

Supporting the future of Syria and the region

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CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE SYRIA CRISIS

Report on the Online Consultation
for the Brussels VI Conference



Civil Society in the Syria Crisis

Report on the online consultation for the Brussels VI Conference on “Supporting the future of Syria and the region”



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Executive Summary

In preparation of the sixth Brussels Conference on ‘Supporting the future of Syria and the region’ which will be held on 9-10 May 2022, and similar to previous years, the EU has conducted an online consultation with civil society, open for Syrian individuals as well as representatives from civil society organisations. The online survey was open from 1 April to 10 April 2022. In total, 1.908 replies were collected, reflecting the opinions of 1.277 representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs) and 631 individual Syrians.

The survey focused on three areas:

1. Ways to amplify Syrian voices in public debate
2. Resources and funding to strengthen civil society and enable Syrian participation
3. Durable solutions, including individual prospects and conditions for return

Each area contained a number of questions relevant to the topic. The replies to these questions were analysed, including differences between individual and CSO priorities, as well as across gender and age, and between the various locations of the survey. This report presents the key findings, summarised here below:

1. Amplifying Syrian voices in public debate

Question 1. Key topics for international attention in the coming year

Respondents were asked which topics (out of 18) should receive international attention in the coming year. The top five areas selected by individual respondents were: i) Livelihoods, ii) Food assistance/security, iii) Protection (including gender-based violence), iv) Social service delivery, and v) Returns/durable solutions. Overall, CSOs also focused on livelihoods and service delivery, but also frequently selected political goals including governance, democracy, and a political settlement.

Question 2. Enabling elements to amplify Syrian voices

The majority of respondents, individual or CSO, across the regions and across demographics, agreed that a safe/secure environment free from interference from authorities is crucial to empower Syrians to engage in public debate. The second most selected option for individuals was capacity building, while CSOs identified political support.

Question 3. Key actors

Individuals highlighted the importance of strengthening international/regional actors to ensure Syrian perspectives are taken into account; secondarily, individuals identified the need to strengthen three local categories of actors (community members, community organisations, and local NGOs) as the next most important. CSOs identified these three local categories most frequently. Some CSO participants also voiced frustration with the lack of opportunities for engagement of Syrians (or perceived low quality of these opportunities) in international decision-making.

Question 4. Areas where Syrian voices must be amplified

Individuals overwhelmingly selected “dialogue with host countries for a sustainable response to the refugee crisis” as the most important area for Syrian voices to be heard - at much higher rates than CSOs selected this option. CSO respondents indicated that Syrian voices are most needed in the improvement of provision of basic service delivery. This, together with the provision of information to displaced people about their rights, rated second most selected by individual Syrian respondents.

2. Resources and funding

Question 5. Resources and capacities

Both individuals and CSOs highlighted capacity-building most often as the most-needed resource. There was also agreement on the need for additional funding, increased political support, and political will of host countries.

Question 6. Funding

Respondents agreed that direct funding to local organisations is the most efficient form. However, individuals also indicated support for more open calls for proposals, perhaps suggesting interest in increased diversity of funding streams and eligible recipients.

3. Durable solutions

Question 7. Conditions for return

Across all categories, respondents selected physical safety and respect of fundamental freedoms and human rights as the most important preconditions for returns. A high proportion also indicated “there can be no voluntary, safe and dignified return without a political settlement.” All demographics also ranked the absence of forced conscription highly as precondition.

Question 8. Prospects

Only individual respondents were asked where they see themselves in 5 to 10 years. 24.3% of respondents expected to be in Syria’s neighbouring countries, 12.8% in Syria while 20% selected other areas or preferred not to answer. 44.2% indicated that they expect to be in Europe.

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiation
EiE	Education in Emergencies
EU	European Union
HLP	Housing, Land and Property
HQ	Headquarter
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
NNGO	National Non-Governmental Organisation
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

1. Introduction

On 9 and 10 May 2022, the European Union will host the sixth Brussels Conference on “Supporting the future of Syria and the region.” The first day will be devoted to a Day of Dialogue, inviting to a conversation between civil society representatives, relevant Ministers/principals and decision-makers from the countries neighbouring Syria and institutional stakeholders (EU, UN) and donor countries. The Day of Dialogue will be composed of three sessions with panel discussions on i) Giving space to Syrian voices; ii) Youth and iii) Food assistance and food security.

To prepare for the conference, the European Union commissioned an online consultation to capture opinions and recommendations from civil society and individual Syrians in Syria and beyond, on how to amplify Syrian voices. Specific for this year was the direct outreach to individual Syrians, not per se affiliated with an organisation, which provided a comparative data analysis between individual Syrians and civil society organisations.

Methodology

The online consultation took the form of a survey, available online between 1 and 10 April 2022 in Arabic, English and Turkish. Respondents were actively encouraged via social media advertising to contribute with their opinions. The respondents were divided in two groups – representatives of civil society and individual Syrians, which were reached out to in slightly different ways but answered nearly the same set of substantive questions, in their language of choice. The replies were stored in a secure Upinion database, translated into English, analysed and visualised in this report. For the full methodology, refer to Annex 1.

2. The participants: demographic information

The survey was responded to by a total of 1.908 respondents, of which 1.277 representatives from civil society and 631 individual Syrian respondents. More details on the respondents are provided in the table and sections below. The responses from the survey covers 1.389 focus countries, as some of the 1.277 civil society organisations filled the survey for more than one country/location in Syria.

	<i>Civil society respondents</i>	<i>Individual respondents</i>
Number of participants	1.277	631
Number of focus countries	1.389	631

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

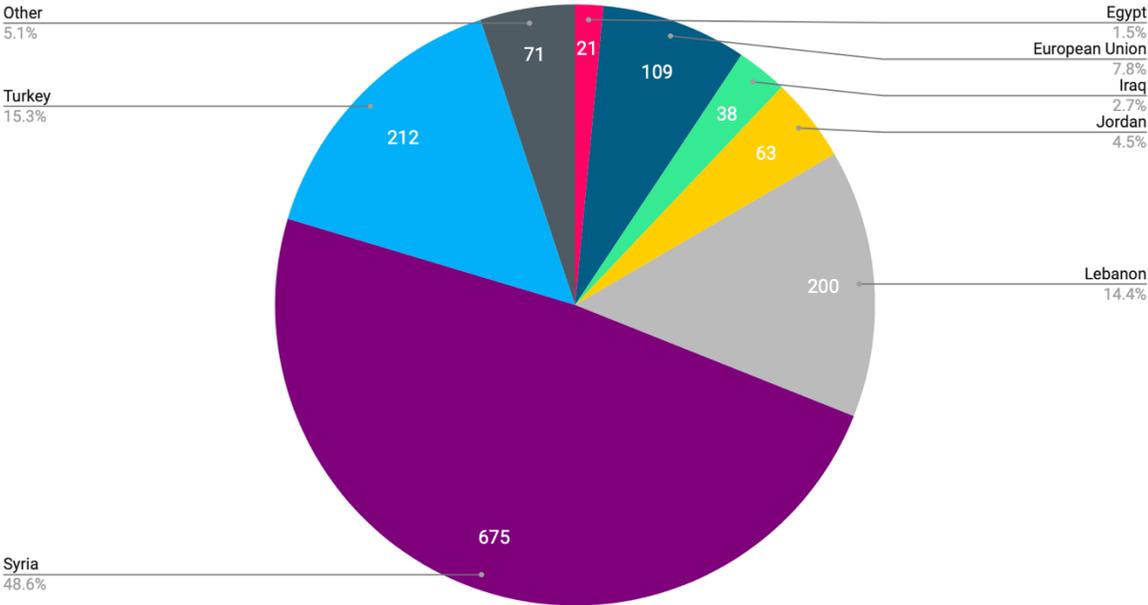


Figure 1a. Distribution of CSO responses from Syria, the region and diaspora (n=1,389)

