



# Understanding Syrian Civil Society Cooperation: Challenges, Opportunities and Implications for a Post-Conflict Syria

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## **Understanding Syrian Civil Society Cooperation: Challenges, Opportunities and Implications for a Post-Conflict Syria**

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Children coming together to form the words : “With knowledge, we build”

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## List of Abbreviations

INGO	International non-governmental organisation
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
LSN	League of Syrian Networks
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
S/CSO	Syrian Civil Society Organisation
UN	United Nations
UN-OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

## Executive Summary

The present report is the outcome of a six-month intensive research project undertaken by four postgraduate students at The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies Geneva, in partnership with the Syrian/Swiss non-profit organisation Geo Expertise. The results are based on 16 in-depth interviews, most of them carried out via Skype, with members of Syrian civil society organisations (S/CSOs). The aim of the research was to map these organisations and their networks in order to understand the challenges they face to cooperate with each other and to identify opportunities to strengthen these bonds. It operates on the assumption that S/CSO cooperation may build the necessary civil society space for their inclusion in a post-war Syria and future peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery efforts, in which they can and should play a significant role.

The main finding of the project is that while official Syrian civil society networks have increased the level of cooperation among actors, the effort required to maintain these formal structures may be detracting from S/CSOs' resources. These resources, that S/CSOs currently devote to formal networking, are necessary to continue carrying out humanitarian activities. This is especially true for smaller organisations, which do not have the required capacity to sustain formal network membership, and which often view formal networks as an added burden.

The project further finds little support for the widely-held assumption among United Nations agencies, international organisations and donors, that formal mechanisms of cooperation necessarily lead to common ground among the many diverse S/CSO actors. Most networks have been struggling to integrate a broad range of actors that cut across political, ethnic, religious and familial ties. What the authors of this report observed is a proliferation of networks that formulate criteria for membership based on values and identity, which has so far failed to improve cooperation between groups that do not have a common vision for the future of the Syrian state.

Some S/CSOs view non-organic cooperation pushed for by donors, as exacerbating tensions, particularly as donor communities have begun to mainstream funding through these networks. This has led to conflict over the management of resources in an increasingly competitive environment. Therefore, this project finds that strengthening cooperation among Syrian civil society organisations through official networks may not necessarily be the best option to increase their contribution to projects that envisage meeting short and long-term outcomes for the Syrian civilian population. Many S/CSOs prefer to focus on local solutions which may not necessarily be grounded on a broad inclusion of all actors and may include less formal methods of cooperation.

The report further notes that opportunities for peacebuilding activities in Syria are slim while the high level of violence against civilians is ongoing. Due to the insecurity within Syria, many S/CSOs are pessimistic about reconciliation activities. There are, however, a number of opportunities for S/CSOs. Some organisations have a clear vision for their place in the post-conflict state. Some C/CSOs have found ways to work with Local Councils on implementing projects. A great concern remains the ability of women and women's groups to advance gender equality in local governance as a stepping stone for changed gender structures.

Our study contributes to the mapping of S/CSOs and identifies their challenges and needs. Below are a number of recommendations to different actors based on the findings of the study.

## Recommendations

**S/CSOs** should independently seek to engage in any forms of formal or informal cooperation that are necessary and/or beneficial to them, focusing on programmatic partnerships and moving beyond ideological divides as an entry point for building a broad and sustainable civil society space.

**S/CSO networks** should foster the creation of a broad and participatory civil society space, facilitate knowledge transfer and capacity building, and encourage mechanisms of informal and voluntary cooperation between S/CSOs.

**Donors** must ensure that funding enables the sustainability and flexibility of S/CSOs and must avoid imposing too many obligations, to grant opportunities to Syrian-led cooperation initiatives and project-design.

**The United Nations** must guarantee a significant role for Syrian civil society, in its broadest sense, in all stages of the peace process, both the transition and post-conflict phase, without exclusion of women and non-members of S/CSO networks.

**All parties to the conflict** must allow and create the necessary conditions for the development of an independent civil society space in any political solution for Syria.

## Introduction

Syria is the most complex political crisis in the world today and presents a pressing humanitarian challenge. Continuing widespread attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure have destroyed an estimated 70% of Syria's infrastructure and have left millions of Syrians displaced and without hope. The international response to the conflict has been hampered by ongoing disagreement between the United States and Russia, which are the primary sponsors of the parties to the conflict. This has not only hindered the prospect of a political solution, but has also created a difficult environment for humanitarian operations and the creation of a civil society space. Despite the persistent political and security challenges, there has been a noticeable proliferation of Syrian volunteerism and civil society activity across the country since 2011 (Qaddour 2013, Brownlee 2015). The proliferation of actors constituting Syrian civil society has led to different forms of cooperation among Syrian civil society organisations (S/CSOs). Increased cooperation efforts are in the interest of avoiding duplication, promoting coordination, and ensuring geographic and thematic administration of short and long-term Syrian needs.

Cooperation has been somewhat successful, particularly through the creation of formalised cooperation structures such as networks, platforms and coalitions.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, cooperation among S/CSOs remains challenging due to ongoing competition for funding, legitimacy, and the limited number of seats for civil society to participate in political negotiations. Cooperation is also challenging because of the complex security situation, which often requires S/CSOs to operate clandestinely. This is especially challenging in areas controlled by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Nusra. These conditions discourage partnerships outside of familiar circles.

The ongoing intensity of the conflict has made long-term peacebuilding efforts near impossible. Some S/CSOs have nonetheless begun to consolidate their post-conflict role, although this has predominantly occurred on a small-scale basis. Challenges and opportunities for strengthening the cooperation between S/CSOs and their networks are explored in this report. Specifically, we investigate the following question: *How can the cooperation of S/CSOs consolidate a Syrian civil society space and strengthen its role in a post-conflict Syria ?*

To respond to this question, we have developed our research along four main axes. First, we identify existing Syrian civil society networks, their members, their organisation, and their coordination mechanisms. Second, we analyse the incentives and motives for S/CSOs to join such networks, as well as the reasons why others choose not to engage in, or are excluded from, these networks. Third, we assess the challenges faced by S/CSOs that prevent them from strengthening the civil society space, which would allow them to play a sustainable role in long-term peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery efforts, once they become a greater priority. As a second step, we identify their needs to overcome these challenges.

The first objective of this research is to provide a detailed overview of the existing S/SCO networks and other cooperation mechanisms. The S/CSOs under review are located in Syria, in neighbouring countries, and in third countries where diaspora groups have created such organisations. Our second objective is to develop informed recommendations for S/CSOs and S/CSOs networks, the United Nations, the parties to the conflict and the donor community. These focus on how to strengthen civil society space in any future Syria.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms network, platform, and coalition will be used interchangeably in this report. This is to reflect the different terms our interview respondents have used for formalised cooperation among S/CSOs. Nonetheless, we will predominantly use the term network.

## Methodology

This report adopts a qualitative methodology, collecting information from a range of primary and secondary sources. From September to November 2016, the authors conducted a total of 16 interviews with 19 individuals from Syrian civil society organisations, platforms, networks, coalitions and international experts. Of the 19 people interviewed, 10 were women and 9 men, although the interviews with women accounted for less than half of the total number of interviews with S/CSOs<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, a total of 10 primary sources including position papers, codes of conduct, bylaws, reports, and other materials relevant to the study, were coded and analysed<sup>3</sup>. The report also engages with a broad selection of secondary literature and theoretical discourses, aiming to produce policy recommendations based on well-founded academic research and primary data collection.

### *Cancelled field research*

The project had initially included a two-week field trip to the Turkish city of Gaziantep. Gaziantep is a town some fifty kilometres from the Syrian border. Since the beginning of the armed conflict in Syria, Gaziantep has been the centre of an eclectic mix of people: aid workers, current and aspiring ISIS fighters, sex workers, members of international organisations, illegal antiques dealers and a host of S/CSOs (Boffey 2016). Unfortunately, the field trip was cancelled in August due to security concerns. In light of our cancelled field trip, we decided to conduct Skype interviews and meet with relevant actors who came to Geneva for workshops and meetings. We also decided to extend the pool of Syrian civil society organisations we would survey to include actors in Jordan and Lebanon, two other central hubs for S/CSOs. The missed opportunity from being unable to do research in the field thus opened up other opportunities.

### *Data Collection*

The primary data collected for this report are the various interviews conducted, with respondents selected by means of a non-random sample and through a snowballing data collection method. While efforts were made to screen and select a number of S/CSOs and international experts who we had identified as potential contributors to our research, not all of those selected responded to our requests for an interview. Of the 25 S/CSOs initially identified and selected for the study, the response rate was over 50%. We further relied on those who did respond to put us in touch with other actors. The participants of our study were selected and grouped into three main categories: Group 1 were S/CSOs with membership in a network, platform or coalition, as well as coordination bodies of these networks themselves; Group 2 were S/CSOs that did not form part of a network; Group 3 were outside international experts, including persons from UN agencies, international donors, and other partners. It is important to note that the border between Group 1 and 2 were not as rigid as we had initially expected. This is taken into account in the data analysis and the results section of this report.

The majority of interviews were conducted in English, while three were conducted in Arabic following a request by these respondents. The interviews conducted in Arabic were translated in real time by one of our researchers who is a native Arabic speaker. The interviews lasted between 25 and 60 minutes, with the Arabic interviews being among the longer ones because the translation itself took time. The interviews were also primarily conducted via Skype. Skype is a free software application that was founded in 2003 and

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<sup>2</sup> See Annex n°3: Research Interviews' Respondents

<sup>3</sup> See Annex n°4: Relevant documents on civil society cooperation, provided by respondents



allows visual and audio communication via webcam of a computer or a smartphone (Seitz 2016, p. 230). Usually, interviewers relying on Skype are “able to create a good research partnership via Skype” (Seitz 2016, p. 233). At the same time, conducting Skype interviews meant that we were unable to recruit as many participants as we may have been able to during the planned fieldwork (Deakin and Wakefield 2014, p. 607). We were also concerned with the assumption that “it appears to be more difficult to obtain in-depth responses to sensitive questions via Skype” (Seitz 2016, p. 232).

A number of additional problems did present themselves before and during some of our Skype interviews. These included some bad internet connections resulting in dropped calls and freezes, inaudible sections, and inability to read the body language of our respondents (Seitz 2016). Despite these drawbacks however, we strongly felt that our heavy reliance on Skype interviews did not affect the richness of our results. In fact, we agree with the analysis by Deakin and Wakefield (2014, p. 605), that Skype interviews allowed us greater flexibility and may have led to more reflective answers by our respondents (Deakin and Wakefield 2014, p. 608). Indeed, Skype may allow people to feel more at ease and less nervous because they are in a familiar environment (Seitz 2016, p. 231). Research has also shown that establishing a good rapport between interviewers and participants may not be as big a problem as is often assumed (Deakin and Wakefield 2014, p. 610).

Due to the changed nature of the interviews from face-to-face to Skype interviews, we adapted our interview strategy. We had initially anticipated to undertake semi-structured interviews defined as “conversations in which you know what you want to find out ... but the conversation is free to vary, and is likely to change substantially between participants” (Fylan 2005, p. 65). When we discovered that we would have to conduct the interviews via Skype, we opted for a more closed interview structure. While still remaining relatively semi-structured, we developed a guide with precise questions to follow throughout the interview, so as to limit the time constraining effects of Skype, and ensure the flow of conversation.

We used different guides for interviews with S/CSOs respectively members or non-members of networks. The former has been modified to include more specific questions after six interviews (See Annex<sup>4</sup>). We also mapped the interview questions with reference to our research questions, which allowed us to control that each aspect of the research questions was covered (Castillo-Montoya 2016, pp. 812–813). In addition to the main questions, we developed sub-questions as a follow-up, should the interviewee not address these particular aspects which we were interested to know more about. These follow-up questions helped us to redirect the discussion in line with the research question, and to solicit the information we felt was relevant from the participants (Jacob and Ferguson 2012).

Owing to the privileged position of Geneva, where our research team is based and where S/CSO members at times find themselves for the purpose of trainings, or to participate in the peace talks, we were able to conduct some interviews face-to-face. While our results rely mainly on the insights gained from our interviews, another primary source of data we collected were the various documents and resources shared with us by our interview respondents. These related to the function and/or activities of the respondents’ and their respective organisations. These were also sources of data that were unaffected by the decision to cancel the field element of our research.

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<sup>4</sup> Annex n° 1.1: standard interview for members of networks, version 1. Annex n°1.2: standard interview for members of networks, version 2. Annex n°1.3: standard interview for non-members of network.

Figure 1.1 – Map of S/CSO Central Hubs



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## *Limitations*

Aside from the limitations arising from our cancelled field research, there are several others that should be highlighted. The main limitation we faced relates to the constantly changing situation in Syria itself, which bears upon the environment and conduct of S/CSOs. Focusing, as we do, on civil society space that would allow S/CSOs a greater voice during the post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery phase, this challenge was particularly daunting. In order to discuss the peace process, we made use of Ball's (2001) two-fold definition: the first step of a peace process is finding peace through negotiations, ceasefires and peace agreements. The second step is the long-term building of peace, comprised of a transition and consolidation phase, usually referred to as "peacebuilding". The Syrian conflict is still in the first phase of the peace process, where there are currently few signs for a political solution in the near future. In fact, there are numerous factors that are likely to increase both the duration and the intensity of the violence: the fragmentation of the main opposition, the multiparty nature of the conflict, and the intervention of multiple foreign powers trigger self-reinforcing mechanisms of violence and prevent the success of mechanisms for peace (Fisher 2016).

