

DEVELOPMENT ASSETS

Local Approaches from Syria

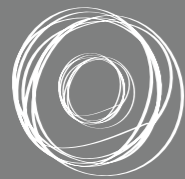
Issue 3 2020: September - December





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CommonSpace Initiative
for Shared Knowledge & Consensus Building

Development Assets:
Local Approaches from Syria

Supported by Common Space
Initiative 2021

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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

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

- A survey distributed to a sample of 711 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 November and late December 2020, an online survey was distributed to 711 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 55% male and 45% female; their ages ranged from 17 to 83, and those older than 40 years amounted to 14% of the sample. Around 70% of respondents had completed their undergraduate or postgraduate studies, while 20% had only completed secondary school, and 9% had not completed secondary school. With regard to marital status, 51% of the respondents were single, 45% were married, and a small percentage was divorced or widowed.

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

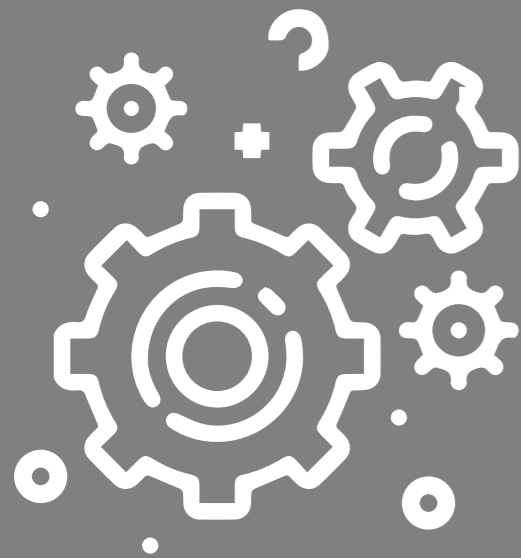
in non-profit organizations, 20% worked in the public sector, 15% in the private sector, 14% were business owners, 8% were self-employed and 20% were unemployed.

Around 75% of respondents had been living in the same governorate for more than 10 years, 9% had been living in their current governorate for 5 to 10 years, and 13% 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 September and the end of December 2020. Data on governmental decisions, statements and applications related to development and service sectors were gathered from the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), as well as the official website of the Syrian Prime Ministry, Tishreen daily newspaper and the Official Gazette. Data were classified according to sector, governorate and government level.

With regard to private media, news and materials on development were collected from 18 private Syrian media outlets during the final third of 2020. The sample gathered in this period consisted of 1,115 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.



Methodology

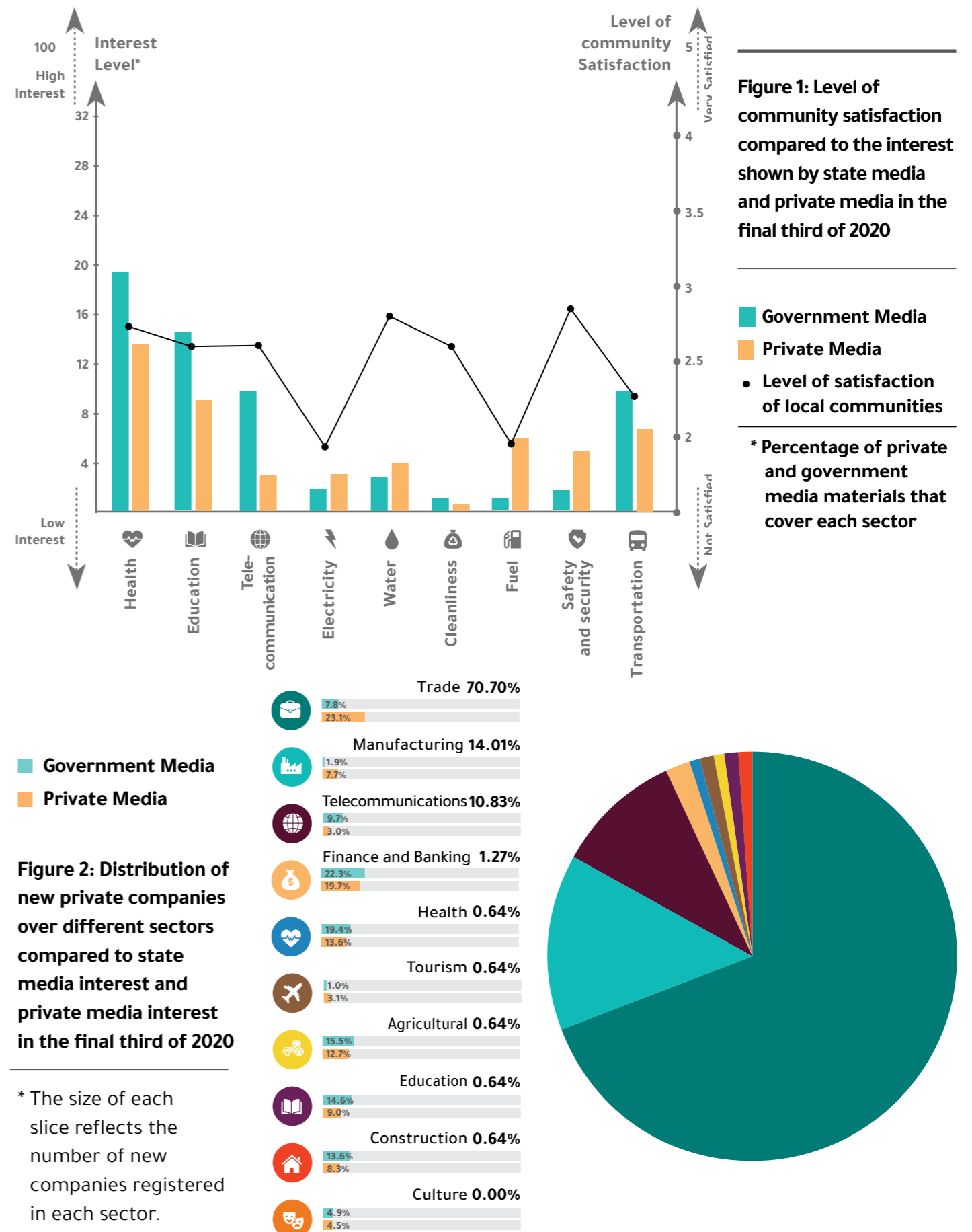


Development Interactions: Factors/ Stakeholders

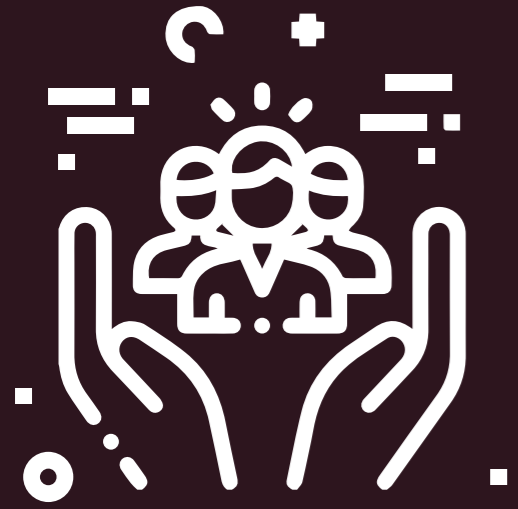
In light of the continued deterioration of the economic situation and the declining exchange rate of the Syrian pound, local communities have become less satisfied with transportation services and fuel supplies in the final third of 2020. Satisfaction with electricity has also dropped, reaching its lowest level in two years. Nevertheless, electricity did not get any considerable attention in state media, while the interest of private media in the subject has relatively decreased compared to the second third of the year. However, private media have started to pay more attention to issues of fuel, especially given the deterioration of transport services and the increasing demand on fuel for heating during the winter. The level of satisfaction with the internet and telecommunications has also decreased in the past third. On the other hand, there has been a slight increase in satisfaction with safety and security, as well as healthcare. Families still face the same level of difficulty in securing their livelihood. Activists who responded to the survey still struggle to the same extent as they did in the second third as for finding work that matches their experience and qualification. In comparison with the past third, more activists indicated their desire to travel and settle abroad within the coming two years.

While the wholesale trade, import and export sector has the greatest share in terms of the number of new companies registered, there has been a significant increase in the size of investment in the IT sector with regard to the number of companies and the size of their capital. This comes hand in hand with moderate interest shown from state media and low interest from private media with regard to telecommunications sector. Moreover, there has been an increase in the number of companies that are active in the

manufacturing sector, while state media interest in the sector has remained low. Private sector investors did not show high interest in the health, education, tourism, agriculture and reconstruction sectors.