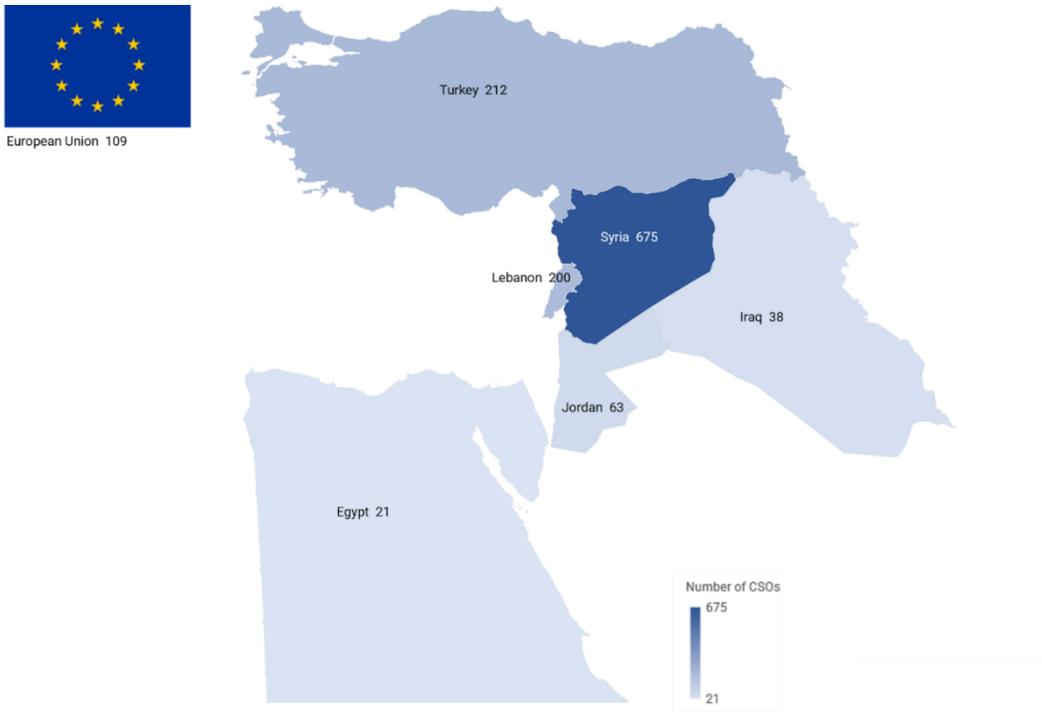


Figure 1b. Distribution of CSO responses from Syria, the region and diaspora (n=1.389¹)

The CSOs that had indicated “Syria” as their focus country were asked to further specify which area of Syria they focus on. A breakdown is shown below.

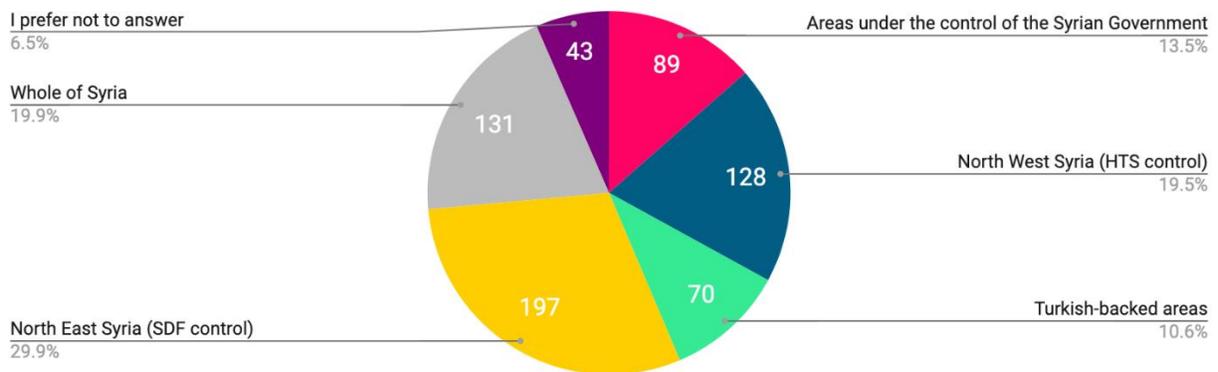


Figure 2. Distribution of CSOs in Syria (n=658)

¹ Respondents that indicated they are from “other” countries are not reflected on this map.

Type of organisations

As is illustrated in the bar chart below, the three main groups of CSO respondents represented local or community-based organisations, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and national non-governmental organisations (NNGOs).²



Figure 3. CSOs by type of organisation (n=1277)

Syrian individual respondents

631 Syrian individuals participated in the online consultation, the majority of whom are currently in Turkey and Lebanon³, as is visible on the map below. All individual respondents are of Syrian origin.

² The 16.6% 'I do not represent an organisation' includes i.a. consultants involved in refugee matters, activists, Syrian citizens, and people otherwise interested in contributing to this consultation.

³ Solid comparisons between CSO representatives and individual respondents have therefore been made mainly with regard to the Turkey and Lebanon data.

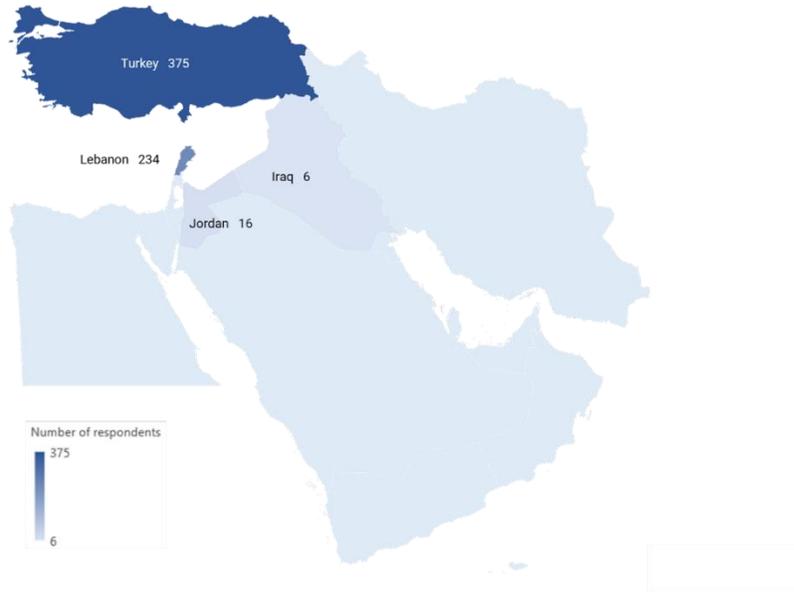


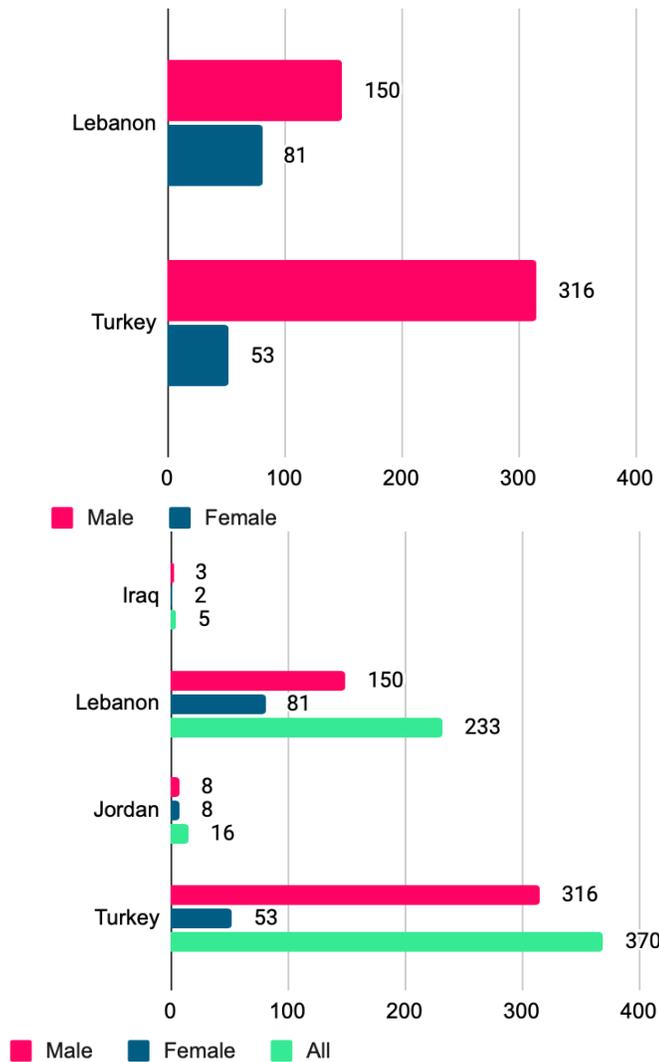
Figure 4. Distribution of Syrian individual respondents in the region and diaspora (n=631)

Gender and age

Over three-quarters (76%) of the Syrian individual respondents is male, which results in a male-female ratio of 3:1 in the survey.

