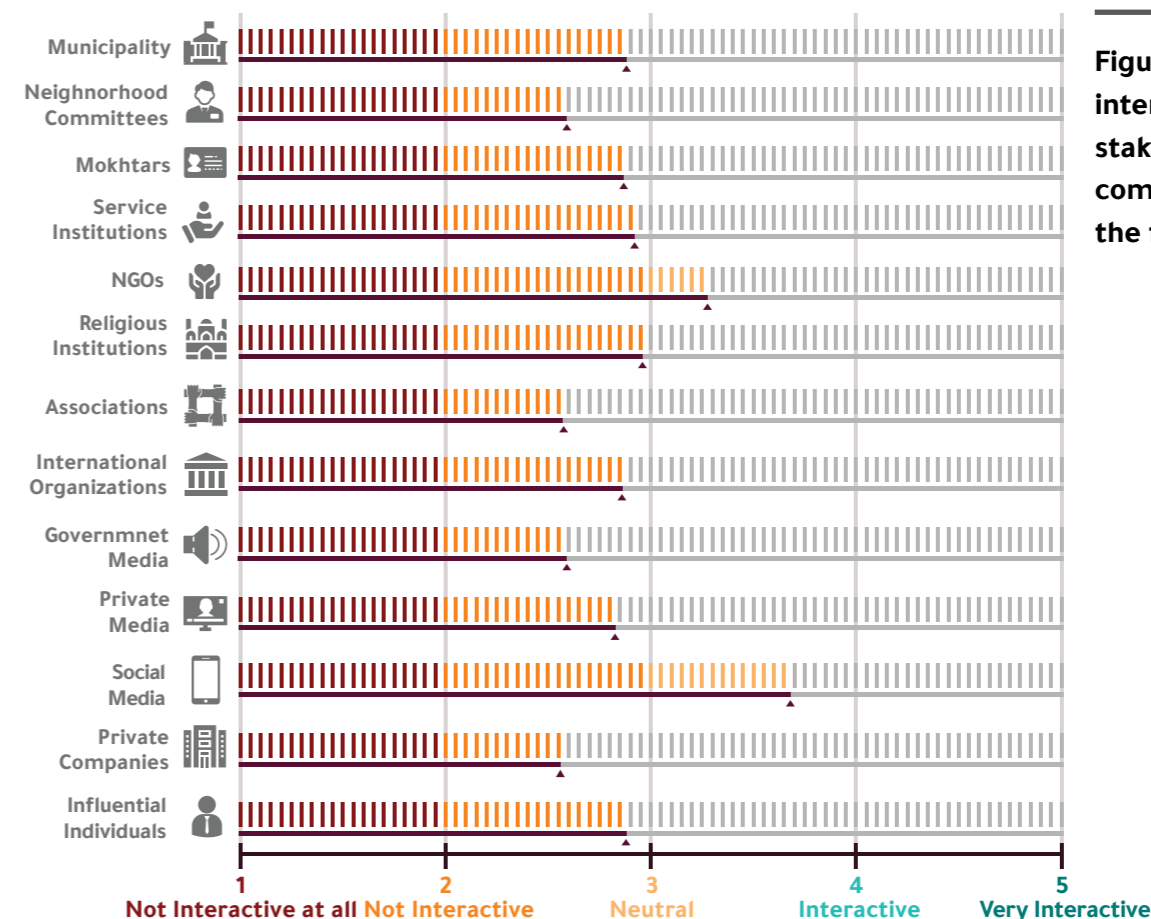


Figure 6: The levels of interaction of different stakeholders to local community needs in the first third of 2021

Non-governmental Organizations

Cooperation among community actors, such as NGOs and volunteer groups remained at 2.8 on a gradual scale⁴. Moreover, national funders granted the same degree of independence to the beneficiaries they supported over the past third, indicated by 2.3 on a gradual scale⁵. In contrast, the degree of independence granted by international funders increased from 2.4 to 2.5. According to respondents, the greatest degree of independence granted by these actors was in Quneitrah.

As for newly licensed NGOs, data from the Official Gazette during the first third of 2021 indicates that two NGOs had been denied license while another 46 were licensed. The number of license approvals given have doubled compared to the same period during 2020, and it increased compared to the previous third. The newly licensed NGOs are prominently active in the sectors of charity and social service. Most associations that were denied a license were in Raqqah and Hasakeh, while half of those that were licensed operated in Rural Damascus and Sweida and the Syrian geography as a whole.

Branches of previously licensed NGOs were registered in several governorates, amounting to seven branches this third. In addition, all applications by NGOs to amend their internal systems and regulations have been accepted. During this third, there was a notable increase in the number of established NGOs whose domain of work is specific certain villages or towns. The level of official interaction with community action decreased from 3.0 in the previous third to 2.9 this third on a gradual scale⁶.

According to respondents, the extent of gender equality in employment within the non-profit sector increased from 2.7 to 2.9 on a gradual scale⁷. Employment opportunities were most equal in Damascus and Latakia, while the greatest gap in gender equality was 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