It therefore seems too early to consider the second step in the peace process, peacebuilding itself. Indeed, premature peacebuilding can prevent the war to follow its natural course, which is to transform into peace after having reached a "culminating phase of violence" (Luttwak 1999, p. 36). In other words, "hopes of military success must fade for accommodation to become more attractive than further combat" (Luttwak 1999, p. 36). However, "it is never too early to be planning for Syria's transition" (Bennett 2013, p. 13). Predictions of what Syria will look like once the violent conflict is over also diverge. Three major hypotheses have been made by experts: the first is the vision of one unified nation governed by the main opposition, based on consensus on fundamental issues (Cakmak and Ustaoglu 2015); the second is one state governed by President al-Assad with weak and divided autonomous regions (Cammak and Sokolsky 2016); and the third is the fragmentation of Syria into several independent entities organised around Syria's minorities (Puder 2016). What is certain is that post-conflict Syria will need decades of rebuilding and recovery at all levels. We assume that identifying ways of strengthening the bonds, structure and coordination mechanisms of Syrian civil society during the ongoing conflict and within current activities will help ensure continuity in the peacebuilding phase and reinforce the role of S/CSOs post conflict, whatever form the new state will take.

The very insecure environment within Syria presented us with further challenges in undertaking our study. It primarily meant that we were unable to reach certain CSOs, including Kurdish organisations. We were at times referred to more persons from our respondents, but often with the caveats that "they might not get back to you" owing to the security and related challenges - such as a lack of reliable internet connection or electricity - within Syria. The insecure context has also led to our decision not to name specific organisations and individuals as they may feel unsafe if personally identified.

Additionally, we must acknowledge the common limitations that arise from relying on interviews as our primary source of data. While we avoided leading questions (see Interview Guides in the Annex) and made an effort to maintain a neutral position on any political issues that might affect our relationship with respondents, a truly limiting factor may have been language, as most of the respondents who we interviewed had a native language other than English. We offered to conduct interviews in either Arabic or English, so we must assume that respondents felt comfortable enough to express themselves in English. Nonetheless, we cannot discount small misunderstandings or misinterpretations that may have arisen.

Another limiting factor regarding the interviews were the different understandings regarding what “networks”, “cooperation”, or “civil society” actually mean. Several respondents used different words when they referred to what we, in this report, call ‘networks’, which at times led to some confusion. We tried to mitigate this as far as possible by asking how they themselves define their coordination attempts with other organisations. When speaking about coordination and cooperation, some interviewees referred to institutional cooperation and others to cooperation on an individual level. Finally, the concept of civil society remains fluid, which is in part because it is an open term, and in part because the idea of an independent civil society is relatively new in Syria. The question of who “counts” as an S/CSO is particularly pertinent when speaking about Local Councils. This is mainly due to the fact that different Local Councils have vastly different characteristics. While some act more like local governments, including taxing the local population and being allied with one or more of the warring factions, others try to stay impartial and have their origins in an S/CSO.

### *Opportunities and contributions*

Having originally constructed our research on the widely-held assumption among UN agencies and international donors about strengthening cooperation among S/CSOs in a particular way, we quickly discovered that this assumption was problematic. As a result, the focus of our research evolved from identifying opportunities to strengthen cooperation through network membership, to understanding the dynamics of S/CSO cooperation, with a specific focus on cooperation in the newly-formed civil society space. Removing our initial assumption about formal cooperation mechanisms being necessarily beneficial to the future of S/CSOs opened the door for a richer analysis of the information provided to us, leading to some interesting results.

Given the time constraints relating to the project delivery of this report, we were unable to do as comprehensive an assessment of all the actors we would have liked. This forced us to choose key actors who may or may not represent the wider view of S/CSOs working in this field. This is important to highlight to avoid that our findings are used for further pre-emptive assumptions, which can shape policy outcomes. Nonetheless, we are confident that our study makes a significant contribution in identifying some key challenges relating to cooperation among S/CSOs, which may be of particular interest to UN agencies and donors.



## Literature Review

During our interviews, many respondents called for a better understanding of the Syrian context. Within the limits of this study, we attempt to provide a broad overview of some key historical underpinnings of the Syrian conflict, and its implications for the creation or development of a Syrian civil society space.

### *The Syrian Conflict and Syrian Civil Society*

#### *From civilian protest to proxy war*

Most experts studying Syria explore the root causes of the 2011 uprising in the Baathist era and the rule of Hafiz al-Assad (Abboud 2016; Hokayem 2013; Majed 2014). Indeed, as Seale (1989) suggests, this era constitutes a turning point in Syria's internal affairs and international relations. Most importantly, Hafiz al-Assad's rule turned the Alawite minority into a political entity (Majed 2014; Seale 1989) and made Syria a key actor in the Middle East (Hokayem 2013; Seale 1989). The 1970s and 80s were a time of Syrian economic growth, but also of brutal repression for anyone voicing social or political discontent (Majed 2014; Abboud 2016). Succeeding his father in the year 2000, Bashar al-Assad had great ambitions for administrative modernisation and economic reforms. Civilian hopes for political change were also high.

During Bashar al-Assad's first term in power, civil society – in the modern sense – began to develop. In his inaugural speech in 2000, Bashar al-Assad called for "placing the concept of civil society on the public agenda" (Sawah 2012, p. 8). Such a push forward by the president may have "revitalised the NGO sector from above" (Sawah 2012, p.8). The number of registered Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) almost tripled from 555 in 2002 to 1485 in 2009 (de Elvira 2012, p. 5). However, their possible activities remained limited, confined to charity and philanthropy, and were meant primarily to alleviate the Syrian state's welfare responsibilities (de Elvira 2012 pp. 12-14, de Elvira 2013, pp. 30-32 and Spitz 2014). Economic liberalisation and its downsides, especially in rural areas, were therefore not accompanied by the opening of civil society space, which continued to be restricted (Majed 2014, p. 46). This caused the fragmentation of Syrian society, and with it the decay of the Syrian state (Hokayem 2013, p. 28). By 2010, Syria's international relations had improved, but internally, economic inequalities and social tensions had increased, often invisible or ignored at the international level (Majed 2014).



The Syrian popular uprising began in February 2011 in the cities of Damascus and Daraa. Inspired by the Arab Spring, a complex interplay of forces at the social, economic and political level contributed to the protest movement (Abboud 2016; Majed 2014). Due to the legal and political atmosphere that was still highly limiting to the work of civil society, S/CSOs were taken by surprise by the events (Alvarez-Ossorio 2012, p. 32). This has meant that the revolutionary movement in Syria was rather uncoordinated at the outset. Cavatorta (2012, pp. 76-77) argues that the incidence of the Arab Spring left civil society in the Middle

East, including in Syria, with many questions: what impact does the uprising have on the role of civil society as part of the Arab Spring? In what ways are the myriad transformations in the state-society relations changing the role of civil society? As far as Syria is concerned, how does all of this apply to both liberal and Islamist sectors of civil society?

Despite limited coordination, the protest movement spread across the state quickly (Abboud 2016). The peaceful Syrian revolution faced almost immediate repression from the Assad regime, and civilian deaths only encouraged greater political dissent (Majed 2014). As the peaceful revolution continued, the violence of the regime's crackdown intensified (Majed 2014, p. 62). By November 2011, the number of civilian deaths was estimated to be around 3'500 (Arimatsu and Choudhury 2014, p. 8).

Government forces regularly made use of heavy weaponry, targeting the suburbs of Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Hama (Arimatsu and Choudhury 2014, p. 9). This led to the impossibility of free assembly in the streets, and the revolution evolved to take mostly a rural and dispersed character (Majed 2014, p. 65). Despite some attempts to coordinate the movement, the political and military oppositions were not able to come together as a unified front (Majed 2014, p. 69). The opposition remained divided on fundamental issues, mostly related to "the militarisation of the uprising, the internationalisation of the crisis, the recourse to foreign intervention, and the merits and modalities of dialogue with the regime" (Hokayem 2013, pp. 71–72). Reacting to the brutal response of Assad's government, the militarisation of the rebellion increased, developing in parallel to the political opposition (Abboud 2016, p. 81). By early 2012, the armed revolution had become a "defining, dominant and irreversible feature of the Syrian uprising" (Hokayem 2013, p. 81).

The Free Syrian Army, which emerged in 2011 as an umbrella organisation of a small number of military rebel groups, gained control of entire regions, particularly in Northern and Eastern Syria, while Assad's army was forced to retreat to strategic areas (Majed 2014, p. 72). However, due to a lack of leadership, resources and control over local units, the Free Syrian Army failed to unite the entire opposition (Hokayem 2013, p. 83). This led to the proliferation of militias, estimated at over a thousand in 2012 (Hokayem 2013, p. 84). "The Free Syrian Army's failure paved the way for the emergence of other armed groups, including but not limited to the Islamic Front, the Army of Islam, Jabhat an-Nusra, and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), all of whom had conflicting agendas and strategies" (Abboud 2016, p. 84).

Sectarian dynamics inherent to the Syrian context, especially since the rise of the Alawites minority as the dominant elite, added to the conflict's complexity. Syria is composed of various groups with radically different interests and grievances. Alawites, Christians, Kurds, Druzes, Turkmens, Sunnis, Shias and other minorities are dispersed in the country and no region or city is homogeneous (Hokayem 2013, p. 17). While sectarianism does not primarily define the Syrian uprising – in fact, Syrian's early revolutionaries aimed at proposing a non-sectarian vision of Syria – warring parties have instrumentalised and politicised communal identity and the conflict has intensified division along sectarian lines (Abboud 2016, p. 183). This division adds to other rural/urban, socio-economic and class divides of the Syrian society (Hokayem 2013; Abboud 2016).

Another key element of the Syrian crisis is the internationalisation of the conflict. The increasing spread and intensity of violence has triggered diplomatic attempts and military involvement of international and regional actors. At the regional level, the alliances reflect the ongoing Sunni-Shia divide. While Assad's government is backed by Iran and Hezbollah, the opposition groups are supported financially and militarily by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which both advocate for regime change but also experience disagreement between themselves. Turkey and its direct military involvement in the conflict play a further major role,

particularly in relation to Turkey's adamant opposition to increased Kurdish involvement in the conflict (Abboud 2016; Hughes 2014).

At the international level, Russia is the strongest supporter of the Syrian regime, driven by military, economic and domestic factors, and mostly by strategic geopolitical interests to re-establish its influence as a global actor and in the Middle East (Abboud 2016; Bagdonas 2012). On the other hand, while Western countries condemn unanimously the Syrian regime, they are ambiguous, divided and ineffective in taking concrete action aimed at regime change (Abboud 2016). While the US and France have been conducting airstrikes against ISIS, they are reluctant to engage in direct military intervention against the regime (Pouchard 2015; BBC News 2015). Even after the use of chemical weapons by the regime in Goutha in 2013, which had been declared a "red line" by the Obama administration, the US made clear its preference for a political process over a military intervention (Abboud 2016, p. 144; Majed 2014, p. 139).

The civilian protests, based on socio-political discontent, have evolved from a domestic issue to a "global conflict" (Abboud 2016, p. 160) and transformed into a proxy war (Hughes 2014). The complexity to the situation limits prospects for a political resolution. While Russia and Iran provide direct support to the regime, the allies of the opposition National Coalition (the US, France, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey) are hesitant and incoherent, a passivity which plays into the hands of the Syrian regime (Reynaud 2016). The international community's lack of consensus has also hindered the political process, and any diplomatic attempts to solve the Syrian conflict to date have failed.

Since 2015, Syria is fragmented into mostly four regions controlled respectively by the Assad regime, the Kurdish Democratic Union Party, ISIS, and Free Syrian Army-affiliated factions, all with their own conflicting interests and political agendas. All armed groups encounter difficulties in holding territories, alliances are fluid, and the frontlines of the conflict shift constantly (Abboud 2016, p. 117). Syria does not correspond to the classical theories of civil war (Abboud 2016), and its uniqueness resides in the national specificities at the historical, socio-economic and political level, as well as in the direct and indirect involvement of international actors.

Violence continues to intensify, spurred by all parties to the conflict. Syria remains one of the most complex humanitarian situations in the world, having already resulted in almost half a million deaths (SOHR 2016), over one million people injured, and over eleven million displaced persons both internally and externally (IDMC 2016, UNHCR 2016), which makes it the worst displacement crisis globally (UN OCHA 2016). The main challenge for humanitarian workers in Syria is access to the area and the people in need, due to the multiple frontlines of the conflict. In September this year, 80% of the UN aid convoys were blocked or delayed (Hopkins 2016), aid workers and convoys have become targets themselves (Borger 2016), and all attempts to establish a permanent ceasefire have failed.

### *Syrian civil society's humanitarian response and its challenges*

Since 2011, Syrian civil society has been acting as first responders to the unprecedented humanitarian crisis (The Humanitarian Forum 2015). Various scholars agree that Syrian civil society should be credited for its quick adaptation and magnitude of response to the dire humanitarian needs in the country. However, they also agree that civil society faces significant challenges that will contribute to shaping its role once the violent conflict ends. For instance, Khalaf, Ramadan and Stolleis (2014, pp. 41-42) discuss the challenges of disintegration of political authority and its displacement by extremist groups, which does not enable civil society to advocate for civic and democratic values. Other power-hopefuls, such

as armed groups and Local Councils, can equally pose a challenge to civil society's capacity to create a shift towards a democratic paradigm after the war (Aarts and Cavatorta 2013, p. 3).

Khalaf (2015, p. 63) questions the place that local civil society groups – once booming and considered pillars of the uprising – would be able to maintain in the current “hybrid governance model”, where various local institutions are vying for power, funding and community support. This not only poses questions about the potential role of civil society in the post-conflict phase but also brings into question the challenges of politicisation, polarisation, and localisation of civil society in a way that threatens its expected mission to “civilise” the conflict (Khalaf 2015). Sawah (2014) describes “lack of coordination” as the biggest challenge before Syrian civil society organisations, with the other major challenge being to “occupy a place” in any prospective political transition.