Country	Male	Female	I prefer not to answer	All
Iraq	3	2	0	5
Lebanon	150	81	2	233
Jordan	8	8	0	16
Turkey	316	53	1	370
Total	477	144	3	624

Nearly one-fifth of Syrian individual respondents fall in the age group 18-24 years old and are considered youth. Only 3% of the sample are above 65 years of age.



Figures 5a and 5b. Gender distribution individual respondents (n=624)

3. Data findings

3.1 Major theme 1: Ways to Amplify Syrian Voices in Public Debate

Key topics for international attention in the coming year

The first theme of the survey concerned Syrian participation and the amplification of their voices. Respondents were asked four questions under this theme.

Q1: Which topics would you consider most relevant in the current situation as focus for the international community in the coming 12 months?

Participants could select up to five topics out of 18 alternatives that they considered most relevant for the international community's focus.⁴ The top five areas selected by individual respondents were chosen at roughly equal rates: i) Livelihoods, ii) Food assistance/security, iii) Protection (including gender-based violence), iv) social service delivery, and v) Returns/durable solutions.

It is notable that each of these five focus areas were selected by nearly 50% of the total sample of individuals answering the question⁵. Taken together, this five-way split underscores the emergency situation faced by individuals in 2022, with a high emphasis among individuals on food security.

"International protection insurance assistance is needed for Syrians. Most Syrians live below the poverty line in diaspora countries and are exposed to violence and deportation, sometimes even forced migration, detention, and execution. I was arrested by the Syrian regime four times, I was tortured, and confiscated my property. Now I am in Lebanon; no one assisted us....."

Male CSO representative, Lebanon

CSO respondents shared individuals' emphasis on the need for attention to livelihoods and social service delivery. But otherwise, their priorities were more evenly split between the 17 categories⁶. CSOs emphasised as crucial the need for dialogue with Syrians generally, and support for local NGOs specifically. These representatives, however, placed greater emphasis on political goals: they highlighted governance, democracy, and rule of law; justice and accountability; and a political settlement as high priority topics. Individuals supported these topics too, but at lower rates.

⁴As participants could select up to 5 choices, percentages do not add up to 100 percent. Results are presented as percentages in order to facilitate comparison between individual and CSO priorities, given different numbers of each type of participant.

⁵ Total n=601; n for each category = 291, 294, 259, 263, and 277, respectively.

⁶ Excluding the last 'I do not have input'.

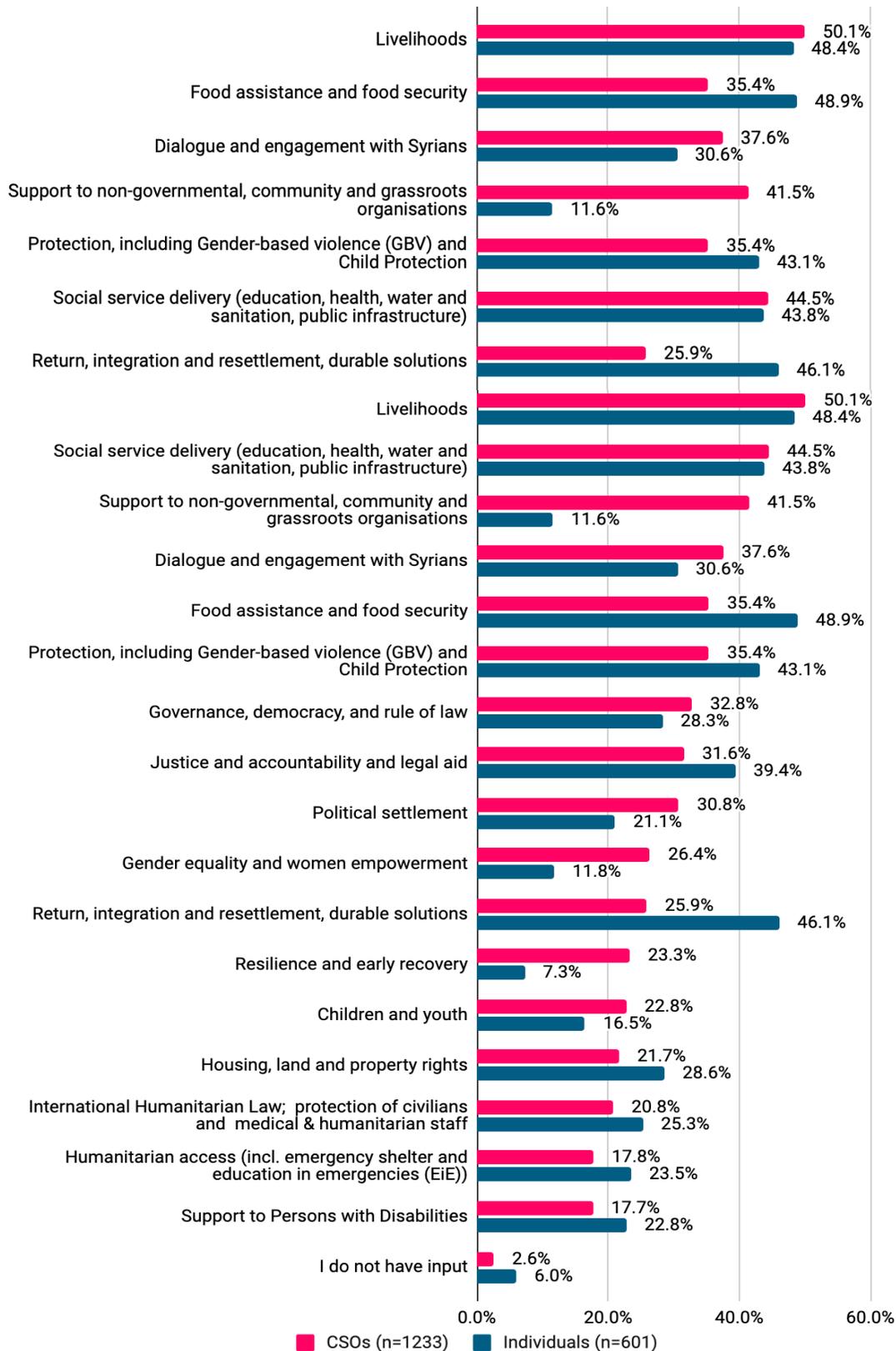


Figure 6. Most relevant topics for international focus - CSOs and individuals

The biggest difference between the two groups was the low emphasis of individuals on support for non-governmental, community, and grassroots organizations. While 41.5% of CSO representatives selected this option, only 11.5% of individuals did.

Individuals selected the “return, integration and resettlement, and durable solutions” option frequently – at nearly twice as frequently as CSOs – making this option the third-most frequently selected. Individuals supported these topics too, but at lower rates.

A few other important observations emerged in both CSO and individual responses: a markedly low emphasis on gender equality and women’s empowerment and a relatively low emphasis on children and youth. The former received much less emphasis by individuals (11.8% of whom selected it) than by CSO representatives (26.4%).

Two findings stand out within the CSO group: the low emphasis on humanitarian access and on persons with disabilities. The former is particularly surprising given the challenges faced over the past several years to secure and maintain humanitarian access through United Nation Security Council authorizations.

Disaggregated results between localities and gender

CSOs based in the European Union selected governance, democracy, and rule of law; dialogue with Syrians; and political settlement as their highest priorities, while ranking basic needs relatively low.

CSOs from Lebanon highlighted food security most frequently - this was the only country where this appeared as the number one selection. The second-highest selection in Lebanon was protection. Only Lebanon and Turkey have this ranked so high.

Respondents from Turkey followed similar trends to Lebanon but placed greater emphasis on dispute resolution issues, such as rule of law, democracy, legal aid, dialogue with Syrians, and justice and accountability.