* 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

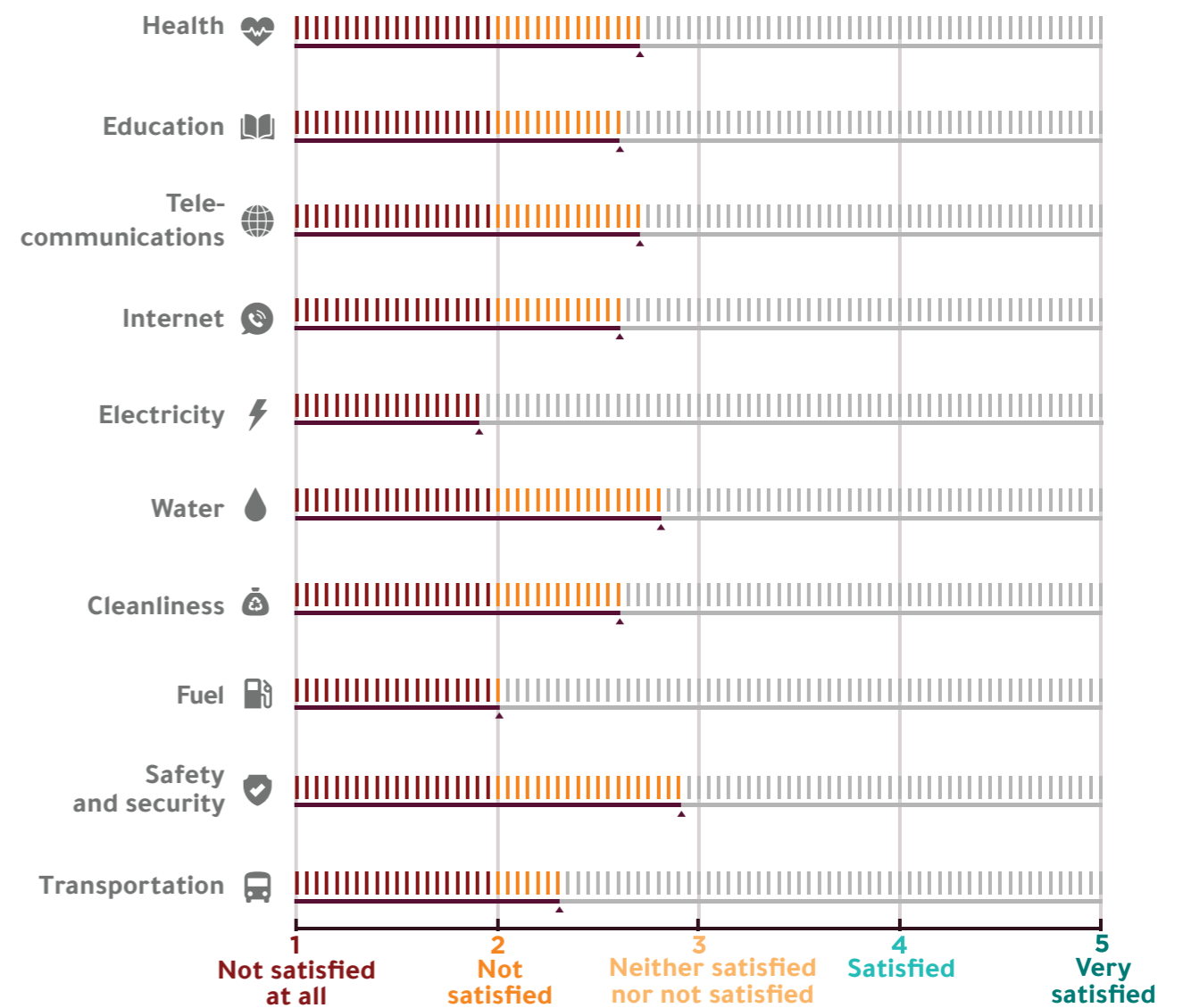
During the final third of 2020, respondents demonstrated decreasing satisfaction with fuel and transport. Satisfaction with electricity has also dropped, reaching its lowest level in two years. Satisfaction rates with internet and telecommunications have also fallen. On the other hand, there was a slight increase in satisfaction with safety and security, as well as with healthcare.

With the onset of winter and the consequent increase of demand for **fuel** for heating purposes, respondents indicated decreased satisfaction with fuel, amounting to 2.0 on a gradual scale¹, compared to 2.3 in the previous third. Southern governorates scored the lowest levels of satisfaction with fuel, with 1.6 in Daraa and Rural Damascus and 1.7 in Sweida. Compared to the second third, satisfaction has dropped from 2.6 to 2.0 in Aleppo, and from 2.5 to 1.9 in Damascus, while it increased from 2.6 to 3.0 in Hasakah. In some areas, respondents complained of the scarcity of fuel and its high price.

The increased duration of power cuts was reflected on respondents' satisfaction with **electricity**, whereby it decreased from 2.0 to 1.9. Satisfaction rates generally ranged from 1.3 to 2.7 at the governorate level, except in Quneitra, which scored 3.3. As the level of main cities, satisfaction with electricity in Daraa and Deir Al-Zur did not exceed 1.1, which translates into "not satisfied at all". Many respondents in a number of governorates expressed their frustration with power shortage and its impact on their daily life.

¹On 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: Activists' average satisfaction with basic services provided in their areas in the final third of 2020













Quneitrah	4.0	3.2	3.3	2.8	3.3	3.7	3.0	3.0	4.0	2.8
Hasakeh	3.0	2.3	3.1	2.9	2.4	3.0	2.8	3.0	3.3	3.3
Raqqah	2.5	2.2	2.2	2.5	2.7	3.5	3.4	2.5	2.7	2.7
Homs	2.7	2.7	2.8	2.4	1.8	2.9	2.7	1.9	3.4	2.5
Aleppo	2.9	2.8	2.6	2.7	2.2	3.1	3.0	2.0	2.7	1.9
Latakia	2.5	2.5	2.9	2.6	1.8	3.0	2.2	2.1	2.9	2.5
Damascus	2.7	2.6	2.8	2.7	1.8	3.3	2.4	1.9	3.0	2.0
Tartus	2.8	2.6	2.5	2.1	1.8	3.1	2.4	2.0	3.4	2.3
Rural Damascus	2.8	2.6	2.8	2.8	1.9	2.5	2.4	1.6	3.4	1.7
Idlib	3.0	2.3	2.5	3.0	1.9	2.6	2.6	2.1	2.3	2.4
Hama	2.6	2.6	2.5	2.1	2.0	2.4	2.5	2.1	2.7	2.5
Daraa	2.3	3.1	2.9	2.3	1.4	2.2	2.5	1.6	1.7	2.7
Sweid	2.3	2.3	2.3	1.9	1.7	2.6	2.6	1.7	1.7	2.5
Deir Al-Zur	2.1	2.5	2.1	2.0	1.3	2.6	2.0	1.8	2.1	2.6
Syria	2.7	2.6	2.7	2.6	1.9	2.8	2.6	2.0	2.9	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 final third of 2020



Satisfaction with **telecommunications** dropped from 2.8 to 2.7 and that with **internet** from 2.7 to 2.6. In the governorate of Raqqah, satisfaction with internet dropped from 3.2 to 2.5, in Hama from 2.7 to 2.1, and in Sweida from 2.4 to 1.9. Satisfaction rates remain highest in Idlib, despite decreasing from 3.2 to 3.0. In the governorate of Rural Damascus, satisfaction increased from 2.5 to 2.8, but responses varied widely across different areas in the governorate.

Satisfaction with **transportation** services has overall decreased from 2.6 to 2.3 across Syria. At governorate level, however, the most drastic drop was recorded in Rural Damascus, from 2.4 to 1.7, while satisfaction rate

dropped from 2.5 to 1.9 in Aleppo, from 2.6 to 2.0 in Damascus, and from 3.1 to 2.5 in Hama. As in the second third, Rural Damascus is still the governorate with the lowest rate of satisfaction with transportation.

Satisfaction with **healthcare** has slightly increased during this third from 2.6 to 2.7. On governorate level, the biggest change was recorded in Rural Damascus, where satisfaction grew from 2.1 to 2.8. Satisfaction rates were close to the average, nonetheless activists highlighted several unmet needs in this context. For example, activists in Qamishli, Raqqah and Idlib noted shortages in medical staff, while others in Idlib, Azaz, Raqqah and Bab commented on the need for raising public awareness around healthcare.

Satisfaction with **education** remained at 2.6 during this third. In the governorate of Sweida, satisfaction dropped from 2.8 to 2.3 during the past third and in Hama from 3.3 to 2.6, while it increased from 2.1 to 2.6 in Deir Al-Zur and from 2.7 to 3.2 in Quneitrah. Satisfaction with **water** also remained at the same level, with a score of 2.8, while that with cleanliness increased slightly, from 2.5 to 2.6. The lowest rates of satisfaction with **cleanliness** were noted in Deir Al-Zur and Latakia, at 2.0 and 2.2 respectively.

Satisfaction with **security** has remarkably increased during the final third of 2020, going up from 2.6 to 2.9. The greatest increase was noted in the governorate of Tartus with satisfaction rising from 2.6 to 3.4, in Rural Damascus from 2.7 to 3.4 and in Deir Al-Zur from 1.6 to 2.1. On the other hand, satisfaction with security decreased notably in Daraa, from 2.5 to 1.7, which is equal to that in the governorate of Sweida.

Living Conditions

When asked about the extent to which families were able to secure their livelihood, including food and other essential needs, activists indicated a level of ability corresponding to 2.5 on a gradual scale², which is the same as the previous third. According to their responses, abilities slightly improved in that regard in the governorates of Hama, Hasakeh, Sweida and Deir Al-Zur, while worsening in Tartus and Aleppo. Compared to the past third, living conditions in different governorates have grown more similar to one another, with the standard deviation dropping from 0.34 to 0.27. At the sub-governorate level, some of the poorest living conditions were recorded Al-Suwar (Deir Al Zur countryside) at 1.3, in Jebleh at 1.5 and in the city of Sweida at 1.6.

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

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 more interactive with community needs, with the level rising from 2.7 to 3.0 over the last third. In the governorate of Daraa, municipal interaction grew from 2.6 to 3.7, which is the highest interaction on that level during the past third. Municipalities in Rural Damascus and Aleppo have become more interactive as well, indicated by an increase from 2.3 to 3.0 and 3.0 to 3.4 respectively. In contrast, the interaction of municipalities in Sweida and Raqqah decreased from 3.1 to 2.7 and from 3.3 to 3.0 respectively. In parallel, the interaction of neighborhood committees also went up from 2.6 to 2.8 and the interaction of Mokhtars grew from 2.8 to 3.0.

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

The interaction of associations remained constant at 2.6, while the interaction of service institutions increased from 2.8 to 2.9, with the greatest increase noted in Daraa, from 2.4 to 3.2.

The interaction of NGOs (nonprofit and nongovernmental) remained at 3.3. Sweida was still the governorate with most interactive NGOs, according to respondents, with an interaction rate of 4.1, followed by Aleppo and Raqqah. The lowest interaction during this third was noted in Damascus and Deir Al-Zur. The interaction of international organizations with the needs of local communities increased slightly, from 2.8 to 2.9. International organizations were most interactive in the governorates of Hama, Raqqah and Aleppo, according to activists, and least interactive in Deir Al-Zur.

