European Union Roadmap for Civil Society Engagement

Baseline Study
February 2026

Acknowledgements

Firstly, it is an honour for our team to contribute to supporting local civil society in Syria. We firmly believe that civil society has been, and continues to be, an essential lifeline for the Syrian nation, both within the country and across the world. Throughout the years of conflict, instability, and uncertainty, the civil society in Syria has played a role in sustaining communities, responding to needs, advocating for rights, and preserving spaces for dialogue, participation, and collective resilience.

Through this study, we aim to support and call for more targeted and sustained support to local civil society by highlighting pathways, priorities, and thematic areas that are relevant to civil society actors and local communities alike. Our hope is that resources, technical assistance, connections, time, and collective efforts invested by national and international stakeholders are directed in ways that genuinely serve the interests, aspirations, and dignity of the Syrian people.

Secondly, this study would not have been possible without the commitment, courage, and generosity of many individuals and groups. We extend our sincere gratitude to the Delegation of the European Union to Syria, Aleph Strategies team, our lead researchers (Layla Zibar, PhD., Razan Brghol, and Belal Shukair), the data collection team in the ١٤ governorates in Syria, and participating local civil society organisations, international organisations, and community members.

We acknowledge the bravery of everyone involved across the different stages of this work from reflecting on and recalibrating the original Roadmap priorities, to designing the methodology, conducting data collection, and shaping the analysis and recommendations presented in this report. Engaging in open reflection and honest dialogue during such a rapidly-changing and uncertain period required trust, resilience, and a shared belief in the value of this collective endeavour.

Finally, it is imperative to note that the data collection for this study was completed by late December 2025. As such, the risks, limitations, analysis, priorities, findings, and recommendations presented within this document are informed by the context and dynamics prevailing at the time. Ongoing developments may continue to shape the environment in which civil society operates, underscoring the need for adaptive, responsive, and sustained engagement moving forward.

Search for Common Ground

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OUR MISSION is to transform the way the world deals with conflict, away from adversarial approaches and toward cooperative solutions.

WE BELIEVE that conflict is inevitable but violence is not. Conflict is a natural result of human diversity. When we deal with conflict adversarially, it generates polarization and violence. When we collaborate, conflict catalyzes positive change.

OUR VISION is a world where cooperation is the norm— where differences stimulate social progress, rather than precipitate violence.

Aleph Strategies

Aleph Strategies is an independent research, evaluation, and strategic advisory consultancy firm based in the United Kingdom and France, operating across the globe, including the Middle East and North Africa region. The firm supports governments, international organisations, foundations, and civil society actors in designing, delivering, and assessing programmes that generate sustainable and measurable impact. They combine rigorous quantitative and qualitative research methodologies with practical, context-sensitive advisory services to strengthen programme effectiveness worldwide. Their work spans monitoring, evaluation and learning, formative research, strategic planning, and organisational development, across a range of thematic areas, including civil society development, gender equality and youth development, media freedom, governance and anti-corruption, and cultural heritage, among others. This work was delivered by Asra Memon, Anne Piotte, Daniel Skillings, Marc Ghazali and Josette Khalil on behalf of Aleph Strategies.

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Acronyms

AANES	Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
CBO(s)	Community Based Organisation(s)
CSO(s)	Civil Society Organisation(s)
EU	European Union
FGD(s)	Focus Group Discussion(s)
GHA(s)	Government-Held Area(s)
HTS	Hayat Tahrir al-Sham
INGO(s)	International Non-Governmental Organisation(s)
KII(s)	Key Informant Interview(s)
NGO(s)	Non-Governmental Organisation(s)
OHA(s)	Opposition-Held Area(s)
SAHA(s)	Self-Administration Held Area(s)
SDF	Syrian Defence Forces
Search	Search for Common Ground
SNA	Syrian National Army
STG	Syrian Transitional Government

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1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose and Scope

Search for Common Ground (hereafter, Search) was commissioned by the European Union (EU) to generate a baseline analysis for the EU Roadmap for Civil Society Engagement (henceforth, 'Roadmap'). This was carried out in collaboration with Aleph Strategies, a team of Syrian researchers, and a local data collection team. The baseline study process was split in three phases
a) development of a monitoring methodology (July to mid-October 2025), **b)** data collection (mid-October to December 2025), and **c)** analysis and reporting (January to February 2026). Given the study timeline, the baseline report does not capture any contextual developments occurring after December 2025, particularly in Northeast Syria.