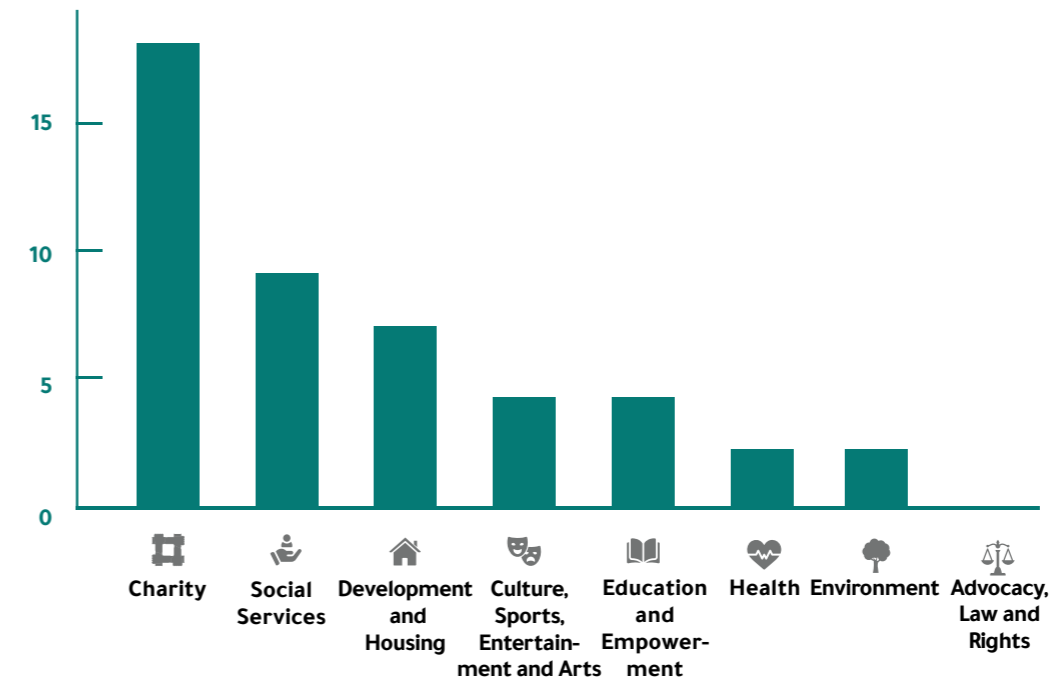


Figure 7: The number of newly licensed NGOs during the first third of 2021

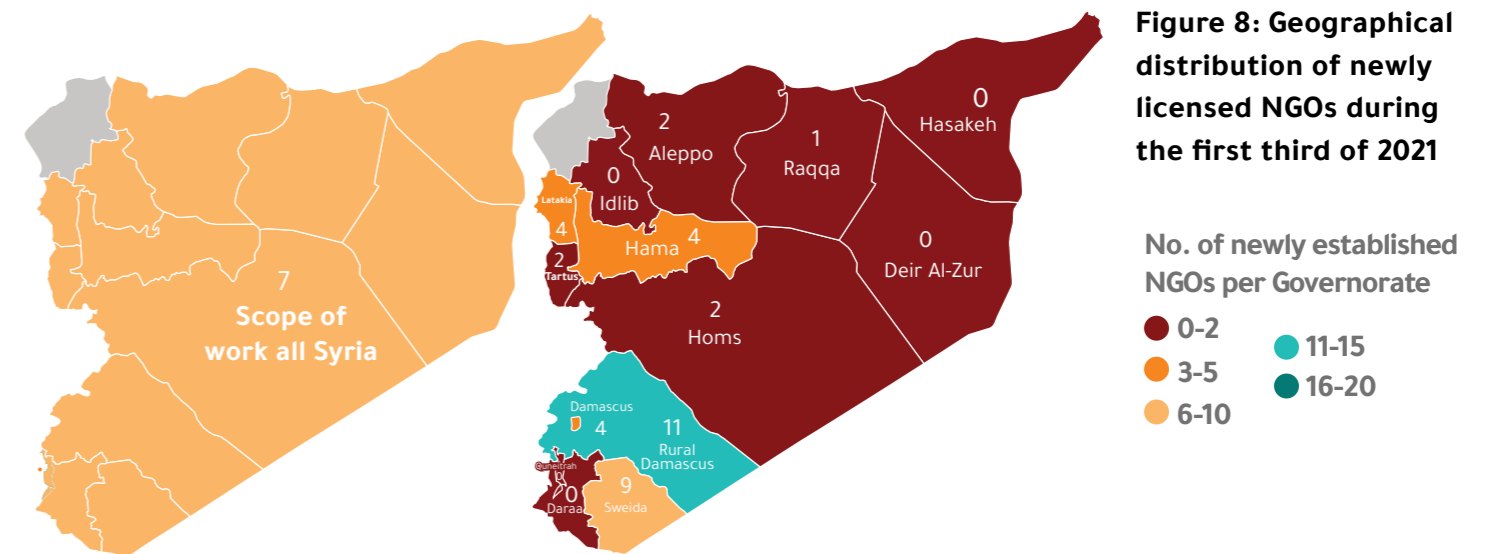


Figure 8: Geographical distribution of newly licensed NGOs during the first third of 2021

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, there has been minor decline in the indicator of child labor, indicated by a decrease from 2.2 to 2.1. Moreover, the indicator for child begging declined from 2.3 to 2.2. Child labor was most prevalent in the governorates of Daraa, Quneitrah and Raqqah, while hile child begging seemed to be most prevalent in Raqqah and Sweida.

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 2.7 to 2.6. The issue of school dropout increased among males and females, where the indicator dropped from 2.1 to 2.0 for males, and from 2.6 to 2.4 for females.

As for domestic violence, 64% of the respondents reported that women in their surrounding mainly resort to their families or tribes, while 8% reported that women mainly resorted to the court, or local influential figures (according to 5%), or to police stations (4%), or non-governmental organizations (4%), while 15% 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 2.6 to 2.7 on a gradual scale⁹. The highest satisfaction with the response of local authorities was found in Aleppo, which scored 3.3, while the lowest, 1.4, was in Deir Al-Zur. Respondents’ satisfaction with state media’s response to the pandemic remained at 2.9, while their satisfaction with private media decreased from 3.0 to 2.9. Satisfaction with social media remained at 3.4. The response to Covid-19 by civil society and local associations decreased from 3.0 to 2.9, and the highest interaction levels by those actors were in Aleppo and Hama during this third. Moreover, according to respondents’ observations of their social circles, the levels of commitment to taking precautionary measures against the coronavirus has decreased significantly in local communities, reflected by a decrease from 2.7 to 2.3 on a gradual scale¹⁰.

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

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

Development Prospects

The extent to which activists believed in community work’s ability to influence development in Syria decreased slightly during the past third, with rates dropping from 3.9 to 3.8 on a gradual scale¹¹. The greatest decrease in this regard was noted in Deir Al-Zur, where satisfaction levels dropped from 2.7 to 1.8. Activists’ trust in the abilities of local administration personnel and elected officials to influence the local development process remained at 2.9. There was a decrease in the extent to which elected officials shared information with citizens, indicated on a gradual scale¹² by a drop from 2.2 to 2.1, which means they have a tendency not to share. The governorates with the least extent of information shared were Daraa, Tatus 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, indicated by a score of 1.9 on a gradual scale¹³, which is the same as the past third. Also indicated by activists’ responses is the fact that women have become slightly more interested in political participation, be it through nomination, voting, or becoming member of a party; on a gradual scale¹⁴, interest levels rose from 2.2 to 2.3, with the highest being in Quneitrah and the lowest being in Rural Damascus.

In another optional question on the impact of using smart cards on the fairness of state subsidy distribution, activists expressed that they found it to make subsidiary distribution less fair, with the indicator pointing at 2.7 on a gradual scale¹⁵, compared to 2.9 in the previous third. The fairest distribution was indicated by activists in Aleppo, and the least fair in Deir Al-Zur.

Activists’ optimism about future prospects of development in Syria decreased from 2.9 to 2.7 on a gradual scale¹⁶. Activists were most optimistic in Hama, indicated by a level of 3.4, and least optimistic in Deir Al-Zur, at 1.6. In this third, 52% of respondents expressed a desire to travel and live abroad within

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

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

the next two years, compared to 48% in the previous third. This percentage has been increasing for four thirds in a row.

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

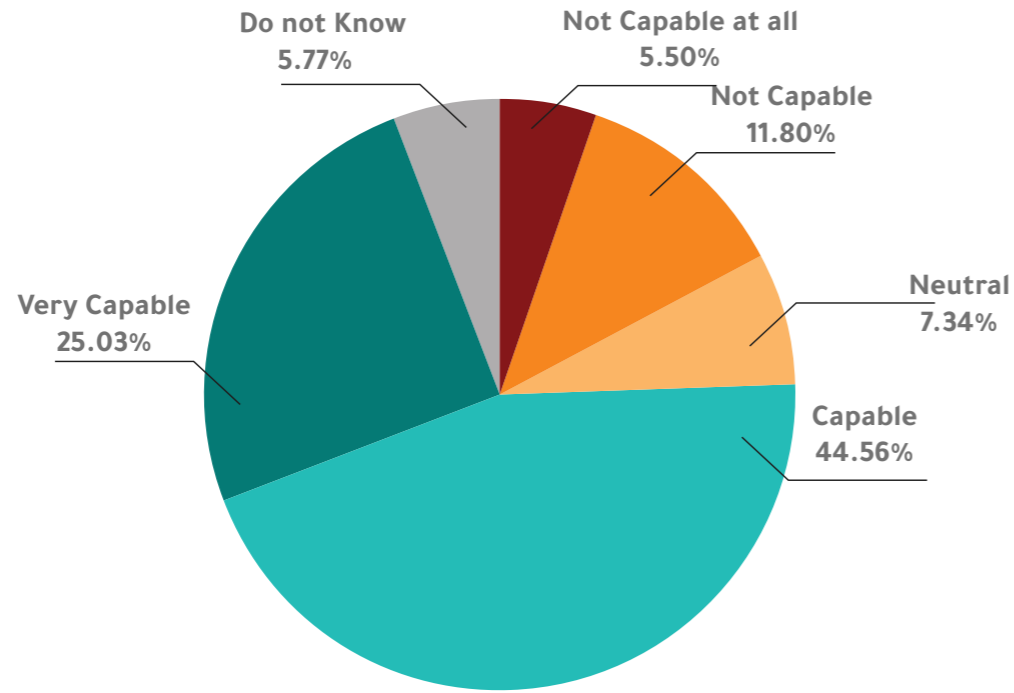


Figure 10: Activists' trust in the ability of local administration personnel and elected officials to influence local development in the first third of 2021