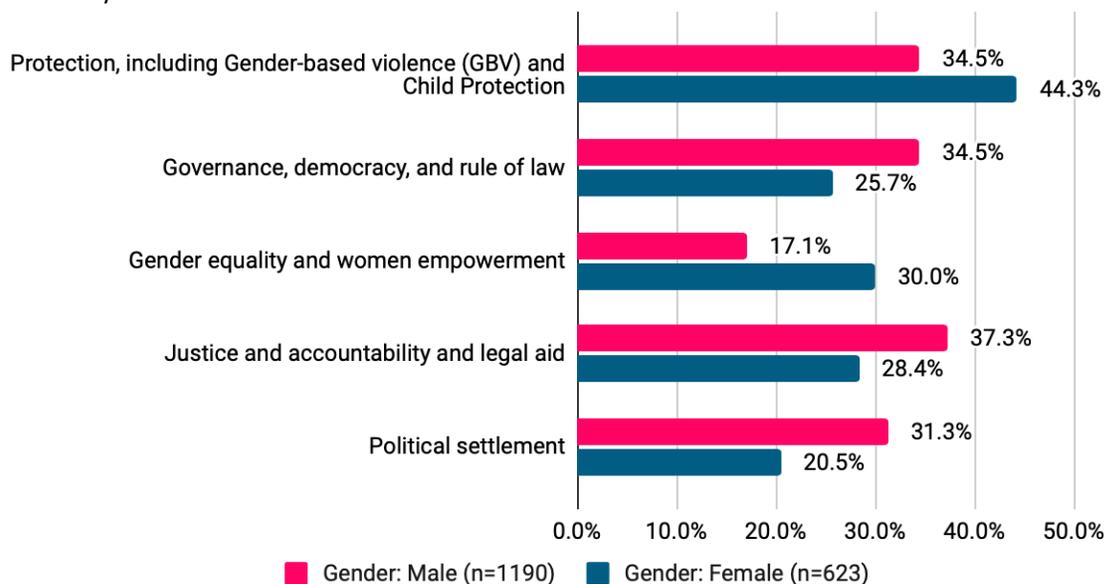


Figure 7. Most relevant topics for international focus – Women (n=623) and men (n=1190)

The overall pattern of results held true across gender and age categories, with some small variation. For example, while the priorities were largely the same across gender, by far the biggest difference referred to gender equality and women's empowerment, which women selected at nearly double the rate of men. Women also placed more emphasis on protection than men did. Men instead tended to select political goals at somewhat higher rates: governance, democracy, and rule of law; justice, accountability, and legal aid; and political settlement, were all higher among men than women. Key divergences between genders are illustrated above.

Across age categories, the patterns likewise held mostly steady. Older individuals placed much greater emphasis on governance, democracy, and rule of law (46.2%) than on livelihoods (30.8%); for the two younger age brackets, that emphasis was reversed (livelihoods garnered near 50% for both; governance was selected by 23% of the youngest and 32% of the middle age tier).

Enabling elements to amplify Syrian voices

Q2: What is particularly important to enable Syrians to engage more in public debate on the future of their country/policies involving them? (Maximum of four choices)

Respondents from both groups agreed on what they consider the most important factor that would enable Syrians to engage more in policymaking: the existence of a safe, secure environment free from official interference. The focus on safety from interference by authorities was consistent across all countries and regions within Syria; the top four selections also remained the same across the region, though with some shuffling in the order.

CSOs chose political will and support next, while individuals chose human resources and capacity.

"There must be an internationally recognized civilian body located inside Syria. [Which] represent all segments of society, including non-governmental organisations and unions. Syrian society must accept this body before it conveys the needs of the Syrian people to international stakeholders; this can be done through long-term dialogues. Organised and with a clear goal and interviews with the media." Male NGO representative, Syria

The least-selected options were also revealing. Both individuals and CSOs selected the same three categories least frequently: Understanding of institutional processes, access to information, and time to engage. Yet, an individual respondent made the following observation:

"[Syrians] have a fundamental problem of meeting the necessities of essential life, and they have no time and energy to be involved in a political process." Female CSO representative, Turkey

A few respondents suggested additional factors that would contribute to Syrians' ability to engage. One listed simply:

"Freedom of expression; - Protection from threats; - The liberation of detainees; - Abolish the security forces; -Fair elections". Female CSO representative, Turkey

A female INGO representative (Syria) highlighted the interplay of economic and political factors, noting that Syrians needed *"economic empowerment [because] a lot of Syrians move away from [civic] engagement to prioritise livelihoods."*

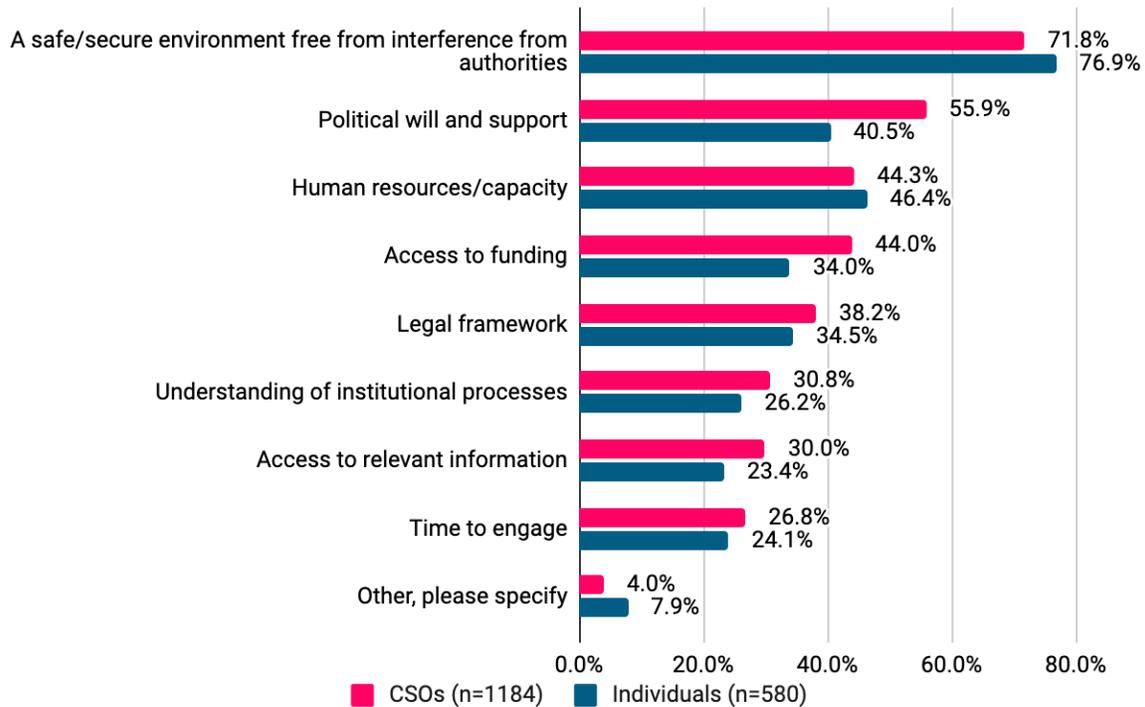


Figure 8. Needed to engage Syrians in public debate - CSOs and individuals

Key Actors

Q3: Who do you consider key actors that should be strengthened to ensure that Syrian voices are heard? Select a maximum of three choices.

Individual respondents selected most frequently international and regional organisations as key players to be strengthened to ensure Syrian voices are heard. CSOs' responses on the other hand selected the opposite – rating the three categories of local actors as far more important: community members, community organisations, and local NGOs.