This document serves as the baseline report, establishing a benchmark for assessing future changes related to the Roadmap's priorities. The baseline report begins with a brief discussion on the initial Roadmap priorities, in view of Syria's current context, and presents the new priorities revised as part of the process. The baseline study then helps establish a reference point at impact and outcome levels across the two new priorities, namely; a) organisational sustainability and b) participatory governance , addressing both quantitative and qualitative indicators of change , using a specific monitoring methodology that was developed.

In addition, and importantly, this report also articulates a third priority for the Roadmap. During the process undertaken for the revision of the Roadmap priorities, stakeholder consultations identified a wide range of possible focus areas under Priority 3, all equally required and relevant for Syria. This baseline study therefore was used to indicate what should be prioritised, among the wide array, and where, and how civil society can be best supported by the EU. The report then draws key implications for the Roadmap implementation and presents actionable recommendations for the EU and other donors, as well as Syrian civil society actors.

Overall, the baseline report draws on extensive quantitative and qualitative research conducted between October 2025 and December 2025, engaging a wide range of stakeholders, including Syrian civil society organisations (CSOs) , international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), local communities, and power-holding actors , across all 14 governorates. With regard to the temporal scope of the research, the inquiry focused on the period starting 2023 until the present time. This focus has allowed an assessment of civil society dynamics in relation to the two Roadmap priorities before and after the major governance developments, such as the fall of Assad regime, establishment of the new government, ongoing factional clashes, and continued foreign interventions, among others.

As outlined in the EU Roadmap Monitoring Methodology, and in collaboration with Search and with input from the EU and informed by consultative interviews with Syrian civil society actors, Aleph Strategies undertook a revision of the EU Roadmap priorities to ensure alignment with dynamics in the post-Assad governance and civil society context.

The indicators are listed in the EU Roadmap Monitoring Methodology document.

We borrow the EU's definition here. For the EU, CSOs refers to CSOs include 'all non-state, not-for-profit structures, non-partisan and non-violent, through which people organise to pursue shared objectives and ideals, whether political, cultural, social or economic. Operating from the local to the national, regional and international levels, they comprise urban and rural, formal and informal organisations'. CSOs, as such, range from grassroots and community-based organisations to non-governmental organisations, women's organisations, indigenous communities' organisations, cultural organisations, faith-based organisations, foundations and research institutions, trade unions, cooperatives, fair trade networks, youth organisations and civic movements, social enterprises, professional and business associations, and the media. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2012:0492:FIN:EN:PDF

We define power-holding actors broadly to include experts and technocrats, local community leaders, local authorities, and national authorities within the current Syrian context. The use of this term is both practical and context aware. First, it ensures that, in addition to civil society actors and communities, input is collected from actors who hold varying degrees of power and authority across different levels of governance, across all Syrian governorates. Second, it reflects the contextual sensitivity that individuals may not always represent the official positions of the authorities with which they are associated but may still provide critical insights into civil society patterns related to the baseline learning topics at hand, again varying by governorates. This approach has allowed us to conduct the analysis responding to Syria's fragmented governance context.