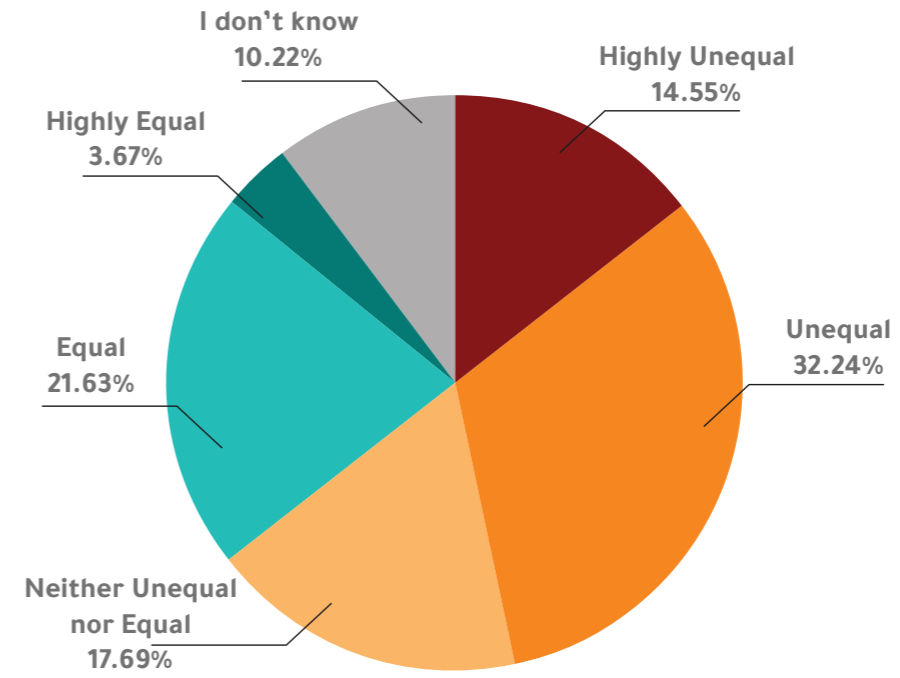
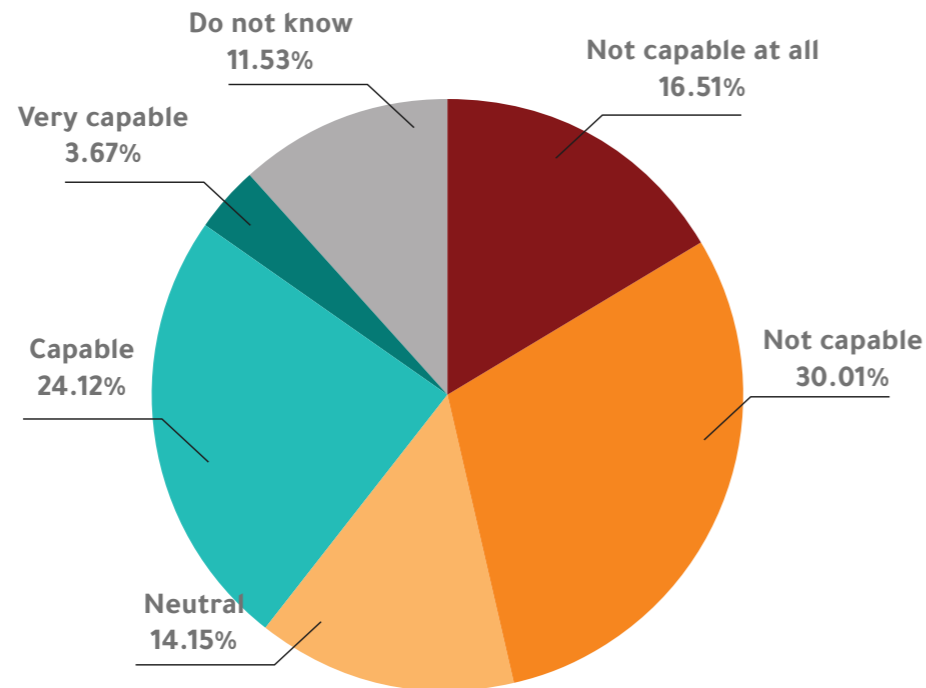


Figure 11: Activists' belief in equal employment opportunities for men and women in the non-profit sector in the first third of 2021

By comparing the results of the community activists' final third of 2020 and the first third of 2021, the following is observed:

- A remarkable decline in the level of satisfaction with services in Quneitrah, Daraa, Deir Al-Zur and Raqqah, and a decrease in satisfaction with safety and security across Syria.
- A continued decrease in families' ability to secure their livelihood, including food and other living essentials.
- A continued increase in the percentage of activists wishing to travel and settle abroad.





Government Action

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 first third of 2021. These materials were extracted from the Official Gazette, the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), the Presidency of the Council of Ministers' web portal, and Tishrin newspaper.

Overview

With respect to the spread of Covid-19, the Ministry of Health announced the official count of cases for the end of the first third of 2021 as follows: 22,733 registered cases, 16,821 cured cases and 1,592 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 process of vaccination, medical staff started to get vaccinated after the arrival of vaccines from several friendly countries after Syria joined COVAX vaccines global access initiative.

The curve for Covid-19 was on the rise at a time when there was also a crisis in providing fuel for transportation, therefore, the government had to limit the working hours of public institutions. Schooling was suspended at the intermediate level, while attendance and examinations at the university level were suspended temporarily. There was a complete lockdown in many cities across the Syrian northeast.

The People's Assembly approved a number of laws and announced the start of the Presidential candidacy registration, as well as the election dates for citizens in

Syria and abroad. Members of the assembly also provided a written endorsement of candidates, of which there were 51, before the candidacy registration period was closed. It is worth noting that looking into nominations and announcing the names of candidates is legally within the jurisdiction of the Supreme Constitutional Court.

The 5th Brussels Conference was held without inviting the Syrian Government. Participants pledged to provide greater financial national support to Syria. The 15th round of Astana talks was held in Sochi, affirming its support of the constitutional committee which had completed its fifth round without progress or agreement on a new date. After leaving the European Union, Britain renewed its sanctions on Syria. A Syrian-Russian conference was held to discuss issues related to refugees, reconstruction and reconciliation. Syrian citizens detained in Israel were freed, by mediation from Russia, and an Israeli girl who had crossed the border was freed in return.

Syria accepted the diplomatic credentials of the ambassadors of Mauritania and Argentina. Talks were held with delegations from Jordan and Iraq to discuss commercial issues. The Syrian government provided Lebanon with tons of oxygen, and it also made contact regarding maritime borders between the two countries. The Syrian government also signed mutual visa exemption agreements with Oman and Abkhazia for holders of diplomatic and special passports.

The economic situation continued to deteriorate and the exchange rate of the Syrian pound fell to unprecedented rates. Then, exchange rates rose again, possibly with the help of governmental actions, including raising preferential rates for international organizations, increasing the fees of remittances from abroad, suspending the import of mobile phones until further notice, in addition to resigning the Central Bank governor and appointing a new one.

The security situation remained volatile in some regions. Flights resumed with Moscow, and new destinations were added to and from Aleppo International Airport. Border crossings were opened for humanitarian aid in the rural areas of Aleppo and Idlib, and the Syrian army entered western Daraa after an agreement with local community leaders to restore stability into the region.

Governmental Institutions and Internal Regulations

Two decrees were issued separately to establish a High Institute for Cinematic Arts, which will be affiliated with the Ministry of Culture, as well as the General Authority for Fish Resources and Aquatic Life. Directorates for administrative development were established or made to replace previous directorates in ministries and several governmental institutes. The name of the Directorate for the Revival of Traditional Heritage was changed into Intangible Cultural Heritage within the Ministry of Culture. Two departments were established for national theatre in Homs and Hama. The Ministry of Electricity approved the organizational structure of the Public Establishment for Transmission and Distribution of Electricity. Several centers were created to serve citizens in Latakia and in the General Directorate of Cadastral Affairs. The framework of the Scientific Research and Technical Development Fund for Higher Education was published.

