

DEVELOPMENT ASSETS

Local Approaches from Syria

Issue 2 2020: May - August





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CommonSpace Initiative
for Shared Knowledge & Consensus Building

Development Assets:
Local Approaches from Syria

Supported by Common Space
Initiative 2020

www.developmentassets.org
info@developmentassets.org



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

Data presented in this issue relies on primary sources obtained from:

- A questionnaire of 665 activists across Syria.
- The Syrian Official Gazette, parts I and II.
- Syrian government media sources.
- Syrian private media outlets.

Between mid-July and mid-August 2020, an electronic questionnaire was distributed to 665 male and female activists located across the country in an attempt to be geographical comprehensive. The respondents were located in more than 60 different areas, and the sample took into consideration population distribution across Syrian governorates, based on estimates provided by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates.

Respondents differed by gender, age and level of education; 58% were male, 42% were female and their ages ranged from 17 to 72, while 19% of the respondents were over the age of 40. Approximately 70% of the respondents had completed undergraduate or postgraduate studies, while 18% had only completed high school and about 11% had not completed high school. As for their marital status, 47% of the respondents were single and 48% were married, with a small percentage of respondents who are divorced and widowed.

Around 21% of the respondents indicated that they worked within the education sector and 19% worked in social care. Other prominent job sectors included trade, healthcare, IT services, agriculture, manufacturing, professional and scientific services. The respondents were employed

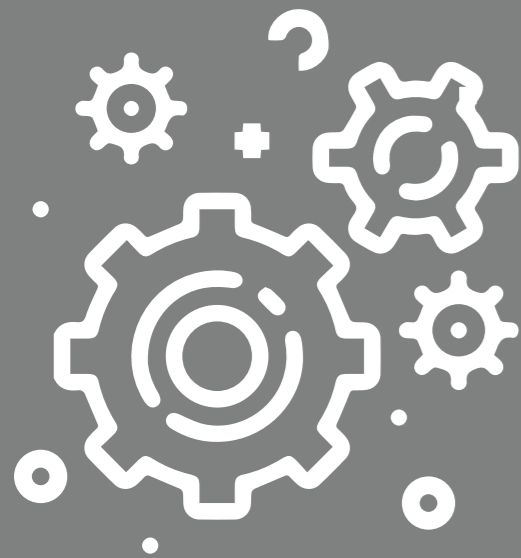
in various capacities; 20% were employed by non-profit organizations, while 18% were employed in the public sector, 12% in the private sector, 17% were private business owners, 10% were self-employed workers and 21% were unemployed.

In total, 80% of the respondents indicated that they live in the same area they were born in, while 9% of them said they have lived in their current area for more than four years and only 8% have lived in their current area for a period of between one and four years, while 2% moved to a new area less than a year ago.

Respondents to the questionnaire answered questions about the state of services, community interactions, and the prospects of development. Most of the questions asked included a scale of options converted to numerical values from 1 to 5 to calculate the mean and standard deviation. In addition to the questionnaire, the study taps on data released in the Official Gazette from May to August 2020. Data was collected on new NGOs as well as companies registered during this period and statistics were analyzed on their type and on which sectors and regions they represented. Data on decisions, declarations, and implementations by the Syrian government related to development and services was also gathered from the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), the Presidency of the Council of Ministers' web portal and the Official Gazette. This data was classified by sector, governorate and government levels.

A sample of news and media materials related to development was collected from 18 private Syrian media outlets during the second third of 2020. The sample size collected during this period amounted to 905 media items. These materials were extracted from the media sites in automated manner using sections and keywords and were classified by sector and region through an algorithm built by the research team.

Data in this report is presented through preliminary statistics without in-depth analysis. It should be noted that there is a largely informal aspect of civil work and commercial activities that is not captured in this study. This limits the possibility of seeing the bigger picture in an integrated fashion.



Methodology

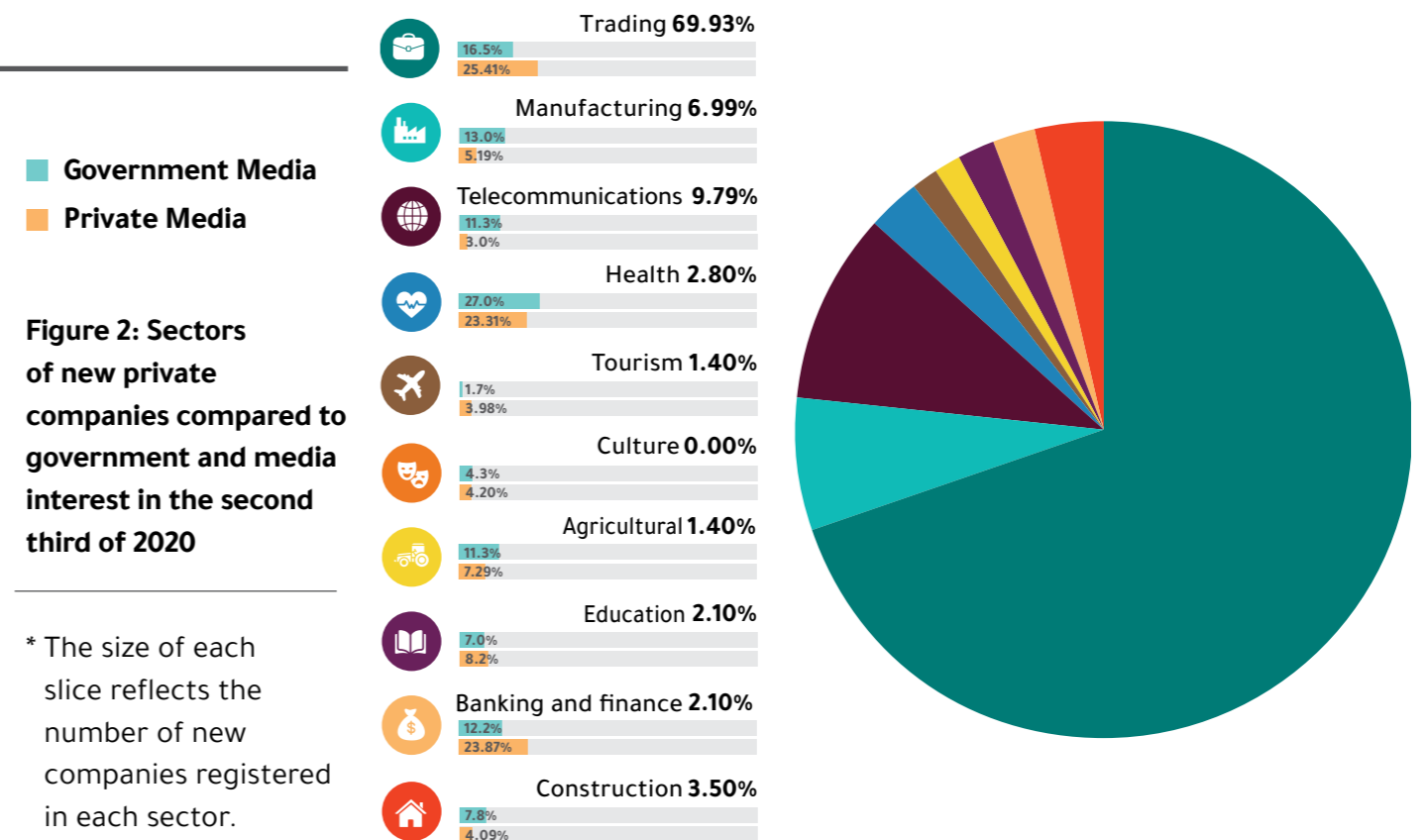
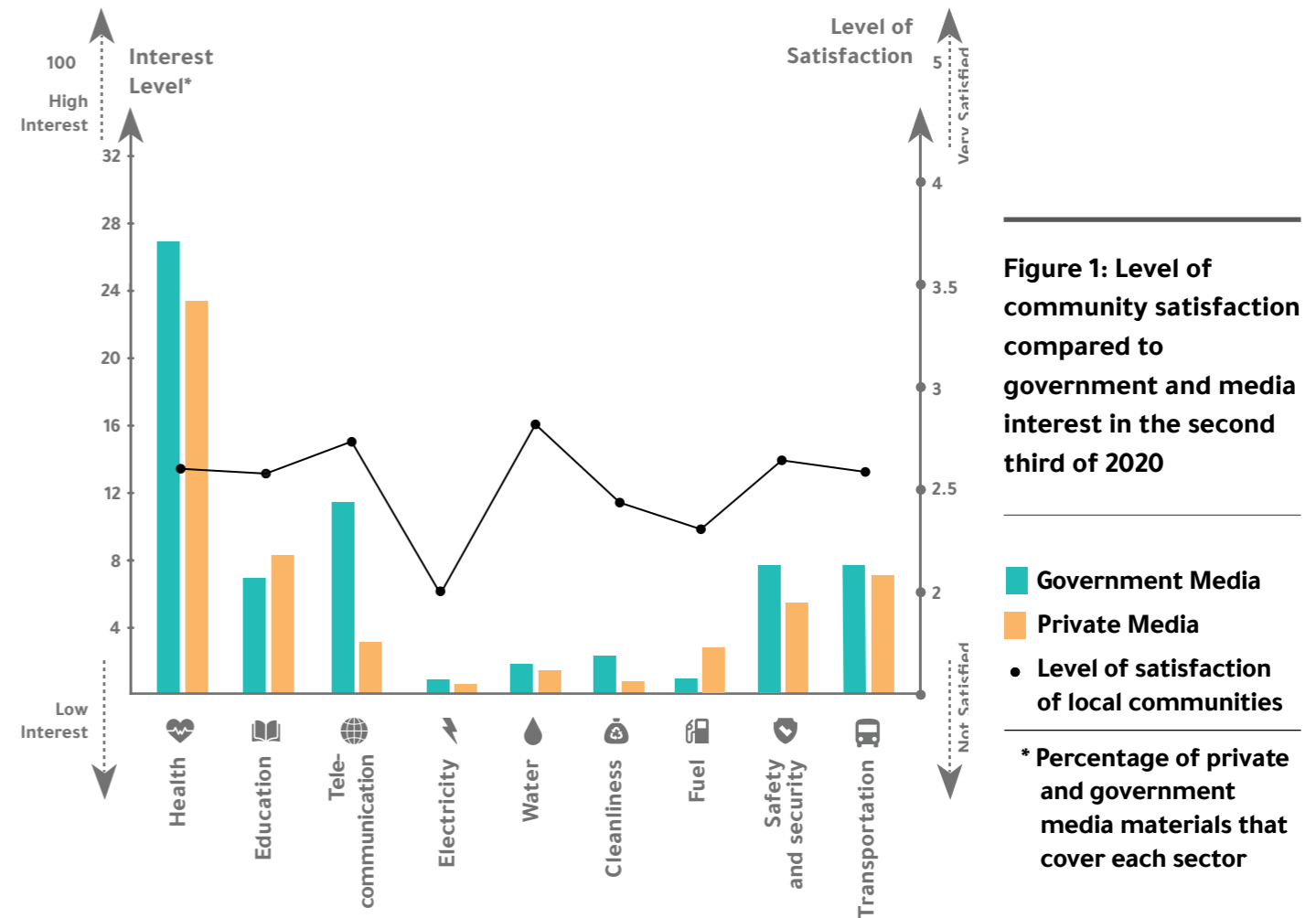


Development Interactions: Factors/ Stakeholders

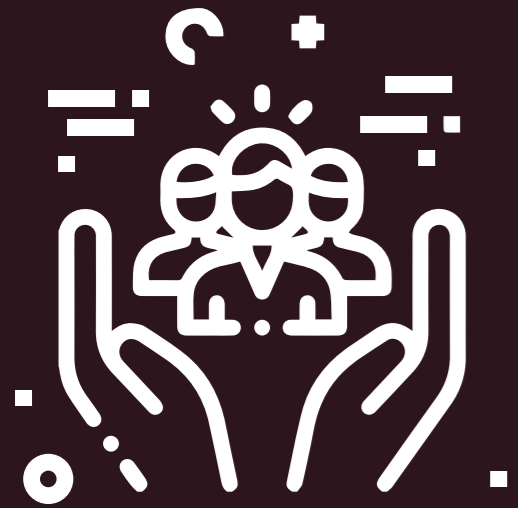
Overall, service levels have become less divergent among governorates this third. Some governorates that had enjoyed a relatively better level of services until the first third of 2020, like Tartus, Aleppo and Hasakeh, suffered from a drop in satisfaction with service levels this third. In other words, no governorate or city now guarantees its residents a significantly better level of services. Syrian private media's coverage of issues related to Syria as a whole increased from one third to two thirds, which emphasizes that services and development issues are increasingly becoming less region-specific.