1.2. Overview of the EU Roadmap

The Roadmap, in its initial form when published by the EU in 2023, was viewed as both a strategic document and a guiding mechanism to structure the EU's funding, partnerships, and dialogue with Syrian civil society. The EU Delegation regards it as a critical instrument for directing calls for proposals, operationalising partnerships, and engaging with civil actors beyond project-based interactions. The first version of Roadmap listed the following priorities:

- ***Priority 1*** - the Representation of Civil Society: focused on strengthening civic agency, community linkages, networks, and fair access to resources for CSOs, leveraging complementarity and community engagement focusing on youth and women empowerment

- ***Priority 2-*** Deliberative Democracy: centred on supporting inclusive dialogue for democratic reforms, bridging divides, and enabling civil society-led participation in decision-making, with women empowerment

- ***Priority 3-*** Public Well-being: aimed at enabling civic actors to contribute to resilience, recovery, and well-being, with a focus on local solutions to mitigate conflict, by establishing local agency and cross-geography value chains, and exploring new modalities of aid

- ***Priority 4-*** Self-Constitution: focused on strengthening CSO sustainability, governance, and equitable partnerships, and prompting synergies, knowledge creation and gender-responsive capacity development and improving donor funding processes

When developed three years ago, the Roadmap was guided by a consultation process that underpinned the overall analysis of the Syrian civil society landscape. This methodology used then sought to capture diverse perspectives from Syrian civil society actors as well as international stakeholders and those representing Syrian diaspora, ensuring the resultant priorities were grounded in evidence and representative of a wide spectrum of voices. The consultation included the following:

- ***Literature review***: existing reports, studies, and analyses to map out the existing knowledge base on Syrian civil society.
- ***Key informant interviews (KIIs):*** 27 with Syrian CSO experts and 6 with international stakeholders.
- ***Focus group discussions (FGDs):*** 12 with Syrian civil society actors.
- ***Validation workshops:*** Four sessions with diverse civil society participants to refine findings.

In total, 110 individuals took part in 45 consultations. Participation included balanced representation from across all Syrian contexts: Government-held areas (GHAs), Opposition-held areas (OHAs), Self-administration-held areas (SAHAs) in the Northeast, neighbouring countries, and the Syrian diaspora.

1.3. Context Analysis

Since the publication of the Roadmap in June 2023, Syria has undergone profound political, security, and socio-economic shifts that significantly reshape the environment in which civil society operates. The collapse of the Assad regime in December 2024 and the establishment of an interim authority in early 2025 marked a decisive shift in Syria's political trajectory, while simultaneously introducing a period of heightened uncertainty. These changes necessitate a reassessment of the assumptions underpinning the Roadmap and frame the baseline as a measurement taken during a transitional moment rather than within a stabilised post-conflict setting. ***The interim political order remains fragile and highly centralised.*** While the formation of a transitional government and the adoption of a provisional constitutional declaration signalled a move toward institutional reconfiguration, governance arrangements continue to concentrate power within a narrow executive structure.

Political participation has been uneven, and key segments of Syrian society, particularly Kurdish, Druze, Alawite, Christians, and women-led actors, have remained underrepresented in formal transition processes. As a result, civic space has opened selectively rather than comprehensively, shaped as much by informal negotiation and local power dynamics as by formal legal guarantees.

International engagement has shifted rapidly from isolation toward cautious reintegration. Partial sanctions relief and renewed diplomatic engagement have created openings for reconstruction planning and investment. These developments coexist with persistent international conditionality around inclusion, accountability, and minority protection. At the same time, the humanitarian system remains severely underfunded, and administrative restrictions continue to constrain civil society operations. This dual reality, emerging reconstruction narratives alongside ongoing humanitarian dependence, places CSOs in a complex position, navigating competing expectations, funding modalities, and political sensitivities.

Economically, Syria remains in a state of acute distress. Widespread poverty, high inflation, unemployment, and currency instability continue to define daily life for the majority of the population. While sanctions easing has enabled limited economic activity and investment, entrenched corruption, elite capture, and weak oversight mechanisms constrain inclusive recovery. These dynamics directly affect civil society sustainability: access to diversified funding remains limited, banking and compliance barriers persist, and dependence on short-term external funding continues to shape organisational behaviour and incentives.