Religious institutions have become more interactive with the needs of the local community, with their degree of interaction amounting to 3.0 in the final third of the year, compared to 2.9 in the previous third, and 2.6 in the first third. The interaction of religious institutions increased the most in the governorates of Raqqah, Daraa, Quneitrah, Aleppo and Tartus. On the other hand, religious institutions in Rural Damascus

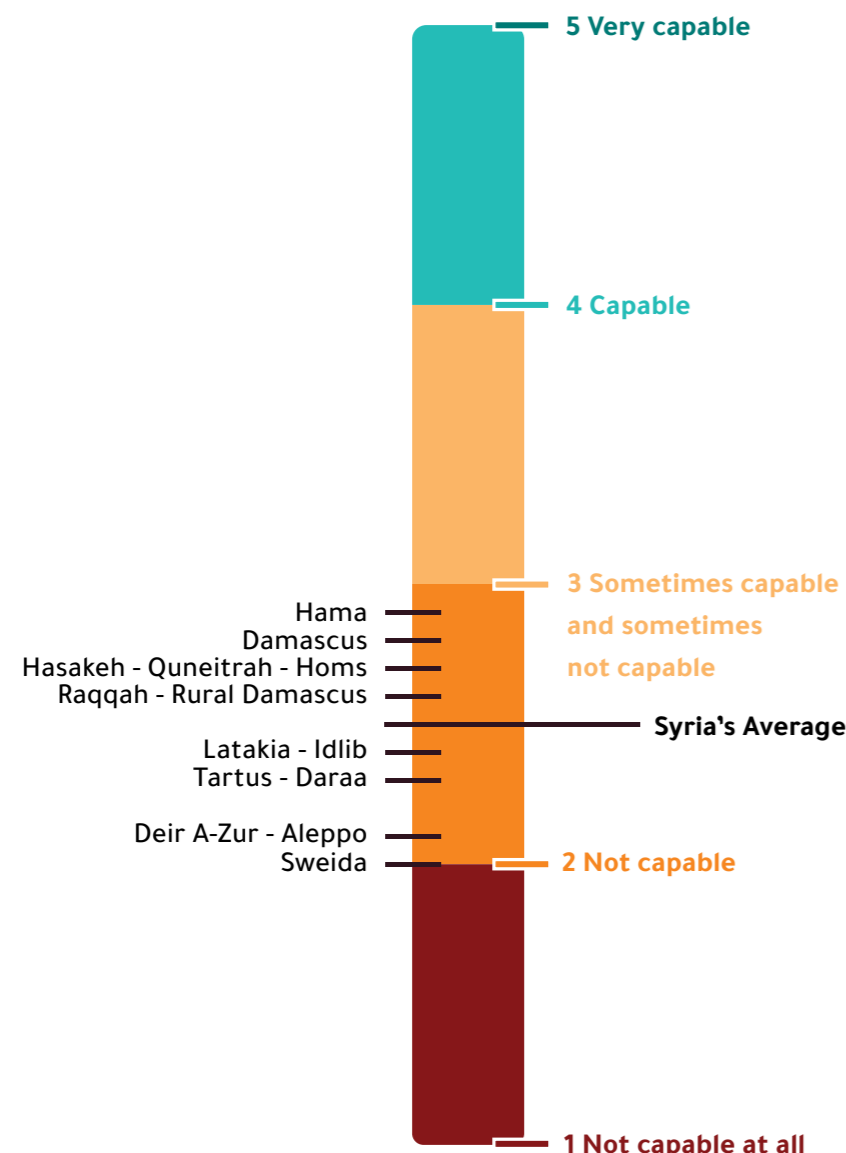


Figure 5: Families' ability to sustain food and other living needs in the final third of 2020, classified by governorate

became less interactive than they had been in the previous third.

The interaction of private companies with the needs of local communities across Syria remained at 2.6. Yet there are some noteworthy changes at the governorate level. For example, the interaction of companies in Tartus increased from 2.4 to 3.1, while it decreased from 3.1 to 2.7 in Hama. Influential individuals maintained the same level of interaction with local needs, which amounts to 3.0.

With regard to media, the interaction of state media with the needs of the local community increased from 2.5 to 2.7, while that of private media increased slightly, from 2.9 to 3.0. According to the responses of activists, private media seems to be relatively more interactive in Raqqah, Sweida, Aleppo, Hasakeh and Idlib. Social media interaction remained at 3.8.

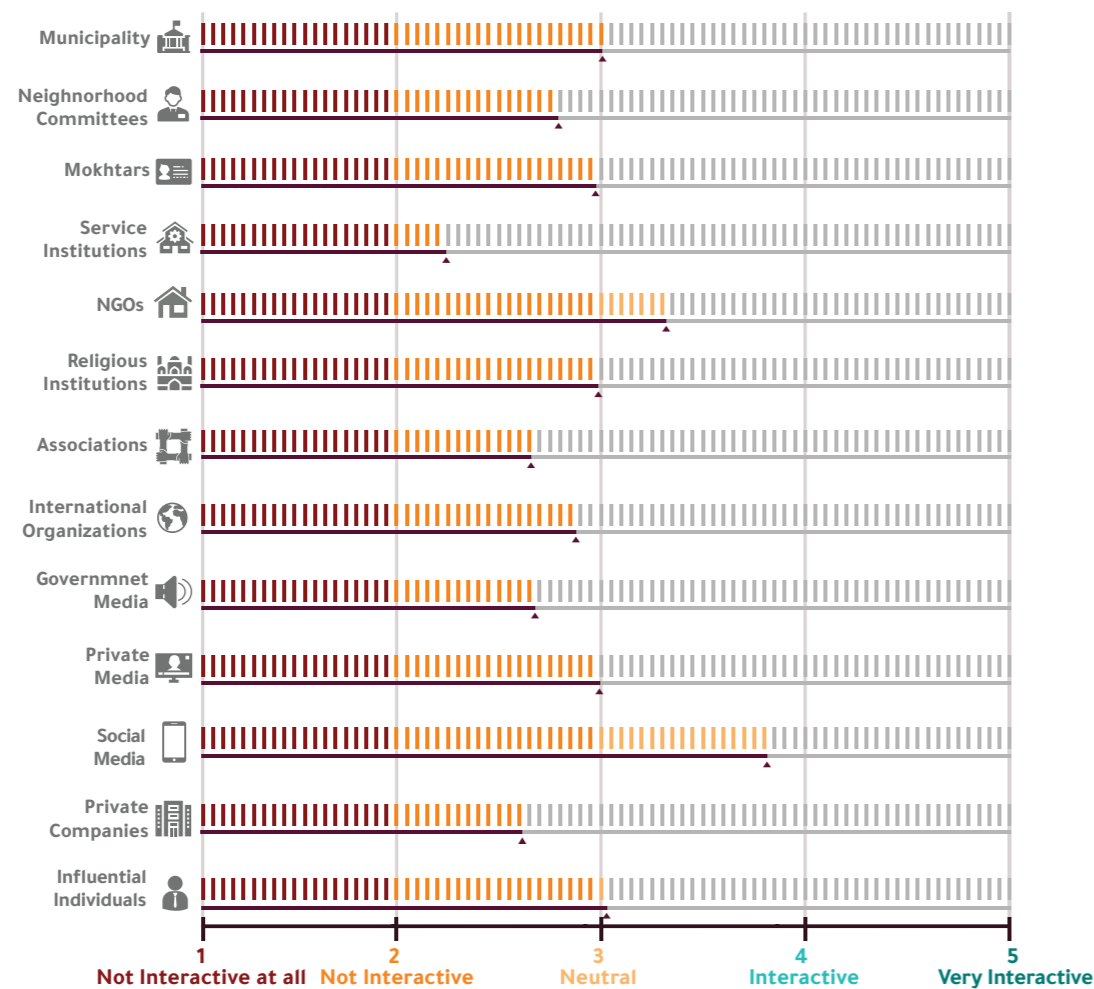


Figure 6: The levels of interaction of different stakeholders to local community needs in the final third of 2020

The community's interaction with local activities increased from 3.1 to 3.3 according to activists, with the highest interaction amounting to 3.9 in Daraa and 3.7 in Sweida.

Non-governmental Organizations

Cooperation among community actors, such as NGOs and volunteer groups has increased in the final third of 2020, reaching a level of 2.8 on a gradual scale⁴ compared to 2.7 in the past third. Moreover, donors granted increasing degrees of independence to the beneficiaries they supported, indicated by 2.3 on a gradual scale⁵, which is relatively higher than 2.2 in the previous third, and 1.7 in the first third. In contrast, the degree of independence granted by international funders dropped from 2.6 to 2.4.

As for newly licensed NGOs, data from the Official Gazette during the second third of 2020 indicates that eight NGOs had been denied license while another 41 were licensed. The number of license approvals given have doubled compared to the same period during 2019, and it increased compared to the previous third. The newly licensed NGOs are prominently active in the sectors of social service and charity. Most associations that were denied a license were in the governorate of Sweida, while half of those that were licensed operated in Rural Damascus governorate and the Syrian geography as a whole.

Branches of previously licensed NGOs were registered in several governorates, amounting to eight branches this third. In addition, all applications by NGOs to amend their internal systems and regulations have been accepted. For the first time in many years, two NGOs were merged into one in Damascus. The level of official interaction with community action increased from 2.8 in the previous third to 3.0 this third on a gradual scale⁶.

According to respondents, the extent of gender equality in employment within the non-profit sector remained at 2.7 on a gradual scale⁷. At the governorate level, the greatest gap in gender equality remained in Deir Al-Zur.