Some have equally addressed the role of women as agents of peacebuilding in Syria. Aside from engaging in CSOs, Syrian women have set up several “women's groups” that focus on psychosocial support and peacebuilding activities (Ghazzawi et al. 2015, pp. 10-13). A study by the Centre for Civil Society and Democracy (CCSD) has concluded that women's contribution to peace has, despite many challenges, only grown in the midst of the ongoing conflict (CCSD 2014, pp. 10-11).

There have been many attempts to understand the areas of specialisation and activism of S/CSOs. A study by Citizens for Syria (2015, pp. 13-14) has found S/CSOs to be operational in areas of relief, advocacy, media, and many social services, with more density, presence and capacity in opposition-controlled areas. In its pursuit to account for the expansive role of Syrian civil society since 2011, the authors surveyed over 1000 S/CSOs and concluded that many of them have taken on state functions in various regions of Syria. The functions undertaken by the opposition-affiliated Interim Government seek to compensate for the absence of the Assad regime, and some of these functions are implemented by S/CSOs (CfS mapping report 2015).

As noted earlier, some scholars have paid attention to the potential for power-struggle among various local power brokers now and post-conflict. Key components of local governance structures in areas outside government control are the Local Councils. Dubbed “islands of peace” (Hellmueller 2016) and “an answer to ISIS” (Starritt 2015), Local Councils originated from Local Coordination Committees that took on organisation of protests and documentation of government crackdown (Khoury 2013, pp. 4-5).

Local Councils pose a challenge to categorisation with respect to their position vis-à-vis civil society. A Humanitarian Dialogue Centre report (2014, p. 24) concluded that the relationship between the Local Councils and the opposition's interim government and other political formations remains “inorganic”. As Citizens for Syria notes, Local Councils “are *interfacial* bodies, making their classification difficult” (CfS mapping report 2015). However, other scholars, such as Khalaf, contend that in the case of Aleppo, “the Local Council remains part of civil society, even though it enjoys support from one of the main armed groups” (Khalaf 2015, p. 61). Due to their contested status as a CSO, this study treats them as external actors with which S/CSOs interact.

Despite challenges, there is no doubt that Syrian civil society will continue to play an important role in humanitarian assistance to the Syrian population in dire need of aid. However, there is also a need to look further into the future and evaluate what role these organisations may play in the long-term peacebuilding efforts of post-conflict Syria. This study makes such an attempt.



## *Humanitarian Assistance vs. Peacebuilding*

Humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding are two separate but related concepts, which share the goal of building sustainable peace and security (Kondo Rossier 2011, p. 4). Humanitarian actors focus on immediate needs and tend to disregard politics as much as possible (Kondo Rossier 2011, p. 5). Activities include basic services delivery including in the health and education sectors, advocacy, and civil-military coordination (Kondo Rossier 2011, p. 7). Those active in peacebuilding usually adopt a longer-term strategy, which includes political reforms (Kondo Rossier 2011, p. 5). Peacebuilding activities include the eradication of poverty and inequality, transparent governance, the promotion of respect for human rights and the rule of law (UN Security Council President 2001). Yet, “defining a clear boundary between [humanitarian action and peacebuilding] is exceedingly challenging” (Kondo Rossier 2011, p. 4).

## *Defining Civil Society*

Civil society is usually a prominent actor in both humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding. “Civil society is a sphere of voluntary action that is distinct from the state, political, private, and economic spheres” (Spurk 2010, p. 9). As such, civil society has five predominant characteristics. It I) has an institutional presence and structure, II) is independent from the State, III) is non-profit distributing, IV) is self-governing and V) is voluntary (Salamon et al. 2006).

To understand the particulars of Arab civil society demands a more culturally specific focus. In Arabic, there are two overlapping definitions of civil society, namely, *al-mujtama’ al-ahli* and *al-mujtama’ al-madani*. *Mujtama*, meaning society, is the link between the two terms, but the two definitions together are distinctly representative of the evolution of civil society in the Arab world. The first is a more traditional understanding of civil society, with *al-ahli* meaning ‘kinship’. This links one definition of Arab civil society closely with tribal structures and ethnic ties. The second comes closer to the above-mentioned definition of civil society, with *madani* meaning ‘civil’. According to Haddad (2012, p. 12) *al-mujtama al-madani* “carries a willingness to move away from traditional structures and perceptions [of civil society]”. In Syria, this evolution has already taken place. Nonetheless, there are still many civil society organisations established around kinship. This is further exacerbated by the ongoing violence in the country, which seems to have led to the creation of civil society groups along pro-regime and anti-regime lines (though the former group is significantly smaller) (Khalaf et al. 2014).

During armed conflict, as the space for civil society shrinks and their activities become more limited, CSOs often become fractured along ethnic and political lines (Spurk 2010, p. 18). This is problematic, as the greater the divisions along power, politics, ethnic and gender lines, the more difficult it becomes for CSOs to mobilise for a common cause (IPTI 2016, p. 4). In these cases, CSOs may become monolithic actors solely focused on their own agendas and lose sight of the common work (Kjellman et al. 2010, p. 38). Unsurprisingly, civil society’s engagement during an armed conflict is also curtailed. As Kjellman et al. (2010, p. 39) put it, “[f]ostering and building civil society are challenging under the best of circumstances and are obviously rendered far more difficult when the basic functions of the state break down”. The higher the level of violence, the more challenging the engagement of CSOs in the peace process. In fact, the level of violence and the behaviour of the state are the most enabling or disabling factors influencing CSOs’ participation and cooperation (Paffenholz et al. 2010, p. 409).

Different assumptions, definitions and perceptions of civil society can also make cooperation more difficult. As Nilsson (2012, p. 346) suggests, while most civil society actors are assumed to work towards a common good, some may also be “uncivil” with close links to a

warring party. This can present a challenge to the peace process if left unaddressed (Nilsson 2012, p. 346). Another overwhelming perception of civil society is its definitional conflation with NGOs, which has often ignored the significance of other civil society actors such as religious leaders, churches, unions, sports and leisure associations (Paffenholz 2010, p. 61). In reality, civil society actors vary in “structure, governance, formality and the scale and scope of their operations and revenue” (Anheier and Themudo 2002, p.191). Moreover, the definition of civil society is constantly evolving. As Anheier and Themudo (2002, p.197) suggest, “the tension between needs and opportunities [for civil society] on the one hand and the constraints of existing organisational forms on the other, create a push towards differentiation and innovation.”

Globalisation represented a key turning point for the structure of traditionally localised civil society and the evolution of a ‘global’, ‘transnational’, civil society (Salamon et al. 2006, Anheier and Themudo 2002). This is important to consider in the Syrian context, where emergent civil society actors are interacting in both local and global spheres. Within these dynamics, the transnational donor-recipient relationships that exist are of particular importance, specifically because donors are concentrated in the North, and recipients in the South (Anheier and Themudo 2002). These have the power to define how civil society actors choose to represent themselves, and ultimately, how they interact. Thus, civil society partnerships may be self-initiated just as much as they may be the result of “normative pressures exerted by donors that stipulate collaboration and partnership as a precondition for funding” (Anheier and Themudo 2002, p. 205). Dependence on donors and sensitivity to donor preferences is therefore, another defining characteristic of civil society.

For the purpose of this research, we define civil society as “a sphere of voluntary action that is distinct from the state ... private, and economic spheres” (Spurk 2010, p. 9). We will not only focus on groups that have a human rights or humanitarian mandate, but will also include those that focus predominantly on education, culture, women, peacebuilding and similar issues. As far as possible, we will not disregard groups based on clear ethnic, political or religious affiliations, as we recognise that some such affiliations are embedded in the cultural context of civil society. We rather assess whether a group is actively “pro-peace”. By “pro-peace”, we mean a willingness to collaborate with other civil society actors and work together towards peaceful solutions for Syria. Our focus will be on already-existing networks and platforms of Turkey-based S/CSOs, mainly those who are active in Gaziantep, but also some S/CSOs and networks based in Lebanon, Jordan and beyond. While we strongly believe in the significance of independent actors that are not represented by CSOs or NGOs, the constraints of our study do not allow us to extend our scope of research to include these civil society actors. Thus, we proceed with identifying Syrian CSOs as our main object of study.

*Syrian* CSOs are defined as “an organisation established inside or outside Syria for the exclusive purpose of undertaking activities in Syria and/or supporting Syrian communities within the MENA region or abroad, and whose Board of Directors is composed of at least 50% Syrian nationals and whose Director is a Syrian national” (UN OCHA 2016a).

## *Strengthening Cooperation*

The building of networks among civil society actors around issues in which a common ground can be found, has been identified by some as a successful strategy for strengthening the role of civil society (Paffenholz and Ross 2015, p. 35). With this in mind, formal cooperation - cooperation based around a clear structure of membership and governance with regular interaction among member organisations - has been expressed by international partners and some Syrians alike, as a desirable and effective way of pursuing long-term stability, peace and development in Syria. The UN and other international practitioners have placed a great emphasis on this formal, bureaucratic and sometimes forced method of cooperation, through networks, platforms and coalitions, sometimes disaggregated by themes such as 'health' and 'education'. Indeed, a resource published by UN-OCHA (2016) regarding their "Syrian Civil Society Organisations Platform", lists a number of benefits to becoming a member of a platform, including the opportunity to engage in international coordination mechanisms, to gain capacity development training, to participate in inter-agency exercises and advocacy activities, as well as to network with INGOs, UN agencies, and donors.

This demonstrates the UN's interest in creating incentives for Syrian civil society to cooperate and coordinate activities, especially when they relate to advocacy and humanitarian assistance. In addition, the criteria for membership to these UN-led platforms makes a particularly strong case for the inclusion of network coordinating bodies, creating further incentives for these to serve as representatives a group of S/CSOs, culminating in the preference of 'one voice' for Syrian civil society. While the intention of these efforts seem to stem from a willingness to ensure the inclusion of Syrian civil society in the peace process and beyond, their effectiveness and potential to bring Syrian actors from different civil society communities together, is still questionable.

Interestingly, despite international efforts to encourage a specific structure of cooperation among S/CSOs, it is unclear how effective or realistic these cooperation mechanisms are in the Syrian context. Broadly defined as "hybrid organisational forms" of civil society, networks - which appear to be the most preferred structure driven by donors and UN agencies - are considered to be open structures which can "expand and integrate new actors" (Edelmann 2003, pp. 1-3). Until now, the majority of networks and coalitions inside and outside Syria are mostly composed of a central coordinating body which is responsible for managing membership and the coordination of activities. This is true of the most well-known networks, alliances and coalitions, such as the Syrian Relief Network and the Syrian Network Alliance. However, great variation still exists as to the level of transparency, democratic representation, decision-making processes and overall communication of these bodies. Thus, a typology of cooperation is not only difficult to impose, but also, the establishment of a formal cooperation network, coalition or platform does not necessarily mean that all actors in the network feel adequately represented or share the same views on important issues.

A commonly heard joke within the S/CSO community is that two groups of Syrians come together to form a single organisation, and by the end of their first meeting, eight organisations have been created. This exemplifies some of the challenges and particularities of the Syrian context, which cannot be ignored when identifying possibilities to strengthen the cooperation of civil society more generally. Aside from divisions along pro-government and contra-government lines, which vary in extremity; ethnic and religious diversity of the Syrian population has also led to fragmentation and the creation of a small number of S/CSOs that are interested in forwarding the priorities of their individual ethnic or religious group (Charney 2015). This is true of a number of Kurdish S/CSOs that have been established since the beginning of the war (Citizens for Syria 2015). Cooperation with these organisations is neither a priority for the actors themselves, nor for partner organisations, who dismiss these entities as political and non-legitimate representatives of civil society.

At the same time, many informal forms of cooperation in Syria do exist - that is, cooperation initiatives that are not simply motivated on the basis of funding or legitimacy concerns, but rather represent a group that has built trust, shared values and coherent objectives. When networks, coalitions or platforms do not share these fundamental bonds, their creation does not necessarily mean that civil society is any closer to bridging the divisions which are so problematic to finding a political solution in Syria. Moreover, while the assumption has often been that informal forms of cooperation may lead to more formal structures over time, this is not a necessary outcome.

Whether formal and broadly inclusive civil society cooperation is achievable in the Syrian context is questionable, but opportunities are nonetheless explored in this report. Both dismissing opportunities for cooperation and over-simplifying their realistic implementation to the Syrian context would be counterproductive. There may be opportunities for S/CSOs to cooperate in some issue areas more than others, and among some actors more than others. If so, these areas and actors should be identified, so as to strengthen the space for civil society in a post-conflict Syria in peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery efforts. It also goes without saying that the less divided a civil society, the more difficult it is for political actors to exclude civil society from important decision making processes (IPTI 2016, p. 4). This in itself should serve as a strong incentive for S/CSOs to work together.

## Results

This section outlines the key takeaways of our in-depth interviews with members and non-members of S/CSOs. We first provide a detailed overview of the current landscape of Syrian civil society cooperation before discussing why some organisations decide to partake in networks while others resist this move. In a second step, we outline the challenges for and needs of S/CSOs to assess how they can play a constructive role in the post-conflict phase.