Security conditions further complicate the operating environment. Although large-scale frontlines have largely receded, violence remains localised, fragmented, and driven by unresolved grievances, communal tensions, and competing armed actors. Recent mass violence in coastal and southern governorates illustrates the risks of collective punishment, weak reconciliation mechanisms, and perceived bias in security interventions. In this context, CSOs operate amid heightened social fragmentation, displacement, and distrust—factors that directly affect community engagement, participation, and perceptions of legitimacy.

Foundation for Defence of Democracies (FDD), Syria's National Dialogue Committee: A Facade of Inclusivity, 14 February 2025, available at: https://www.fdd.org/analysis/policy_briefs/2025/02/14/syrias-national-dialogue-committee-a-facade-of-inclusivity/

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Ismail, Z., 'Sham Cash Under Scrutiny: A Forensic Analysis of Syria's New E-Wallet', SMEX, 17 April 2025, https://smex.org/sham-cash-under-scrutiny-a-forensic-analysis-of-syrias-new-e-wallet/

Human Rights Watch, Syria: New Government Restricts Aid Operations, 12 May 2025. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/05/12/syria-new-government-restricts-aid-operations

Against this backdrop, Syrian civil society occupies an ambivalent position. The post-2024 period has seen renewed mobilisation around advocacy, service delivery, and community-based initiatives, with increased visibility for youth, women's networks, and local organisations. At the same time, CSOs face persistent structural constraints: limited influence over policy processes, uneven access to funding, regulatory ambiguity, and public scepticism linked to donor dependency and weak accountability mechanisms. Civil society legitimacy remains situational: strong in proximity-based service provision and advocacy, weaker in formal political influence and long-term institutional positioning.

This baseline is therefore situated at a critical juncture. Civil society is neither fully constrained nor fully enabled; civic space is neither closed nor consolidated. Instead, CSOs operate within a transitional environment characterised by partial openings, persistent risks, and deep structural challenges. The findings that follow should be read with this context in mind: as a snapshot of capacities, collaboration, and legitimacy at a moment of flux, where trajectories remain contested and outcomes are not yet determined.

Christou, W., 'The streets are empty, no one dares go outside': Syria's Alawites terrorised by revenge killings, The Guardian, 15 March 2025. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/mar/15/the-streets-are-empty-no-one-dares-go-outside-syrias-alawites-terrorised-by-revenge-killings

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Neumann, H., Supporting Syrian Civil Society: Insights from the Brussels Syria Conference, 18 March 2025. Available at: https://hannahneumann.eu/en/supporting-syrian-civil-society-insights-from-the-brussels-syria-conference/

1.4. New EU Roadmap Priorities

Syria's civil society continues to evolve in response to profound political, social, and institutional change. In light of recent developments in governance, it became imperative to review the EU Roadmap priorities, as significant shifts have occurred since their publication with direct implications for their continued relevance. In particular, the following key observations emerged.

- ***Clarifying the EU's role:*** The previous Roadmap risked framing EU support as a replacement for government support. The Roadmap's revision was necessary to affirm the EU's 'complementary' role and re-emphasise shared responsibility for civil society development, which is critical to mobilising more donor support.

- ***The role of civil society requires further review and strengthening.*** Civil society has the potential to play a greater role in governance and decision-making, yet this space remains limited or absent in many contexts. Consultations highlighted that CSOs are often confined to service delivery roles, with few opportunities to influence policy or represent community priorities. Recognising CSOs as governance actors are therefore critical to more inclusive and responsive decision-making processes.

- ***`Changed political and civic realities require clearer, more inclusive priorities:*** While the Roadmap's broad priorities, as framed in its initial version, remain relevant, Syria's post-regime context has altered who can participate in the civil society, whose voices are heard, and which topics receive attention . Despite improved mobility and relatively greater engagement space, Syrian civil society continues to witness marginalisation of grassroots organisations, women, youth, and locally embedded actors at large. This necessitates a shift in priorities to explicitly centre inclusion, clarify the core advocacy role of civil society, and better reflect the diversity of actors and capacities across the civic ecosystem .