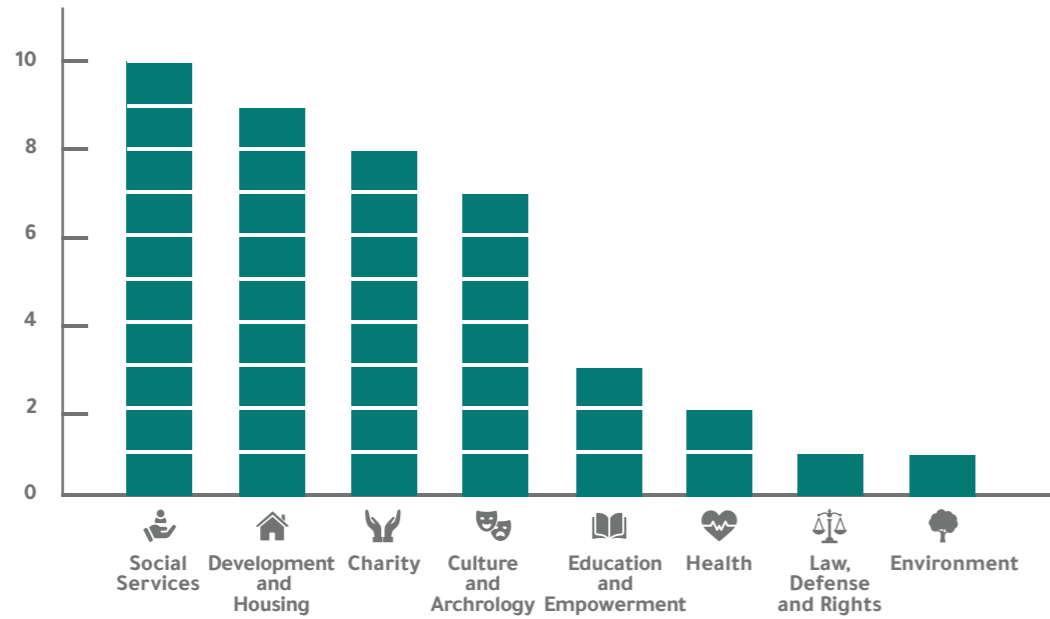
⁴ From 5 to 1: very cooperative - cooperative - neutral - not cooperative - not cooperative at all - I don't know

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

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

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



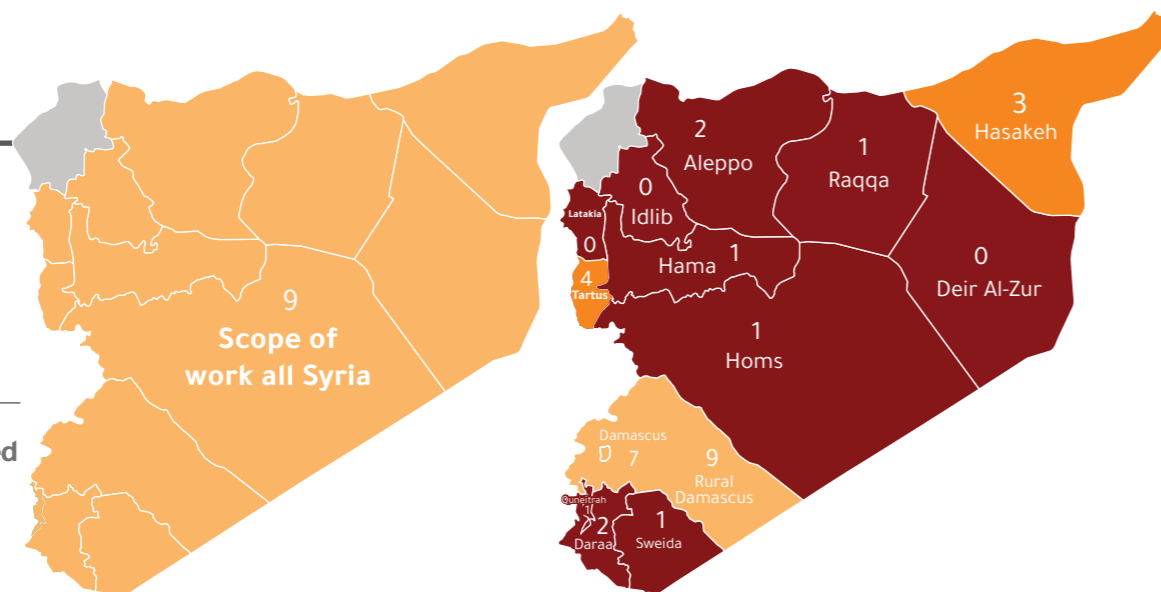
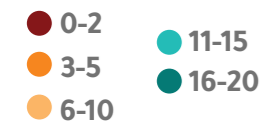
Social Issues

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 improvement to the indicator of child labor, indicated by an increase from 2.0 to 2.2, which is nonetheless a low value, meaning that the issue is somewhat common. In the final third of 2020, child labor was most prevalent in the governorates of Idlib, Quneitrah and Aleppo.

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

Geographical distribution of newly licensed NGOs during the final third of 2020

No. of newly established NGOs per Governorate



As was the case in the previous third, child marriage, particularly for girls under the age of eighteen, remained at the same degree of commonality, indicated by an indicator level of 2.7. The issue of school dropout among males remained at 2.1, while that among females underwent some improvement, from 2.5 to 2.6.

As for domestic violence, 62% of the respondents reported that women mainly resort to their families or tribes, while 11% reported that women in their surrounding mainly resorted to the court, or local influential figures (according to 5%), or to police stations (5%), or non-governmental organizations (4%), while 11% 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 decreased satisfaction with local authorities' response indicated by a drop from 2.7 to 2.6 on a gradual scale⁹. The highest satisfaction with the response of local authorities was found in Aleppo, which scored 3.4, while the lowest, 1.7, was in Deir Al-Zur. Respondents' satisfaction with state media's response to the pandemic increased from 2.7 to 2.9, and so did their satisfaction with private media in the same regard, which went from 2.9 to 3.0. Satisfaction with social media remained at 3.4. The response to Covid-19 by civil society and local associations increased from 2.8 to 3.0, and the highest interaction levels by those actors were in Aleppo and Raqqah during this third. Moreover, according to respondents' observations of their social circles, the levels of commitment to taking precautionary measures against the coronavirus has increased in local communities, reflected by an increase from 2.6 to 2.7 on a gradual scale¹⁰.

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

¹⁰ From 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 remains the same as it was in the past third, indicated by a rate of 3.9 on a gradual scale¹¹. Their trust in the abilities of local administration personnel and elected officials to influence the local development process increased from 2.6 to 2.9. The highest level of trust was found in Idlib, which scored 3.2, and the lowest was 1.5 in Quneitrah. There has also been a slight increase in the extent to which elected officials shared information with citizens, indicated on a gradual scale¹² by a rise from 2.1 to 2.2, which is quite low nonetheless. The governorates with the least extent of information shared were Damascus and Sweida, indicated by 1.6 and 1.7 respectively.

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, compared to 1.8 in 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 2.1 to 2.2, with the highest being 2.8 in Tartus and the lowest being 1.8 in Sweida.

In another optional question on the impact of using smart cards on the fairness of state subsidy distribution, activists expressed that they found it overall did not have a high impact, and the indicator remained at 2.9 on a gradual scale¹⁵. The fairest distribution was indicated by activists in Aleppo and Rural Damascus, and the lowest in Deir Al-Zur.

Activists' optimism about future prospects of development in Syria remains unchanged and measures 2.9 on a gradual scale¹⁶. The level of optimism in that regard decreased most remarkably in the governorate of Sweida, from 2.5 to 1.7, in Homs from 3.0 to 2.4, and in Idlib from 3.5 to 3.0.

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

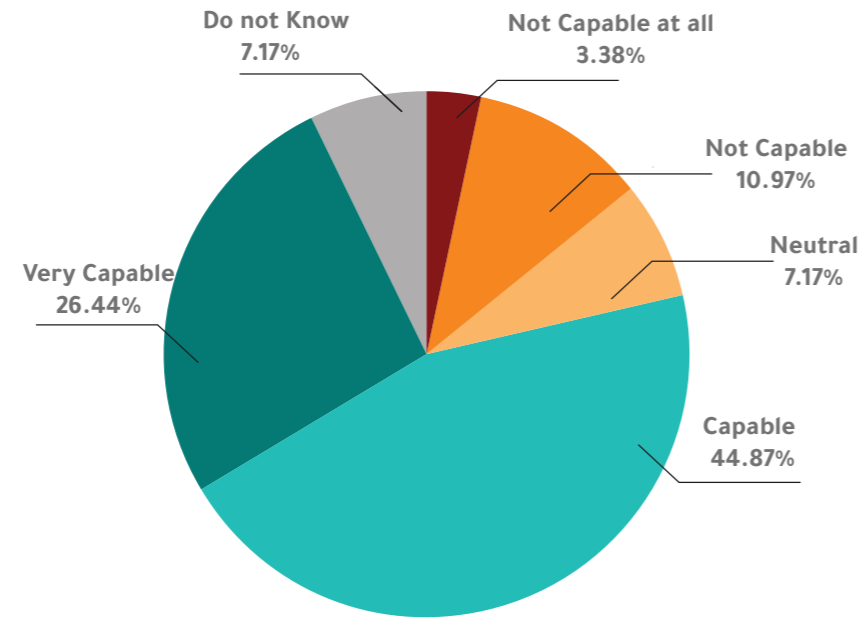
¹⁶ From 5 to 1: very optimistic - optimistic - neutral - not optimistic - not optimistic at all - I don't know

In contrast, optimism increased from 2.9 to 3.3 in Hama and from 1.9 to 2.3 in Deir Al-Zur. Around 48% of respondents expressed a desire to travel and live abroad within the next two years, compared to 45% in the previous third.