The financial and accounting regulations of the Cooperation Fund for workers at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor were approved. The organizational structure of the Syrian Post was approved. Moreover, the Ministry of Awqaf specified the mechanisms for collecting donations in Islamic schools and institutes. Additionally, the Ministry of Finance published warehouse systems guidelines for public entities with administrative functions.

The Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade amended the duties of directorates in the

Public Establishment for International Fairs and Exhibitions. The Ministry of Information published the rules of procedure and financial regulations for the Cooperation Fund of its staff, as well as the staff of the General Organization of Radio and TV, Al-Wehda Foundation and the Arab Advertising Organization. Guidelines were set for productivity bonuses for workers at Al-Ahlia Company for Rubber and Plastic Products and the State Company for Shoe Manufacturing. Productivity bonuses were distributed to workers in Baniyas Refinery Company, the General Company for Shipping Agencies, and those in the Syrian Insurance Company.

Duties of the Council of Ministers were amended. The Presidency of the Council of Ministers circulated the nomination criteria for the role of Assistant Manager. It also set the career path for the Deputy Minister. The Minister of Education delegated dozens of authorities to Governors and Deputy Ministers. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor approved the inclusion of previous service in the government in the years of contributory service as per the social security law. Labor regulations were amended at the Syrian Electronic Payment Company, and so was the incentive reward system for the affiliates of the Ministry of Oil and Mineral Resources and the Ministry of Electricity and its institutions, as well as for workers at the Syrian Civil Aviation Authority.

Focus Topics

Economy

Economic issues had the largest share of state media coverage and of governmental decisions as in the previous third. Grants were disbursed to state workers as well as pensioners. Some exchange bureaus had their license revoked, and a private social banking institution for microfinancing was established. The prices of goods imported by the private sector were increased by 5% to compensate for the expenses endured by the importer. This was meant to restore some balance into the market and stabilize the local market price for some food items.

The expenses charged by the General Organization for Free Zones were set. Prices were redefined for packaged cement, black cement, premium gasoline, 95- octane gasoline, and regular gasoline. Prices of kerosene, aviation kerosene, mineral oils and butane were also redefined.

The contribution of economic institutions and companies towards the expenses of the Central Organization for Financial Control was also defined. The value of bank guarantees for airfreight services was amended. The Ministry of Internal Trade obliged private sector importers of bank-financed goods to handover 30% of their imports, and it set the price of a ton of wheat produced at Syrian Grain.

The Minister of Finance declared new rules pertaining to income-taxpayers. The prices for publications by the Ministry of Finance were redefined and articles related to the cost of stamp printing were amended. One decree raised the capital of the Industrial Bank. Another two decrees terminated the appointment of the Central Bank governor and appointed a new one. A mechanism was set for transferring shares of current public owners of stocks at any of the existing microfinance banks. Investors in the Aleppo branch of the General Organization for Free Zones were exempted from due occupational allowances. Finally, a license was issued for the establishment of a new Islamic Bank under the name of the National Islamic Bank.

Agriculture and Rural Areas

Agriculture and rural areas came in next this third, outperforming other topics of focus. Game hunting of all types was banned. Prices were set for woodland products for 2021. Eligibility for the National Project Financing Fund for Modern Irrigation was published. The site of Siristan forest in Tartus was classified as a natural reserve. The services provided by the Directory of Animal Health and the Directory of Plant Protection were specified in terms of types and fees. Approvals by administrative units, municipalities, the Directory of Professions and Licensing in each governorate were added to the

supporting documents required for licensing forest depots. Heirloom seeds were identified and prices were set for cotton and wheat.

Education

Education came next in terms of focus. University fees were set for enrolled students in accordance with article 103 of executive orders. Full-time teaching staff were given additional offloading compensation. New degrees were launched at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels at a number of colleges as well as private and public institutes. Financial systems and rules of procedure were amended and curricula were set for some faculties. The value of university achievement awards was readjusted. The Higher Education Council issued the rules and guidelines for writing, translating, printing and distributing university books. As for Arab and foreign students who acquired the Syrian nationality after enrollment, a decision was issued to collect their fees in Syrian Pounds as per the exchange rate at the Central Bank of Syria.

Manufacturing

Next in line was manufacturing, although it had a limited share of decisions. Supplies required for manufacturing curative and preventative veterinary products were exempted from customs fees. Vocational training centers were established in all governorates except Rural Damascus and Raqqah.

Health

Health followed manufacturing with regard to state media coverage. Some decisions pertaining to health were issued in the Official Gazette, including the formation of the National Coordination Committee, which aims to raise the caliber for planning, execution and coordination related to Ministries and concerned parties, to enhance the efficiency for vaccination against Covid-19. Immediate facilities were designated to prevent the pollution of water in the October 16th lake in Latakia. A fee of \$35 was imposed on travelers to the People's Republic

of China to cover the cost of the immunoglobulin antibody test. Al-Baath University Hospital was established in Homs.

Housing and Construction

A number of properties were acquisitioned or considered public assets in Rural Damascus, Daraa, Tartus, Homs and Sweida. The General Establishment of Housing was granted an annual loan of no more than 5 billion Syrian pounds, at an interest rate of 1%, to build houses for state workers. The Ministry of Public Works and Housing issued regulations for the classification of contractors. Amendments were applied to articles of Law 11/2011 to facilitate real-estate ownership for non-Syrians. Moreover, a decision was issued to consider real-estate registration and documentation works in Manbij suspended since 28/4/2018.

Local Community

A number of decisions were issued in support of various segments of society. Outstanding loans that were offered by the National Project Financing Fund for Modern Irrigation were exempted from contractual interests and late payment penalties. Every business owner who is subscribed to the National Institution of Insurance and Pensions and whose enterprise is located within the regions liberated since 2019 was exempted, by a decree, from interests and additional due expenses.

Student loans were exempted from fees and stamps and consequential charges. Those who are displaced, studying abroad, sent on official missions, under 18, as well as truck drivers and workers in aviation and maritime transport have all been exempted from exchanging \$100 into Syrian Pounds upon crossing the border. Syrians, and persons of equivalent status, were exempted from paying fines for being late to updating civil status records or issuing a personal identification card or family booklet.

Some town councils and city councils were dissolved, while chairmen were appointed and delegated

authorities in others. Committees were formed to regulate prices in governorates. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor made amendments to the conditions for granting licenses to non-Syrian experts. It also amended the regulations for collecting donations. Approval and license renewal were granted to legal accountants for the year of 2021. The Arab Beekeepers Union was licensed by opening a branch in Syria. Indirect costs of data and services provided by citizen service centers were determined. The Consumer Protection Act was amended. Prices of subsidized items were redefined. The tariff was redefined for transporting people via public transportation modes that run on fuel oil. The Support Program for Military Conscription Layoffs, "Jareeh Al-Watan" Program, and the Syrian Rural Areas Support Program continued to offer services and financial aid to target recipients.

Foreign Affairs

A trade and economic cooperation agreement with Crimea was ratified, in addition to certifying the contract signed with the Russian ATG company to protect and rehabilitate fields and infrastructures in addition to completing and developing Block 22 of Al-Thawra oil field. Also certified was the contract signed with the Russian Capital Group to excavate and produce oil in maritime Block no. 1. A memorandum of understanding was signed to reactivate the Syria-India Center of Excellence for Information Technology. Moreover, a Partnership Framework Agreement was signed with Gavi, the vaccine alliance. The Syrian delegation to sessions of the 10th round of the Joint Syrian-Iraqi Ministerial Committee was formed.

Other Focus Topics

In addition to Civil codes, the prevention of smuggling persons, the regulation of real-estate tax collection and increased penalties on offences under the telecommunications law, the General State Budget for 2021 was issued. Executive orders of decree 35/2020 approved the exemption of business owners in liberated areas from fines. The

Presidency of the Council of Ministers issued rules and regulations for preparing communications and circulars. The State Council deemed the Insurance Supervisory Commission as one of the state's general establishments.