- ***Peacebuilding priorities remain constrained by current operational models.*** Persistent insecurity, economic hardship, and social fragmentation require civil society actors to navigate immediate humanitarian needs alongside longer-term peacebuilding and social cohesion objectives. Informants underscored how prevailing donor approaches, often favouring large organisations and procedural compliance, limit the ability of smaller, locally rooted CSOs to contribute effectively to this agenda. Addressing these constraints will require shifts in priorities and funding models to better enable locally grounded actors to play meaningful roles in promoting public well-being and social cohesion.

- ***Syria faces a wide and complex range of needs, making prioritisation essential during the current transitional period.*** Several informants consulted agreed that Syria's needs are many. There was consensus during the inception phase of this baseline process that a more current study is required to identify the most urgent priorities for Syria's transition, informed directly by communities across all 14 governorates. This should be undertaken in parallel with an assessment of what CSOs can realistically deliver, where they can play the strongest roles, and how donors can best support CSOs to meet these needs.

Haid, H. (2025): Syria's expanding but fragile civic space: opportunities and risks in the post-Assad transition. Arab Reform Initiative. Available at: https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/syrias-expanding-but-fragile-civic-space/

CIHRS (2025): "We can't sit back and wait": Syria's transition through the eyes of civil society. Available at: https://cihrs.org/syrias-transition-through-the-eyes-of-civil-society/

In view of these observations, between August and October 2025, the relevant stakeholders (including the EU Delegation, Search for Common Ground, Aleph strategies, and the research team) convened to set the pathway forward for this assignment. It was collectively agreed that given the strategic importance of the Roadmap as a living framework, there is a need for ongoing monitoring and learning, and even ongoing assessment and recalibration of the Roadmap priorities and their relevance to the context and needs of Civil Society in Syria. This assignment therefore focused on refining and operationalising the Roadmap priorities and conducting a participatory monitoring system for the new priorities.

In view of the above, following changes to the old priorities were done:

- ***Merging Priority 1 and Priority 4***. There is clear overlap in themes of collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and capacity building. The merged priority will cover both the internal organisation and legitimacy of civil society actors, as well as their collaboration with one another.

- ***Retaining Priority 2.*** This priority is seen as highly critical in Syria's current context, more so than before. It provides a framework for civil society's role in inclusive dialogue and decision-making.

- ***Reframing Priority 3.*** The current framing of this priority is no longer relevant or viewed as a critical donor focus. Some elements, such as the role of CSOs in dialogue, peacebuilding, and capacity development, can be integrated into other priorities, while others warrant further exploration to inform a new and more clearly defined priority.

The recalibrated Roadmap priorities the priorities were tightened and now read as follows;

Priority 1 – Organisational Sustainability:
This priority responds to structural challenges facing Syrian civil society, including fragmentation, weak coordination, and donor-driven competition, which collectively undermine the influence and legitimacy of local actors. By strengthening collaboration, embedding accountability practices, and sequencing capacity and sustainability support after coordination is established, it positions CSOs to advocate more effectively and sustain their work.

Priority 2 – Participatory Governance:
This priority addresses Syria's deeply polarised context by strengthening inclusive spaces for dialogue that enable communities to influence decision-making. By linking community deliberation to governance processes, it seeks to rebuild trust, reduce exclusion, and lay the foundations for future democratic reform.

Priority 3 – Community Resilience:
This priority was not defined during the initial methodology development phase. A dedicated needs analysis was therefore conducted, as part of the data collection phase, to inform and define this priority. In summary, this priority focuses on strengthening civil society's role in community-level recovery and resilience. It aims to enable CSOs to sustain and expand reconciliation/social cohesion work and to better link livelihoods and economic recovery with peacebuilding, based on locally defined needs. We provide key findings and proposed results framework associated with this priority in its designated section below.