By comparing the results of the community activists' survey of the second and the final thirds of 2020, the following is observed:

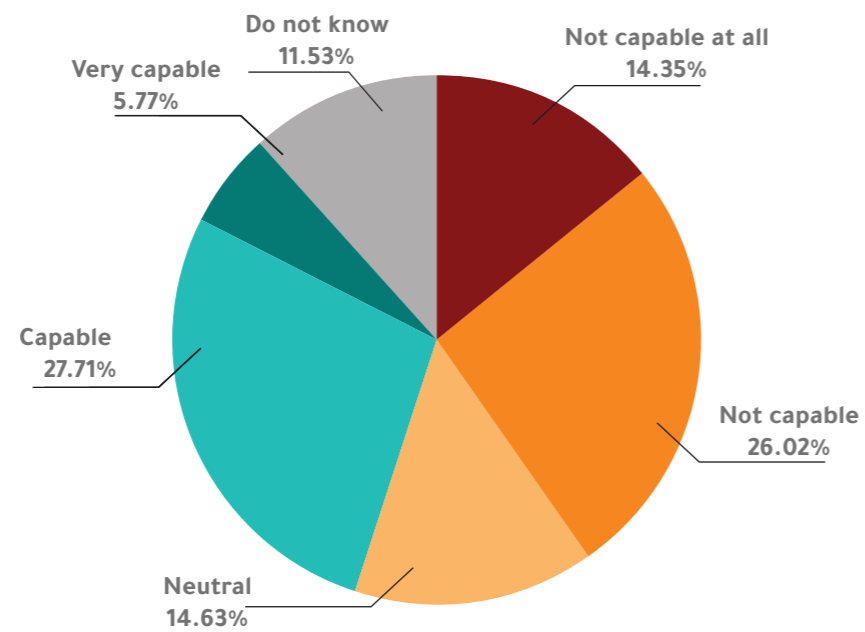
- A remarkable decline in the level of satisfaction with fuel, transport and electricity.
- An increase in the interaction of municipalities, neighborhood committees and mokhtars with the needs of local communities
- A relatively large increase in the number of newly licensed NGOs.
- An increase in the percentage of activists wishing to travel and settle abroad

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



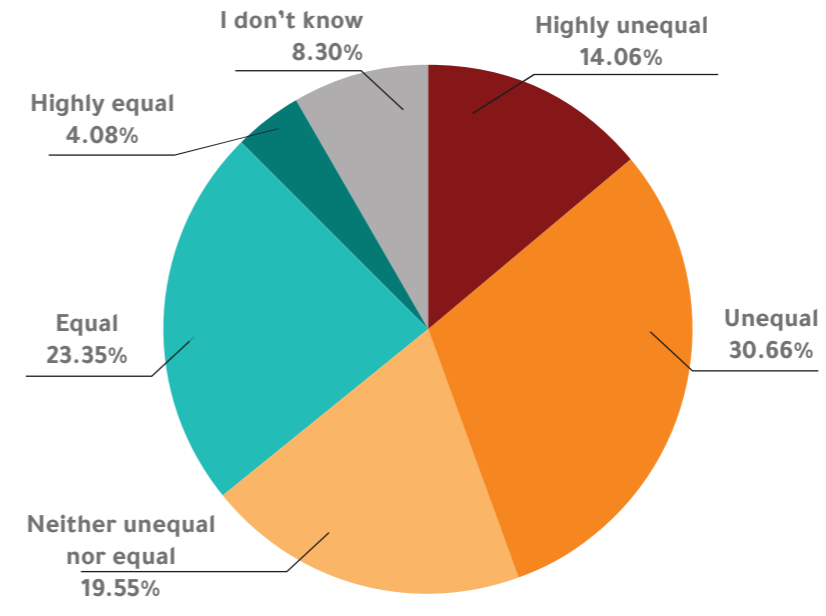
- Not capable at all
- Not capable
- Neutral
- Capable
- Very capable
- Do not know

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



- Highly unequal
- Unequal
- Neither unequal nor equal
- Equal
- Highly equal
- I don't know





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 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

With respect to the spread of Covid-19, the Ministry of Health announced the official count of cases for 2020 as follows: 11434 registered cases, 5350 cured cases and 711 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.

The new government presented its ministerial statement, and the People's Assembly approved it after prolonged discussions. The Assembly also approved the 2021 budget, allocating 7000 billion Syrian pounds to current operations' provisions and 1500 billion pounds to investment credits.

Wildfires brutally consumed long stretches of farmland and forestland. According to official statistics, there were 2,115 fires in farmlands and 365 in forestlands within the governorates of Hama, Homs, Latakia and Tartus. The government approved reparations and response plans for affected areas, some of which will be implemented urgently while others will go on for years ahead.

On the level of safety and security, there were, at several points, many breaches to the truce between government and opposition forces, and there has been a notable re-emergence of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) activities in desert areas, with recurring attacks on civilian and military buses which claimed the lives of dozens. Nassib border crossing with Jordan has been subject to several opening and closure decisions.

Overall, the economic situation continues to deteriorate as the Syrian pound's exchange rate falls. A presidential decree disbursed a grant of 50,000 pound to cover all civilian and military personnel, and one to cover pensioners. Another decree increased the amount of tax-exempt returns from 15,000 pound to 50,000. Towards the end of the year, another decree was issued to disburse a one-time grant of 50,000 pound for state workers, and 40,000 pound for pensioners.

The US and the EU renewed sanctions on Syrian entities and figures. With limited international presence, the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs held a conference in Damascus on the return of refugees. During the final third of 2020, there was only a small number of returning refugees, which did not exceed a few thousands. A number of agreements and memoranda of understanding between Syria and Russia were announced, whereby 1 billion Dollars will be allocated to the restoration of electrical networks and the reconstruction of industrial infrastructure. Moreover, Abkhazia opened an embassy in Damascus, and the People's Assembly endorsed signed agreements with Crimea, Serbia and Iran.

On another note, the Syrian Constitutional Committee carried on with its work, and the fourth round of its small group discussions was held in Geneva, addressing fundamental and national principles. The session took place in a quiet, positive atmosphere according to reports of the event, paving the way for the upcoming round of discussions which will address constitutional principles, and is expected to take place under appropriate circumstances.

The Ministry of Education opened schools in due time. However, in areas under Autonomous Administration,

schools that teach the central government's curriculum remained closed. The Military Service Law was widely amended, giving new options for payment of service allowance and decreasing the exemption fee for those living abroad, taking into consideration the number of years they have lived outside Syria.

Governmental Institutions and Internal Regulations

During the past third, the National Reconciliation Commission was cancelled, and so was the decree 21/2018, which included founding the commission of martyr's sons schools. Moreover, the accounting system for the Social Insurance Institution was approved. The organizational structure of the Central Organization for Financial Control was issued, as well as the operation system of the General Establishment of Geology and Mineral Resources. In addition, the financial system for Al-Sham Islamic Center for Combatting Terrorism and Extremism was issued. The Ministry of Justice amended some articles in the rules of procedure and financial regulations of the Cooperation Fund of its staff, and labor regulations of the Syrian Post were approved.

The new cabinet was announced and governors were reassigned in Raqqah, Deir Al-Zur, Hama, Idlib, Quneitrah and Rural Damascus. Decrees were issued identifying a number of positions needed to carry administrative services at the Ministry of Local Administration and Environment in addition to the Ministry of Public Works and Housing. The Finance Director was delegated some authorities and a one-time grant of 50,000 pounds was disbursed to state workers and pensioners. Furthermore, workers in the educational sector were granted a monthly compensation for the nature of their work, which amounts to 40% of their salary, while 10% was granted to those in charge of administrative work at the ministry and its affiliates. Workers in educational complexes in Aleppo, Raqqah, Deir Al-Zur and Hasakeh were granted a compensation amounting to 25% of their salary on grounds of being in remote areas, which is inapplicable to the

salaries of those who work in provincial centers.

The Syrian Prime Ministry gave priority to public construction enterprises and companies to review and execute all public sector projects. Workers on official duty were exempted from corona-test fees. A minimum and a maximum were defined for salaries and compensation wages for workers and full-timers, while pay raises were adjusted at dozens of governmental bodies. Office directors and ministers' assistants were given additional powers. Within the Ministry of Finance, workers at financial directorates were granted returns of tax collection, and tax brackets on salaries and wages were adjusted.

Focus Topics

Economy

Economic issues had the largest share of state media coverage and of governmental decisions. Prices were increased for services offered by the Syrian Arab Organization for Standardization and Metrology. The operation system of the General Establishment for Cereals Processing and Trade was issued. The price of one ton of cement and the price of mineral oils were redefined for customers and for the oil company. The price of 95-octane gasoline was fixed at gas stations owned by the oil company and the selling price for premium gasoline was adjusted.

The ninth and tenth real profit divisions were created. Contracts were certified to extract phosphate ores from Sharqiya mines in Palmyra and to export phosphate to Serbia. Executive orders were issued regarding civil aviation law. The City Centre Commercial Complex, owned by Latakia governorate council, was deemed a public asset. A certification fee for the statutes of some companies was defined. Some legal accountants were licensed for 2020. Additional powers were delegated to the

Tax Inquiry Manager.

Health

In state media coverage, health came in second after economy, however it did not have an ample share of governmental decisions. State media focused on the spread of Covid-19 and pandemic-related statistics. Al-Tal National Hospital and a health center in Rural Damascus were opened. Al-Assad University Hospital fully resumed its therapeutic and surgical medical services for patients, as well as its educational and training services for post-graduate medical students. The media directed some focus to breast cancer early-detection services and campaigns. Some materials addressed the fact that medical services would continue to be offered throughout the holidays.

Manufacturing

The manufacturing sector was not widely covered by state media, however, it was the focus of a good number of governmental decisions in the final third of the year. Mandatory terms were issued for producers and importers of food commodities. Some articles were amended in the common financial system for vocational organization. A tariff was set for transporting one ton of fuel oil from shipping centers to distribution centers, and the selling prices of mineral oils were set for dealers, consumers, the oil company and other entities. The selling price for subsidized Arabic bread was adjusted, in addition to setting the selling price for flour supply and determining the standard weight of one batch of subsidized Arabic bread loaves.

Agriculture and Rural Areas

Many plans were set and implemented in this sector; the Ministry of Agriculture responded to wildfires in forestlands and farmlands, and extensive afforestation campaigns were launched. The ministry also focused on constructing agricultural roads and granting farmers loans from the Agricultural

Cooperation Bank. On another note, local selling prices and export prices were set for cotton, cereals, and seedlings, in addition to setting the selling prices of wheat and barley for the 2020-2021 planting season. Rules of procedure and financial regulations of the Cooperation Fund were amended. Moreover, the phytosanitary centre in Bukamal was classified as a first-class center, and forest sites were located for purposes of ecotourism.

Media coverage that focused on agriculture was widely invested in issues of rural development, household farming support programs, projects concerning fishery resources and fostering small family fish farms, as well as livestock loans. In discussions with agriculture experts and enthusiasts, the ministry highly prioritized matters of wheat farming and its development. Moreover, some schools executed noteworthy agricultural activities, especially in Rural Damascus.

Education

The Ministry of Education actively followed-up on curriculum development. Its several visits to different schools across governorates were covered by state media. The disbursement value for student grants was adjusted at vocational secondary schools. As for news of the Ministry of Higher Education, dozens of degrees were launched at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, the Technical Education Council was founded, and curricula were set for some faculties. On another note, the value of compensation for administrative burden was decided for members of faculty who occupy administrative positions at university, and an order of classification was established for workers at private educational institutes.