### *Mapping Syrian Civil Society*

The emergence of the Syrian civil society movement is largely considered a reaction to the magnitude of needs emerging from the revolution and later armed conflict. S/CSOs realised early on, their need to come together in different forms, to coordinate positions, streamline operations, express joint positions, influence target audiences and save resources. This section seeks to categorise and map different forms of S/CSOs collaboration based on our interviews with S/CSOs members, external experts, and the available literature. It is important to iterate that, like the situation in Syria, the stage for Syrian civil society organisations is dynamic and constantly changing. Making a final account of collaboration is near impossible, also because - inside Syria - there are flexible, informal and constantly-changing forms of pragmatic networking that may not be captured or accessible due to security, among other considerations. Nonetheless, the following is an attempt to identify and understand different forms of cooperation within Syrian civil society. Below, we use the concept of 'platforms' to mean all different forms of cooperation, and 'networks' to refer to more formal CSO collectives that describe themselves as such and comprise of individual CSO members. The typologies created clearly show that more or less formal structures of cooperation can and do exist.

#### *Figure 1.2 Standing platforms*

Standing platforms are forms of civil society cooperation established with the goal of serving as long-term platforms of collaboration. They share the following characteristics:

- 1) They tend to be more strategic in terms of what they envision to be their role in Syria in the transitional period and post-conflict. They largely envisage a role for themselves in:
  - a) supporting the building of local government capacities;
  - b) project implementation, according to their respective specialisations.
- 2) They tend to have larger memberships of Syrian-led CSOs based inside Syria.
- 3) All standing platforms were established in the early stages of the conflict between 2011 and 2013.
- 4) Although many of their members operate inside Syria, they have presence in neighbouring countries, especially in Turkey (mostly in Istanbul and Gaziantep) where they are closer to local UN offices, other Syrian CSO premises, cross-border humanitarian operations, and Lebanon
- 5) Their members inside Syria mostly operate in opposition-controlled areas, while some of them still maintain presence in government-controlled areas; albeit with a lower profile.

Although no network has a full singular focus but rather engages in a number of activities, those forms of collaboration vary in terms of the following criteria:

*Figure 1.3 Operational networks*

1. Many networks are established among member CSOs that have a common operational interest. For example, due to the volume of humanitarian suffering caused by the conflict, humanitarian and relief organisations have formed several networks to coordinate their operations of delivery of humanitarian and relief aid to Syrian civilians in different cities. For instance, the Syrian Relief Network is an umbrella of Syrian humanitarian CSOs working inside and around Syria to respond to humanitarian needs of Syrians. Although the Syrian Relief Network's bylaws are mainly operationally-oriented, the vision of the network entails some advocacy and research aspects, while the mandate of operational coordination remains the primary function of the network.
2. Another type of operational network, less accessible to international observers, are local geographically-oriented networks. On a small-scale and in some areas in Syria (especially in southern Syria), networks of local CSOs come together in a form of network to coordinate operations and streamline incoming funding and mutual support and cooperation between their respective communities within their geographic area. Membership in different types of networks (geographical vs. broader operational) is not mutually exclusive, as many networks do not require exclusive membership. However, as obscure as the local geographic networks are to outside observers, being the frontline operators, their dynamics, needs and potential roles warrant further research.

*Figure 1.4 Advocacy networks*

1. The needs of Syrian civil society, as well as the needs of Syrian citizens under siege, internal displacement or international displacement, have prompted Syrian civil society actors to establish advocacy-driven collaboration bodies. Within these networks, they lobby for policy changes, attitude shifts and raise awareness to gain attention from key actors.
2. The dimension of local and/or international advocacy is the most common denominator among networks whose members we interviewed. However, some networks have the primary function of advocacy besides other functions (e.g. operational). This includes the Syrian NGO Alliance, which spells out its mission as "advocacy for a Syrian voice in the humanitarian response".
3. Numerous advocacy networks are also rights-oriented; for instance, promoting the rights of Syrian women and girls in the wake of the conflict as victims but also more broadly as members of society (economic empowerment, local participation and capacity building), for example the Syrian Women's Network. Others focus on general human rights issues, such as documentation of victims, child and orphan rights, as well as participation in the Geneva intra-Syrian talks and consultations as part of the process led by the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, which had been running through 2016.

*Figure 1.5 Hybrid networks*

1. Some forms of intra-civil society collaboration represent a form of hybridity in terms of their focus. Their focus is distributed among a number of issues without prioritising one, with functions that sometimes are beyond mere coordination or immediate advocacy. Although they might share many characteristics with non-standing platforms (see below), they envision a sustained role for themselves as networks in their country's future; despite not being clear on what it might be at the moment.
2. Examples of that include the Syrian Civil Coalition (Tamas). Tamas is a cluster of S/CSOs that are based both inside and outside of Syria, from different geographic areas inside the country (North, centre and southern Syria), as well as different sectoral areas (development, relief, education, health and peacebuilding). Tamas is mainly active in coordinating among CSOs on how to maintain a role and a space for Syrian civil society in the Syrian transition and beyond, and has been reflecting on a number of longer-term, strategic questions with respect to the status and role of civil society in local governance, reconciliation, and development.
3. Another example is the SHAML network, with membership that is active in education, women's rights and local development with a common denominator of "building a future Syria that respects ... human rights, gender and all citizens equally" with a more secular pitch.

*Figure 1.6 Hybrid networks: UN-OCHA Platform*

1. This platform is both a prominent and peculiar form of networking that is different from the 'mainstream networks'. UN-OCHA in Gaziantep has been a running point on coordination of cross-border humanitarian operations across the Turkish-Syrian border. Since the establishment of the UN-OCHA office in Turkey in April 2013, it has supported the efforts of S/CSOs to coordinate themselves into different platforms of collaboration, including what has become known as 'networks'. UN-OCHA Turkey established a "Syrian CSO Platform" in late 2015 primarily to streamline coordination of humanitarian operations among humanitarian actors within Syrian civil society.
2. Growing demand from Syrian civil society to engage in further coordination activities encouraged UN-OCHA Turkey to support the institutionalisation of efforts of S/CSOs to establish coordination platforms. This coordination mechanism continues to develop. From a platform of humanitarian networks of smaller, geographically diverse but thematically similar CSOs to a broader platform of networks and individual organisations in relief and non-relief activities (beyond immediate humanitarian needs), the creation of the League of Syrian Networks (LSN) with its headquarters based in Gaziantep represents the most recent embodiment of creating a "network of networks" that entails a professionalised code of conduct, internal bylaws and diverse membership.

### Non-standing platforms

Non-standing platforms are looser, less centralised forms of collaboration within civil society organisations that tend to have a singular thematic focus that is non-programmatic in the short-term. They usually lobby for a certain objective. An example is the The Day After project. Its working groups focus on a range of different issues but all related to the overarching objective of transitional justice. Notably, non-standing platforms also tend to engage public figures alongside CSO actors.

### Informal networks:

Especially inside Syria, needs for cooperation and coordination of roles, functions and operations may arise, including in government-controlled areas, or across government-and opposition-controlled area. This triggers the need for bottom-up cooperation among CSOs to complement mutual needs, facilitate local exchanges and trust. This kind of cooperation is mostly temporary, and more difficult to capture or portray than the formal networks because it is in a constant state of change, according to the rising (relief) needs or in response to security risk (especially on the governmental side). Nonetheless, this kind of exchange is positive for a potential inter-communal post-conflict trust-building in Syria mainly because it engages CSOs on the governmental side of territorial control.

### Multiple memberships

Syrian civil society coming together into different cooperation platforms takes many forms. Depending on the needs, goals and political opportunity structures, some S/CSOs will not limit their engagement to one form of collaboration. Apart from seeking membership with international bodies, some S/CSOs choose to be member of a number of different platforms at different levels depending on what benefits they envision from being member of such entities.



### *Why (not) networking*

While many S/CSOs choose to create or join formal cooperation structures, there are many who either do not see their value or are not seen as valuable or legitimate partners. These groups thus operate outside of formal networks and engage in more informal forms of cooperation. To a significant extent, donors are shaping S/CSO decisions on how and with whom they cooperate. Placing restrictions on, or offering incentives for S/CSOs to cooperate in a specific way, however, does not necessarily translate into effectively consolidating a space for Syrian civil society. Many forms of cooperation that currently exist may be superficial and may simply represent a pragmatic decision by S/CSOs to seek international legitimacy and access to funding. Indeed, at least 10 S/CSOs we spoke to suggested that formal cooperation was becoming more and more of a pragmatic activity to gain visibility from donors and the international community. One respondent said the decision was based on the concern that civil society was being “forgotten” between the Assad regime and the opposition.

## **“Networking is always good, but let’s not straightjacket people into one model”**

Since 2011, S/CSOs have increased their level of coordination in regard to their geographic distribution and delegation of activities thus helping to avoid duplication. However, the effort required to maintain and administer formal structures of cooperation (such as networks) has also been criticised by some respondents. One organisation expressed this concern clearly: “Networking is always good, but let’s not straightjacket people into one model.” For smaller organisations, some felt that the resources dedicated to representation in formal coordination structures such as the UN-OCHA platform and other networks might be detracting S/CSO resources towards meaningful local projects. These projects often propose creative humanitarian solutions to immediate civilian needs and integrate longer-term solutions that envisage development, peacebuilding and capacity building. One encouraging example cited was a “penpal” peacebuilding and reconciliation initiative that encouraged mothers who had lost their children from opposition-controlled areas and regime-controlled areas to exchange letters and share their grief. This aimed to bridge understanding and communication between women holding different perspectives of what a future solution for Syria should look like. Other organisations cited similarly inspiring projects, but regretted that for smaller organisations with limited resources, formal networking was becoming more of a burden. As one respondent put it, “coordination is an issue but it’s not the solution.” Several S/CSOs expressed a desire to dedicate greater resources to their projects, which are more likely to bring about solutions and tangible outcomes, rather than simply “sitting around a table”.

We also found little support for the underlying assumption by UN agencies and donors that formal mechanisms of cooperation would necessarily contribute to diverse S/CSO actors finding a common voice in the peace talks. In fact, many respondents identified different opinions as the main limitation blocking certain organisations from becoming members of a network. Thus, a majority of networks were not broadly inclusive and many S/CSOs suffered exclusion when they did not share the majority opinion of a network, primarily in relation to politics. Extremist groups or groups sharing strong ties to warring parties trying to pass off as independent S/CSOs are considered illegitimate and dangerous to cooperate with, particularly as they deter outside funding. These therefore represent a portion of the S/CSOs that do not belong to any network, not necessarily because they refuse to, but because they are excluded from the mainstream networking circles.

Within formal networks, it also became clear when speaking to a number of actors that members of the network do not always share the same values or vision for a future Syria. This seemed to pose a problem for representation, particularly when network coordinating bodies were seen to represent members' positions. These bodies are also often invited to represent members in the peace talks based on the - sometimes erroneous - assumption that they are representative of all members. In some cases, tensions had even contributed to members leaving a network and creating further divisions among S/CSO actors. There is "too much of trying to force an agenda [of cooperation]," said one respondent. "Civil society represents different views. To say that they must all speak as one voice is quite a challenge." In fact, several S/CSOs shared the concern that forced cooperation models could exacerbate tensions between civil society groups. Donor communities begin to mainstream funding through networks, which has in some cases lead to conflicts over the management of resources and an even more competitive environment among S/CSOs. Therefore, we discovered that mainstreaming funding may not necessarily contribute to encouraging membership in networks, even though in some cases it can serve as an incentive. On the contrary, it may contribute to a competitive environment among S/CSOs.

Some S/CSOs neither see networks as an opportunity nor as a limitation but simply believe that they have no added value. These organisations generally believe that they can perform their activities independently. This seemed to be the case for S/CSOs with reliable funding, international recognition and greater resources in terms of expertise. From some individuals' perspectives however, several of these S/CSOs that were non-network members avoided joining because of pride. This came up as a cultural factor of civil society that was mentioned by several diaspora organizations and Group 3 respondents.

Still, several organisations emphasised the importance of certain forms of cooperation. As one respondent put it, "in Syria, needs are high and resources are limited." Citing their reasons for joining networks, they emphasised that coordination would guarantee fair distribution of aid to the Syrian population. In fact, almost all of the respondents agreed that coordination was important in the delivery of assistance and services to the widely spread Syrian population, and that within this framework, some level of cooperation was not only desirable, but instrumental. However, there was broad agreement that **how** this cooperation should be structured (or not) and to a lesser extent **who** should be included (or not), should not be directed by donors. Rather, it should be a bottom-up initiative based on convenience and a genuine desire to cooperate.

For some groups, a certain extent of "intentional" inclusivity was also considered important. Intentional inclusivity was understood to mean that donors should intentionally place some requirements on including certain actors that were vulnerable to exclusion in cooperation networks. This was particularly an opinion shared by women's groups. However, one organisation explained that more creative rather than directive approaches to inclusivity could also be encouraged. Specifically, power-sharing could be achieved in any given situation, even when it posed many challenges. They cited the example of one platform which had managed to bridge a power struggle between older members of a local community and their youth by creating two committees, a "Wise People's Committee" made up of the elders that was consulted on decision-making, and an "Executive Committee" made up of the youths, which was responsible for implementing daily activities. What this and other examples demonstrate is that Syrians are capable of overcoming ideological and other barriers to cooperation themselves without outside interference. They may simply require the space, resources and flexibility to do so.

### *S/CSOs Challenges and Needs*

There are many challenges facing S/CSOs, and several needs that have to be met in order to strengthen the civil society space in Syria. From our interviews, five themes have become apparent. First, the insecure situation in Syria itself presents the biggest challenge for both individual CSOs and for cooperation among them, and prevents the implementation of a strong and safe civil society space. The challenges and opportunities for civil society largely depend on who controls what territory. Second, the dire security situation has led to a “brain-drain”, and S/CSOs face shortcomings in certain areas, particularly in expertise. Third, the current funding mechanisms need to be improved to truly serve S/CSOs’ further development and more funding sustainability is needed. Fourth, in order to build a sustainable Syrian civil society space, the definition of civil society and its scope must be clarified. Fifth, women face distinct challenges when it comes to their involvement in political processes, and their role may need to be enhanced through targeted measures.