The proposed supplementary agreement to provide an additional fund amounting to 7 Million Euros to execute works in the quarter specified by law was ratified and added to the main contract between the Ministry of Water Resources and the Malaysian Renox company to make technical units as well as drinking-water treatment plants and sewage treatment plants in Rural Damascus. Al-Fayha Group for Arab and international shipping and transit agencies was licensed in Damascus. The Council of Antiques was formed, and archaeological sites were identified on the Damascus-Homs international road. Some historical sites were registered in Daraa. Entry fees for theatres were revised. The Ministry of Communication and Technology increased the fees for all services enlisted in system of the Electronic Certification Center. A decision was issued to settle the status of small tourist passenger vehicles in Syria, with special plates issued by the Ministry of Transport without registration. Official working hours during Ramadan were set, and a decision was issued regarding electronic applications for transporting passengers.

Licensing regulations were issued by the Syrian Telecommunications and Post Regulatory Authority regarding value-added services, internet access services in internet cafes and the standard license for service providers. The Board of Commissioners for the Syrian Telecommunications and Post Regulatory Authority approved the single-use license for operating public communication networks. Ms. Shahira Fallouh was awarded the Syrian Order of Merit of the Excellent Degree for her services in administration as well as her care for martyrs' children.

Interest by Government Level

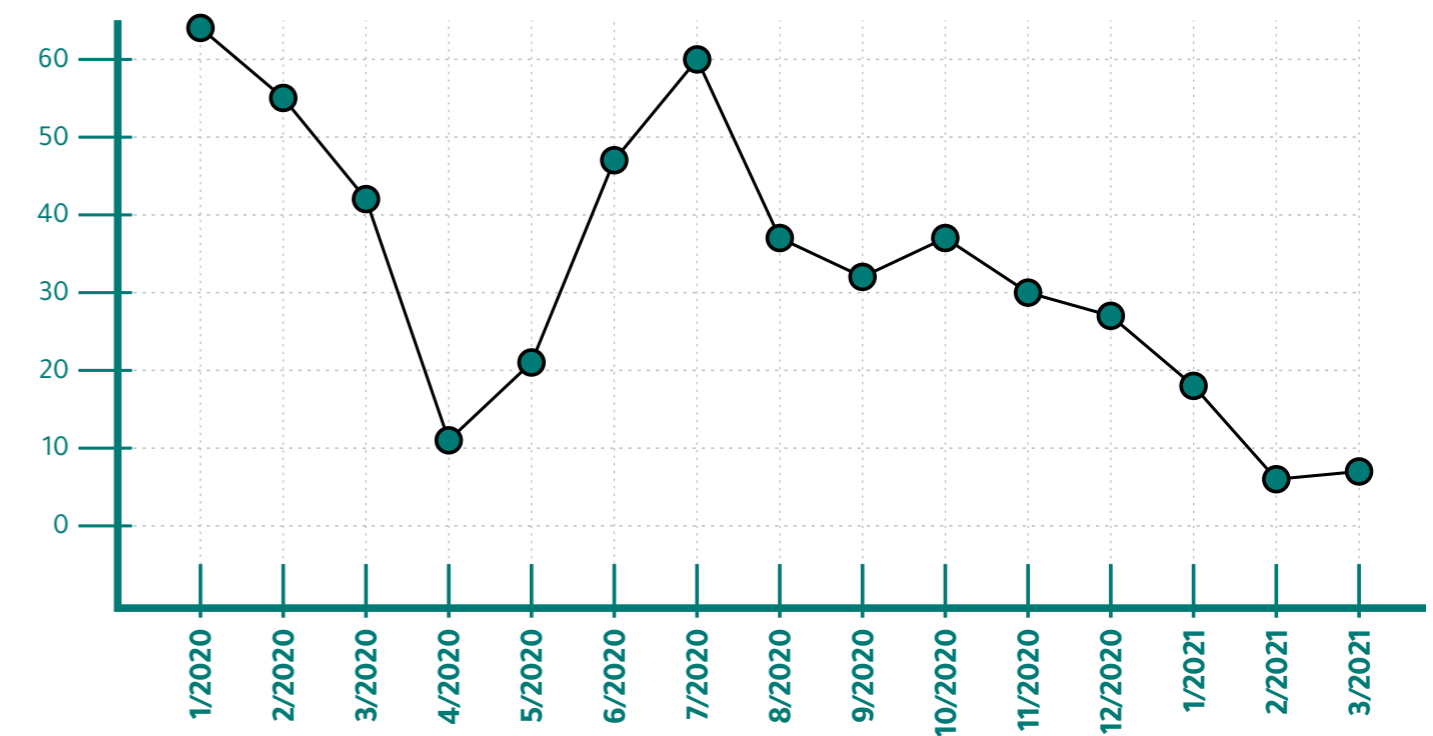
According to government media, different governmental levels showed different interest levels with the various sectors and services. Half of the reviewed materials covered statements by ministries and governorates. During the past third, governorates outperformed the ministerial level when it came to inaugurating projects and launching services. Local authorities had very limited share of plans and decisions, while there was a larger number of plans, decisions and statements by the ministerial level. On the level of daily events, less than half of the reviewed materials were interactive. Most interaction came from ministries, 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 January to April 2021. Data regarding the labor market was extracted from a survey of community activists.

New Companies

During the first third of 2021, 160 new private companies were registered through official channels, which is less than the number of companies registered in the previous third. The total capital deposited upon registering these new companies was estimated at 3.6 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. 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 15 companies was modified to comply with the Companies Provisions Act no. 29/2011.



Limited liability companies construed 79% of newly registered companies, while the remaining 3% consisted of private joint stock companies. In terms of numbers, 63% of new companies were active in the wholesale trade, import and export sector. The total capital of these companies represents 23% of the capital invested in establishing companies during this period. Investment in the manufacturing sector remains the same with regard to the number of companies and the size of capital. During the past third, the most outstanding sectors in terms of capital investment size were financing and insurance as well as lodging and food services. Contrastingly, there was a decrease in investment in the transport and storage sector as well as in the information technology sector, both of which received attention from the private sector in the previous third.