In this third, respondents' satisfaction with health services decreased significantly. Meanwhile, both state and private media increased their focus on health issues, especially in the context of Covid-19. Respondents' dissatisfaction with services aligns with poor living conditions; respondents' answers indicate that families struggle to obtain food and essential living needs in all governorates.

In this third, the number of newly registered companies decreased significantly compared to the previous third. Wholesale trade, import and export companies still had the largest share of newly registered companies, while the number of newly licensed manufacturing companies decreased. The health sector still does not attract private sector investments despite the deterioration in health conditions and the increased media interest in this sector.



* 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 2020, the satisfaction rate for most services, except internet and telecommunications, decreased in the second third of 2020. The largest drop in satisfaction rate was recorded for health and water services, while electricity remained the service with the lowest satisfaction rate. Satisfaction rate with services dropped dramatically in Tartus governorate, where it has become at a similar level to the average of Syria as a whole.

The satisfaction rate with **health** services dropped from 3.0 in the previous third to 2.6 in this third on a gradual scale¹. The uncontrolled spread of Covid-19 in many areas resulted in a major decrease in the satisfaction rate with health services. Deir Al-Zur governorate recorded the lowest level of satisfaction with health services, at 1.9. The level of satisfaction with health services in Tartus decreased significantly from 3.7 to 2.4. In Rural Damascus, the satisfaction level dropped from 3.0 to 2.1. In Rural Damascus, the lowest rates

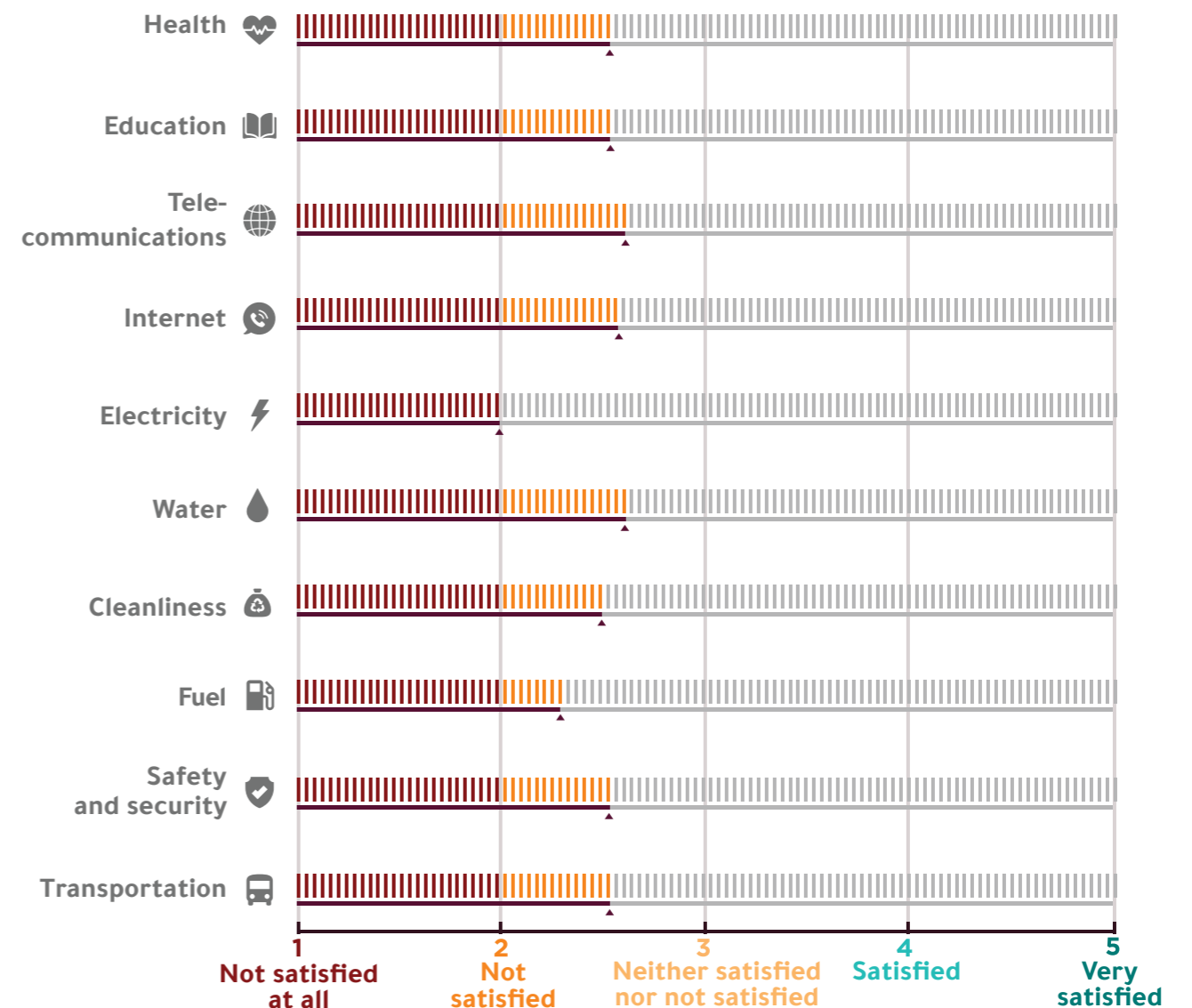
of satisfaction with health services were recorded in Jaramana and Douma.

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, respondents in the cities of Raqqah and Qamishli complained about the deterioration of health services. Activists from Latakia indicated that health centers cover some areas but not others. Respondents from Ariha city (Idlib governorate) indicated that there are no health centers in their area. Respondents from Daraa city also criticized the limited services provided by local reproductive health centers.

Satisfaction with **water** also decreased from 3.2 in the previous third to 2.8 in this third. The most notable decline in water satisfaction level has been recorded in the governorates of Daraa, Hama, Rural Damascus, Aleppo,

¹ On a scale from 5 to 1: very satisfied - satisfied - neither satisfied nor dissatisfied - not satisfied - not satisfied at all - I don't know

Figure 3: Average satisfaction of activists in Syria with basic services provided in their areas in the second third of 2020













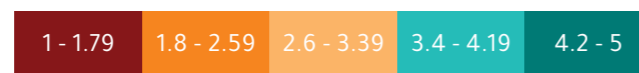
Quneitrah	2.8	2.7	3.1	3.1	3.8	3.3	3.5	2.8	3.6	2.8
Homs	2.8	2.9	3.2	2.6	2.1	3.7	2.8	2.5	3.4	2.7
Hasakeh	2.9	2.6	3.2	3.1	2.4	2.6	2.7	2.6	3.1	3.0
Damascus	2.6	2.5	3.0	2.7	2.4	3.5	2.9	2.5	2.9	2.6
Hama	2.9	3.3	3.1	2.7	2.0	2.9	2.3	2.6	2.6	3.1
Aleppo	2.9	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.4	2.9	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.5
Raqqa	2.4	2.1	2.6	3.2	2.2	3.2	3.0	2.4	2.5	2.6
Tartus	2.4	2.7	3.3	2.4	1.8	3.8	1.9	2.0	2.6	2.7
Latakia	2.8	2.6	2.8	2.4	1.8	2.8	2.2	2.4	3.0	2.5
Sweida	2.6	2.8	2.9	2.4	2.4	3.0	2.3	2.1	1.7	2.8
Idlib	3.0	2.4	2.8	3.2	1.9	2.4	2.5	2.1	2.2	2.3
Rural Damascus	2.1	2.2	2.8	2.5	1.7	2.4	2.1	2.0	2.7	2.4
Daraa	2.5	3.0	2.3	2.1	1.5	1.7	2.2	1.9	2.5	2.5
Deir Al-Zur	1.9	2.1	1.9	1.9	1.5	2.1	1.7	2.1	1.6	2.4
Syria	2.6	2.6	2.8	2.7	2.0	2.8	2.5	2.3	2.6	2.6
المحافظة	Health 	Education 	Tele-communication 	Internet 	Electricity 	Water 	Cleanliness 	Fuel 	Safety and security 	Transport 

Figure 4: Average satisfaction of activists with basic services provided in their area by governorate of the second third of 2020



Quneitrah and Hasakah. At the sub-governorate level, the lowest levels of water satisfaction were recorded in the cities of Hasakeh, Jisr Al-Shughour, Salamiyeh, Daraa, and in the southern and northern countryside of Daraa governorate. Respondents in Idlib, Ariha, and Jisr Al-Shughour (Idlib governorate) complained about water shortage along with its high cost. Activists in the city of Hasakeh indicated an almost complete water cut off, forcing residents to depend on surface wells which are not suitable for drinking. Similarly, respondents from Raqqa, Tartus, Latakia, Sahnaya (Rural Damascus) and Mukharram (Homs countryside) complained about the deterioration of water services.

As for **security**, respondents' satisfaction decreased from 3.0 in the previous third to 2.6 in the current third. Satisfaction with security remained at its lowest levels at 1.6 and 1.7 in Deir Al-Zur and Sweida governorates. Satisfaction with security increased slightly in Homs, recording the second highest rate following Quneitrah, while it decreased in most other governorates.

Respondents' satisfaction with **electricity** remained low with a decrease from 2.3 in the first third to 2.0 in the second third of the year. Exceptionally low levels of satisfaction were recorded in the governorates of Daraa, Deir Al-Zur, Rural Damascus, Latakia, Tartus and Idlib. At the sub-governorate level, activists' dissatisfaction level has reached extreme lows in the cities of Salamiyeh, Jaramana, Sahnaya, Daraa and Deir Al-Zur, along with most cities in the countryside of Deir Al-Zur. Many respondents, especially those residing governorates' central cities, complained about the poor electricity service.