Housing and Construction

State media focused on the process of real-estate documentation in some areas and on the issue of unfulfilled planning schemes. Syria signed a memorandum of understanding with

Russia regarding the exchange of expertise on construction and on unified building systems. Healthcare and service projects were inaugurated in Rural Damascus. In terms of decisions, a number of properties were acquisitioned or considered public assets in Sweida, Daraa, Latakia, Tartus and Rural Damascus. The direct buffer area for Ahmad Al-Khatib Dam in Tartus was defined.

Local Community

A decision was issued to establish Al-Sham Islamic Center for Combatting Terrorism and Extremism. Reference-services fees were revised at Al-Assad National Library, centers for plastic arts and applied arts, the Higher Institute for Dramatic Arts, the High Institute for Music, as well as popular culture institutes and music conservatories. Fees were set for using halls of Ministry of Culture's cultural centers.

Loan exemptions were granted by the Agricultural Cooperation Bank to farmers whose lands were damaged by wildfires, and grants were given to affected villages and families in order to execute local projects. An article was added to the Executive Directions of the Weapons and Ammunition Act, allowing license renewal from abroad. The Defense Laboratories Institute and the General Foreign Trade Organization were authorized to sell hunting cartridge. Members were appointed in the Board of Directors of different chambers of commerce across governorates. Salary compensations were decided for teachers in musical institutes. A decision was issued to establish a new educational complex in Quneitrah. Terms and conditions for licensing and operating theatre, ballet and music institutes were also issued during this third.

Other Focus Topics

Dr. Faisal Al-Miqdad was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, Dr. Bashar Jaafari was appointed Deputy Minister, while Bassam Al-Sabbagh was assigned as the Permanent Representative

of Syria to the United Nations. The Federation of Arab Industrial Cities and Zones obtained a license to establish permanent headquarters in Damascus, and a cooperation agreement with the Republic of Cuba was ratified in relation to tourism. Moreover, the amended credit facility agreement with the Export Development Bank of Iran was approved, and the Minister of Finance was chosen to represent Syria at international financial organizations.

Regarding tourism, entry fees for museums and archaeological sites were revised. The financial regulations of the General Commission for Touristic and Hospitality Training were approved. Some historical sites were registered in Hama, and changes were made to the registration decision of Nijma Archaeological Palace in Sweida.

On a legal note, some articles in the Atomic Energy Commission Act were modified, and one security company had its license renewed. Decisions of governorate councils were approved regarding applying taxes and fees on the expenses of 2021.

Interest by Government Level

According to government media, different governmental levels showed different interest levels with the various sectors and services. As was the case in the previous third, the ministerial level had the largest share in inaugurating projects, launching services and developing plans. Next came directorates, which outperformed governorates and local authorities, especially when it came to making statements and holding activities. On the level of daily events, most interaction came from ministries, alongside directorates, followed by local authorities and governorates, while media interaction was limited in this regard.



Data on new companies is based on the official data published on registered companies in the Official Gazette from September to December 2020. Data regarding the labor market was extracted from a survey of community activists.

New Companies

During the final third of 2020, 181 new private companies were registered through official channels, which is about the same number of companies registered in the previous third. The total capital deposited upon registering these new companies was estimated at 5.9 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 18 companies was modified to comply with the Companies Provisions Act no. 29/2011.

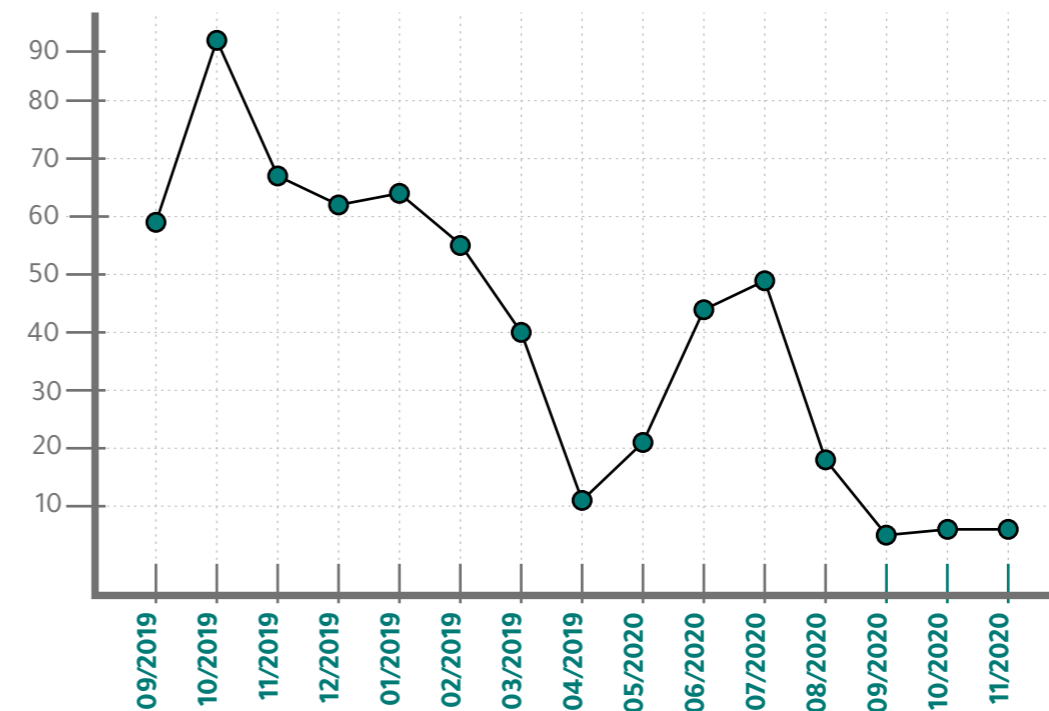


Figure 12: A timeline of the cumulative number of companies registered since September 2019, including those registered in the final third of 2020, including new and modified licenses

Limited liability companies construed 98% of newly registered companies, while the remaining 2% consisted of private joint stock companies and private joint stock holding companies. In terms of numbers, 61% of new companies were active in the wholesale trade, import and export sector. The total capital of these companies represents 17% of the capital invested in establishing companies during this period. The information technology sector grew relatively more than other sectors, with the registration of 17 new companies, the total capital of which amounts to 34% of the capital of new companies. Such companies are active in programming, technical solutions and online payment systems. Moreover, companies in the manufacturing sector increased in number, however their capital did not exceed 5% of the total capital.

Geographically speaking, the governorates with the largest share of newly registered companies were Damascus and Rural Damascus, where 87% of new companies were established; other governorates maintained a small number of newly registered companies in the past third.



Private Sector and Job Market

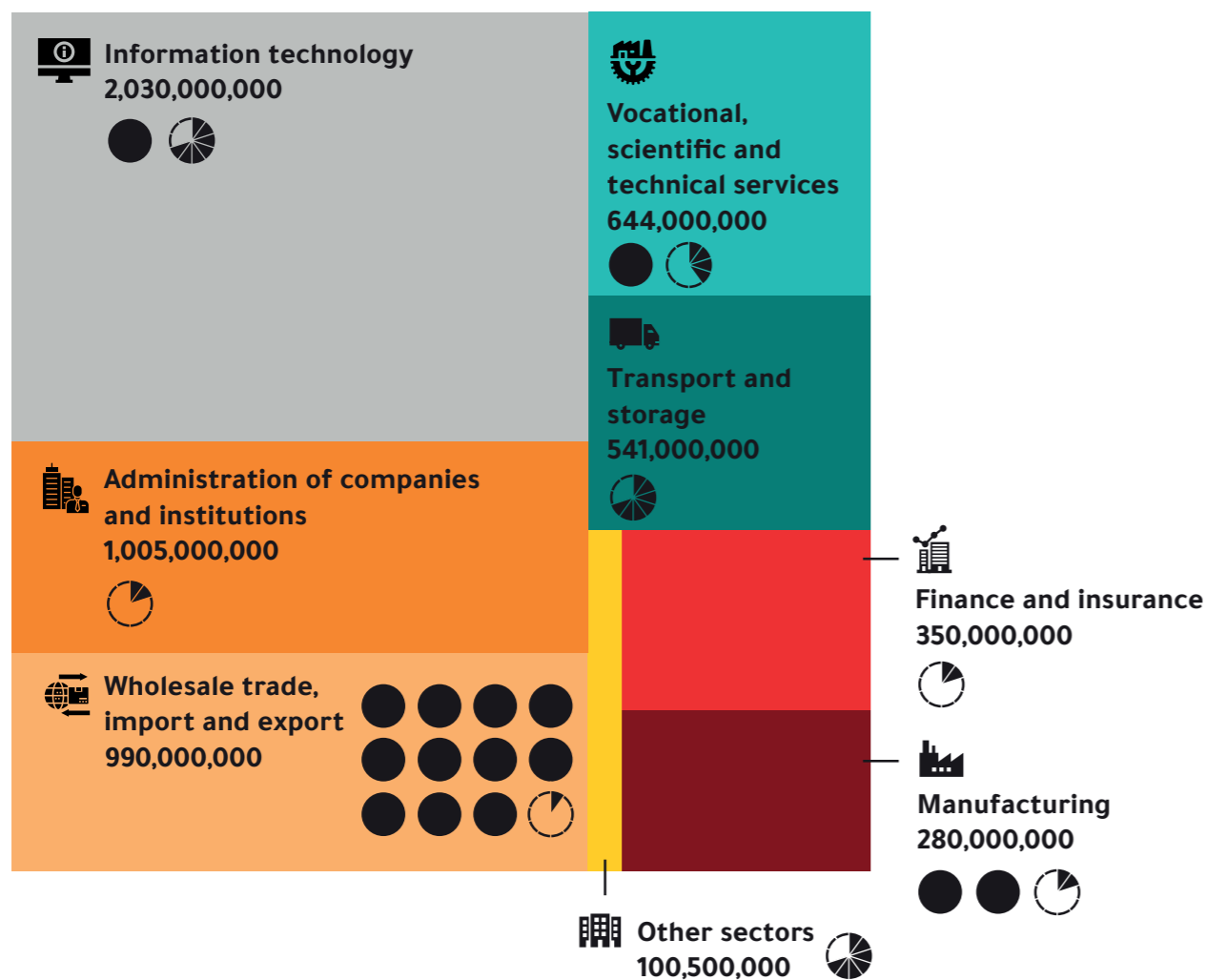


Figure 13: New companies registered in the final third of 2020 classified by sector and capital investment

As for foreign investment, partners from Lebanon contributed to establishing 15 new companies, most of which are in the wholesale trade, import and export sector, in addition to some in the information technology sector. Other foreign investment was mainly limited to the wholesale trade, import and export sector. On a different note, 26% of the new companies included female shareholders, whose shares amounted to 9% of the total capital of these companies.