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



Private Sector and Job Market

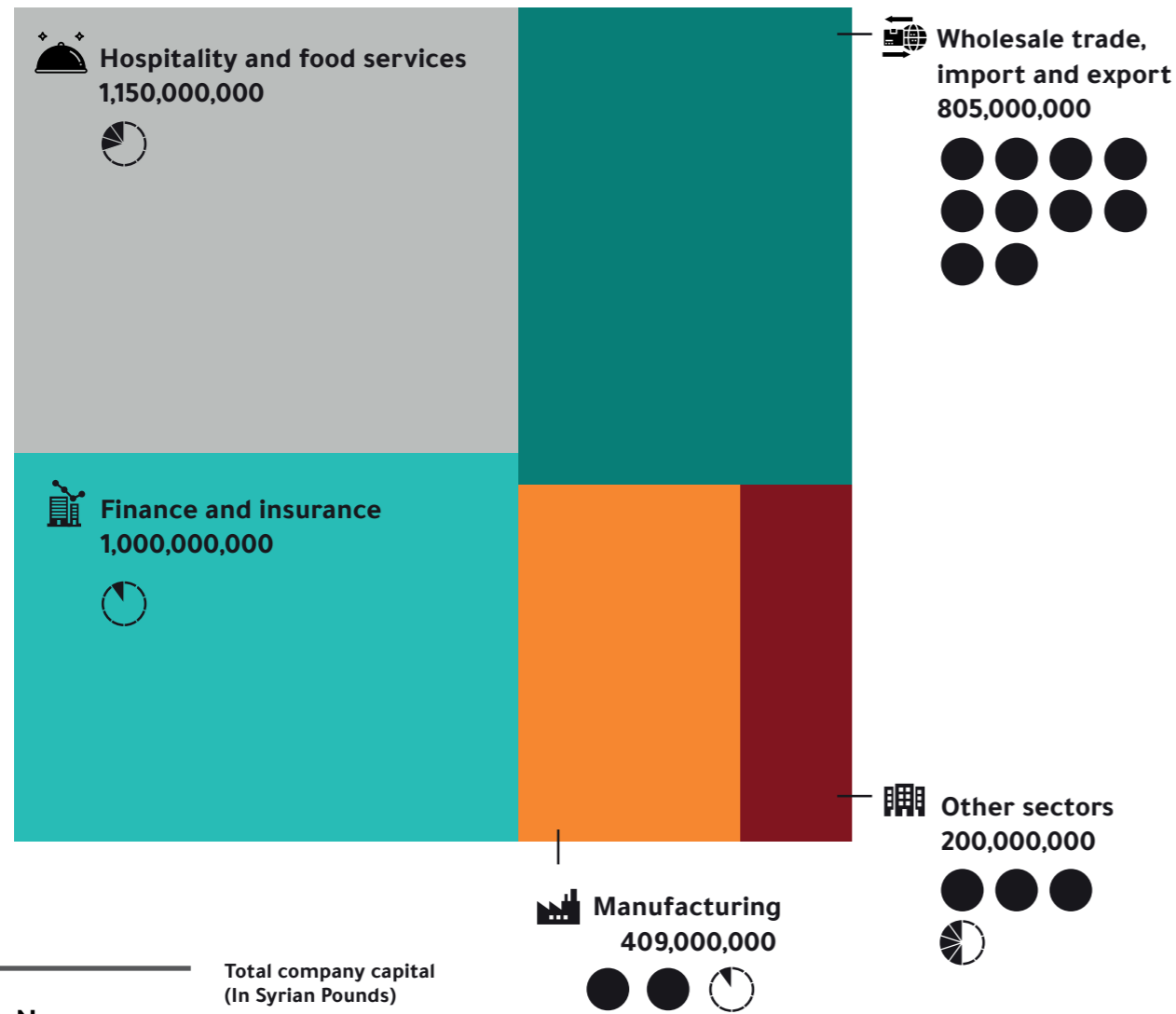


Figure 13: New companies registered in the first third of 2021 classified by sector and capital investment

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 84% of new companies were established; other governorates maintained a small number of newly registered companies in the past third.

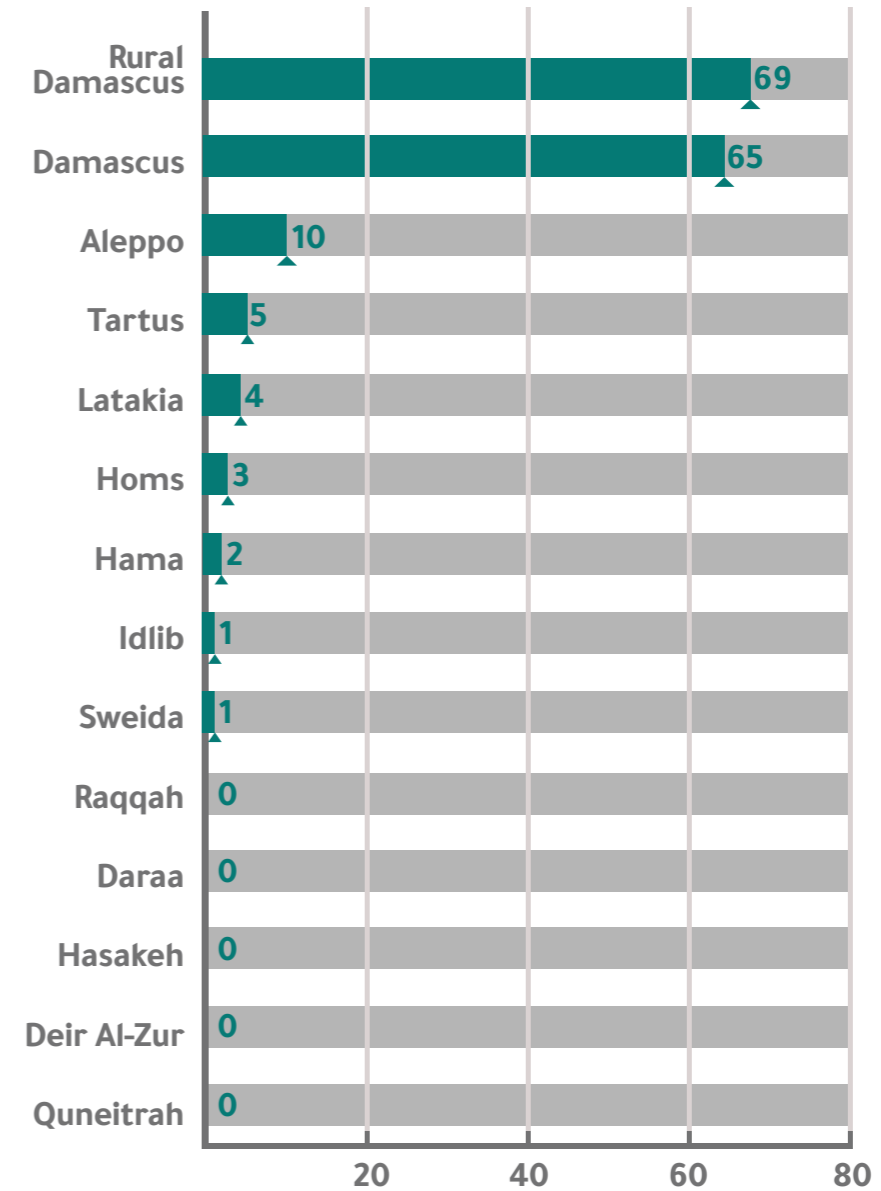


Figure 14: Number of new companies registered in the first third of 2021 by governorate

As for foreign investment, the number of companies established with the contribution of Iranian shareholders has doubled, amounting to 10 new companies, most of which are in the wholesale trade, import and export sector, in addition to the information technology sector. Jordanians contributed to establishing 5 companies. Other foreign investment was mainly focused on the wholesale trade, import and export sector as well as vocational, scientific and technical services. On a different note, 19% of the new companies included female shareholders, whose shares only amounted to 6% 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 remains at the same level of difficulty, represented by an average of 2.1 on a gradual scale¹⁷. Responses ranged between 1.6 and 2.5 across governorates, meaning that respondents find it difficult to find work that suits their level of expertise and academic qualification across the entire Syrian geography. Gender difference did not seem to affect the level of difficulty finding a job, as the average for males and females was 2.0 and 2.1 respectively. As for age groups, the answers of respondents who were under 20 years old indicated that they could find suitable jobs more easily, with an average response of 3.0. Responses did not vary considerably according to the level of academic qualification.