Satisfaction with **education** also decreased from 2.8 in the previous third to 2.6 in the current third. Disparities among governorates in terms of satisfaction with education decreased in this third. The lowest level was recorded in Deir Al-Zur at 2.1 and the highest in Hama at 3.3. Respondents from Idlib governorate (the cities of Idlib, Binnish, Jisr Al-Shughour, Harem, Ariha, and Maarat Misrin) emphasized the need for better education quality and the need to raise teachers' wages and improve school curricula. Activists from Raqqah complained about the constant change of the school curricula, while activists from Tabqah (Raqqah Governorate) demanded the active use of online schooling due to the spread of Covid-19 pandemic.

Satisfaction with **transportation** services decreased from 2.8 to 2.6. At the governorate level, the most dramatic drop was in Sweida, where satisfaction decreased from 3.6 to 2.8, and Aleppo, where it decreased from 3.1 to 2.5. Respondents from multiple rural areas in Homs, Latakia, Idlib and Quneitrah reported the shortage of public transport services in their areas.

Regarding public **cleanliness** services, the level of satisfaction decreased from 2.7 in the first third of the year to 2.5 in the second third. The most prominent changes were in Tartus, where the level of satisfaction with cleanliness dropped dramatically from 3.3 to 1.9, and in Aleppo, where satisfaction level decreased from 3.2 to 2.7.

The level of satisfaction with **telecommunications** remained the same, at 2.8, while satisfaction with **internet** services increased slightly from 2.6 to 2.7. Satisfaction with the internet increased in Quneitrah from 2.3 to 3.1, which became, along with Hasakeh, Raqqah and Idlib, the governorates with the highest levels of satisfaction with the internet. Average satisfaction with **fuel** services remained the same at 2.3, but the differences among governorates have decreased compared to the previous third.

Living Conditions

Activists' responses regarding the ability of families in their surroundings to sustain food and other living needs indicated a level of 2.5 on a gradual scale². Variations in living conditions amongst governorates are limited; it seems that families in all governorates suffer to fulfil these basic needs, as the average rate recorded was below 3.0 in all governorates. The governorates of Sweida and Deir Al-Zur recorded the lowest levels among the governorates, at 1.7 and 1.8. In most governorates, the rate for main cities did not exceed that of the countryside, despite relatively higher income levels in urban areas. This could be an indicator of urban poverty, an issue that requires further research.

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

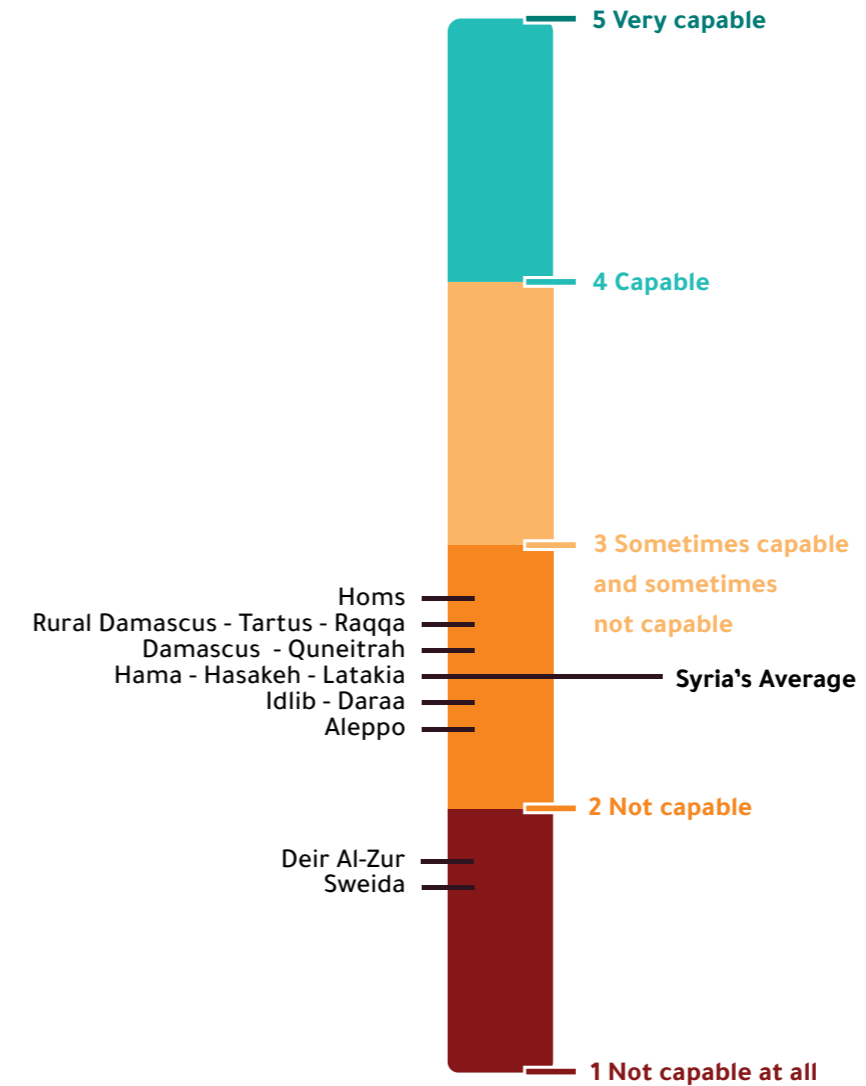


Figure 5: Families' ability to sustain food and other living needs in the second third of 2020, by governorate

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' interaction with community needs dropped from 2.9 in the first third of the year to 2.7 in the second third. The most significant decrease in the interaction of municipalities was in the governorates of Quneitrah, Rural Damascus and Tartus. Neighborhood committees' interaction with community needs also decreased from 2.7 to 2.6. In Sweida governorate, the interaction of neighborhood committees increased from 2.9 to

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

3.5, followed by Aleppo and Hama at 3.1. According to respondents, mokhtars' level of interaction remained at 2.8. Thus, mokhtars have become more interactive with local community needs than municipalities and neighborhood committees. Mokhtars were most interactive in the governorates of Hama, Aleppo, Homs and Quneitrah, and least interactive in Deir Al-Zur.

The interaction of NGOs (nonprofit and nongovernmental) with local community needs remained the same in this third at level 3.3. At the governorate level, NGOs' interaction were relatively higher in the governorates of Sweida and Raqqah. The interaction of service institutions decreased from 3.0 to 2.8. The most dramatic decrease in the interaction of service institutions was reported in the governorates of Quneitrah, Rural Damascus, Sweida and Tartus. As for associations, the level of interaction decreased from 3.0 to 2.6 in this third.

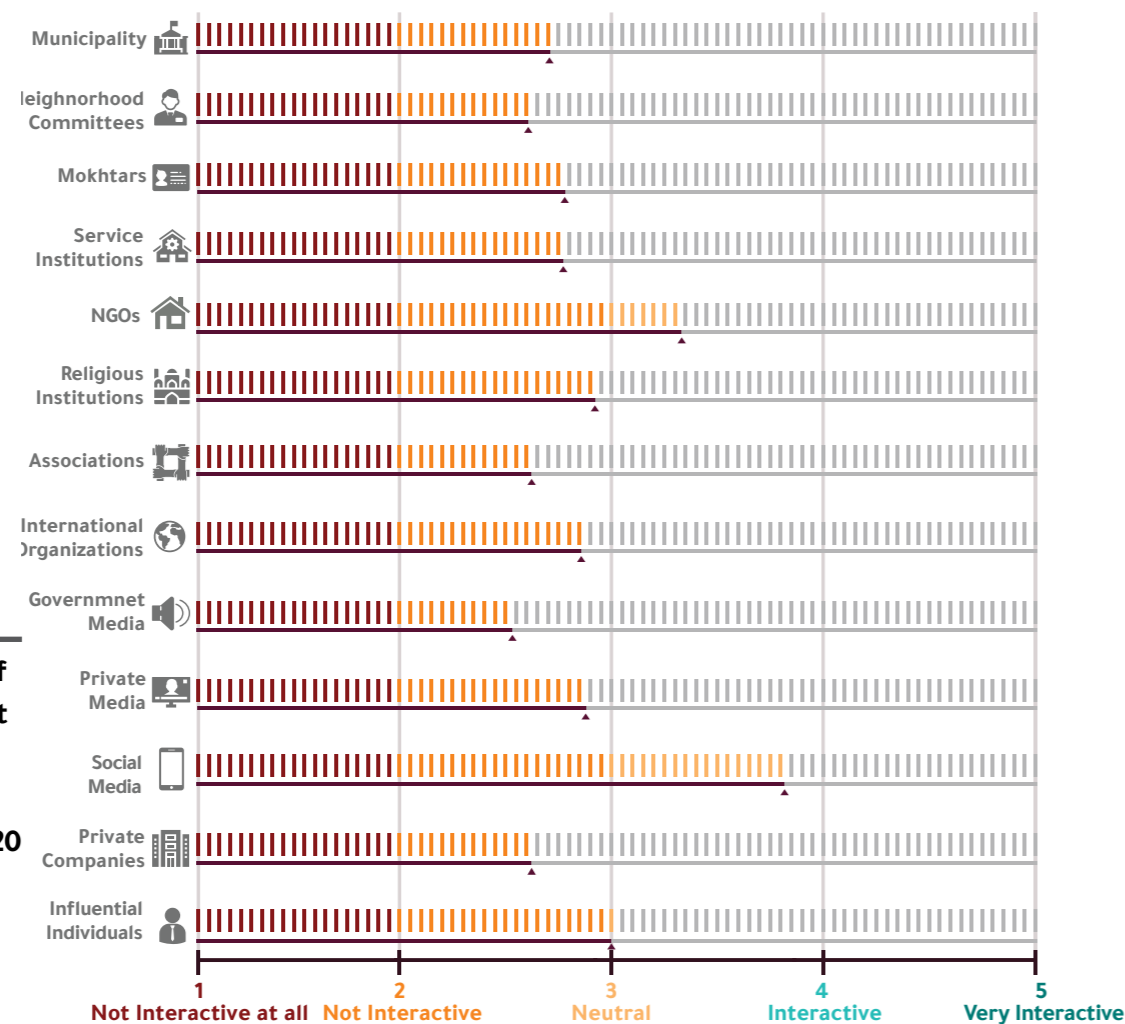


Figure 6: The degree of interaction of different stakeholders to local community needs in the second third of 2020

The interaction level of international organizations decreased from 2.9 in the first third of 2020 to 2.8 in the second third. At the governorate level, the international organizations seem to have reallocated their interaction, according to respondents. While the interaction of international organizations decreased dramatically in the governorates of Raqqah, Quneitrah, Tartus and Homs, it increased significantly in the Hasakeh governorate.