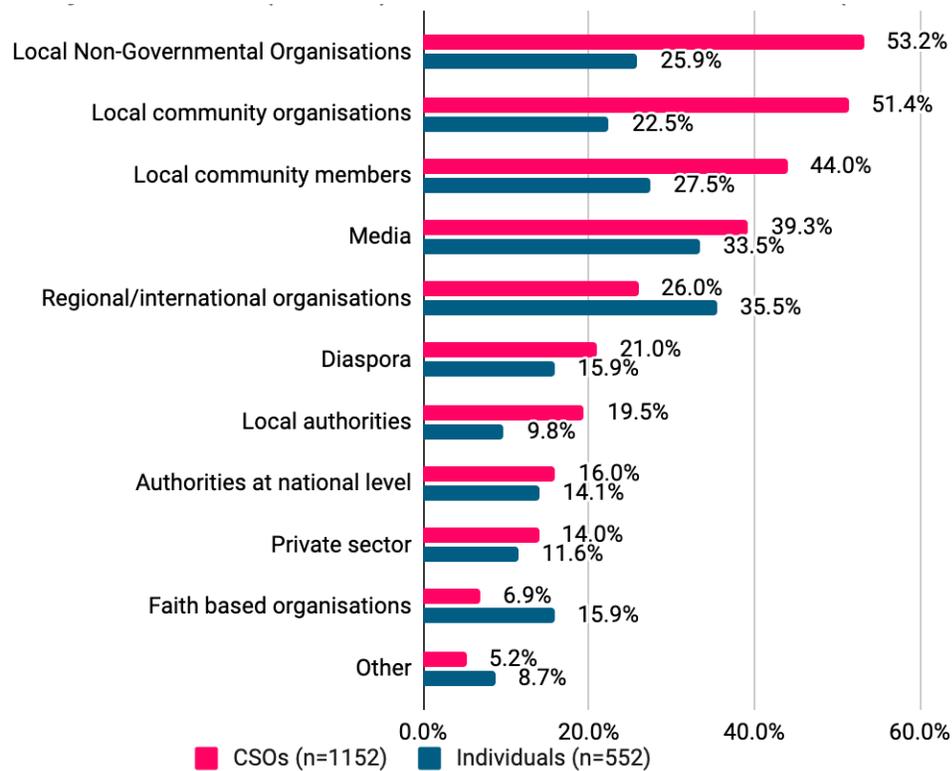


Figure 9. Which key actors should be strengthened - CSOs and individuals

This conclusion is supported by some answers to the open-ended questions, which indicated a wish for further engagement. As articulated by a female CSO respondent from Syria:

“We [...] encourage Syrians to be empowered, prioritize their demands and be engaged in dialogue, because they feel that society is talking on their behalf. They also need to be facilitated to travel to be on the ground at crucial meetings.” Female CSO respondent, Syria

Aside from individuals’ greater emphasis on international and regional actors, there was largely agreement between CSOs and individuals on the top five key actors, but in different order. Individuals placed relatively higher emphasis on local community members (versus community organisations and NGOs). Thus, while CSOs selected each local actor at higher rates than did individuals, individuals favoured “local community members” - in other words, individuals - over community organisations and NGOs. The corresponding finding for CSOs reinforces this point: they selected local NGOs and community organisations at higher rates than (individual) community members. Some respondents suggested novel political arrangements to empower Syrians:

“Supporting the establishment of a broad, democratic, secular political organisation that includes a large group of Syrian elites that can mobilise a large number of Syrians. Its work is institutionalised and supported financially by the European Union to be a body capable of participating powerfully in the administration of Syria through the process of a political solution based on a genuine political transition to a post-Assad political system.” Male CSO representative, the EU

Each group placed a relatively low emphasis on both local and national authorities, but within this ranking, individuals indicated a higher emphasis on national authorities compared to local, whereas for CSOs, the reverse pattern held. This may reflect the importance of local partnerships for CSO participants.

The media was recognized as a key player for both types of respondents. Several quotes and disaggregation of the data shed further light on how respondents viewed this key player:

“First, as a Syrian society, we must know who represents us abroad. Many people have entrusted themselves to speak on behalf of the Syrian people. As Syrians, we must make, in every country in which there are a large number of Syrians, such as Turkey, Germany, and other countries that host the Syrians, a party or movement that brings together our opinions, ideas, and requirements to convey the correct image of our demands and problems. It is also necessary to shed light on the successes of the Syrians in all countries of the world and their suffering to convey the correct image that represents us, and not the image created by the media.” Male individual respondent, Turkey

These sentiments indicate that respondents recognize the key role that media play in shaping discussions and perceptions of Syrians, and that at least some are dissatisfied with the way the (international) media are representing Syrian voices.

Disaggregated results between localities and age

Country breakdowns of individual responses yielded similar results to overall individuals. In Lebanon⁷, international/regional organisations were the most selected option, with media also highly selected. In Turkey, international/regional organisations were second to the top, while Syrians within Syria also selected this option at relatively high rates, though not as highly as they selected local organisations and individuals. These selections likely reflect the perceived power of both international/regional organisations and the media, both of which can be seen as key allies needed to amplify Syrian voices.

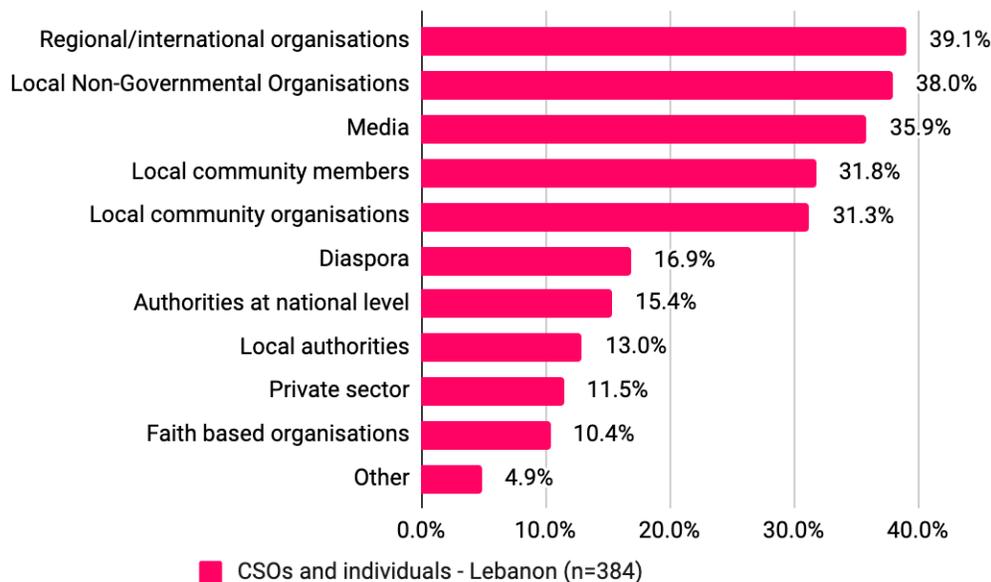


Figure 10. Which key actors strengthened - CSOs and individuals combined - Lebanon

⁷ And Jordan, though n=16 in Jordan and thus too low to draw conclusions off.

The combined results of individual and CSO responses from Lebanon are summarised above, showing the trends discussed.

Disaggregating by region, we see that EU CSO respondents selected most frequently media as an actor that needs to be strengthened. European CSO respondents also selected diaspora frequently, an intuitive finding (they likely *are* members of the diaspora, after all, or work most closely with these individuals in Europe). But even so, these respondents selected local community organisations and NGOs even more highly than diaspora.

One interesting pattern emerged by age: the younger the respondent, the less likely they were to select local or national authorities. Indeed, only 7.5% of the youngest respondents selected local authorities, versus more than a quarter of the oldest respondents.

“Syrians are still far from decision-making places and are not fairly represented in the public debate due to difficulty accessing and expressing their vision and aspirations. And restricting representation to groups and segments that do not represent the vast majority, including women and other marginalised groups. So that the outputs lack comprehensiveness, transparency, and a touch of reality and needs.” Female CBO representative, Syria

Areas where Syrian voices must be amplified

Q4: In what areas is it particularly important that the voices of Syrians and local Syrian organisations are amplified? (Select a maximum of four choices)

This question elicited marked differences between the two types of respondents. Individuals overwhelmingly selected “dialogue with host countries for a sustainable response to the refugee crisis” as the most important area for Syrian voices to be heard - at much higher rates than CSOs selected this option.

For individuals, the next-most important areas for amplification of Syrian voices were an even split between the provision of basic service delivery and the provision of information about rights.