#### *Security and civil society space*

Unsurprisingly, all respondents mentioned security as a challenge facing S/CSOs, including 7 respondents who classified it as the first and highest obstacle to their work. The precarious security situation prevents organisations from planning their role in the post-conflict phase and regarding advocacy and human rights. Instead, the emphasis of many S/CSOs, even of those that had originally focused on human rights issues, has shifted towards humanitarian assistance, particularly immediate service delivery and education. This has resulted in less engagement in development and peacebuilding projects. Working on long-term and strategy planning is not possible, when “all you do is react”, as one respondent said. The dire security situation also leads to fatigue and trauma, and one respondent identified a need for more psychosocial support in order to sustain the sanity of S/CSO’s staff.

Additionally, four respondents explained that the insecure space in Syria has forced many organisations to relocate themselves across the border, which makes cooperation more difficult. Many organisations have their headquarters outside of Syria, but still have some staff inside the country, which brings it challenges, particularly in terms of communication. Indeed, when Headquarters agree on a certain issue, decisions need to be transmitted to the staff in Syria, who also have a responsibility to regularly report back. As cooperation mostly happens between Headquarters, this becomes a cumbersome process. On the other hand, one respondent also said that their organisation benefited from being located outside of Syria, as it afforded them a “bird’s eye view” of the situation and allowed them to map organisations and networks. Furthermore, it allowed them to work in all parts of Syria rather than being restricted to one area.

Problems of communication also emerge from the heavy restrictions on freedom of expression in certain areas, putting staff located inside Syria at risk when they share information on the events occurring in their area. Two respondents specifically reported considerable limitations on freedom of expression and assembly, which are factors restricting S/CSOs abilities to raise awareness and do advocacy, but also to physically meet, conduct and coordinate their activities.

S/CSOs activities, including communication and cooperation, appear to be particularly challenging as civil society space is, like CSOs themselves, a relatively new concept in Syria. The respondents who operate on the frontlines reported that the challenges they face vary depending on the party in control. Two respondents mentioned that their organisations had centres shut down in opposition-controlled areas by salafist or extremist factions. In Daesh and al-Nusra controlled territory, it was reported to be near impossible to operate. In areas where moderate opposition forces are in control, it also varies widely according to the faction, but the regulatory framework with regards to CSOs is generally more liberal. In government-controlled areas, civil society initiatives are numerous but they are not able to mature due to governmental restrictions and pressure. Kurdish areas are, according to one respondent, the most open to civil society. But in general, although there are some exceptions, armed groups are not supportive to peacebuilding initiatives and some perceive S/CSOs as a threat. While S/CSOs might manoeuvre around the armed groups and their restrictive attitudes towards them, opening up civil society space for social mobilisation and peacebuilding initiatives is enormously challenging.

There is a strong need to create and maintain physical safe spaces where S/CSOs can conduct meetings, coordinate activities and hold trainings and workshops. Virtual or online safe spaces for people inside Syria to share information, document violations and report on the humanitarian situation are urgently needed. This will aid awareness raising as well as transitional justice and accountability mechanisms, as specified by one respondent. More generally, stopping the large-scale violence and reinforcing human security is urgently needed, as it would allow more space and time to think about long-term planning and coordination strategies, currently impossible due to the emergency of the humanitarian situation. One organisation that was interviewed decided to focus on reducing violence on the ground. It ran a campaign expressing that bombing ISIS will not reduce extremism, but that violence must be stopped. In order to investigate *how* this could be achieved, they interviewed over 200 Syrian activists on different proposals and ideas on how to stop violence inside Syria. The outcome was that many respondents favoured a no-fly zone to stop the barrel bombs, as well as a continuation of meaningful peace talks. The campaign argued that because barrel bombs do not target the military but also hit civilian areas, they may radicalise civilians. Therefore, in order to limit radicalisation and further violence, this was suggested as a much supported measure.

### *Capacity-building*

The security situation within Syria and the ensuing flight to neighbouring countries has led to a “brain drain” for S/CSOs, a term used by at least three respondents. They reported that many people who have expertise in certain areas have fled the country. One respondent also mentioned that due to insecurity, many staff members chose to leave the organisation, were arrested, or even killed. Syrian expertise is lacking in many sectors. One respondent stated that they had to wait for six months before finding a qualified executive director. Seven of the respondents expressed the need for increased training and capacity-building exercises, especially within the technical areas of S/CSOs, namely managing and leading an organisation, or in the “technocratic fields”, to quote one respondent.

Most important is capacity-building at the financial level: as S/CSOs and their networks have to deal with increasingly high budgets, they need to ensure that they have no gaps in their

financial structure. Additionally, capacity-building is demanded in communication and reporting, especially with regards to establishing relationships with international donors. Financial reporting follows very strict requirements, particularly when it comes to EU donors. According to many of our respondents, most donors require so much reporting that by the time the funds have come through to the organisation, they already require their first report, as one respondent mentioned. These reports also take a very long time to write, time that could be better spent focusing on other activities. However, in order to be in direct contact with their donors, and avoid relying on I-NGOs as intermediaries, at least two respondents agreed that building and strengthening skills in financial reporting is crucial for S/CSOs. One respondent also mentioned the need for capacity-building in public relations, in order to be capable of broadening their own visibility, reaching out to the media and a broader public.

A current tendency among S/CSOs is to do capacity-building through experience and expertise sharing, especially between big and small organisations in order to boost the level of the latter, as reflected by the practices of two respondents. There is room for more cooperation at this level and expertise-sharing among Syrian organisations needs to be encouraged and strengthened both within and outside of networks. Most importantly, capacity-building must be sustainable. One respondent insisted on the fact that training must lead to empowerment. In order to do so, training should not be limited to short-term workshops, but trainers must find ways to follow-up, to update, to inform about the evolution of the events and the changing context. Another point raised with regards to sustainability of the workshops is to train the trainees to become trainers.

### *Sustainable funding*

Of our 16 interviews, 11 respondents mentioned funding-related issue among their main constraints, including seven who specifically referred to a need for more sustainable funding. They explained that there is too much project and not enough core funding, which would allow organisations to plan their own projects and cooperation, rather than solely focus on implementing the projects that are demanded by donors. Furthermore, project funding, especially when coming from governments, is very strict and does not allow for objectives to be adapted as new needs arise. The short funding cycles also mean that no long-term planning is possible. At least three respondents focused on the problems related to short term funding, which one respondent said was funding for six to 10 months, stating “[w]e need support for one year or more, to be able to work strategically”. Two organisations also said they had encountered problems in receiving funds through cross border wire transfers. Due to anti-terror measures adopted by many Western governments, promised funds take weeks to arrive, which makes responding to immediate needs very difficult. Cooperation activities are equally restrained by project-based short-term funding and would benefit from more core funding. Moreover, one respondent insisted on the fact that no sustainable funding is available for Syrian coalitions, despite the abundance of resources provided to international or regional coalitions. There was therefore some criticism of governmental donors generally preferring to fund I-NGOs.

There is clearly a need to increase core funding to Syrian organisations, to develop better funding mechanisms and foster greater cooperation among the donor community. This may help to coordinate and distribute funding in a more efficient way. Another respondent emphasised the fact that sustainable funding also means funding sustainable projects. A

number of organizations expressed a desire to develop projects more focused towards long-term post-conflict needs of the Syrian population. This is both difficult when an organization receives project funding that favors S/CSOs addressing more immediate needs, but also when they face the ongoing challenge of volatility in Syria. More sustainable funds are also needed towards women's organisations, in order to increase their participation in the peacebuilding and reconstruction processes, as highlighted by our respondents from women S/CSOs.

The allocation of funds relates to another point that many S/CSOs implicitly or explicitly mentioned during the interviews: donors' lack of understanding of the Syrian context. One respondent explained that the analysis of the conflict is now focused on its military aspects, but not on the social and political ones, in other words not on the substantial aspects of the revolution at the root of the conflict. This makes it hard for S/CSOs to obtain funding for the projects that they think are the more relevant, more sustainable and more effective. A better understanding of the Syrian context by the donor community is thus required, in order to direct funding towards the sustainable and relevant civil society models and projects.

### *Bridging polarised views on the role of civil society*

The interviews have demonstrated that S/CSOs are not only polarised at the political, sectarian, religious levels, and between local versus diaspora S/CSOs, but also on the issue of the role civil society should play both during the conflict and in the post-conflict phase. Civil society is a relatively new concept in Syria. Thus, a culture around civil society has not yet been fully established and cooperation within and between organisations are largely personality-driven. In the words of one respondent "there is no global understanding of what civil society is today in Syria". Contestations exist over the terminology, role, and legitimacy of S/CSOs, as well as internal tensions based on political issues and competition over resources.

## **"There is no global understanding of what civil society is today in Syria."**

One important topic of divide is whether S/CSOs should fill the gaps left by the government and take an active part in the political

process, or should be limited to civilian activities and not enter the sphere of local governance characterised as being politicised. These divisions at times also exist within the same organisation. This means that cooperation can be more difficult than it is for CSOs in other places and in different contexts. One respondent from a large S/CSO network stated that they were currently working on solutions to depolarise civil societies, in particular on civil society's participation in the Geneva Peace Talks. According to the respondent, polarisation is increasingly becoming a core characteristic of S/CSOs. While some S/CSOs have succeeded in harmonising their public messages, this polarisation makes it extremely difficult to build networks and even more to find an alignment of S/CSOs because of the evolutionary dimension of this polarisation and its interaction with the armed conflict.

These divisions also sometimes come from a lack of communication between S/CSOs operating in different areas. While bridging sectarian and political divisions might not be realistic, there is some room for reaching common ground. There is therefore a need for

increased communication between S/CSOs on how they define civil society and how they perceive their role in the future peacebuilding phase. This also includes defining how they perceive themselves in comparison to the Local Councils, defining their respective roles and activities, and developing coordinating mechanisms between Local Councils and CSOs. Bridges could also be built through programmatic alignment, by actually working together rather than simply “sitting together in a room”, as phrased by one respondent.

Furthermore, civil society is generally expected to embody democratic values, and many S/CSOs promote this “civility”. But there is a large rift between Syrian organisations calling each other “not true civil society”. As one of our respondent explained, civil society is a space that can encompass all sorts of organisations and, even though it does need to be regulated, it is not necessarily democratic. The inclusive system that liberal peacebuilding seeks to create has proven to fail when it comes from the outside, and is not built from the society itself. Civil society space, its limits and its inclusivity need to be built and defined by actors of Syrian civil society themselves. And, as this respondent emphasised, nobody as the monopoly over civil society space, and it therefore needs to be accepted that there will be different types of organisations, for instance Islamist entities, who have the right to play in this space despite their values considered uncivil. It is up to Syrians to build bridges among themselves and to create this civil society space.

This again relates to the lack of understanding of the Syrian context and Syrian civil society, which our respondents often mentioned. The international community, in pushing for more cooperation through formal networking structures, is expecting S/CSOs to speak with one voice. But this does not reflect the reality on the ground. For example, the participation of civil society and women in the peace talks are expected to speak as one homogenous entity despite their many divergent opinions. There is therefore a need to better recognise the diversity of S/CSOs, and to acknowledge that cooperation does not necessarily mean full agreement.

## *Women*

There is an assumption among the majority of warring parties, donors and INGOs that women are more peaceful and that they can easily “be turned into peace doves”, as one respondent reported. This view of women has led to the misleading expectation that women will easily find common ground. While many women - like many men - agree that the conflict needs to be solved through a political solution, there is little space for women to debate the particularities of what such a solution should entail, owing to violence and religious extremism.

Women from Syrian civil society face particularly high difficulties. When asked what the specific challenges for Syrian women are, one respondent answered “everything”. The following examples, mentioned by different respondents, are just some of the challenges Syrian women face. First, there is no political will to enhance the role of women. Donors, actors on the ground, members of INGOs and the UN all believe that the feminist movement is “a luxury that they don’t have time for”. Second, within the peace talks themselves, women have been pushed to the side: the peace table is seen as being “for men with arms and territories [and there is] no place for women anyway”. Third, the space women have carved out for themselves is quickly disappearing due to explosive weapons and general insecurity.

Fourth, the “general misogyny” that rules both in Syria and among donors leads to no one taking the lead in combating it. Fourth, where women have tried to influence the peace process, for example through Local Councils, they have been pushed to the side with the excuse that women already had a voice, despite the fact that this “voice” translated to women being “shoved in a room to discuss”, without the results from these debates ever entering the real decision-making space. Finally, when the state stopped carrying out its functions, other actors, which include S/CSOs and Local Councils, took over. Rather than starting afresh, however, it has been easier to keep the old structures in place, which includes gender structures. Consequently, not much is changing on the ground for Syrian women.

Based on these interviews, we identify a need to acknowledge the key position that women should play within the Syrian civil society space, to strengthen their role within that space, and increase their participation in peace processes, peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery. Generally, according to one respondent, there is a need for a more gendered-perspective on the conflict. Despite the fact that this need is only addressed by women’s organisations among our respondents, it is important to take it into account. Indeed, previous studies have found that women inclusion in peacebuilding processes and post-conflict recovery can ensure both that an agreement is reached (Paffenholz et al. 2016), and the sustainability of peace (Stone 2014). Ways must therefore be found to enhance women’s participation in decision-making processes, and generally women CSOs’ role in Syria, through specific mechanisms.