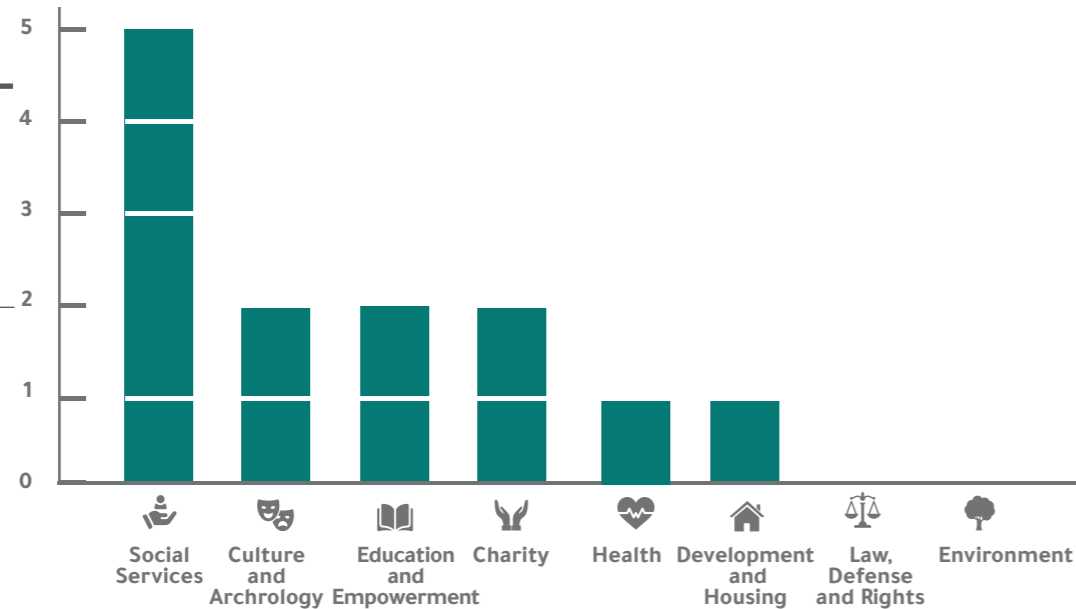
The interaction of religious institutions with the needs of the local community increased from 2.6 to 2.9, after declining in the previous two thirds. The most significant increase in the interaction of religious institutions took place in the governorates of Idlib, Aleppo, Rural Damascus, Damascus and Hama. On the other hand, the interaction of religious institutions decreased in the governorates of Daraa, Quneitrah and Tartus. This third, Hama governorate recorded the highest rate of interaction of religious institutions, while the lowest rate was recorded in Deir Al-Zur.

The interaction of private companies with the needs of the local community did not change significantly this third, it increased from 2.5 to 2.6. On the other hand, respondents' answers indicate that the interaction rate of influential individuals with local needs increased from 2.8 to 3.0. The highest level of interaction was recorded in the governorates of Sweida and Hama.

On the media front, the level of government media interaction with local needs decreased from 2.7 in the first third to 2.5 in the second third. The interaction of private media remained at 2.9 and that of social media at 3.8.

According to activists, the interaction level of the local community with the community activities remained the same at rate 3.1 in Syria overall.

Figure 7: The number of newly licensed NGOs during the second third of 2020



Non-governmental Organizations

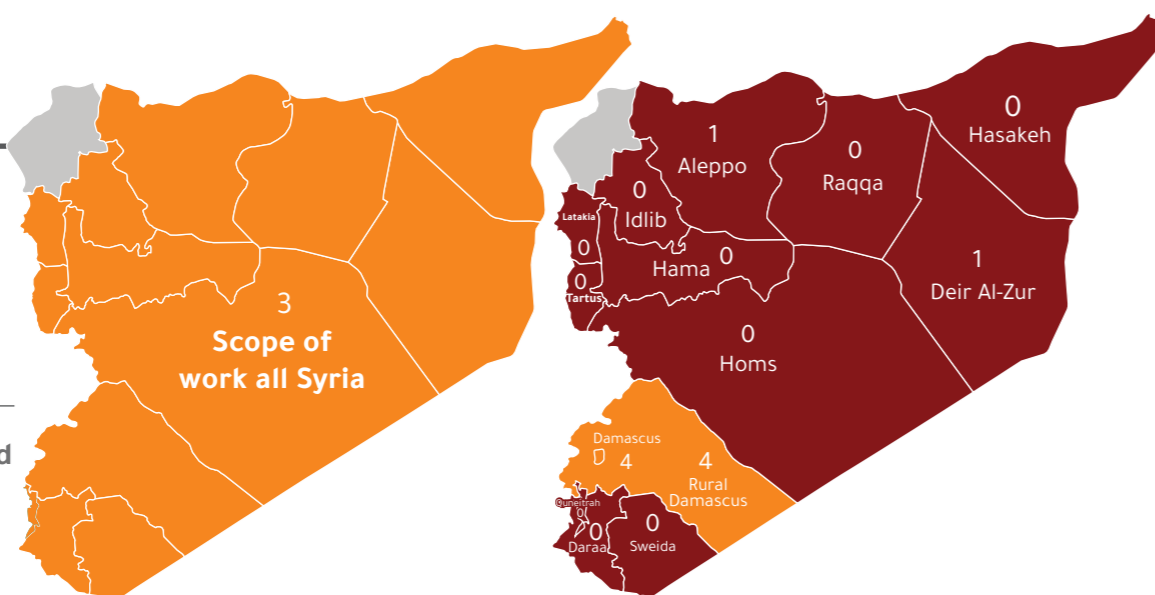
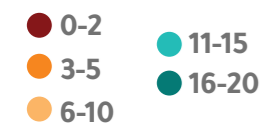
In the second third of 2020, cooperation among community actors, such as NGOs and volunteer groups remained the same at 2.7, according to activists⁴. According to the respondents, the degree of independence granted by donors to beneficiaries they support on the ground increased significantly. For national donors, the rate increased from 1.7 to 2.2 on a gradual scale⁵. Similarly, the level of independence granted by international donors increased from 1.9 to 2.6. However, despite the increase in the independence level, the rates still indicate limited independence granted to NGOs on the ground.

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

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

Figure 8: Geographical distribution of newly licensed NGOs during the second third of 2020

No. of newly established NGOs per Governorate



As for newly licensed NGOs, data from the Official Gazette during the second third of 2020 indicates that five NGOs had been denied license while another 13 were licensed. These are much fewer than the number of NGOs licensed in the previous third. The most prominent sectors for newly licensed NGOs are social services. Most rejected NGOs are located in Damascus and Rural Damascus, while the licensed ones are concentrated in Rural Damascus. Branches of previously licensed NGOs were registered in several governorates, amounting to six branches this third. In addition, all applications by NGOs to amend their internal systems and regulations have been accepted. The level of official interaction with the civil society dropped slightly from 2.9 in the previous third to 2.8 this third on a gradual scale⁶.

According to respondents, the opportunity for males and females to find employment within the non-profit sector became somewhat less equal this third. The degree of equal opportunities decreased from 3.1 in the previous third to 2.7 this third⁷. At the governorate level, the lowest rate of equal opportunities was recorded in Deir Al-Zur.

Social Issues

This section discusses the presence of several social issues in local communities based on the respondents' perspective of how common each of these phenomena is on a gradual scale⁸. As for child labor, the level of commonality indicated by respondents is 2.0, meaning it is a common issue in Syria overall. According to activists, this phenomenon appears to be somewhat more prevalent in the governorates of Raqqah, Aleppo, and Rural Damascus. Similarly, the issue of street children begging also appeared to be a common phenomenon at a level of 2.1. The latter phenomenon is most common in Aleppo governorate, and least common in Deir Al-Zur governorate.

Child marriage, particularly for girls under the age of eighteen, seems less common than the two previous issues. It recorded a level of 2.7. Moreover, it appears to be more common in the governorates of Aleppo,

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

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

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

Idlib, Daraa, Raqqah and Quneitrah, while it was least common in Tartus.

The issue of school dropout appears to be more common for males than females, as it recorded a level of 2.1 for males compared to 2.5 for females. According to respondents' perceptions, Raqqah governorate recorded the highest school dropout level for males, while Quneitrah recorded the highest school dropout level for females in the second third of the year.

In case of domestic violence, the main choice that women resort to is family or the clan, according to 66% of the respondents, while 8% of the respondents indicated that women in their surrounding mainly resorted to the court, local influential persons (4%), police station (4%), or NGOs (4%).

Response to Covid-19

Respondents rated their satisfaction with the response of different entities to the Covid-19 epidemic. They showed a relatively higher level of satisfaction with the social media response, rated at 3.4 on a gradual scale⁹, which is a similar rate to that of the last third. In contrast, the level of satisfaction with the local authorities' response was 2.7. According to the respondents, the highest level of responsiveness by local authorities was recorded in Hasakeh governorate, while the lowest level was in Daraa governorate. The level of government media response decreased from 3.1 to 2.7, and the private media from 3.1 to 2.9. The level of social and local actors' response also decreased from 3.1 to 2.8. The highest level of response recorded in the governorate of Aleppo, while the level of response from social and local actors decreased significantly in the governorates of Tartus, Quneitrah and Sweida. As for the extent of local communities' commitment to carry out the preventive measures due to Covid-19, respondents indicated an average commitment level of 2.3 this third, compared to 3.2 in the previous third

⁹ From 5 to 1: very satisfied - satisfied - neither satisfied nor dissatisfied - not satisfied - not satisfied at all - I don't know

on gradual scale¹⁰. The governorate of Quneitrah recorded the highest levels of commitment according to respondents' answers.

Development Prospects

Activists' faith in community work's ability to influence the development process in Syria remained at the same level as the previous third, at a rate of 3.9 on a gradual scale¹¹. Their belief in the ability of local administration personnel and elected officials to influence the local development process decreased slightly from 2.7 to 2.6. The most significant drop was recorded in the governorates of Tartus, Hama and Quneitrah. The extent to which elected members of local administration share information with citizens decreased dramatically from 2.6 in the previous third to 2.1 this third on a gradual scale.¹² In this third, the lowest level of information sharing was recorded in Daraa governorate.

In response to an optional question about the extent to which parliamentary election programs met voters' aspirations, activists indicated a relatively low level at an average of 1.8 on a gradual scale¹³. The lowest levels were recorded in Tartus and Damascus at 1.2 and 1.3, while the highest level was recorded in Aleppo at 2.4. Activists' answers regarding the extent to which women are interested in political participation (nomination, voting and party membership) indicated that interest in participation is low, at the level of 2.1 on a gradual scale¹⁴. Variations among governorates were relatively small; all ranged between 1.7 and 2.5.

As for the impact of Smart Card use on the fairness of the government subsidy distribution (an optional question), activists indicated that using the card did not affect the fairness of subsidy distribution, with an average answer of 2.9 on a gradual scale¹⁵.

Activists' optimism about the future of development in Syria increased from 2.6 to 2.9 on a gradual scale¹⁶. The highest level of optimism was recorded in Idlib

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

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

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

¹³ From 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

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

¹⁵ From 5 to 1: share well - share - neutral - do not share - do not share at all - I don't know

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

at 3.5, while the lowest level was in Deir Al-Zur at 1.9. The percentage of respondents who expressed a desire to travel and live abroad within the next two years increased from 36% in the last third to 45% in this third.