In contrast, CSO respondents indicated clearly that Syrian voices are most needed in the improvement of provision of basic service delivery (with lower emphasis on provision of information). One CSO participant, a male INGO representative inside Syria, noted that Syrian voices were needed “upstream” of the point of service delivery, at planning and grant-making stages:

“[Syrians’] participation in decision-making, at the higher levels of the grants process and operations [is needed].” Male INGO representative, Syria

In the middle tier of importance, CSOs focused on dialogue with host countries (individuals’ top selection), contributions to the political process inside Syria, and empowering Syrians, particularly women and youth.

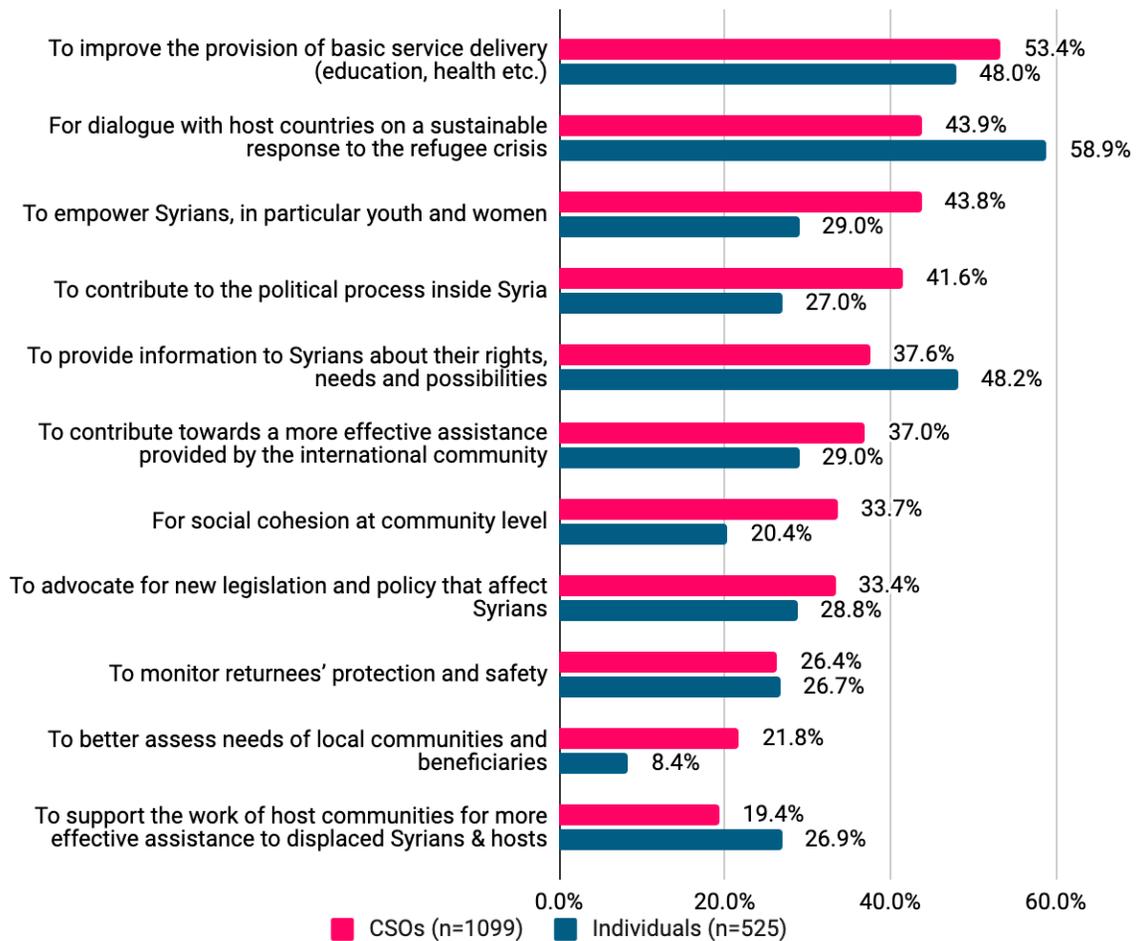


Figure 11. Areas where Syrian voices should be amplified - CSOs and individuals

Individuals had an even split between several options: advocacy for new legislation; monitoring of returnees' safety; more effective assistance provision by the international community; contributions to political processes inside Syria; supporting the work of host communities; and empowering Syrians especially women and youth. As one female CSO participant put it:

"We can encourage Syrians to be empowered, prioritise their demands and engage them in dialogue, because they feel that society is talking in their place." Female CSO representative, Syria

Finally, individuals' least-selected option is worth mentioning: they selected "assessing the needs of local communities and beneficiaries" even less frequently than "prefer not to answer."

3.2 Major theme 2: Resources and Funding

The second theme of the survey concerned resources and funding available and needed to strengthen civil society and enable Syrian participation. Respondents were asked two questions.

Resources and capacities

Q5: What resources do Syrian individuals/organisations across the region need most to have their voices heard more/to be publicly engaged more? *Select a maximum of four choices.*

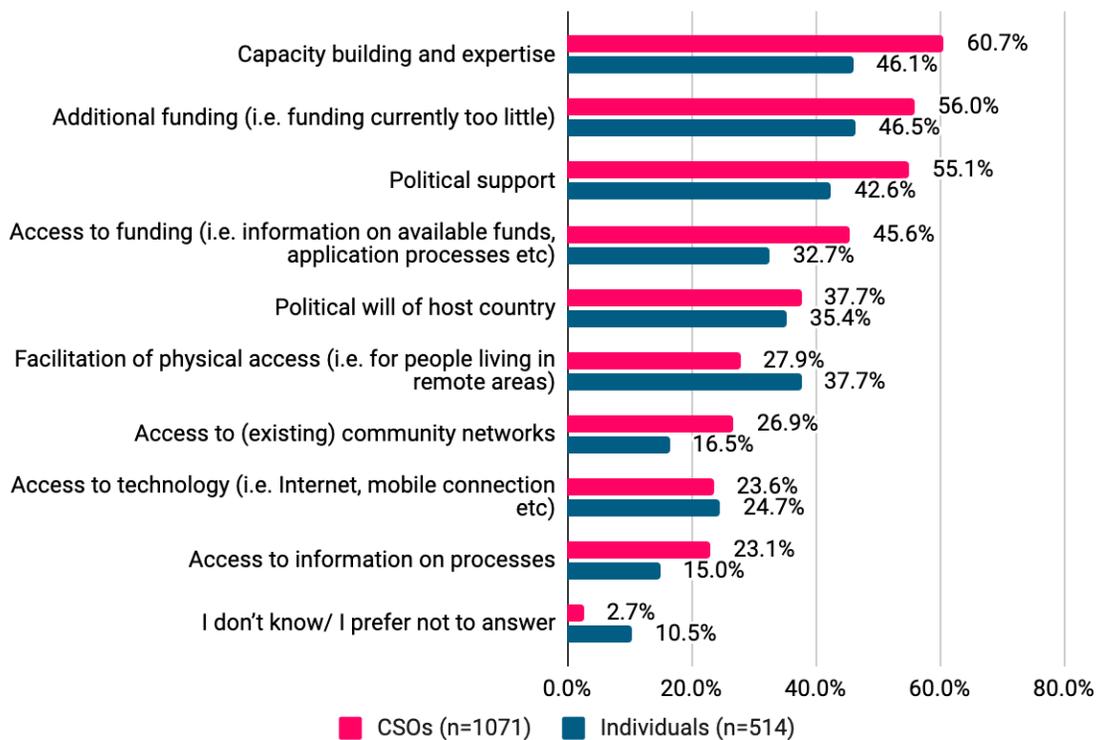


Figure 12. Resources needed for more engagement - CSOs and individuals

This question is similar to the question on how to empower Syrians to engage in public debate. However, this version includes more concrete options, such as physical access issues and access to technology. Nevertheless, the results were fairly similar across questions. Both CSOs and individuals indicated that capacity-building is essential for Syrians to engage publicly.

One INGO employee in Turkey shared: *"The Syrian population in Turkey who my organisation supports are seasonal agricultural labourers who are often unwilling to engage with authority figures. These populations need support in terms of outreach, consultation over time and coaching to help them engage in a meaningful way."*

Results were likewise similar between the two groups with other highly selected resources: additional funding, political support, and political will of the host country. Individuals selected additional funding at a very slightly higher rate than capacity building (but not statistically significant).