## Conclusion

The present report has focused on identifying and understanding forms of cooperation between S/CSOs and found that a wide range of formal and informal cooperation exists. We highlight that the more formal and structured networks often lead to donor-driven and forced cooperation, which can become a burden for S/CSOs. These burdens express themselves as resource allocation issues and competition. On the other hand, other forms of informal cooperation that are Syrian-initiated and led seem to be more beneficial for S/CSOs. It is thus important for the international and donor community to recognise that there are alternative ways to foster cooperation. Imposing upon S/CSOs the need to come together in formal networks may even lead to negative unintended consequences, such as increased competition between organisations.

We found that S/CSOs are primarily engaged in humanitarian assistance, carrying out several activities related to short-term service delivery and relief work. S/CSOs have built an impressive web of formal and informal cooperation structures that allows them to avoid major duplication of work and widely meet needs of the Syrian population. Humanitarian assistance however occurs sometimes at the expense of long-term peacebuilding work and planning for a future post-conflict Syria. Long-term planning is almost untenable in the current stage of the conflict, which is characterised by constant changes on the ground; yet some organizations have also made some initial progress in this regard. Other restraints to their activities in development, peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery are related to their limited resources and too much donor interference in project design. At the same time, the key role played by S/CSOs at present, is contributing to the expansion of a Syrian civil society space, consequently strengthening their role in the transitional and post-conflict peacebuilding phase.

## More Specific Recommendations

**S/CSOs** should independently seek to engage in any forms of formal or informal cooperation that are necessary and/or beneficial to them, focusing on programmatic partnerships and moving beyond ideological divides as an entry point for building a broad and sustainable civil society space.

S/CSOs should

1. identify other organisations in the same sector and sign a Memorandum of Understanding in order to avoid competition and duplication of work, and to foster programmatic alignment along common interests;
2. recognise women's S/CSOs as equally valuable programmatic partners, and generally the importance of women's role as a cross-cutting theme;
3. disengage, when the context allows it, from the operational mode and open participatory discussions on the role of Syrian civil society and of the local councils, to set up a common framework for current operations and for the transitional and post-conflict phase.
4. consider developing communication and collaboration mechanisms between S/CSOs and the local councils.

**S/CSO networks** should foster the creation of a broad and participatory civil society space, facilitate knowledge transfer and capacity building, and encourage mechanisms of informal and voluntary cooperation between S/CSOs.

S/CSOs networks should

1. foster experience and knowledge sharing between organisations with different expertises;
2. continue to reach out to S/CSOs that view formal networking with suspicion and encourage broader participation;
3. maximise the autonomy of members through a more flexible membership structure;
4. make membership fees proportional to the prospective network members, so as not to disadvantage smaller organisations.

**Donors** must ensure that funding enables the sustainability and flexibility of S/CSOs and must avoid imposing too many obligations, to grant opportunities to Syrian-led cooperation initiatives and project-design.

Donors should

1. ensure that their funding decisions are based on a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of the Syrian conflict, and acknowledge the diversity of voices among Syrian civil society, including of women S/CSOs;
2. consider providing more core funding rather than project funding, and lengthen the funding cycles in order to allow S/CSOs to autonomously identify priorities and develop long-term plans and strategies;

3. support capacity-building workshops and trainings, especially in financial and core management tasks, and ensure their sustainable outcomes in order to compensate the brain drain. This could include making available instructional online videos guiding S/CSOs through the financial reporting requirements. Donors should also consider making the reporting conditions more flexible;
4. make available psychosocial support to S/CSOs staff working on the ground, and fund S/CSOs retreats to give them space to deal with potential traumatic and psychological issues, as well as to strategise and make plans for the future of Syria.

**The United Nations** must guarantee a significant role for Syrian civil society, in its broadest sense, in all stages of the peace process, both the transition and post-conflict phase, without exclusion of women and non-members of S/CSO networks.

The United Nations should

1. ensure that the complexity of the Syrian conflict is recognised by all actors working on the situation, acknowledge the diversity and divergent voices of Syrian civil society, and recognise the fact that S/CSOs networks, as coordinating bodies, do not necessarily represent the opinions of all member organisations;
2. make women's inclusion in civil society space a priority and encourage their meaningful political participation, while recognising the diversity of women's positions;
3. connect with hard-to-reach organisations on the ground that may have a different insight into the needs to Syrian society;
4. consider the implementation of a no-fly zone through the UN Security Council. Should the Security Council continue to be deadlocked, the General Assembly must hold a formal discussion under Uniting For Peace to adopt a Resolution that authorises a no-fly zone.

**All parties to the conflict** must allow and create the necessary conditions for the development of an independent civil society space in any political solution for Syria.

1. All parties to the conflict should ensure that civil societies are able to work in a free and secure environment;
2. Any political solution must guarantee a space for independent civil society to operate.

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## Annexes

### *Annex n°1 Interview Guides*

#### Annex 1.1

#### Standard Interview for Members of Networks

##### Version 1

#### Introduction about us and our research

*(first by email, then shortly before starting the interview)*

Purpose: confidence-building + make sure we do not generate inflated expectations regarding the benefits of our research vis-a-vis the interviewee.

Important to mention:

- we are students
- part of an academic exercise (explain briefly)
- objective of the research: examine the forms of cooperation between S-CSOs and the role of S-CSO networks in peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery
- research is conducted in collaboration with Geoexpertise - could build links to the previous ARS group, who they possibly knew
- the collected data and results of the research will be shared with Geoexpertise and the Graduate Institute
- names and organisation names will be confidential
- ask for permission for audio-recording

#### I) Information about the organisation itself

##### **1. Tell us about your organisation. What kind of work do you do?**

*Follow-up questions and prompts:*

- a. Which sectors?
- b. Which geographical areas?
- c. When and why were you established?
- d. What are your main goals?
- e. How many people work in your organisation?
- f. What are your ongoing projects? What is the size of the projects conducted?  
What are the limitations you encounter in the development of these projects?  
Who are the partners that support these projects? (indirectly: get to know about the funding sources)
- g. What challenges do you face as a single CSO?

#### II) Formal network activities

##### **2. What is your understanding of a civil society network and its functions?**

##### **3. Which network(s) are you a member of? Since when?**

##### **4. Tell us more about this network...**

- a. What kind of activities and issue areas does your network cooperate on?
- b. Who are the partners involved?
- c. What are the criteria or conditions to join the network?

- d. What are the objectives of the network?
- e. How is the network organised? What is the structure?
- f. How do you interact with the network? How often do you convene/meet/consult?

**5. What motivated you to join this network?**

- a. How did you hear about this network?
- b. What sounded positive about joining the network?
- c. What were your expectations when joining the network?

**6. What has changed for your organisation since you are part of the network?**

- a. What have you gained from being part of this network?
- b. What are the downsides of being part of this network?
- c. Are there challenges associated with being across the border rather than in Syria itself?

**7. In case of multiple network affiliations:**

- a. Do the duties/responsibilities of membership in these networks contradict? Are you able to reconcile them?
- b. How much capacity do your multiple affiliations require in terms of your staff and/or administrative capacities? [sustainability of membership]
- c. Do you think such entities complement or contradict each other? If the latter, how can that be approached?

III) Other forms of collaboration/cooperation, apart from network activities

**8. Besides your activities in the network, to what extent do you collaborate with other organisations? [including other networks, too]**

- a. Which organisations and why?
- b. What form does this cooperation take? (organisation, communication, frequency, etc.)
- c. In which sectors/activities do you cooperate?
- d. (What are your relations to other Syrian organisations?)
- e. (What are your relations to international organisations?)

**9. What is the added value of this cooperation for your organisation ?**

IV) Future of S-SCOs networks regarding peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery

**10. How do you see the network developing in the future ?**

- a. What is next for the network?
- b. What role do you see for your network in the peace process today? And in the post-war phase?
- c. What will/would be the priority areas of your networks in the post conflict phase? (ex: education, gender and women's rights, national reconstruction and reconciliation, transitional justice, etc.)

**11. What do you need in order to strengthen your cooperation with the network / with other organisations?**

- a. internal needs
- b. external needs
- c. What are the obstacles to closer engagement with the network / with other organisations? (political polarisation, geographic polarisation, trust, transparency of information, etc.)

## **Annex 1.2**

### **Standard Interview for Members of Networks**

Version 2, modified on October 9, 2016

#### **Introduction about us and our research**

*(first by email, then shortly before starting the interview)*

Purpose: confidence-building + make sure we do not generate inflated expectations regarding the benefits of our research vis-a-vis the interviewee.

Important to mention:

- we are students
- part of an academic exercise (explain briefly)
- objective of the research: examine the forms of cooperation between S-CSOs and the role of S-CSO networks in peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery
- research is conducted in collaboration with Geoexpertise - could build links to the previous ARS group, who they possibly knew
- the collected data and results of the research will be shared with Geoexpertise and the Graduate Institute
- names and organisation names will be confidential
- ask for permission for audio-recording

#### **I) Information about the organisation itself**

##### **1. Tell us about your organisation. What kind of work do you do?**

- a. Which sectors?
- b. Which geographical areas?
- c. When and why were you established?
- d. What are your main goals?
- e. How many people work in your organisation?
- f. What are your ongoing projects? What is the size of the projects conducted? What are the limitations you encounter in the development of these projects? Who are the partners that support these projects? (indirectly: get to know about the funding sources)
- g. What challenges do you face as a single CSO?

#### **I)b) In case of women's networks**

##### **1. b) Do you see the role of women changing in Syria today?**

- a. How is it changing?
- b. Is there a shift in gender relations? E.g. the interplay between men and women.
- c. Do you cooperate with all organisations or mainly with other women's organisations?
- d. Have you experienced disagreements with other organisations regarding the role of women?
- e. How do you envision the role of women in post-war Syria?

II) Formal network activities

- 2. What is your understanding of a civil society network and its functions?**
- 3. Which network(s) are you a member of? Since when?**
- 4. Tell us more about this network...**
  - a. What kind of activities and issue areas does your network cooperate on?
  - b. Who are the partners involved?
  - c. What are the criteria or conditions to join the network?
  - d. What are the objectives of the network?
  - e. How is the network organised? What is the structure?
  - f. How do you interact with the network? How often do you convene/meet/consult?
- 5. What motivated you to join this network?**
  - a. How did you hear about this network?
  - b. What sounded positive about joining the network?
  - c. What were your expectations when joining the network?
- 6. What has changed for your organisation since you are part of the network?**
  - a. What have you gained from being part of this network?
  - b. What are the downsides of being part of this network?
  - c. Are there challenges associated with being across the border rather than in Syria itself?
- 7. In case of multiple network affiliations:**
  - a. Do the duties/responsibilities of membership in these networks contradict? Are you able to reconcile them?
  - b. How much capacity do your multiple affiliations require in terms of your staff and/or administrative capacities? [sustainability of membership]
  - c. Do you think such entities complement or contradict each other? If the latter, how can that be approached?

III) Other forms of collaboration/cooperation, apart from network activities

- 8. Besides your activities in the network, to what extent do you collaborate with other organisations? [including other networks, too]**
  - a. Do you cooperate with Local Councils?
  - b. What is your relationship with the Local Councils?
  - c. Are Local Councils CSOs?
- 9. What is the added value of this cooperation for your organisation?**

IV) Future of S-SCOs networks regarding peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery

- 10. What are the biggest challenges for your organisation / network at the moment?**
  - a. If security: what does that entail? (Esp. bombings or are there other aspects?)

- b. What do you need to overcome these security challenges? (E.g. training abroad)

**11. How do you see the network developing in the future?**

- a. What is next for the network?
- b. What role do you see for your network in the peace process today? And in the post-war phase?
- c. What will/would be the priority areas of your networks in the post conflict phase? (ex: education, gender and women's rights, national reconstruction and reconciliation, transitional justice, etc.)

**12. What do you need in order to strengthen your cooperation with the network / with other organisations?**

- a. internal needs
- b. external needs
- c. What are the obstacles to closer engagement with the network / with other organisations? (political polarisation, geographic polarisation, trust, transparency of information, etc.)

## **Annex 1.3**

### **Standard Interview for Non-Members of Networks**

Introduction about us and our research

*(first by email, then shortly before starting the interview)*

Purpose: confidence-building + make sure we do not generate inflated expectations regarding the benefits of our research vis-a-vis the interviewee.

Important to mention:

- we are students
- part of an academic exercise (explain briefly)
- objective of the research: examine the forms of cooperation between S-CSOs and the role of S-CSO networks in peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery
- research is conducted in collaboration with Geoexpertise - could build links to the previous ARS group, who they possibly knew
- the collected data and results of the research will be shared with Geoexpertise and the Graduate Institute
- names and organisation names will be confidential ;
- ask for permission for audio-recording

#### **I) Information about the organisation itself**

##### **1. Tell us about your organisation. What kind of work do you do?**

*Follow-up questions and prompts:*

- a. Which sectors?
- b. Which geographical areas?
- c. What are the political, religious, ethnic affiliations (of staff, and target audiences)?
- d. When and why were you established?
- e. What are your main goals?
- f. How many people work in your organisation?
- g. What are your ongoing projects? What is the size of the projects conducted? What are the limitations you encounter in the development of these projects? Who are the partners that support these projects? (indirectly: get to know about the funding sources)

#### **II) Reasons for not being part of a network**

##### **1. What is your understanding of a civil society network and its functions?**

##### **2. What do you know about the existing S-CSOs networks ?**

##### **3. Why are you not part of network?**

- a. What stands in the way of you joining a network?
- b. What are, according to you, the strengths and weaknesses of the existing networks?
- c. In your organisation, have you ever discussed being part of a network? If yes, why have you not pursued this?

III) Potential room for increasing network involvement

**4. What potential advantages do you see in being part of a network?**

- a. On what issue areas/activities would it be beneficial for you to cooperate with other organisations?
- b. Ideally, how should a network operate?