By comparing the results of the community activist survey between the first and second thirds of 2020, the following is observed:

- A decrease in the level of satisfaction with most services and a convergence in the level of satisfaction among governorates.
- A decline in the level of interaction of municipalities and government media with the needs of the local communities, while the interaction of religious institutions with these needs increased.
- A decrease in the number of new licensed NGOs.
- An increase in activists' optimism about the future of local development in Syria, despite the increased number of activists who desire to travel and settle abroad.

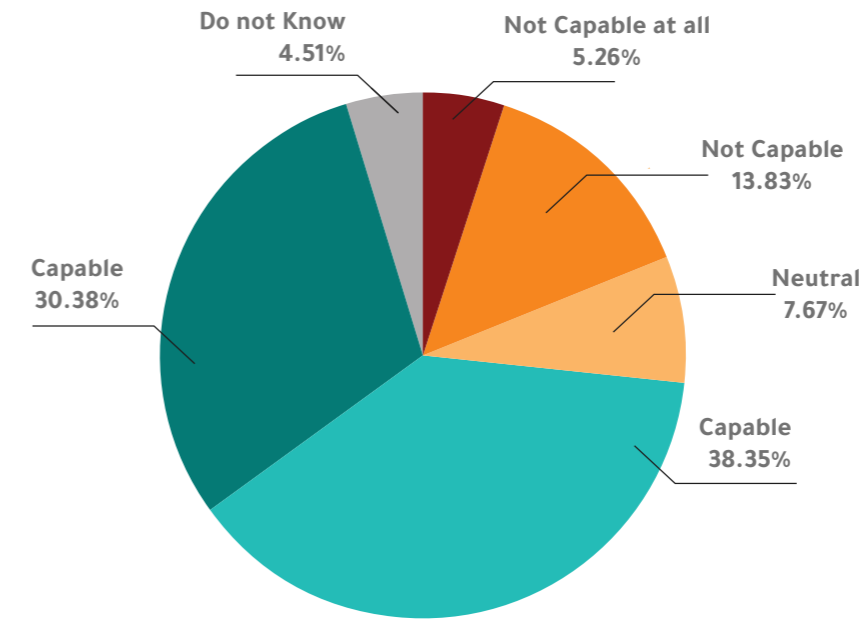


Figure 9: Activists' belief in the ability of community action to influence the development process in the second third of 2020

- Not capable at all
- Not capable
- Neutral
- Capable
- Very capable
- Do not know

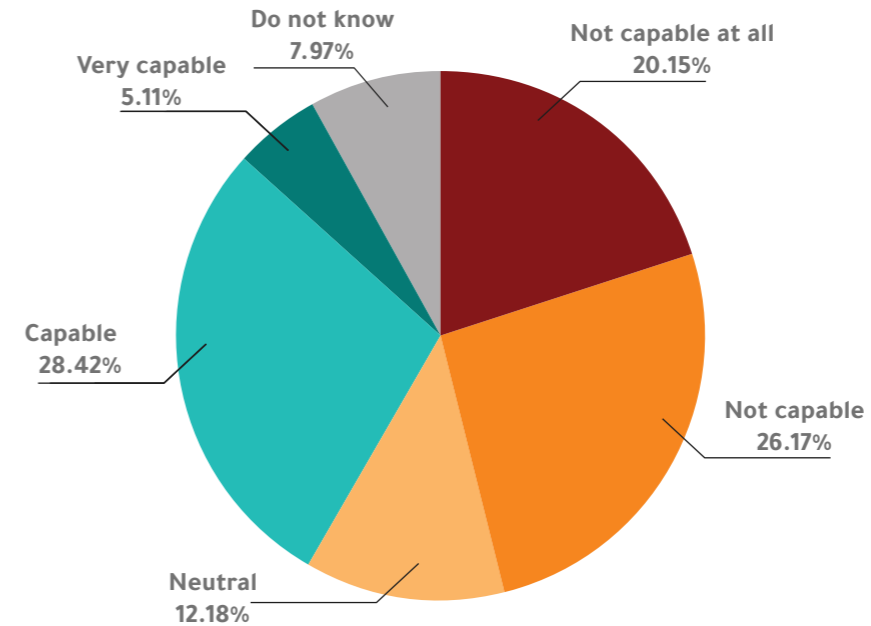


Figure 10: Activists' belief in the ability of local administration personnel and elected officials to influence local development in the second third of 2020

- Not capable at all
- Not capable
- Neutral
- Capable
- Very capable
- Do not know

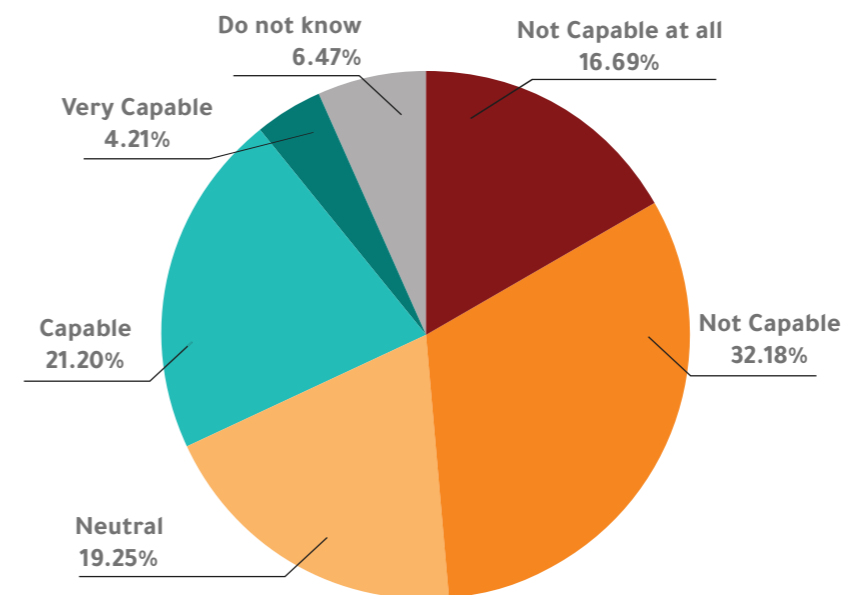


Figure 11: Activists belief in equal employment opportunities for men and women in the non-profit sector in the second third of 2020

- Not capable at all
- Not capable
- Neutral
- Capable
- Very capable
- Do not know



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 2020. 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

While the second third witnessed meetings and interactions on the Syrian file on different levels, and despite the resumption of the Syrian Constitutional Committee meetings after a nine-month break, Caesar Act entered into force, affecting the economic situation in Syria dramatically. Internal contact lines were characterized by an uneasy calm, while cases of Syrians recruited in conflicts in different countries were reported.

The commercial, governmental, and educational sectors in Syria had gradually reopened after their closure due to the outbreak of Covid-19 epidemic, despite the steadily increasing number of infections. While the government attempted to control the spread and distribute limited testing kits to various governorates, hundreds of potential unregistered infections have been indicated by the high daily death toll, especially in Damascus and Rural Damascus. However, the death toll started to decline again.

The exchange rate of the Syrian pound against foreign currencies reached an extraordinarily low rate. Market prices increased significantly. A dramatic shortage was noticed in basic needs such as fuel and other supplies, in addition to constant electricity cuts and the shortage of services in most regions.

The People's Council elections were held after being postponed twice, with the participation of only 33% of those eligible to vote, according to official reports. In light of the public dissatisfaction with the deteriorating of living conditions, Imad Khamis was dismissed from the premiership and the Minister of Internal Trade and Consumer Protection was released of his duties. This took place a few weeks before the expiry of the government's mandate due to parliamentary elections. Hussein Arnous was assigned as the head of the new government. Twelve ministers changed in the new government, but there were no changes in the sovereign portfolios.

Governmental Institutions and Internal Regulations

The National Program for Post-War Syria was finally issued. The planning and structuring of the program started years ago. It outlines the national strategy to reach Syria Vision 2030. A decree was issued to establish the General Corporation for Electric Power Transmission and Distribution, which replaced the institutions of Electric Power Transmission and Distribution. Another decree was issued to modify the structure of the Ministry of Administrative Development and regulated its staffing. The organizational chart of the Ministry of Housing and Construction was also approved. A directorate for legal affairs was established at the Public Administration of the Agricultural Cooperative Bank, and another directorate was established at Telecommunication and Postal Regulatory. At the Planning and International Cooperation Commission, the Shared Services Directorate was established to replace the Administrative and Labor Affairs Directorate and the specialized technical training department was also established there.



Government Action

A decree was issued to establish joint chambers of commerce and industry along with the Federation of Syrian Chambers of Commerce. Decree 10 of 2020 was issued to exempt raw material imports from customs considering them as inputs to local industry. A decision was issued defining the state's right to extracted mineral resources.

The Minister of Domestic Trade and Consumer Protection and the former Prime Minister was dismissed. Additional duties were delegated to the Director of Labor and Social Affairs and to the Secretary General of Council of Ministers. Bonus pays were approved for workers in the General Organization for Tobacco, the General Food Industry Association, and the Syrian Corporation for Batteries and Liquid Gases in Aleppo.

Focus Topics

Health

Health was the major focus of the government's agenda. Actions, news and instructions about coping with the Covid-19 pandemic had a large share of the government's focus. Updates about quarantine and isolation centers and health institutions, testing procedures, and the distribution of registered cases gained the major attention. The government also attempted to open multiple test centers for travelers, but failed to reduce congestions at authorized testing centers. In terms of government decisions, regulations for the registration and importation of chemical pharmaceuticals have been set. The Minister of Health has delegated additional authorities to the Director of Medical Records and Licenses and to the Head of the Specialist Citizen Service Centre.

Economy

After health, government media focused on trade, finance and banking. Among the most prominent government decisions was the imposing of an exchange of \$100 or its equivalent in foreign currencies for each individual Syrian visiting from abroad, except drivers

and children, in accordance with the state's official exchange rates, starting from August 1, 2020.

The coronavirus testing fee was set at \$200 arrivals and \$100 for departures. Postage fees have also been changed for Official Gazette subscribers. A decree was issued to determine postage stamp printing fees. Auditing firms were licensed for the year of 2020 and new accountants were certified in addition to renewed licenses for former accountants.

As for the Ministry of Finance, taxes on wages and other taxable incomes (real profit category) were consolidated within one tax file for each year. As for wages, the Ministry of Finance determined the minimum rates for reduced incomes. Compensation was also set for the Financial Management Committee, the Financial Supervisory Committee, the chairperson and members of the general authority for the committees responsible for income tax revisions and other workers in the ministry.

The exchange rate of the US dollar for the 2021 budget was set at the equivalent of 1,250 Syrian pounds. The prices of new and used burlap sacks have also been determined and prices of electricity produced from renewable energy systems have also been set. The Ministry of Transport has modified the rental rates for halls of honor at Syrian airports.

The Central Bank of Syria has amended its internal regulations. It set the minimum interest rate for minimal-period deposits in foreign currencies to 3.5% annually on dollar cash deposits, and 1% on euro cash deposits. A decision was issued to extend the three-month period in the electricity investment system of the General Electricity Transmission with two extra months. Noor Microfinance Foundation was dissolved. The Savings Bank disposition system for obsolete items was approved.