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

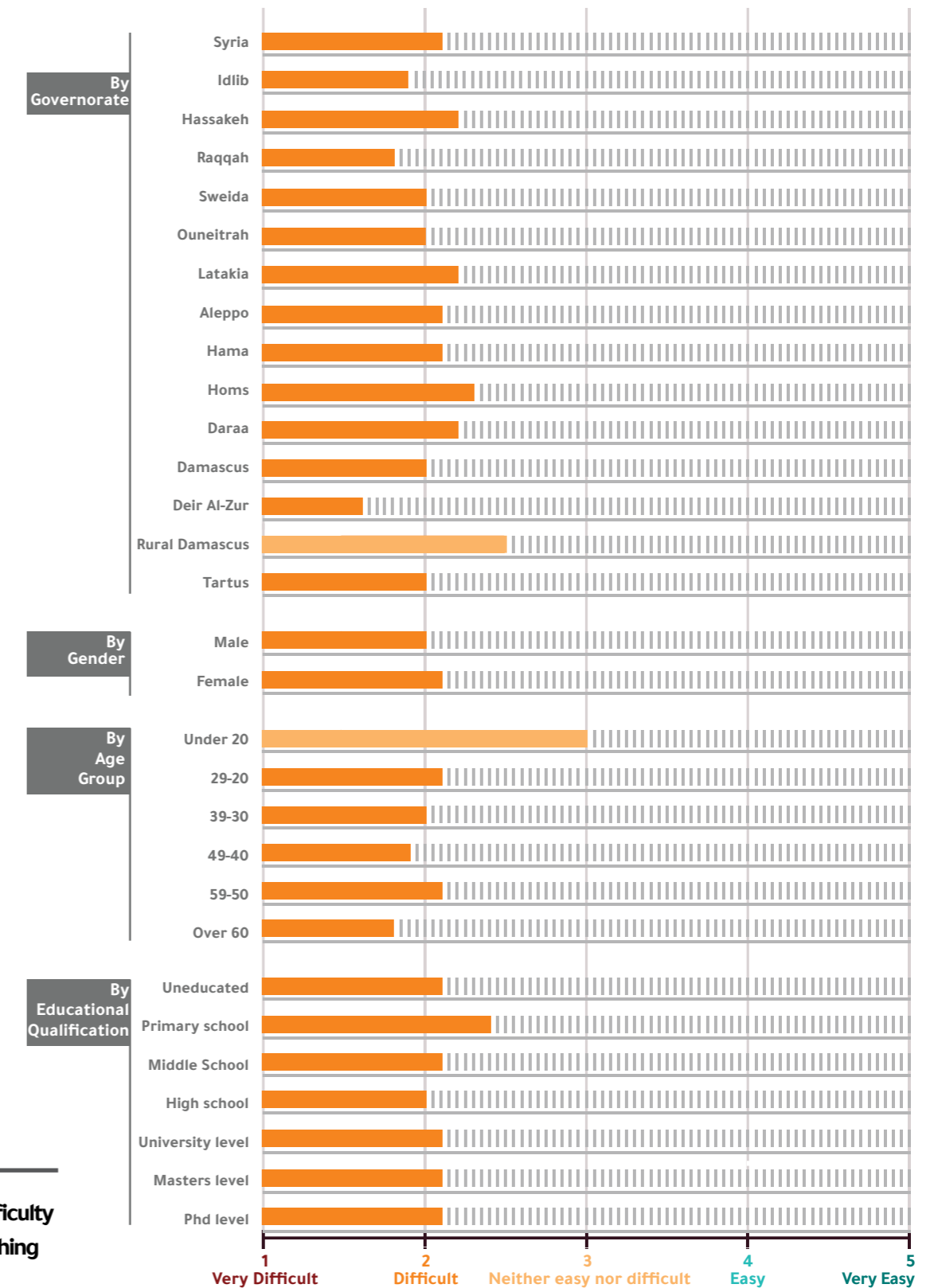
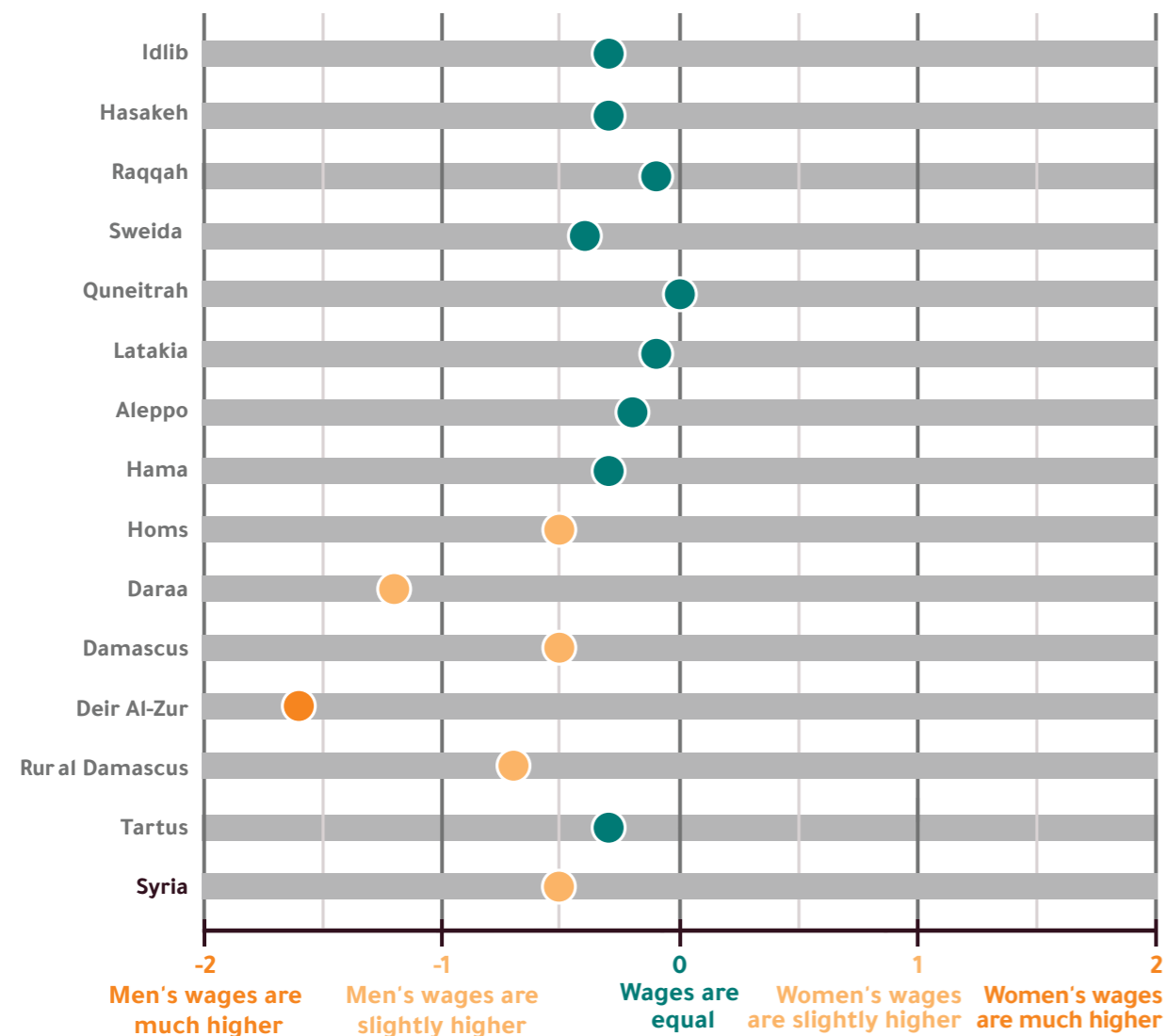


Figure 15: Level of difficulty of finding work matching the respondents' academic background and experience, classified by governorate, gender, age group, and academic qualifications in the first third of 2021

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 first 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. This is slightly worse than the previous third, when the average was -0.4. The gender gap somewhat decreased in Quneitrah, Raqqah, Latakia, Sweida, Aleppo and Damascus during this third, while it increased, with regard to wages and incentives, in Deir Al-Zur, Idlib and Rural Damascus. During this third, wages were closest to equality in Quneitrah and Latakia, and farthest from equality in Deir Al-Zur and Daraa.



By comparing data from the final third of 2020 and the first third of 2021, the following is observed:

- **A decrease in the number of newly registered companies, with growing investments in financing and insurance and lodging and food services.**
- **An increase in the contribution of foreign partners to establishing new companies.**
- **An increase in the gender gap when it comes to salary wages of equally qualified men and women, especially in Deir Al-Zur, Idlib and Rural Damascus.**

During the first third of 2021, more than 1,198 materials related to development and services in Syria were reviewed. These were gathered online from 19 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, which focused heavily on the falling exchange rate of the Syrian pound as well as the deteriorating economic situation, the lack of services, sanctions and the redefinition of subsidies. A large percentage of materials featured new laws and regulations related to economy and consumer protection. While most materials focused on the increasing prices of food substances and commercial activity, a small part of coverage was dedicated to new electronic services that banks started providing.

Health issues ranked second, with prominent Covid-19 coverage, especially with regard to interactions by official bodies, as well as statements warning against new waves of the pandemic. Some materials focused on advertising new health centers as well as Ministry of Health initiatives to renovate existing public hospitals and open new ones. Some materials were concerned with covering the losses faced by Syria's health sector within a year of the spread of Covid-19. It is worth noting that coverage of Covid-19 vaccines included only limited information without any details on vaccine types, numbers, or the national vaccination scheme.