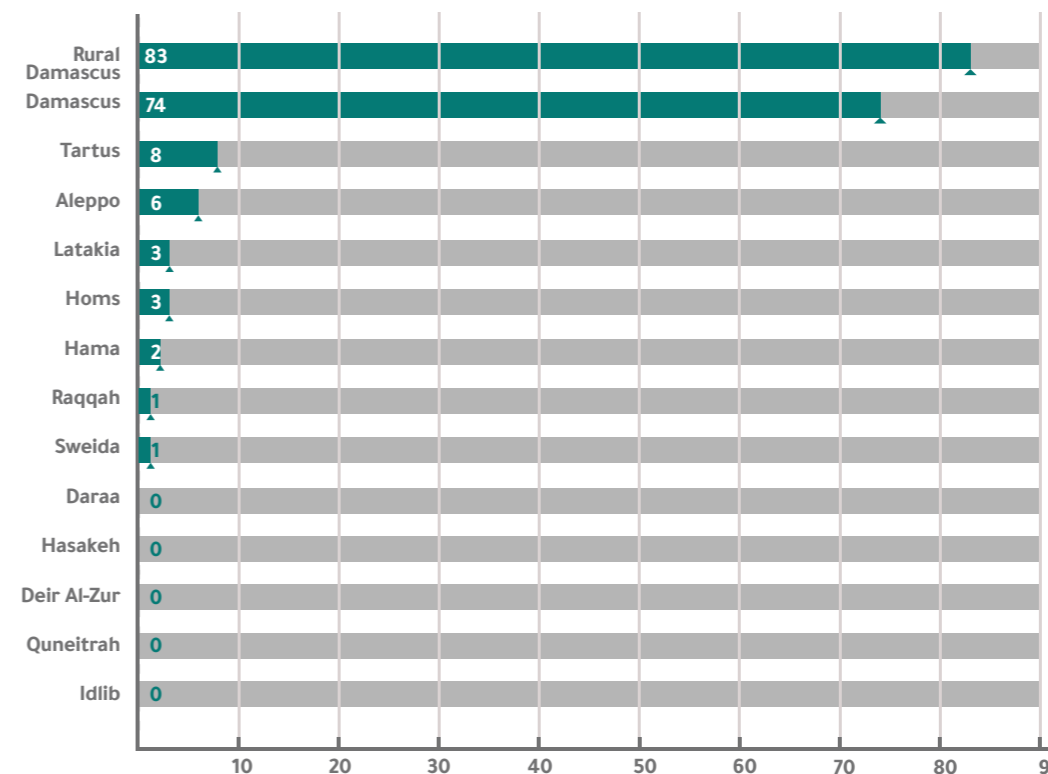


Figure 14: Number of new companies registered in the final third of 2020 by governorate

Job market

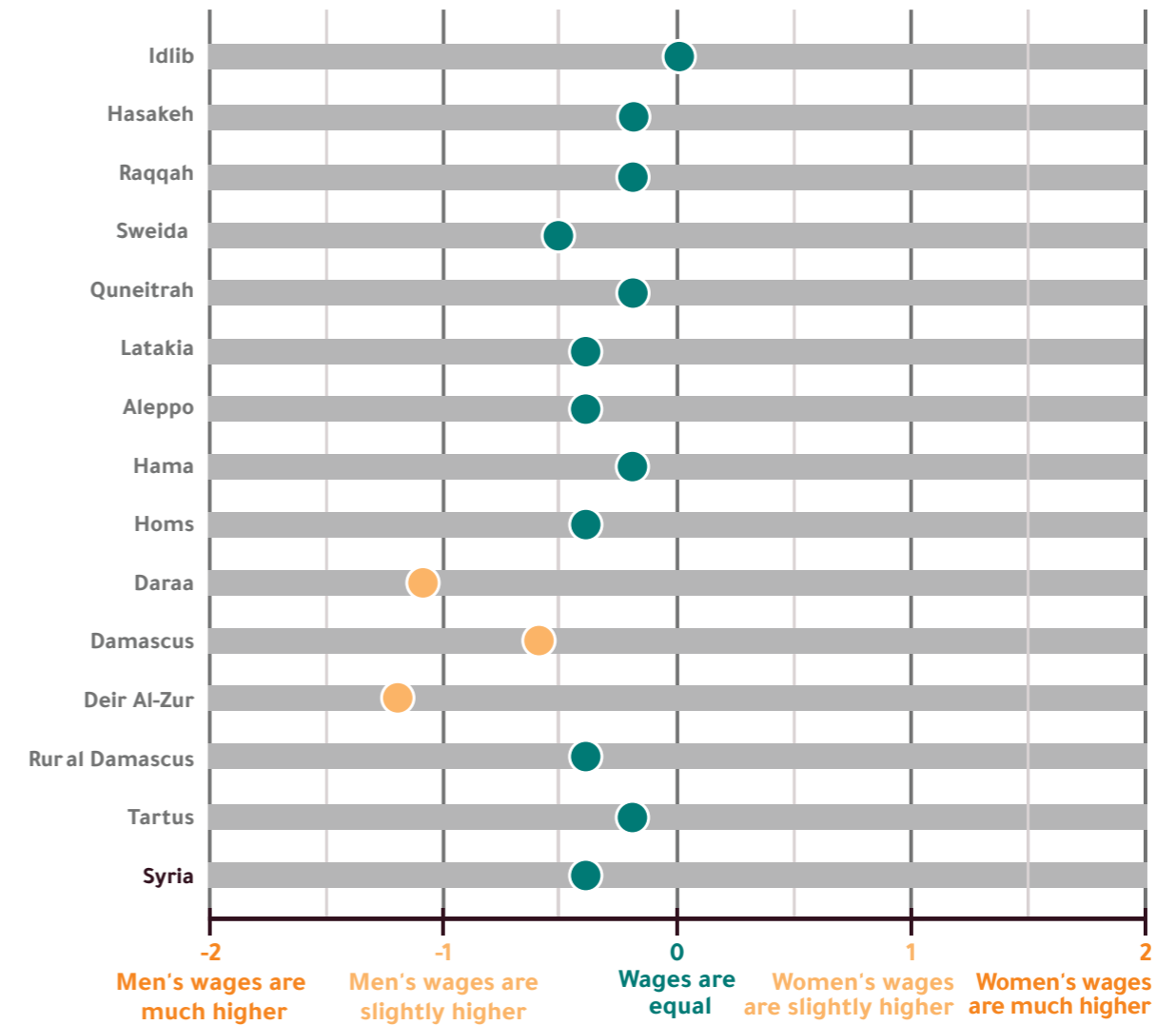
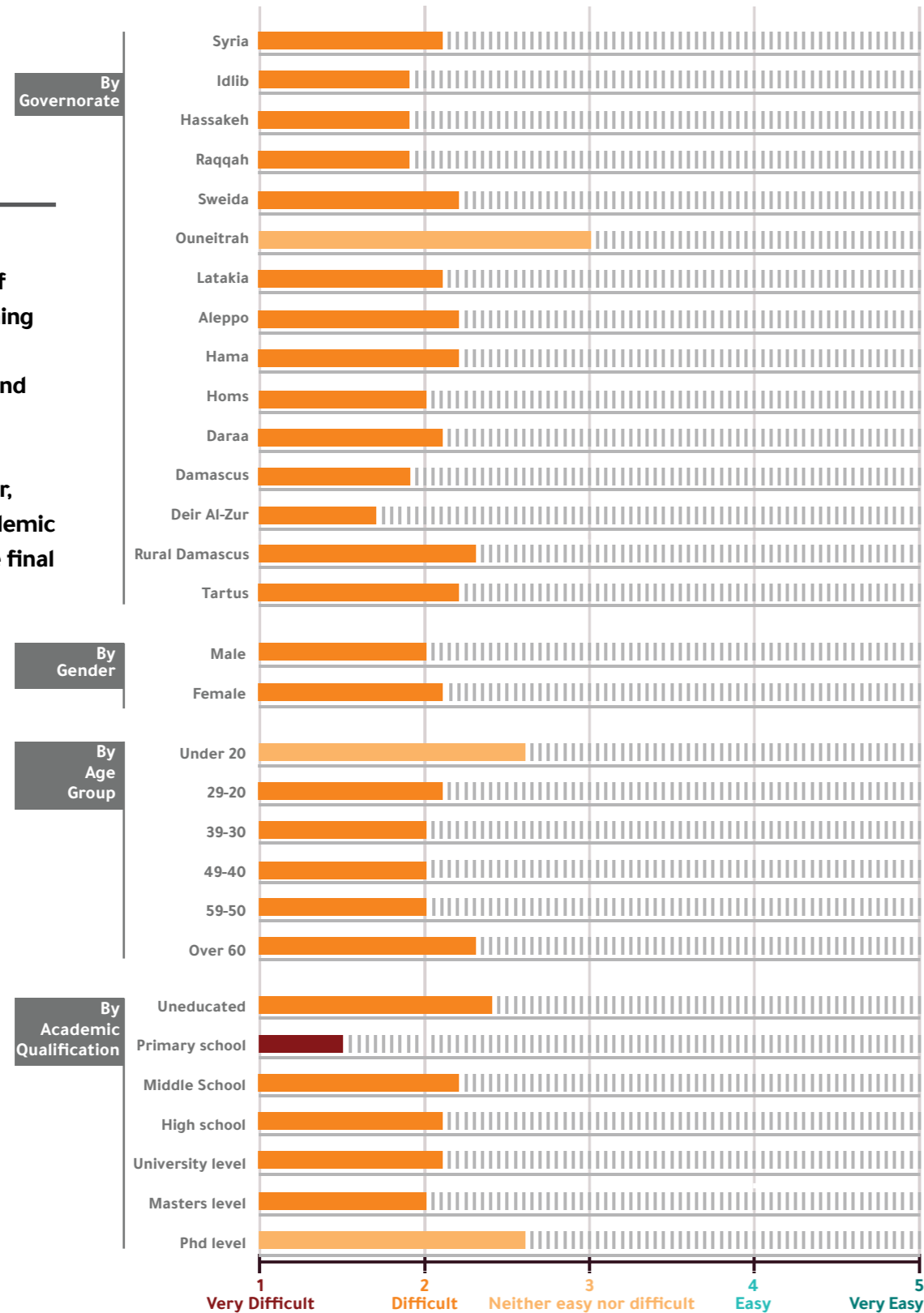
According to activists' responses to the Developmental Assets survey, finding suitable work that matches one's qualifications and experience remains at the same level of difficulty; represented by an average of 2.1 on a gradual scale¹⁷. Responses ranged between 1.7 and 2.3 across governorates, excluding Quneitrah. 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 2.6. Responses did not vary considerably according to the level of academic qualification, however PhD holders faced a little less difficulty finding suitable jobs.