Manufacturing

Manufacturing ranked next in the government media coverage this third. A decree was issued to exempt subscribers who used electricity for agricultural

purposes from fines and interest charges. The production supplies and raw materials used in the manufacturing of human medicines was also exempted from customs duties. The selling prices of mineral oils were set for fuel companies, factories and consumers, and the price of aviation kerosene sold to the Air Force was also set. The Ministry of Industry assigned the General Organization for Tobacco to purchase tobacco and tobacco crops.

Agriculture

As for agriculture and rural activities, the price of purchasing a kilogram of locally produced wheat was set. Quality standards for wheat production have been announced for the 2020 season and conditions for wheat transportation for the season have also been determined. The Ministry of Agriculture has created new advisory units and specified the necessary conditions for importing animals and animals' waste. It also permitted the use of streptococcus vaccine to vaccinate cows. The ministry also determined the liter price of nitrogenous liquid. Special technical and health parameters were set for the importation of potato seeds.

Local Administration

During this third, several articles of the Local Administration Law 107 were amended. The executive instructions of the Real Estate Judiciary Law No. 16 of 2014 were also issued. The decision of the Executive Office of Hama Governorate Council to define the administrative boundaries of Kafat municipality was approved. The councils of Masyaf city and the council of Adra Labor city in Rural Damascus were dissolved. A temporary executive office has been established for Shein town in Homs Governorate. A new nahiya was demarcated at Jdaidet Artouz, Rural Damascus. Chairmen of councils were appointed. The head of Sweida's city council was dismissed. In Latakia, executive offices were reconfigured, while temporary executive offices were established.

Telecommunications and Internet

A list of restrictions and regulations for the reliability of information security companies has been defined. The membership of the Board of Commissioners in the Communications and Postal Regulatory Authority has been modified. The administrative level of the readiness directorate at the ministry was also reduced. The reference offers for interconnection were approved by the Telecommunications and Postal Regulatory Authority. A regulatory module for short range devices was approved by the Telecommunications and Postal Regulatory Authority.

Education

The number of teachers and education staff in public universities was determined. The financial system of the Virtual University was modified. A decree was also issued to specify the annual scholarships for each educational institution that are allocated to families of martyrs and wounded people, setting 2% as the minimum proportion of registered students at each college or institute.

The number of Board of Trustees of the Al-Jazeera University was set. The internal regulations of intermediate institutes issued in 2008 have been amended. Executive instructions were issued for the decree on the criteria for passing high school certificate. A decree was also issued to amend some articles of the executive regulations of University Law regarding exhaustion and the granting of opportunities to students. A supplementary exam was granted for students in all high school branches. Bylaws were approved for many colleges and master's programs. Several teaching curriculums were modified, and several postgraduate master's and PhD studies in various specializations were initiated.

Housing and Construction

The 2006 internal regulations of the General Directorate of Real Estate Investments have been amended. In Aleppo, the real estate registration and documentation services at the documentation office since 13 June 2012 were considered suspended. The contractors' system has also been modified.

In Tartus, the direct buffer area of Basil Al-Assad's Lake Dam in Safita was modified. The buffer area around Minin spring in Rural Damascus was also modified. Some properties have been registered for the state and allocated to the Ministry of Finance. Dozens of properties were acquired by the state in the governorates of Tartus, Rural Damascus, Daraa, Hama, and Sweida for public benefit.

Law

Executive instructions for decree 10 of 2020 were issued by the Ministry of Finance. The decree had exempted imported raw materials from customs considering them as inputs to the local industry. The licenses of some security and safety companies have also been cancelled. Articles from Law 34 of 2007 regarding veterinarians have been amended. The Supreme Constitutional Court issued appeals regarding the electoral process. The new People's Assembly was called to convene. Documents issued by the extraordinary conference of the Universal Postal Union were certified.

Other Focus Topics

As for tourism, Dreib Mosque in Nabek, Rural Damascus was registered as a historical site, in addition to Hammam Al-Halq and some other historical buildings in Hama. The historical registration of Al-Sharq Hotel building in Latakia was also modified.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor allowed insured individuals to include their previous public employment period in to the period that counts for their income. The ministry also established a citizen service center. Executive instructions were issued for newly established nurseries. In addition, decree was issued to extend legal deadlines mentioned in the tax legislation and applicable fees. A decision was issued by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers to extend the support program for persons discharged from military service. Similarly, the two years program to support new graduates was also extended and its implementation mechanism was defined.

The Ministry of Culture provided compensation for lecturers at cultural platforms. A Syrian contribution to the Syrian International Development Corporation assets was also approved. The service period for the ambassadors Walid Othman and Riad Haddad was extended. A decision was issued to amend the fees of services to external parties in the National Energy Research Center.

Interest by Government Level

According to government media, different governmental levels showed different interest levels with the various sectors and services. The ministerial level had the greatest share of launching new projects and services, and in issuing statements to the media during press conferences, as well as development plans. The ministerial level was followed by governorates, and next came the directorates. Approximately two thirds of government media materials issued were based on ongoing events. Ministries were most interactive, followed by governorates and then directorates.



Data in this section is based on the official data published on registered companies in the Official Gazette from May to August 2020. Data regarding the labor market was extracted from a survey of community activists.

New Companies

During this period, 179 new private companies were registered through official channels, which is about 32% less than the number of companies registered in the previous four months. The total of capital deposited upon registering these new companies was estimated at about 24.6 billion Syrian pounds. These capitals do not represent all investments, but rather what the partners chose to deposit as a declared initial investment upon the establishment of the company. Therefore, actual investments exceed the amount of capital deposited at incorporation. We also point out here that these numbers do not include unregistered commercial activities, especially small ones, of which there is a fundamental lack of data as the size of the informal sector is unknown. The numbers included in this section also do not include companies and investments in areas outside the control of the central government, as companies are not registered in these areas through the central government channels in Damascus. In addition to the newly registered companies, the status of 23 companies were modified to comply with the Companies Provisions Act no. 29/2011.

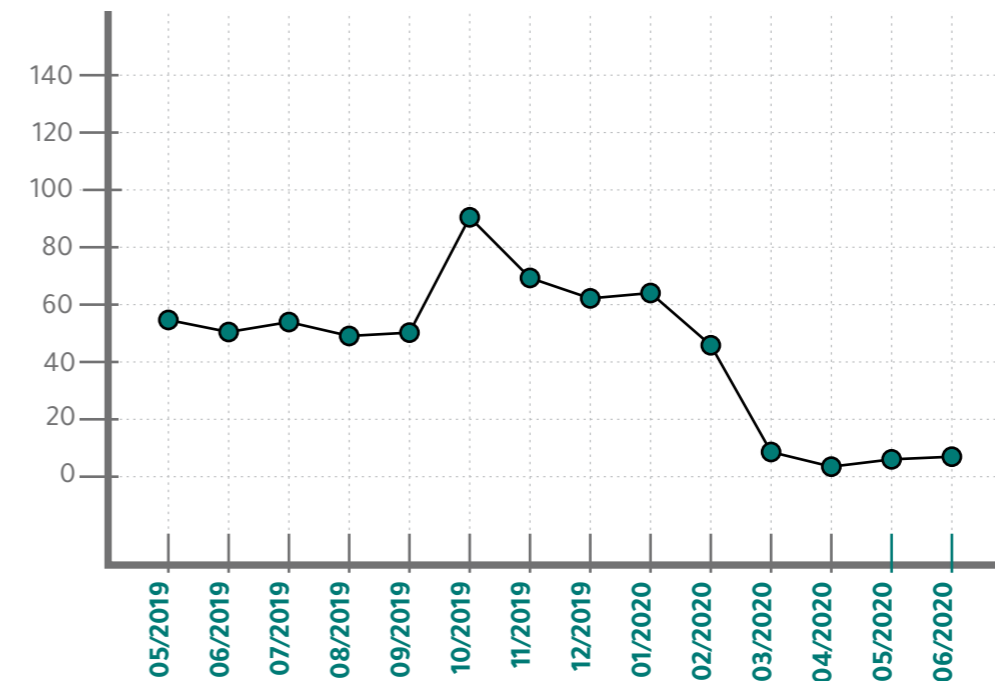


Figure 12: A timeline of the cumulative number of companies registered since May 2019, including those registered in the second third of 2020, including new and modified licenses

Limited liability companies represented 98% of the newly registered companies, compared to 2% private joint stock companies and private joint stock holding companies. In terms of the number of companies, 56% of new companies were active in the wholesale trade sector. The total capital of these companies represents about 3% of the capital invested in establishing companies during this period. In this third, two companies were registered with a significantly higher capital level compared to the average of companies: the Coast Refinery in Tartus governorate and Rasafah Refinery in Raqqah governorate, with a capital of 10 billion Syrian pounds each. Capital investments have doubled in the transportation and storage sector compared to companies registered in the previous first four months. Investments in new manufacturing firms decreased, in terms of both number and total capital.