IV) Other forms of collaboration/cooperation

**5. Besides your individual activities, to what extent do you collaborate with other organisations?**

- a. Which organisations and why
- b. What form does this cooperation take? (organisation, communication)
- c. In which sectors/activities do you cooperate?
- d. (What are your relations to other Syrian organisations?)
- e. (What are your relations to international organisations? )

**6. What is the added value of this cooperation?**

V) Future of the individual S-SCO regarding peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery

**7. How do you see your organisation developing in the future?**

- a. What is next for your organisation?
- b. How do you see the role of your organisation in the peace process today? And in the post-conflict phase ?
- c. What will/would be the priority areas of your networks in the post conflict phase? (ex: education, gender and women's rights, national reconstruction and reconciliation, transitional justice, etc.)

**8. Would you like to extend your cooperation with other Syrian organisations in the peace process today and in the post-conflict phase? If so, how?**

- a. With different organisations or with a network?
- b. Could you imagine joining a network? Which one?
- c. In which areas of work would you like to increase cooperation?

**9. What do you need in order to strengthen cooperation with other organisations?**

- a. Internal needs
- b. External needs
- c. What are the obstacles to closer engagement with the network / with other organisations? (political polarisation, geographic polarisation, trust, transparency of information, etc.)



## *Annex n°2: Mapping Different Forms of CSO Cooperation*

This annex aims to highlight a number of forms of cooperation among CSOs, captured through our research. The list is not exhaustive yet seeks to underline a number of prominent actors within different forms of CSO cooperation.

### **1. CSO FORMAL NETWORKS**

**The League of Syrian Networks (LSN) (also known as the Syrian Networks Committee ‘SNC’):** An umbrella body of coordination that encompasses 6 key formal networks as of 01.12.2016, and is based in Gaziantep, Turkey. Its member-networks are:

- *Syrian Civil Coalition* (Tamas): Member CSOs active in peacebuilding and development in northern and southern Syria.
- *Syrian Relief Network* (SRN): Active in relief and humanitarian coordination and advocacy, mostly in northern Syria.
- *Union of Syrian CSOs* (USCSO): Active in development and humanitarian operations and advocacy especially in northern Syria.
- *Syrian General Union of Relief Organizations* (SGU): Active in relief, development, advocacy and local peacebuilding, especially in north-western Syria
- *Elaf*: A network of local CSOs in areas such as Aleppo, Idlib and some areas under control of radical Islamist factions.
- *Syrian NGOs Platform* (Minbar of SCSOs in Turkey): An Istanbul-based platform comprising 50 SCSOs operating in Syria with presence in Turkey; active in peacebuilding, development and education in opposition-controlled areas.

*Syrian Hope, Alliance, Modernity and Liberty* (SHAML) network: A network of 6 mid-size CSOs with headquarters inside Syria in development, education and local capacity building, operating in diverse areas (in terms of the party in control).

*Syrian NGO Alliance* (SNA): Advocacy-focused alliance of relief and humanitarian NGOs, former network-member of the LSN.

*Syrian Network for Civil Action* (SNCA): A network of CSOs mostly operating in Kurdish areas north of Syria, active in development and human rights activities.

*Network of Independent CSOs*: A loose network of CSOs operating in a number of areas inside Syria, including Kurdish and government-controlled areas, that do not want to be affiliated to a particular thematic formal network.

*Aman Syria Network*: An advocacy network comprising CSOs, public figures and intellectuals aimed at peacebuilding and the prevention of violence, based in Gaziantep, and operates in opposition-controlled areas.

### **2. NETWORKS OF INDIVIDUALS**

*White Helmets (Syrian Civil Defence):* A network of +3000 volunteers present in 10 Syrian governorates who act as first-responders following airstrikes against civilian areas. They also engage in international advocacy, and were shortlisted for the Nobel Peace Prize of 2016.

*Syrian Network for Human Rights:* A network of professionals and volunteers in and outside Syria; active in documenting human rights violations, and engaged in advocacy especially on detainees, abductees and missing persons.

*Mubaderoon:* A network of volunteers and community initiatives inside Syria operating in areas in and outside governmental control. They specialize in peacebuilding, community-service, and local development initiatives.

*Mulham Team:* A network of volunteers active in community development in many areas inside Syria; with offices in Amman (Jordan) and Gaziantep.

### **3. ISSUE-FOCUSED PLATFORMS**

Thematic, loose advocacy and/or joint reflection platforms that have no organisational body/secretariat. Examples include:

*Syrian Women's Network:* An advocacy network of CSOs, public figures and initiatives focused on promoting the situation of Syrian women's rights under the war. It is based in Beirut, Lebanon.

*Syrian Civil Society Platform:* A loose reflection and advocacy platform of CSOs initiated by a Syrian think tank; the Centre for Civil Society and Democracy in Syria (CCSD).

### *Annex n°3: Research interviews' respondents*

#### **(A) Respondents:**

##### **Highlights:**

- **Total number of respondents: 18; 50% females, 50% males**
- **Response rate: 55%**
- **Syrian respondents: 72% of total respondents**
- **Interview methods: 1) Skype: 14 (77%), 2) In-person: 4 (%23)**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Respondent name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Venue</b>	<b>Resident of</b>	<b>Gender</b>
1	Alaa Al Din Al Zayyat	General Coordinator, League of Syrian Networks (LSN) Board Member, Syrian Civil Coalition (Tamas)	Skype	Turkey	M
2	Zaidoun Al Zoubi	General Coordinator, Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations (UOSSM)	Skype	Turkey	M
3	Joumana Khair	Deputy Coordinator, Syrian Relief Network, CEO, International Supporting Women Association	Skype	Turkey	F
4	Sabah Al Hallaq	Board member, Syrian Women Network Coordinator, Syrian Citizenship League	Skype	Lebanon	F
5	Mazen Kewara	Turkey Country Director, Syrian American Medical Society SAMS Representative at the Syrian NGO Alliance	Skype	Turkey	M
6	Mohamed Kotoub	Lebanon Heads of Operations, Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS)	In-person	Lebanon	M
7	Amr Shannan	Turkey Office Coordinator, The Day After (TDA) project	Skype	Turkey	M
8	Salma Kahale	Head of Programs, Dawlaty Organization, also part of the Planet Syria Campaign	Skype	Turkey	F

9	Hozan Ibrahim	Executive Director, Citizens for Syria	Skype	Germany	M
10	Tamara Hallaq	Humanitarian Affairs Officer, UNOCHA, Gaziantep, Turkey	Skype	Turkey	F
11	Aziz Hallaj	Director, Common Space Initiative	In-person	Lebanon	M
12	Laila Alodaat	Program Manager, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)	Skype	UK	F
13	Sarah Boukhary	Program Officer, WILPF	Skype	Switzerland	F
14	Rajaa Al Talli	Director, Centre for Civil Society and Democracy in Syria (CCSD)	Skype	Turkey	F
15	Josie Shagwert	Program Officer, CCSD	Skype	Turkey	F
16	Ziad Khayyata	Coordinator, Syrian Hope Alliance Modernity and Liberty (SHAML) Coalition	Skype	Turkey	M
17	Honey Al Sayed	Co-founder, Souriali	In-person	Switzerland	F
18	Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou	Professor of International History, Deputy Dean of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy	In-person	Switzerland	M

**(B) Inaccessible interlocutors:**

No.	Respondent name	Affiliation	Country of Residence	Gender
1	Tawfik Chammaa	UOSSM	Switzerland	M
2	Union of Syrian CSOs	-	Turkey	-
3	Abir Haj Ibrahim	Mobaderoon	Lebanon	F
4	Syrian Feminist Lobby	-	France	-

5	Assaad Al Achi	Director, Baytna Syria	Turkey	M
6	Union of Women of Kurdistan	Arya Jumma	Syria	F
7	Faruk Habib	Deputy Director, White Helmets	Turkey	M
8	Maria Al Abdeh	Coordinator, Women Now for Development	Lebanon	F
9	Oula Ramadan	Director, Badael Center	Turkey	F
10	Mulham Team	-	Syria	-
11	Yasmine Masri	Search for Common Ground	Lebanon	F
12	Aman Network	-	Syria	-
13	Bassem Hajjar	Director, Local Administration Councils Unit	Turkey	M
14	Fadel Abdel Ghany	Syrian Network for Human Rights	Qatar	M
15	Firas Masri	Civilians CSO for Peace and Justice	Turkey	M

*Annex n°4: Relevant documents on civil society cooperation, provided by respondents*

**1. Example of a Code of Conduct for Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working in the Syrian Medical Humanitarian Affairs**

The crisis in the Health Sector in Syria has reached unbearable limits; not only as a result of the absence of any regulatory legal framework, but also due to the migration of Syrian medical staff and the lack of security and safety on the ground. Therefore, and since this sector requires a strong regulatory system to save what is left of the sector and work on rebuilding its crumbling and dilapidated remains, the undersigned medical organizations reached out for signing a code of conduct calling it “Code of Conduct for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working in Syrian Medical Humanitarian Affairs”.

The signatories of the Code, as representatives of the institutions to which they belong, acknowledge and assert their organizations' commitment to all provisions of the Code.

**I. TERMS**

1. Joint strategic planning, cooperation and coordination in the execution of projects
2. Working on the full support of emerging and existing medical institutions and on the governance framework of the Health Sector in Whole Syria. This includes the following:
  - a. Full coordination and gradual provision of necessary resources, according to the plans set forth by the organizations that have signed collaborative agreements with the medical institutions
  - b. Support the unification of the health and administrative criteria; to raise the standards of healthcare provided to the people
3. Applying standardized policies and procedures in the implementation of projects
4. Mobilizing joint advocacy and full coordination
5. Full commitment to the Principles of Humanitarian Action
6. Adopting a clear mechanism in conflict resolution, with the attempt to resolve emerging tensions and conflicts internally as far as possible

## **II. VALUES**

### **INDIVIDUAL VALUES**

honesty, neutrality, fidelity, volunteering when needed, selflessness, equity, goodwill, mutual respect, sound judgement, integrity

### **INSTITUTIONAL VALUES**

#### **FINANCIAL CONTROL AND TRANSPARENCY**

- Applying standard policies and procedures to prevent fraud and profiteering
- Applying standard policies and procedures in procurement and construction operations
- Applying standard policies and procedures to preserve the assets and warehouses
- Applying standard policies and procedures in the management of human resources, to ensure efficiency, integrity and honesty
- Preservation of the available resources and making full use of them

#### **PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION**

- Obligation to adopt projects and activities within the available specialties and capabilities
- Commitment to the minimum standards of protection of beneficiaries
- Commitment to the order of priority for new relevant projects according to the number of beneficiaries and the severity of the suffering

#### **COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS**

- Complementarity in the use of resources
- Preserving media and literature rights of the partners
- Independence and neutralizing humanitarian medical work from military, political and ideological disputes
- Coordinating with all stakeholders within the regulations of the Code

## **2. UNOCHA Description on Syrian Civil Society Platforms**

## Syrian Civil Society Organizations Platform

### **1. Why be a member of the platform?**

Through the Syrian Civil Society Organizations Platform, UNOCHA Turkey supports Syrian CSOs to:

- engage in international coordination mechanisms (including clusters);
- participate in inter-agency exercises (such as needs assessments, response plans etc...);
- participate in advocacy activities led by the humanitarian community at the Turkey hub;
- network with INGOs, UN agencies, donors, and other international organizations/bodies;
- receive information on funding opportunities, call for proposals, training opportunities, meetings with decision makers etc...; and
- benefit from capacity development opportunities.

### **2. Eligibility conditions**

#### **a. Membership criteria**

The platform members are a/individual organizations and b/coordination bodies.

All members (individual organizations and coordination bodies) of the Syrian CSO Platform are Syrian Civil Society Organizations<sup>1</sup> (with a focus on humanitarian NGOs) that implement activities in Syria. These organizations are by definition non-governmental, non-political and non-military.

In addition, to be classified as a coordination body, all the following criteria must be filled:

- Existence of an organizational structure (General Assembly, Board of Directors/ Steering Committee and Executive Office/ Secretariat) formalized through ToRs
- At least one of the coordinating functions (see application form) is performed by the coordination body
- The Board of Directors/ Steering Committee should be composed of Syrian CSOs that are all members of the Syrian CSO Platform
- At least 50% of the coordination body organization members should be members of the Syrian CSO Platform
- All together the member organizations of the coordination body should implement activities in at least 5 governorates and/or in at least 5 sectors

#### **b. Commitments by Members**

All Syrian CSO Platform members (individual organizations and coordination bodies) are requested to demonstrate, in all relevant situations, a commitment to:

2. Humanitarian principles as prescribed in the Joint Operating Principles and the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief.
3. Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse as guided by the Statement of Commitment on Eliminating Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN and Non-UN Personnel.
4. Quality and accountability in humanitarian action, including use of the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response.
5. Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), a Convention concerning the minimum age for admission to employment. This Convention is enforce since June 1976, and Syria ratified it in September 2001, specifying that the minimum age is 15

*[N.B.: Should OCHA become aware of a possible breach of any one of these Commitments, OCHA reserves the right to remove the offending organization from the Syrian CSO Platform.]*



## The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

### **OCHA at global level<sup>1</sup>**

OCHA is the part of the United Nations Secretariat responsible for bringing together humanitarian actors to ensure a coherent response to humanitarian emergencies.

OCHA's mission is to: (1) Mobilize and coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors in order to alleviate human suffering in disasters and emergencies; (2) Advocate the rights of people in need; (3) Promote preparedness and prevention; and (4) Facilitate sustainable solutions. OCHA delivers its mandate through: Coordination, Advocacy, Information management, Humanitarian financing, and Policy.