Individual respondents placed a higher emphasis on the facilitation of physical access, while CSOs rated that option relatively low. This category could include both ground transportation for accessing local dialogue opportunities as well as international travel to engage with high-level meetings on the future of Syria:

"We can encourage Syrians to be empowered, prioritise their demands and engage them in dialogue, because they feel that society is talking in their place. They also need to facilitate their travel to be on the ground at crucial meetings (emphasis added)." Female CSO representative - Syria

Disaggregated results between age, gender and localities

The main difference across age ranges is a slight escalation, with increasing age, of emphasis on the importance of political support. There was a drop in emphasis across age ranges on facilitation of physical access.

Results differed more strikingly between male and female respondents. Women overwhelmingly chose capacity building, then additional funding, access to funding, and political support for priorities 2, 3, and 4. Men likewise chose capacity building most, but placed much higher emphasis on political support (selecting it second-most often) and then additional funding. Access to funding came a distant 4th. Men also placed more emphasis on the political will of the host country, whereas women distributed their support across the remaining categories more evenly. Note that nearly twice as many men answered this question as women.

Within Syria, respondents from government-controlled and Turkish-backed areas emphasised the need for political support (selecting it second-most and most-frequently, respectively). Respondents in other areas focused more on capacity building and additional funding.

Individuals in Turkey likewise emphasised political support - generally, and specifically of the host country - and capacity building, whereas individuals in Lebanon overwhelmingly indicated the need for additional funding. In the open-ended responses, some also suggested novel resources to enhance Syrian engagement with international institutions:

"Creating a new mechanism for direct communication with Syrians and understanding their needs and demands in non-traditional ways. Such as establishing direct communication platforms between them and international institutions." Male CSO representative, Syria

Funding

Q6: What funding do you think is most efficient to strengthen Syrian civil society? Select a maximum of three choices.

When it comes to type of funding, individuals and CSOs agreed that direct funding to local organisations and funding to NGOs to provide support to those local actors were high priorities, however, individuals selected the “open call for proposals” option at the highest rate.



Figure 13. Most efficient type of funding - CSOs and individuals

Another difference between individuals and CSOs was a greater emphasis from individuals on private sector funding⁸. CSOs, on the other hand, selected direct funding to local NGOs and funding to capacity-building organisations at much higher rates, with private sector funding far behind.

Each group selected funding national public institutions least frequently, and loans were also less selected, though more often for individuals than for CSOs.

Disaggregated results between localities

These trends largely held true among different countries. Syrian CSO support for direct funding to local organisations was very high, more than capacity building, whereas Lebanon's and especially Jordan's CSOs

⁸ While each selected private funding the 4th most frequently, for individuals, it was roughly evenly selected with the three top selections.

placed higher emphasis on funding to capacity building organisations. All had relatively high support for open calls, too, but EU respondents selected this option most often.

Within Syria, there was a consensus that the most efficient form of funding is direct funding to local organisations followed by capacity building organisations - except in government-controlled areas, where open calls outstripped direct local funding and funds to capacity building organizations (ranked 2 and 3 respectively).

The youngest age group selected private sector funding at the highest rate (45.2% compared to 38.7% for the next highest, capacity building organizations). This was a marked difference from the other two age cohorts – the middle bracket favoured direct funding to local organizations, closely followed by capacity building, whereas the oldest bracket selected capacity building organizations most frequently.

The order of selections was the largely same across gender, except at the top: men selected direct funding to local organizations most frequently, whereas women selected that option second, after capacity building.

3.3 Major theme 3: Durable Solutions

The third and last theme of the survey concerned returns and the longer-term prospects for the individual respondents.

Conditions for return

Q7. What conditions should be in place in Syria for returns to be voluntary, safe and dignified?⁹
(Select a maximum of five choices)

The same conditions were selected most for both CSOs and individuals: physical safety and security, followed closely by respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms. A large portion of both groups also selected “there can be no voluntary, safe and dignified return without a political solution” - it ranked fourth, after an absence of military conscription for CSOs and job opportunities for individuals.

*“A political solution.
Non-exclusive rule.
A multitude of parties.
The salvation from the tyrant Bashar Assad.
The return of the displaced to their cities, villages, and homes.
The release of all detainees.
The end of the rule of the Assad family.”*
Male individual respondent

⁹ This question was posed to all respondents, both CSO and Syrian individual respondents.

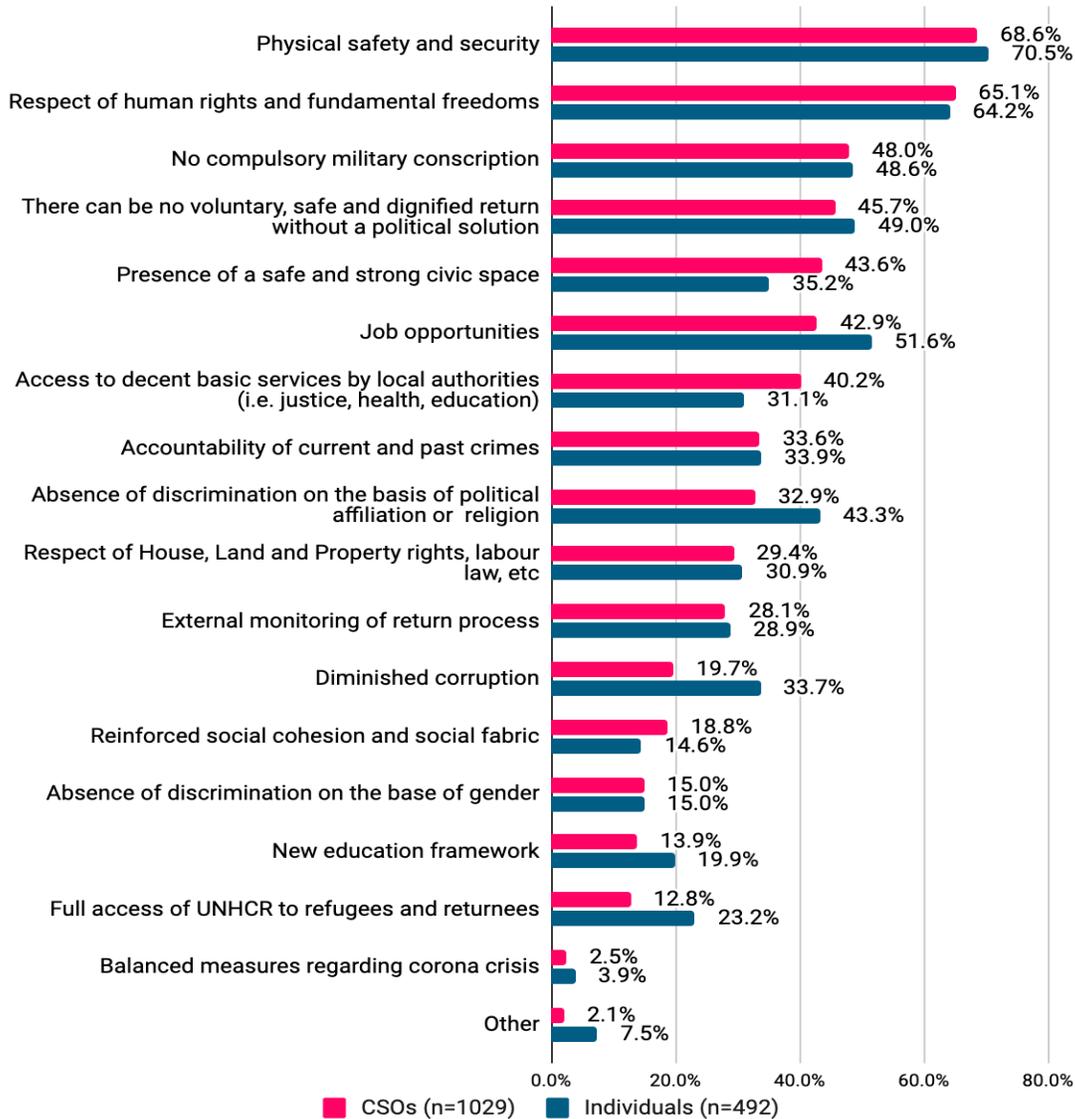


Figure 14. Conditions safe, dignified, voluntary return - CSOs and individuals

However, it is notable that individuals selected job opportunities as one of their top preconditions of return. CSO respondents ranked job opportunities lower, selecting it fifth most – just below “presence of a safe and strong civil society.”