Private Sector and Job Market

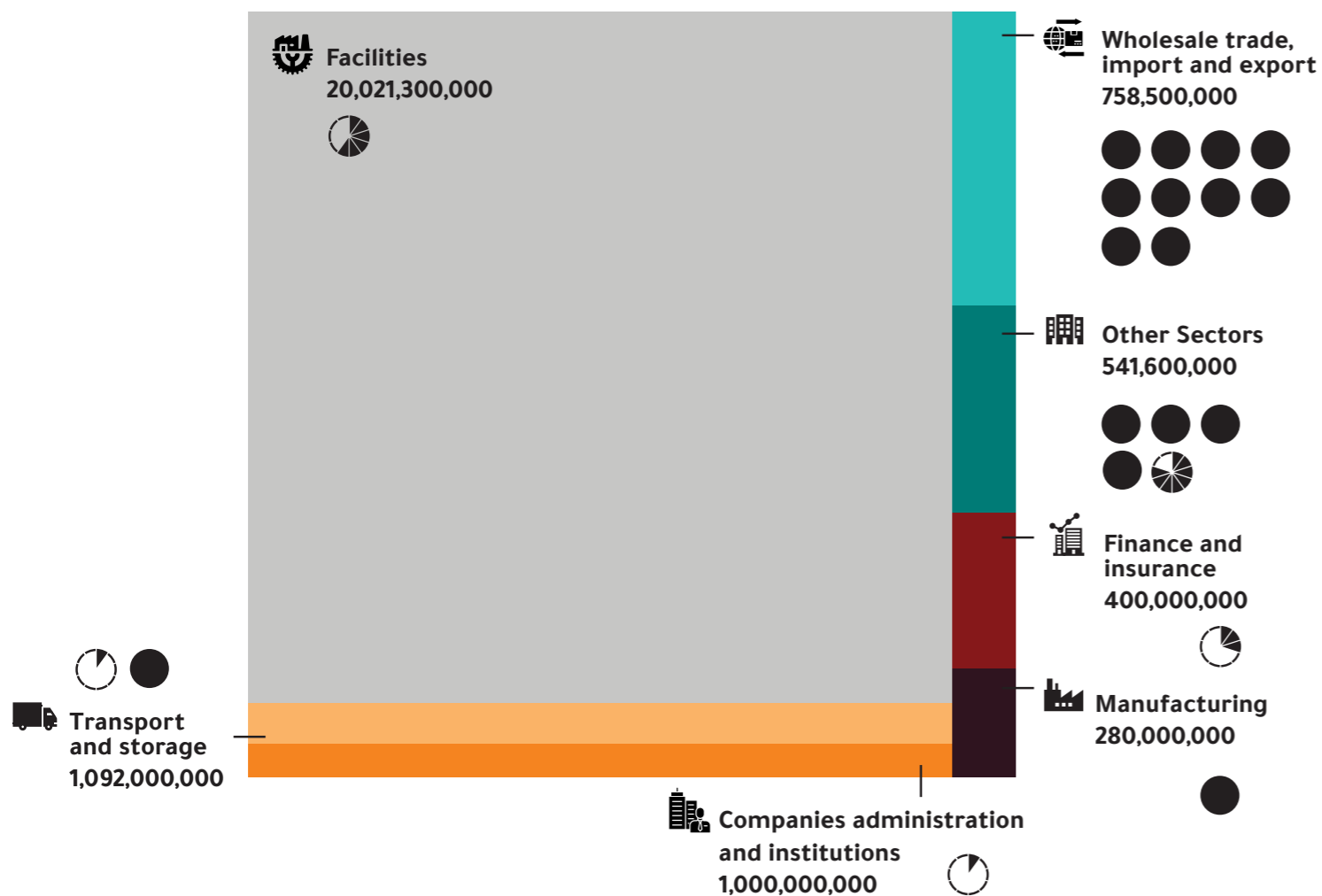


Figure 12:
New companies registered in the first third of 2020 by invested capital and sector

Total company capital (In Syrian Pounds)

Number of new companies / sector

1 company

10 companies

As for foreign investment, Lebanese and Iranian partners were the most involved in establishing new companies. Partners from Lebanon contributed to establishing the two new refineries in addition to their main involvement in the wholesale, import and export trade sector. Overall, 28% of the new companies included female shareholders, which is slightly less than the previous third, but their share of ownership in the capital of these companies did not exceed 1% this third.

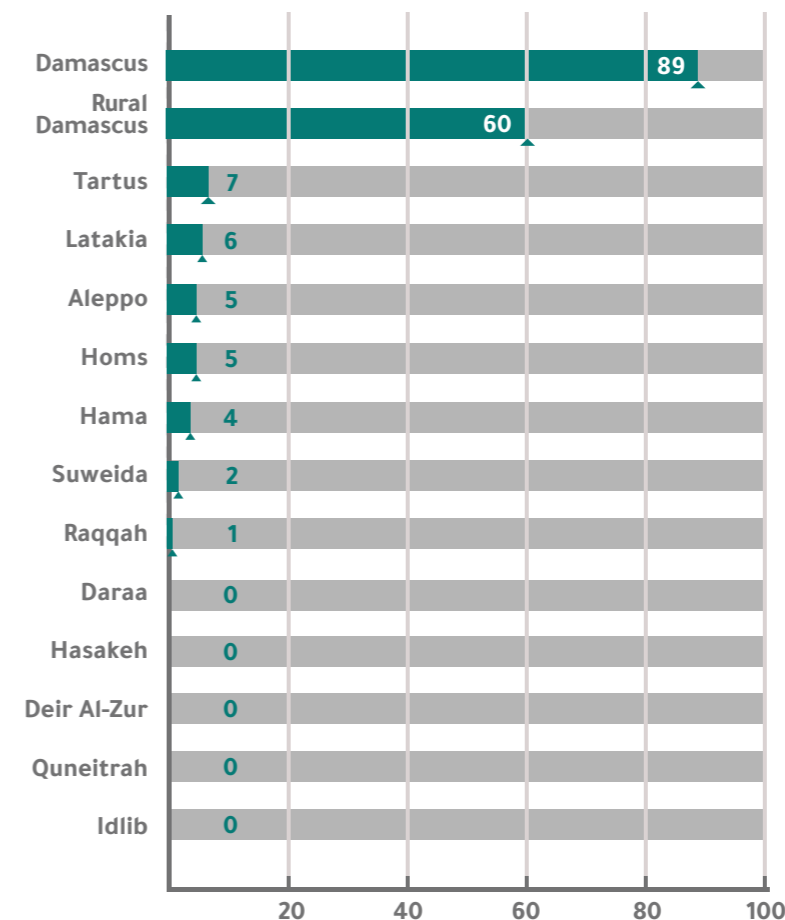


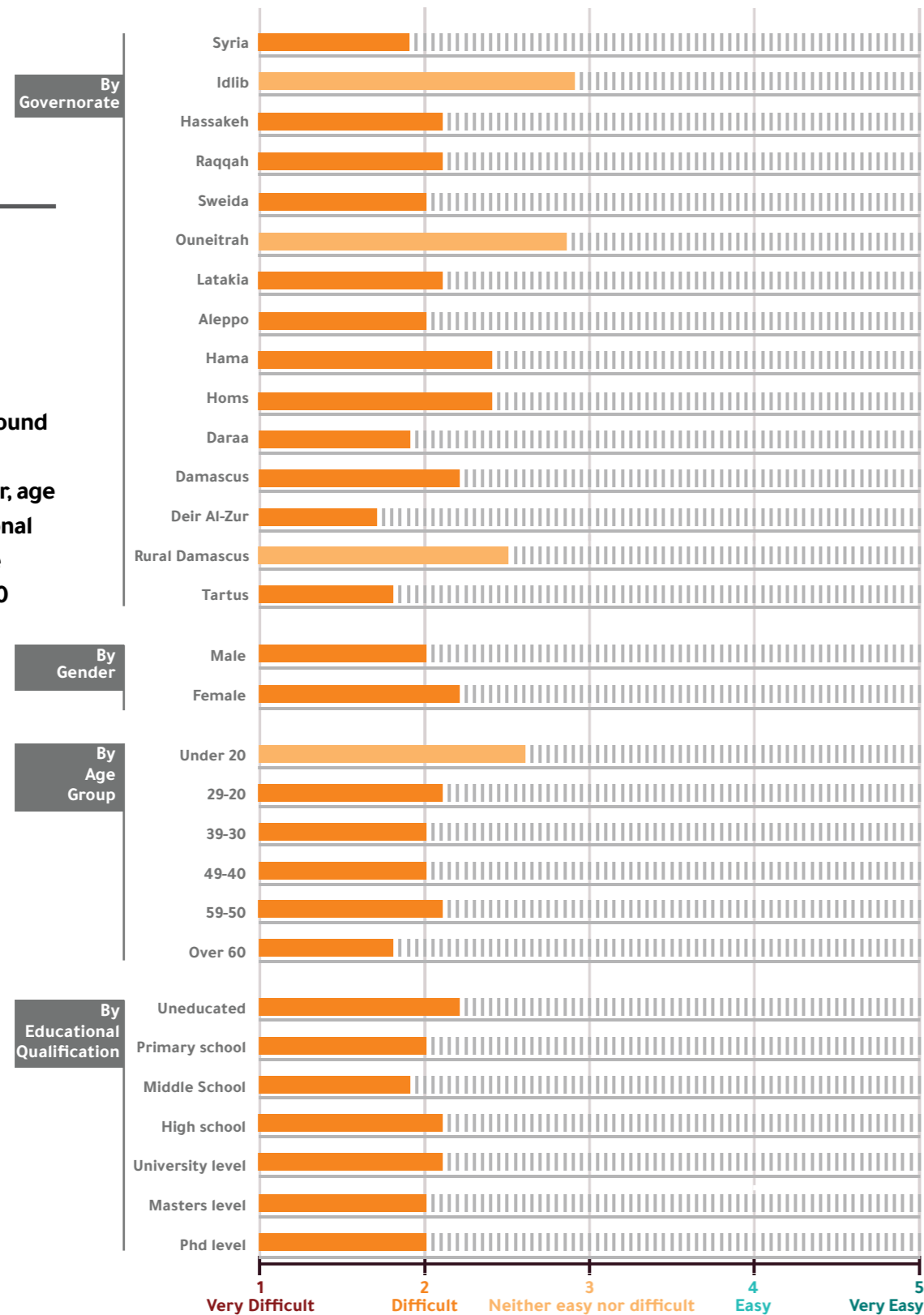
Figure 13: Number of new companies registered in the first third of 2020 by governorate

Job market

Activists' responses to the Developmental Assets questionnaire indicate it is rather difficult for respondents to find suitable work that fits their educational background and experience; the average of their answers was 2.1 on a gradual scale¹⁷. The results were similar at the governorate level, but the governorates of Quneitrah and Rural Damascus fared slightly better than the rest of the governorates, while challenges seem somewhat greater in the governorates of Deir Al-Zur and Tartus. There was almost no difference in the extent of difficulty to find a job among male and female respondents, as the average was 2.0 for males and 2.2 for females. As for age groups, the answers of respondents who are under 20 years old indicated slightly less difficulty in finding a suitable job that fits their experience, at an average of 2.6. On the other hand, respondents who are over 60 faced more challenges in the job market. Activists' answers did not significantly vary among activists with different educational qualifications.