Education came next in media coverage priorities this third. Materials focused on the Covid-19 situation in educational institutions. A share of coverage was dedicated to the suspension of classes for the intermediate level and the postponement of university examinations. Some materials focused on newly released statements by UNICEF on the fact that more than half of the children in Syria are still deprived of education, especially in light of the circumstances brought upon by Covid-19, in addition to some statistics about targeting educational institutions and teaching staff. Electronic services for students were launched, and examinations were suspended then resumed. Protests occurred in the northeast against the military conscription of teachers. There were calls for protests against cutting teachers' salaries for two years in the northwest.

Next in line was coverage of **agriculture and rural areas**. Dozens of materials focused on governmental efforts to rehabilitate agricultural land, construct roads, offer loans and distribute seedlings. Some materials tackled the impact of decisions and local projects aiming to support workers in the agriculture sector and improve their circumstances. Some events were held to display local produce, and they were covered in the media. A large share of media coverage was dedicated to the state of services, which was already poor and has deteriorated further in rural areas and outskirts. Press releases about agricultural seasons were also covered by several media, as there was a decrease in some of the seasonal produce with no apparent reason. Moreover, the Ministry of Agriculture called for the government and private sector to adopt a participatory approach to agriculture.

Law got ahead in media coverage this third, with double the amount of legislative activity compared to the previous months. Many decrees and laws were issued and old legislations were amended. These decrees and laws were widely covered by the media, especially those which affected the daily life of citizens, such as the Consumer Protection Act, the new Civil Code, the Real Estate Sales Law, among



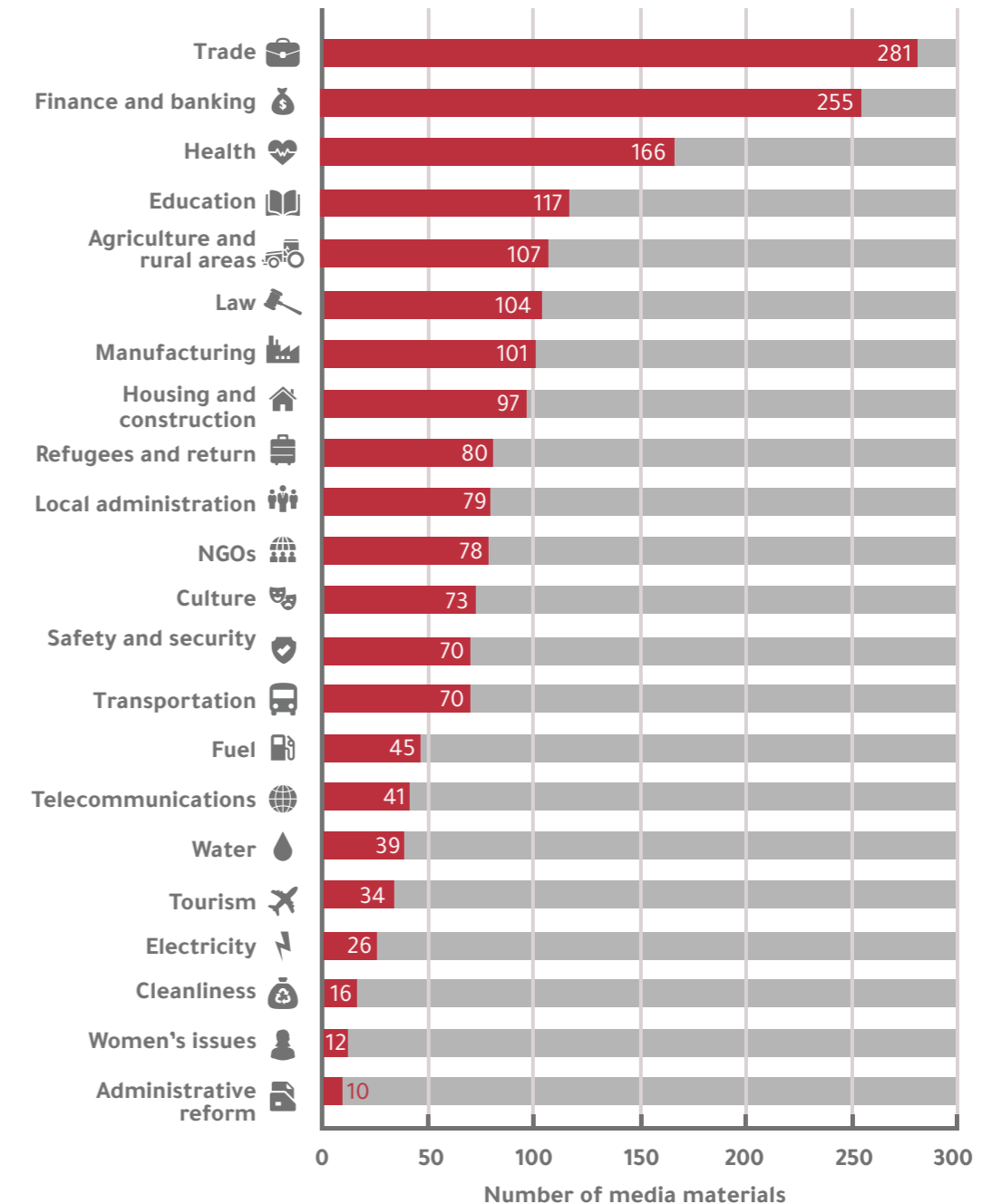
Syrian Private Media

others. Moreover, some media coverage focused on the exemption of some segments from due expenses to public institutions.

Next was **manufacturing**. Private media materials discussed the challenges faced by industrial enterprises, the increasing prices of raw materials, as well as issues of import and export in light of the sanctions imposed on Syria. A share of coverage was dedicated to the status of industrial zones. Other materials addressed local shopping festivals, which gave manufacturers the opportunity to display and sell their products directly to consumers. Some materials addressed the increase of the Industrial Bank's capital and the new agreements it signed, which will facilitate the distribution of loans to manufacturers and craftsmen.

Housing and construction came next in media coverage. The Real Estate Sales Law had a share of coverage, which also included the works of governorate councils and development projects, whether completed or failed. Coverage also included the government's efforts to allocate billions for projects facilitating the return of displaced people and for infrastructures by the Ministry of Local Administration. Materials also discussed the dismissal of some officials in relation to building violations and withholding confidence from some municipal councils. Coverage also included youth housing projects in various governorates. However, media coverage in this section was mainly concerned with the increased real-estate prices and the impossibility of buying a house for most Syrians.

Media coverage of the issues of **refugees and return** also declined over the past third, despite conferences being held to discuss the living conditions of refugees. Not much has changed regarding the return of displaced people, although some facilities were approved. Moreover, media coverage that usually addresses the living conditions in refugee camps reached its minimum, despite the increasing difficulties and challenges on the level of security, economy and health.



Next came **local administration** followed by **NGOs** and issues related to **culture** and **safety and security**, while there was a decline in coverage of **transportation**, despite the fuel supply crisis. It is also worth noting that materials addressing issues of **electricity** were minimal, in spite of the daily struggles faced by Syrians across the board as well as the inequality in electricity rationing, which led the Ministry to regulate and standardize it across different areas.

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

Coverage by Region

The Syrian geography as a whole received about one third of the media coverage during the first four months of 2021. Damascus got the largest share of media coverage, followed by Aleppo, Idlib and Tartus. There was very limited coverage related to 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 final third of 2020 and first third of 2021, the following is observed:

- **Economy and health are still the most widely covered sectors.**
- **Education, manufacturing and law witnessed an increase in media coverage.**



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.

Development Assets is an open initiative and an invitation to share knowledge in a methodological and accessible manner. This invitation is extended to share feedback and suggestions to enrich the product and to develop relevant thoughts that can make it more perceptive and accessible.

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