Each group selected the absence of compulsory military service at almost identical rates (48 percent and 48.6 percent for CSOs and individuals, respectively). This high ranking and consistency show that the continued risk of conscription remains a huge barrier to returns.

Each group selected “balanced measures regarding the corona crisis” at the lowest rate.

Also, at the low end of the priority list were “reinforced social cohesion,” “a new educational framework,” and “absence of gender discrimination” for individuals, while CSOs selected educational framework, absence of gender discrimination, and, UNHCR access to returnees at relatively low rates.

There was a notable difference between individuals and CSOs on provision of basic services by authorities. Individuals rated this as significantly less important than CSOs (by approximately 10 percentage points).

Disaggregated results between age, gender and localities

These selections were relatively consistent across age ranges, with the same top two selections. However, the youngest age range (18-24) showed increased concern for both job opportunities and the absence of compulsory conscription.

Older respondents indicated relatively higher priority for accountability for past crimes and for civic space, while the youngest respondents placed less emphasis on civic space than the other age brackets, but more emphasis on absence of gender discrimination.

Results were strikingly similar across gender, with only minor variations (e.g., women selected access to services at slightly higher rates than men, leading to a higher rate of this selection than civic space; men selected safe civic space more frequently than they selected access to services).

Although only men are directly subject to conscription, the issue was selected roughly equally across gender (47.9% for women; 48.7% for men). This indicates that the concerns regarding conscription are equally important for both male and female individuals.

These patterns largely held across countries and regions as well, with the same top two (safety and fundamental freedoms/human rights) selected most. In Jordan there was a relatively higher emphasis on access to basic services - and strikingly low selection of “there can be no return without political settlement” (26.5 %). In contrast, 60% of respondents in Turkey selected a political settlement as a prerequisite to returns.

Prospects

This question was only posed to individual respondents.

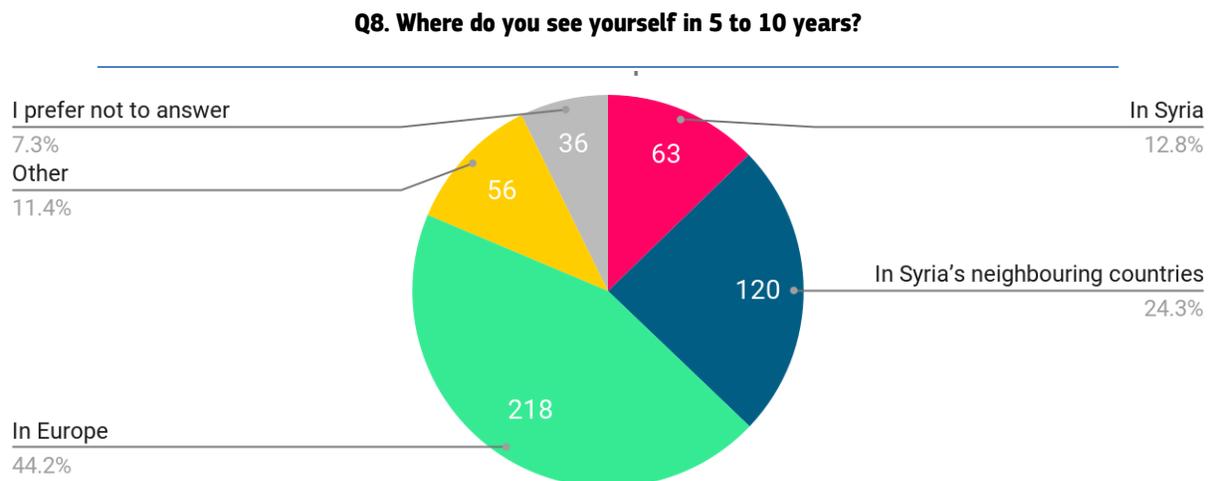


Figure 15. Plans 5-10 years - Individuals (n=493)

24,3% of respondents expected to be in Syria's neighbouring countries, 12.8% in Syria while 20% selected others areas or preferred not to answer. 44.2% indicated that they expect to be in Europe, although the sample did not include anyone presently inside Europe.

Disaggregated results between age, gender and localities

Individuals¹⁰ in each age range selected the EU at the highest rate among the options, but a relatively higher proportion of older respondents indicate that they expect to return to Syria within this timeframe.

Although pluralities of both men and women indicated that they saw themselves in Europe, relatively more men than women did select that they expected to be inside Syria in 5-10 years. In contrast, 52.8% of women selected Europe.

Conclusion

In this year's consultation with civil society, individuals and representatives from civil society organisations across the region and beyond voiced concern and hope as they articulated their key priorities for international action in the coming year and recommended strategies to amplify Syrian voices in public discourse. They identified the key actors that should be strengthened, and selected the forms of funding and types of resources that are needed. And they shared their hopes for the future, including their individual prospects and the conditions they feel are required for a safe return to Syria.

¹⁰ Note that the relatively low total number of individual respondents means that subdividing by age leads to small sample sizes - especially above 65 - so these results may lack the robustness of the rest of the analysis.

Annex I. Survey

See separate PDF document titled 'Annex I. BVIC - Online Consultation - Survey

Annex II. Methodology

Upinion

Upinion is an online research platform that maintains contact with and collects data from respondents all over the world, in a secure manner. Read more about Upinion's mission and the privacy and security regulations we adhere to at www.upinion.com.

Outreach

In order to include a range of Syrian voices across backgrounds, beliefs, and daily occupations, this consultation invited participation from not only Syrian civil society organisations in Syria, the region, and the EU, but also Syrian individuals in Syria's neighbouring countries¹¹. Hence, the voices of Syrians who are not necessarily engaged in formal civil society activities are included in the consultation as well, adding a layer of richness to the data findings.

The consultation was held in Arabic, English and Turkish. The European Commission posted links to the survey on its social media channels and disseminated it to its partners, both in Brussels and at country level in the region that shared it further with a multiplier effect. Additionally, Upinion utilised its already existing panels of respondents in the region and conducted additional social media outreach to reach new Syrian individual respondents¹² in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq to participate in the consultation as well. Targeted Facebook Advertisements were posted, including a clear explanation of the consultation and an overview of what the survey would look like. This outreach was conducted in Arabic.

The survey

CSO and Syrian individual respondents received nearly the same set of substantive questions.¹³ However, CSO representatives answered a number of additional organization-related questions about the type of CSO they work/volunteer for, and what the country/ies of focus is/are. A single CSO respondent could answer the

¹¹ Outreach for individual respondents in Syria itself was not possible due to safety and security and logistical obstacles.

¹² Syrian individuals that indicated they do work or volunteer for a CSO, were led to the CSO conversation as well and counted under this group.

¹³ Syrian individual respondents received only one question about their prospects that CSO representatives did not receive, because it was not relevant from that angle.

substantive questions multiple times, once for each different country, or focus area in Syria. Both CSO representatives and Syrian individual respondents answered demographic questions.

Data

Upinion stored data collected from all language groups and survey flows for both CSOs and individual respondents during the consultation in its secure databases. The data were first translated into English. The data of respondents that started the consultation, but did not entirely finish it, have also been taken into consideration in this report, given that questions are not dependent on each other and that any input was considered valuable. Then analysis took place, which informed this report.

Several notable features emerge when the data are disaggregated by country of focus or residence. However, several of these countries represented such a small subset of the sample that conclusions cannot be meaningfully drawn from the data. Observations in the report are from those countries with significant-enough sample sizes.

Data limitations and challenges

- Time constraints: the time for participants to participate in the online consultation was limited to nine days.
- The online consultation for individual Syrian respondents was limited to people who have a Facebook account and an internet connection, for CSOs it was limited to those who have an internet connection.
- Data collection took place during the month of Ramadan, which may have limited CSO's working hours and people's willingness or availability to participate.
- As the same phrasing was used for both individual respondents and CSO representatives for comparison reasons, the survey might have been complicated or too rich in 'jargon' for individuals not familiar with this work context.
- In Iraq, Egypt, and Jordan, Upinion was limited in terms of outreach due to time and resources constraints.