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 -0.4 on a gradual scale¹⁸ compared to -0.5 in the previous third, meaning that there is a slight shift toward equality in this third. Responses indicate that wages are the closest to equality in Idlib, and farthest from equality in the governorates of Daraa and Deir Al-Zur.

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

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 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 final third of 2020



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

- Growing investments in the information technology sector, in terms of the number of companies and the size of their capital.
- Slight improvement in the gender gap when it comes to salary wages of equally qualified men and women.

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 final third of 2020

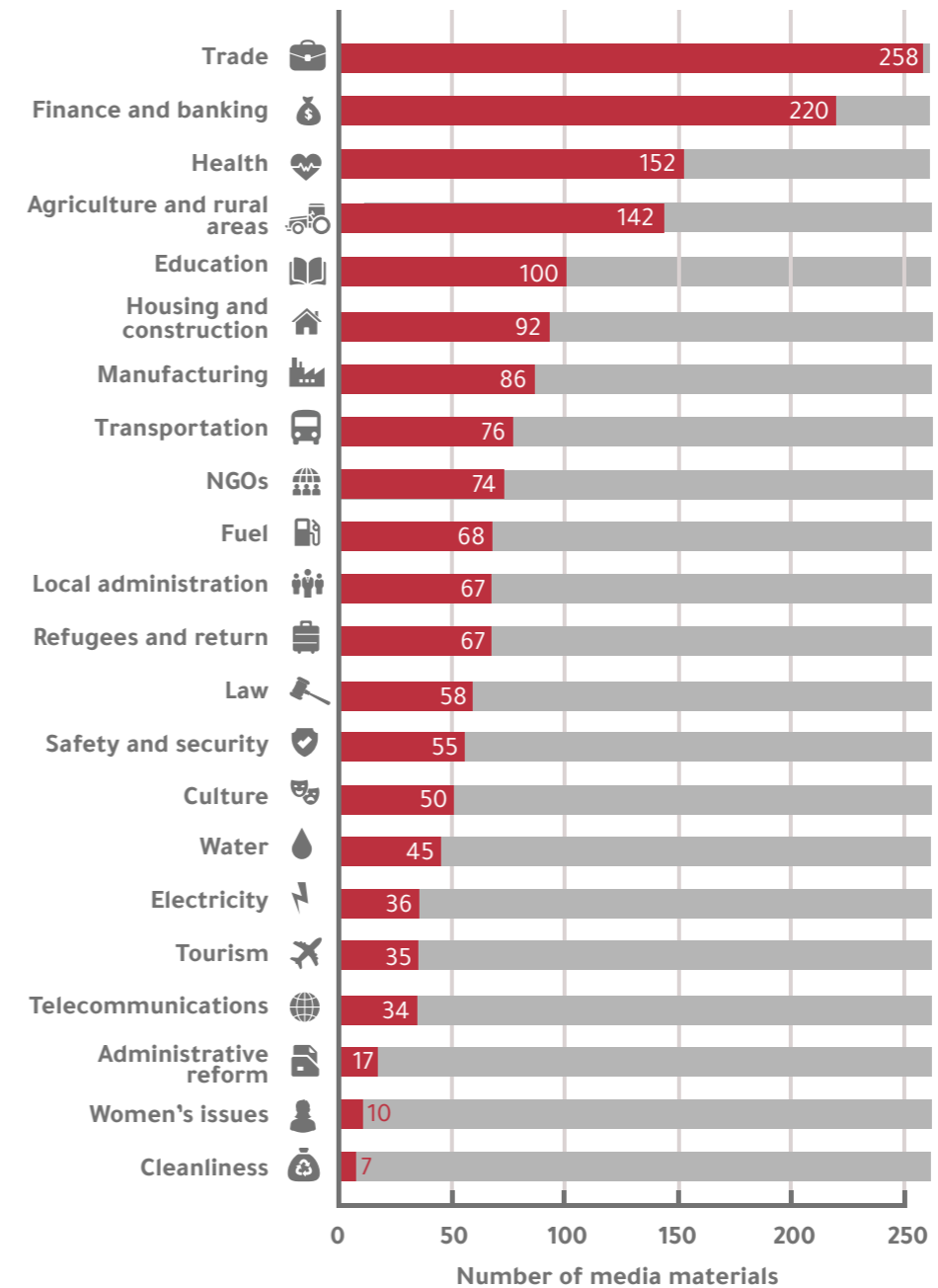


During the final third of 2020, more than 1,115 materials related to development and services in Syria were reviewed. These were gathered online from 18 different private Syrian media outlets, and then analyzed in terms of topical focus and geographical coverage.

Focus Topics

Similar to the previous third, **trade, finance and banking** issues had the largest share of private media coverage, which focused heavily on the deteriorating economic situation, the prices of goods and the instability of domestic and international trade. The recurring breaks in fuel supplies were often approached from an economic perspective, alongside the fluctuation of oil prices and subsidy cuts on certain goods. Some materials discussed the terms and conditions of bank loans and the costs of oil insurance in light of the constant threats and escalations of US sanctions on Syria. Materials also featured the state of commercial border crossing points with neighboring countries, as well as the fluctuation of the exchange rate of the local currency.

Health issues ranked second, with prominent Covid-19 coverage, especially in keeping-up-with-the-spread-of-the-pandemic and with quarantine regulations in some areas. Some materials addressed hospital capacity in relation to the increasing number of Covid-19 cases, while others criticized the Ministry of Education for re-opening schools. Moreover, the media featured some skepticism of the officially registered number of cases. There were materials covering the adjustment of the official prices for medical examinations, which are rarely abided by in the first place. Media also covered Syria's participation in



international committees and health organizations, in addition to awareness campaigns on different health related matters. Toward the end of the year, medical authorities seemed to take the chance to announce some statistics related to their work and the services they provide.

Agriculture and rural areas came next in media coverage priorities, especially with the spread of wildfires in forestlands and farmlands in many Syrian governorates, affecting farmers and produce. Dozens of materials focused on governmental efforts in rehabilitating agricultural lands, constructing roads, offering loans and distributing seedlings. Some media outlets commented on the Minister of Agriculture's

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



Syrian Private Media

interaction with the public on social media platforms, as well as his meeting with some members of the community in order to take their suggestions. 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.

After agriculture came **education**. Major focus was placed on schools and the closure of some classes due to Covid-19. Part of the media coverage in this regard paid attention to the decisions issued by the Minister of Higher Education following the University Excellence Forum as well as the overall status of universities, and the news of Syrian students excelling academically abroad. Some materials also discussed university acceptances, students' financial burdens and the quality of education in northern and eastern areas.

Housing and construction came next in media coverage. The government actively tracked and removed unlicensed structures in different areas, while referring the officials who facilitated them to investigation. The media also covered workshops in various governorates, projects of debris removal, road construction, and the demolition of ramshackle buildings in areas which were previously subject to acts of violence. Some coverage focused on the rising real estate prices, and some highlighted the news of winding up of dozens of residential associations for not abiding by terms of contract. The media also featured the work of Syria Trust for Development in renovating houses affected by the most recent wildfires. Other reports addressed the living conditions of refugees as well as the housing situation challenging their return to Syria, which the government has repeatedly called for and for which it held a conference during the final third of the year.

Next in line were manufacturing issues. The media discussed the status of industrial zones, and it reviewed the plan to open an industrial zone in the city of Ra'i in northern Syria. It also addressed the rise in industrial oil prices and the decline of imports and exports. Reviewed materials also discussed the numbers declared by the Ministry of Industry and the administrative faults they

subsequently point to. Media coverage also tackled requests by chambers of commerce to allow the import of some goods and to increase the limit of production loan credits for manufactures.

Following the industrial sector was **transportation**, where media focused on the difficulties of commuting faced by citizens in different areas due to the scarcity of fuel. The Ministry of Transport simplified the electronic connection procedures among its directories across governorates, and it founded a unified database to cover the requisites of all operations. Some closed roads were opened and renovated. The Damascus-Aleppo railway was completely renovated. Service allowance was redefined for the technical inspection of vehicles. Directories of internal transport continued to introduce new buses and organize internal transport links without taking precautionary measures against Covid-19, which dictate the need to reduce crowding.

Media coverage of the issues of **refugees and return** declined over the past third, despite the refugee's return conference held in Damascus, which was boycotted by a number of countries. Although the conference was widely covered by state media, it received minimal coverage from private media. The issues of internally displaced persons and their living conditions were covered to some extent, especially in northern Syria.

It is worth noting that **electricity** was covered only to a minimal extent in the various media materials which were sampled and reviewed; this is despite the poor supply of electricity and the long duration of power-cuts in different areas as well as the violations committed against power stations.

Focus Topics

The Syrian geography as a whole received about more than half of the media coverage during the final third of 2020. Damascus got the largest share of media coverage, followed by Aleppo. Next came Hasakeh and Idlib in terms of coverage, while the governorate



of Raqqah remained the one that is least covered by Syrian private media according to the reviewed samples. In this third, there was a major decline in coverage related to the issues of Syrians abroad or Syria's participation in international arenas.

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

- Health and economy are still the most widely covered sectors.
- Agriculture and rural life, and housing and construction witnessed a drastic 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.

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