### **OCHA Turkey**

OCHA Turkey was established in April 2013 to coordinate and strengthen the cross-border humanitarian response to the Syria crisis. A few key OCHA Turkey activities are:

#### Coordination:

- Secretariat to the Humanitarian Liaison Group and Chair of the Inter Cluster Coordination Group
- Engage with relevant stakeholders e.g. NGOs, UN, donors, armed groups, governments etc.
- Coordinate inter agency strategic and operational response plans at the WoS and hub level
- Engage with Turkish local and central authorities, including on all cross-border issues
- Coordinate of the UN cross-border assistance under UNSCR 2139 and 2165/2191

#### Advocacy:

- Engage and negotiate humanitarian access with all relevant stakeholders
- Advocate on protection issues, humanitarian principles, IHL, and human rights violations
- Advocacy on humanitarian needs and response with governments and donors

#### Information management:

- Promote data standardization, coordinate needs assessment and support data collection
- Create a wide range of information products for humanitarian community in region
- Manage humanitarian response website ([www.humanitarianresponse.info/operations/stima](http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/operations/stima))

#### Humanitarian Financing:

- Management of the Humanitarian Pool Fund (HPF) and Grants on behalf of the donors
- The HPF finances projects of humanitarian actors in-line with priorities and objectives of the Strategic Response Plan (SRP)
- The HPF gives priority in fund allocation to qualified Syrian NGOs

#### Capacity Building is cross-cutting:

- Targeted trainings on topics related to OCHA's mandate (HPF, information management, access, humanitarian principles, humanitarian coordination, etc...)
- Supporting the establishment of pools of Syrian trainers and the customization of various global training modules and guidelines to the Syrian context

## **3. UNOCHA's SCSO Platform – Envisioned function of the SCSO Coordination Body**

Functions for NGO Coordination bodies		
	Areas	Activities/ Examples
1	Analysis	<p>Conflict analysis</p> <p>Actor/Stakeholder analysis</p> <p>Agency positions in the political economy of a conflict</p> <p>Scenario development</p> <p>Resource analysis</p> <p>Analysis of meetings with restricted access (ICCG, HLG, SSG, Geneva CS room etc.)</p>
2	Advocacy and Representation	<p>Develop advocacy strategies and messaging:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To national government, e.g., inclusion in sector-specific policy processes</li> <li>• To donors/general public, e.g., resource mobilisation, political support around humanitarian issues</li> <li>• To the humanitarian community, e.g., representation of NGO concerns in Humanitarian Country Teams</li> <li>• To the media, e.g., awareness raising on critical humanitarian issues</li> <li>• To UN agencies for programmatic issues, e.g., inter-cluster prioritisation</li> <li>• To military forces (national, international or paramilitary), e.g., humanitarian access, area security, civilian protection</li> <li>• To international community, e.g., representation in external policy-making bodies</li> <li>• To non-NGO actors, e.g., for inclusion of local civil society</li> </ul> <p>Providing advocacy toolkits</p> <p>Capacity-building in advocacy and representation</p> <p>Developing and maintaining common advocacy platform</p>

	Areas	Activities/ Examples
3	<b>Assessment, Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning</b>	Developing and implementing joint needs assessments
		Collating programme reviews, evaluations, and lessons learned
		Facilitating inter-agency discussion of reviews and evaluations
		Facilitating or implementing joint monitoring, evaluation, and review
		Creating opportunities for sharing knowledge and experience between members
		Facilitating inter-agency expert meetings, e.g., human resources, advocacy
4	<b>Information Management</b>	Information sharing and analysis leading to better humanitarian decision-making
		Monitoring Who is doing What, Where and When (4Ws)
		Coordinated assessments and monitoring missions
		Providing relevant information such as population figures pre-emergency, maps, data, or graphics
		Providing services such as websites, SMS messaging services
		Sharing data, reports, advocacy messages
5	<b>Operational Capacity</b>	Establishing specific sectoral coordination structures (e.g., working groups)
		Maintaining a 'Who is doing What, Where' database
		Convening sectoral and/or geographic coordination meetings
		Developing sectoral policies and guidelines
		Facilitating inter-agency programme planning
		Reviewing programming gaps/duplication
		Establishing and/or maintaining additional surge capacity
		Developing disaster preparedness protocols



	Areas	Activities/ Examples
6	<b>Situational Awareness</b>	Producing situational updates for members based on external information, or for external actors based on members' information
		Publishing NGO contact list or agency directory
		Providing single contact point for members
		Producing maps and map products
		Collating needs assessments from members
		Monitoring resource availability amongst members
		Facilitating joint or common needs assessments
7	<b>Services to Members</b>	Sharing relevant information with, and between, members on various topics, including external meetings, such as clusters
		Facilitating registration with relevant authorities
		Providing taxation advice on import, income, and other requirements
		Providing legal advice, e.g., regarding labour laws
		Providing logistics advice, e.g., regarding leasing and procurement
		Carrying out member surveys on key issues, such as staff salaries
		Providing a meeting room and/or resource centre
		Mediating between member NGOs and other coordination mechanisms
		Mediating between NGOs and external stakeholders/partners
8	<b>Training</b>	Providing or facilitating training in key common areas such as: accountability frameworks (e.g. Core Humanitarian Standard - CHS), humanitarian standards (e.g. Sphere), effective partnership (e.g. PoP), needs assessment, security, humanitarian principles
		Providing information about, and assisting participation in, external training courses
		Standardising member training schemes and curricula

	Areas	Activities/ Examples
6	<b>Situational Awareness</b>	<p>Producing situational updates for members based on external information, or for external actors based on members' information</p> <hr/> <p>Publishing NGO contact list or agency directory</p> <hr/> <p>Providing single contact point for members</p> <hr/> <p>Producing maps and map products</p> <hr/> <p>Collating needs assessments from members</p> <hr/> <p>Monitoring resource availability amongst members</p> <hr/> <p>Facilitating joint or common needs assessments</p>
7	<b>Services to Members</b>	<p>Sharing relevant information with, and between, members on various topics, including external meetings, such as clusters</p> <hr/> <p>Facilitating registration with relevant authorities</p> <hr/> <p>Providing taxation advice on import, income, and other requirements</p> <hr/> <p>Providing legal advice, e.g., regarding labour laws</p> <hr/> <p>Providing logistics advice, e.g., regarding leasing and procurement</p> <hr/> <p>Carrying out member surveys on key issues, such as staff salaries</p> <hr/> <p>Providing a meeting room and/or resource centre</p> <hr/> <p>Mediating between member NGOs and other coordination mechanisms</p> <hr/> <p>Mediating between NGOs and external stakeholders/partners</p> <hr/> <p>Mediating between international and local NGOs</p>
8	<b>Training</b>	<p>Providing or facilitating training in key common areas such as: accountability frameworks (e.g. Core Humanitarian Standard - CHS), humanitarian standards (e.g. Sphere), effective partnership (e.g. PoP), needs assessment, security, humanitarian principles</p> <hr/> <p>Providing information about, and assisting participation in, external training courses</p> <hr/> <p>Standardising member training schemes and curricula</p>

Areas	Activities/ Examples
9 Strategic Decision-Making	Undertaking task allocation (sectoral and/or geographic)
	Facilitating collective adoption of principles, standards, or codes of conduct
	Facilitating collective adoption of internal policies (e.g., national staff salary scales)
	Facilitating collective adoption of external policies (e.g., support to local markets)
	Registering and/or monitoring NGO activities
	Facilitating discussion around agency positioning during conflict, especially regarding terms of engagement/disengagement
	Facilitating discussion around agency positioning regarding aid conditionality
10 Safety and Security	Scenario planning
	Coordinating phone/SMS security tree
	Supporting general security communications
	Liaising with governmental authorities, international and national military forces, including a UN peacekeeping or political mission, and private security companies, (therefore allowing the NGOs to keep themselves at arms' distance from military and political actors, where necessary)
	Contingency planning
	Facilitating evacuation planning (security and medical)
	Convoy planning and coordination
	Collating and analysing security incidents and trends and producing security threat reports and data
	Sharing hardware and providing technical support, e.g., for radio networks and handsets
	Undertaking incident management and investigation
	Creating and supporting a full security management system including safe house or locations, technical support
	Maintaining a database of security experts, or links to global information on security experts and trainers
Areas	Activities/ Examples
	Sourcing or developing and making available guidelines and standard operating procedures for security management
	Providing introductory security briefings for new managers or senior staff of agencies, as well as technical assistance and advice to individual agencies
	Conducting or coordinating/arranging security training
	Crisis management: providing support with contingency planning; and facilitating inextremis support, e.g., if an agency suffers a critical incident such as the kidnapping of staff, the platform might be able to provide additional analysis and support through local networks
	Creating a consolidated set of security positions and advocacy messages to feed into local and country platforms, influencing key stakeholders on security matters



#### 4. SCSO Coordination Body application form (UNOCHA)

General information	Coordination body name (Arabic and English):		Logo of the network
	Registration name (s):		
	Acronym :	Former name:	
	Date of establishment:	Registration Status and Date:	
Website :  Skype : Facebook :  Email :  Phone 1 : Phone 2 :  Location of the Executive Office:  Additional contact information (see contact list annex 4)			Contact Information

The Coordination Body
<b>Mandate and vision</b>
Please provide a brief description of the mandate and vision along with supporting documents
<b>Functions (see annex 3 for further details)</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Analysis <input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy and representation <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment and Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) <input type="checkbox"/> Information Management <input type="checkbox"/> Operational capacity <input type="checkbox"/> Safety and security <input type="checkbox"/> Services to members <input type="checkbox"/> Situational awareness

<b>Organizational Structure</b> (please attach the ToRs)	
<input type="checkbox"/> General Assembly: (please provide a brief description and supporting document including names and number of organizations in the General Assembly)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Board of Directors/ Steering committee: (please provide a brief description and supporting document including names and number of organizations in the Board of Directors/ Steering Committee)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Executive office/ Secretariat: (please provide a brief description and supporting document including names and number of organizations in the Executive Office/ Secretariat )	
<b>Membership</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Number of member organizations: _____ (please provide in attachment the list of the members signed by the CEO of each member organization)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Membership criteria: (please provide any supporting document)	
<b>Partnerships</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> With international coordination bodies, INGOs and UN agencies (please mention their names): _____	
<input type="checkbox"/> With other organizations or institutions ( please mention their names) _____	
<b>Capacity Development</b>	
Please define the three main capacity development priorities of your organization: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____	
<b>Participation to coordination mechanisms and fora</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>National coordination mechanisms</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emergency response rooms (please specify): _____</li> <li>Other (please specify): _____</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>International coordination mechanisms</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clusters (please specify): _____</li> <li>Emergency Task Forces (please specify): _____</li> <li>Other international coordination mechanisms (please specify): _____</li> </ul>



Coordination body's member organizations				
<b>Activities</b>				
<b>Relief</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> WASH # of organizations: __	<input type="checkbox"/> Health # of organizations: __			
<input type="checkbox"/> Shelter # of organizations: __	<input type="checkbox"/> NFI # of organizations: __			
<input type="checkbox"/> Logistics # of organizations: __	<input type="checkbox"/> CCCM # of organizations: __			
<input type="checkbox"/> Education # of organizations: __	<input type="checkbox"/> Nutrition # of organizations: __			
<input type="checkbox"/> FSL (including income generating activities) # of organizations: __	<input type="checkbox"/> Cash Based Response: # of organizations: __			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture # of organizations: __	<input type="checkbox"/> Human Rights # of organizations: __			
<input type="checkbox"/> Protection # of organizations: __	<input type="checkbox"/> Child Protection # of organizations: __			
<input type="checkbox"/> Mine Action # of organizations: __	<input type="checkbox"/> GBV # of organizations: __			
<input type="checkbox"/> Early Recovery and Development (incl. infrastructure rehabilitation) # of organizations: __	<input type="checkbox"/> Other activities: _____			
<b>Non Relief</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> Peace building # of organizations: __	<input type="checkbox"/> Capacity development # of organizations: __			
<input type="checkbox"/> Media # of organizations: __	<input type="checkbox"/> Good Governance # of organizations: __			
<input type="checkbox"/> Other activities: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Rule of Law # of organizations: __			
<b>Areas of coverage</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> Aleppo	<input type="checkbox"/> Raqqa	<input type="checkbox"/> Deir Ezzor	<input type="checkbox"/> Hassakeh	<input type="checkbox"/> Quneitra
<input type="checkbox"/> Hama	<input type="checkbox"/> Tartous	<input type="checkbox"/> Latakia	<input type="checkbox"/> Idlib	<input type="checkbox"/> Deraa
<input type="checkbox"/> Sweida	<input type="checkbox"/> Damascus	<input type="checkbox"/> Rural Damascus	<input type="checkbox"/> Homs	
<input type="checkbox"/> Turkey	<input type="checkbox"/> Lebanon	<input type="checkbox"/> Jordan	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	
<b>Participation to coordination mechanisms and fora</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> Clusters # of organizations: __				
<input type="checkbox"/> Syrian CSO Platform # of organizations: __				

**Declaration** (please tick the boxes):

- ☐ The coordination body management certifies the accuracy and correctness of the information provided above
- ☐ The coordination body management has read and understood the conditions of eligibility to the platform (see annex 1) and commits to apply all related principles and values in all relevant situations

❖ UNOCHA Turkey commits to handle provided information in full confidentiality

CEO/ Coordinator:                      Name    Date

Chairman:                                      Name    Date

## 5. Documents reflecting examples of coordination for advocacy efforts by formal as well as loose platforms:

- Syrian Women Rights CSOs report to the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review on violations against Syrian women
- The report, available [here](#), is the result of cooperation between a number of leading Syrian women CSOs in cooperation with an international women CSO (WILFP)