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

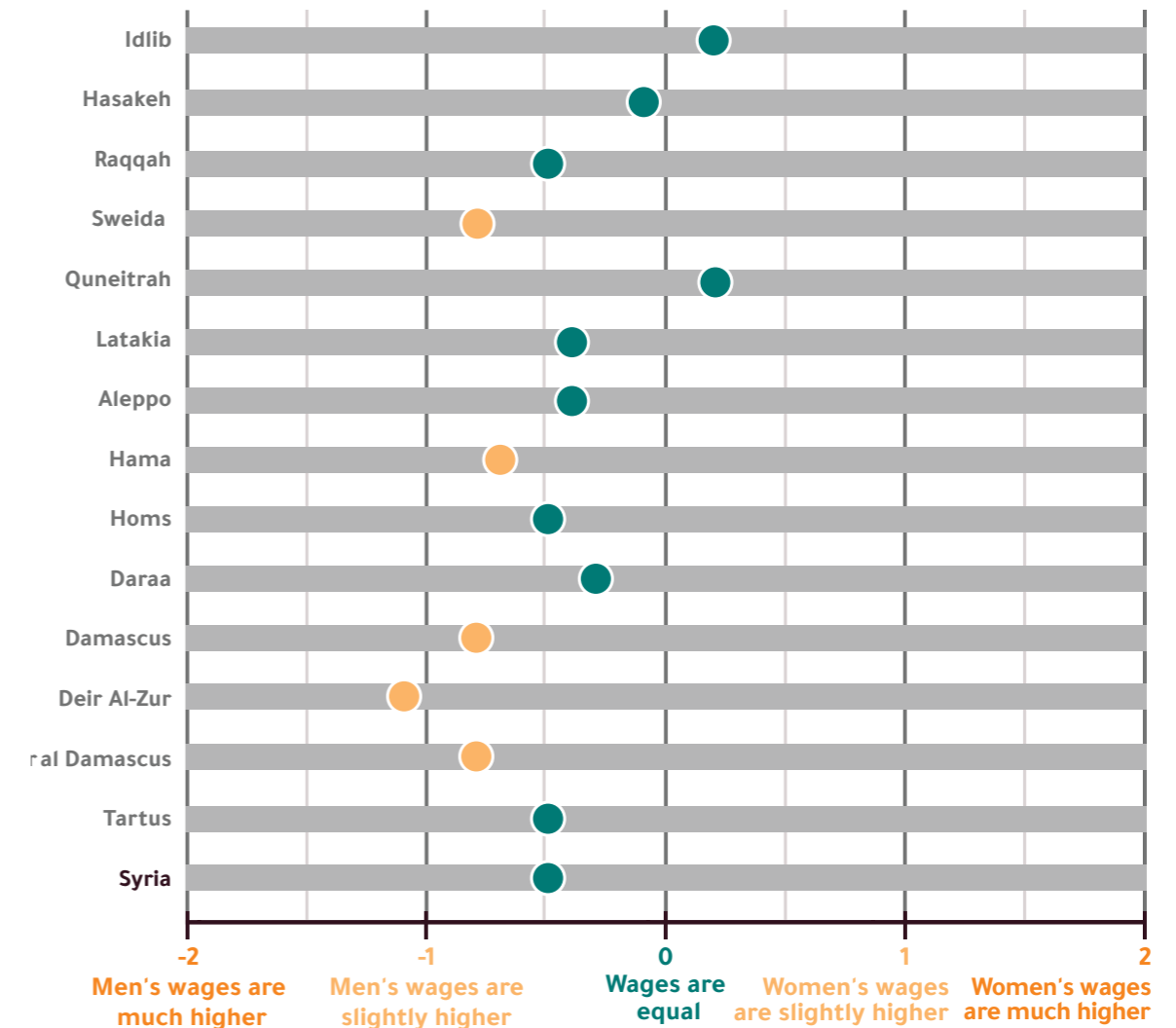
Figure 15:
Level of difficulty or ease of finding work suitable for the respondents' educational background and experience by governorate, gender, age group, and educational qualifications in the second third of 2020



As for the equality of pays and incentives between men and women in the labor market when they possess similar qualifications, the activists' answers indicate that wages tend to be slightly higher for men in this case, as their answers recorded -0.5 on a gradual scale¹⁸. Answers indicate that wages are the closest to equality in Hasakeh governorate.

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

In Idlib and Quneitrah governorates, women's wages slightly exceeded those of men with similar qualifications, according to activists' answers. Male wages exceeded those earned by women in the rest of the governorates.



By comparing data from the first and second thirds of 2020, the following is observed:

- A decrease in the number of new companies compared to the previous third.
- An increase in investment in facilities, especially refineries, in addition to the transport and logistics, while investment in manufacturing has declined.
- New, formal investment continues to be concentrated in Damascus and Rural Damascus.

Figure 16:
The degree of equality in pays and incentives between men and women in the labor market when they possess similar qualifications, by governorate in the second third of 2020

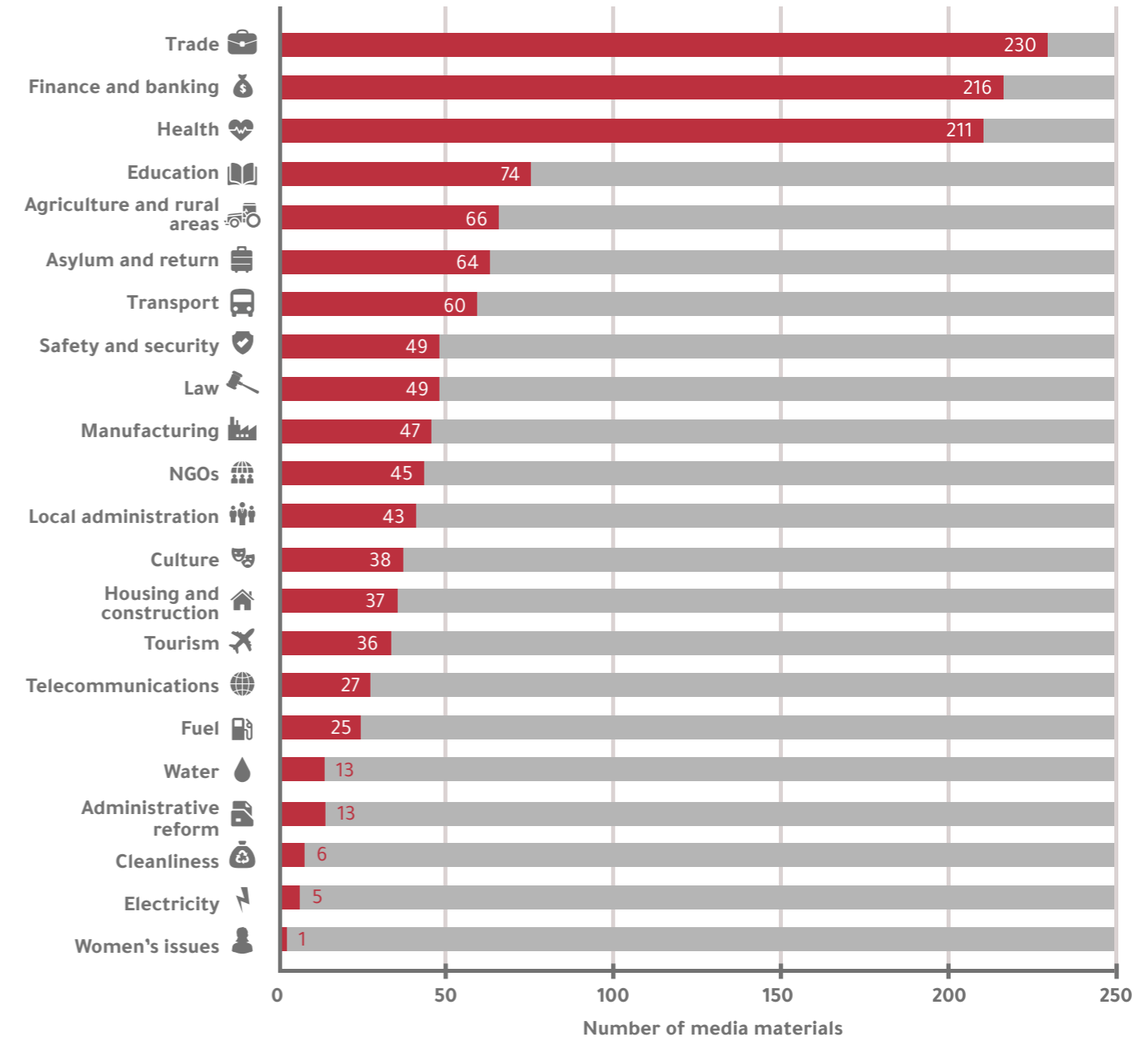


During the second third of 2020, more than 905 media materials related to development and services in Syria were reviewed. These materials were issued by 18 different private Syrian media outlets that were published online. These materials were analyzed in terms of focus and geographical coverage.

Focus Topics

Trade, finance and banking issues ranked first in terms of private media coverage during this third. Major focus was on the deteriorating economic conditions, goods prices, and the unsteady domestic and international trade movement. Dozens of articles also dealt with the effects of the US Caesar Act on trade movement to and from Syria and the sanctions that would affect involved businesses. Various media materials focused on the significant exchange rate changes that occurred in this third, along with different exchange rates between different regions of Syria.

Health issues ranked second in terms of private media coverage during this third. Materials related to Covid-19 were dominant in this regard, especially the spread of infections in some areas, skepticism about the numbers of official reported infections and news of quarantine and testing centers. There was also a good share of local reports about the development and spread of the virus by specialists and academics, the government's responses and approved measures, such as conducting schools' exams, setting the date for the opening of schools and other issues.



Education's share of media materials remained high this third. Major focus was on the preparations to re-open schools amidst the unstable public health situation. Other materials discussed news about the lack of readiness of education alternatives. The Ministry of Education launched health protocols to be implemented in schools. In addition, some media materials tackled the resumption of university education after postponing exams in all branches. Other news addressed the struggle of students, especially from remote areas, after the closure of university housing.

Figure 17: Level of private media coverage of development issues by sector in the second third of 2020.



Syrian Private Media

Agriculture and rural areas came next in the coverage of media materials. News covered some of the forest fires and the issues of receiving wheat from farmers and related problems in northeastern Syria. Media materials covered problems of agriculture and the realities of development and services in rural areas. In addition, some materials addressed the new Ministry of Agriculture's instructions on various issues, such as vaccination of cows and the import of potato seeds and animal feed.

Coverage of **asylum and return** came next. Various materials focused on major burdens Syrians abroad face as a result of the spread of Covid-19 virus and the deteriorating economic conditions in countries like Lebanon, especially with the government imposing the payment of \$100 upon the return of any Syrian. This decision triggered a great controversy and received major media attention, most of which focused on the unconstitutionality of this decision and considering it a great challenge for return. News of Syrians in camps and asylum countries was also present media coverage. In addition, the issues of internally displaced persons and their living conditions have received some coverage, especially in northern Syria.

Transportation came next. Media materials focused on the high costs of transportation and tourist trips among Syrian governorates. Other materials covered international flights to evacuate stranded Syrians and the opening and closing of borders with neighboring countries. In addition, some materials covered licensing decisions, the work of air cargo offices and the impact of shortened quarantine periods.

Next, Syrian private media coverage focused on **safety and security**. Media materials covered the laws and decisions issued in this third. Some articles dealt with decisions of the Self-Administration regarding local affairs management in northeastern Syria. The ongoing uneasy calm on various battlefronts had a share of news, especially about violations, military gatherings and the readiness to fight new battles. Meetings of international guarantors and rumors about the opening of international roads also had a share of media coverage this third.

Manufacturing issues came next. Re-activation of industrial production that had been affected by the spread of Covid-19 virus had a share of the media coverage. The challenges of industrial cities and news of chambers of industry also attracted some media coverage. Next came **NGOs, local administration**, and issues of **culture, housing and construction**, followed by tourism and some services, while women's issues attracted very little insignificant coverage.

Despite the deteriorating **electricity** conditions in most areas, the increased outage hours, and attacks on power plants, electricity received very little coverage by private media outlets. Coverage was mostly in news that address services broadly.

Coverage by Region

Syria as a whole received almost two thirds of the coverage this third. This figure, which has increased from one third to two thirds, could indicate that service issues and development problems are increasingly becoming a common issue across the country. At the governorate level, Damascus had a larger share in media coverage than other governorates, followed by Idlib. Next in terms of geographical coverage was materials that discussed Syrians abroad or Syrian issues in international forums. Next were Hasakeh, Rural Damascus, Aleppo, Latakia, and Deir Al-Zur. The governorates of Sweida, Raqqah, and Quneitrah had limited media coverage in private media materials.

By comparing media coverage between the first and second thirds of 2020, the following is observed:

- The highest proportion of coverage remains on the topics of health and economy.
- A slight increase of media coverage of agriculture and rural areas this third.





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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