The old priorities include Priority 1 - the Representation of Civil Society: focused on strengthening civic agency, community linkages, networks, and fair access to resources for CSOs, leveraging complementarity and community engagement focusing on youth and women empowerment, Priority 2- Deliberative Democracy: centred on supporting inclusive dialogue for democratic reforms, bridging divides, and enabling civil society-led participation in decision-making, with women empowerment, Priority 3- Public Well-being: aimed at enabling civic actors to contribute to resilience, recovery, and well-being, with a focus on local solutions to mitigate conflict, by establishing local agency and cross-geography value chains, and exploring new modalities of aid, and Priority 4 - Self-Constitution: focused on strengthening CSO sustainability, governance, and equitable partnerships, and prompting synergies, knowledge creation and gender-responsive capacity development and improving donor funding processes.

1.5. Results Frameworks

Priority 1: Organisational Sustainability

Impact: Syrian CSOs and civic actors reshape and sustain civic space

	1	2	3
Outcome	Strengthened cross-disciplinary and trans-regional collaboration among CSOs and civic actors	Increased engagement of communities with CSOs as legitimate actors	Enhanced organisational capacities and sustainable management of CSOs
Outputs	1.1: Coordination platforms of CSOs and other civic actors are strengthened 1.2: Donor funding is designed to promote collaboration between large and small CSOs	2.1: Transparency and accountability mechanisms are developed and implemented 2.2: CSOs' capacity is strengthened to relay and respond effectively to community needs	3.1: Tailored capacity assessment processes and peer learning mechanisms are developed and implemented 3.2: Financial diversification is integrated into CSO operations

Priority 2: Participatory Governance

Impact: Syrian CSOs drive inclusive dialogue for shared decision-making

	1
Outcome	Improved processes that enables community involvement in decision-making
Outputs	1.1: Inclusive forums are convened by CSOs for communities and local authorities for dialogue. 1.2: Channels are created by CSOs for community input to reach decision-makers.

Priority 3: Community Resilience

Impact: Syrian communities experience resilience through CSO-led peace and recovery efforts.

	1
Outcome	Enhanced contribution by CSOs to peace and recovery by addressing social tensions and economic stress at community level.
Outputs	1.1: CSO-led reconciliation and social cohesion initiatives are sustained in conflict-affected communities. 1.2: Livelihoods and economic recovery initiatives and small-scale rehabilitation projects led by CSOs are expanded.

Table 1: Results Frameworks for Roadmap Priorities

2. Approach

2.1. Methodology

The monitoring methodology was developed through a phased and participatory process between July and October 2025. It began with consultations with civil society actors to revisit the relevance of the Roadmap priorities, surface contextual constraints, and identify what changes could realistically be monitored across Syria's fragmented operating environment. Initial insights from these consultations informed an Inclusive Design Workshop, where stakeholders collaboratively refined priorities, articulated results pathways, and translated them into measurable indicators. The draft methodology, including the indicator framework and proposed data collection approaches, was then reviewed during a Validation Workshop to test coherence, feasibility, and alignment with both EU requirements and civil society realities.

Sampling approaches were developed in parallel and refined iteratively across these stages. Given the absence of fully accurate population data on the total number of active CSOs and the size of community populations in Syria, sample sizes were determined using statistically acceptable thresholds rather than fixed population proportions. These were further adjusted based on feasibility, access, and security considerations across governorates, in consultation with the research team given their visibility and field experience in all governorates. The final sampling framework, informed by a combination of random, purposive, and stratified approaches - as shown below - reflects a balance between statistical robustness, inclusivity, and the practical constraints of operating in a complex and high-risk context.

The baseline study adopted a mixed-methods approach, relying primarily on primary data collected through direct consultations with four key stakeholder groups: local communities, INGOs and donors, CSOs, and power-holding actors. The study covered all 14 governorates - Al-Hasakah, Al-Quneitra, Aleppo, Ar-Raqqa, As-Suwayda, Damascus, Daraa, Deir ez-Zor, Hama, Homs, Idlib, Latakia, Rural Damascus, and Tartus. Despite the limitations affecting data collection, as outlined below, the study succeeded in gathering a wide and diverse range of data.

Methods	Description of Rationale and Use	Sample Collected
CSO Survey	The CSO survey aimed at targeting a broader population of CSOs. The CSO survey helped gather quantitative measures as listed in the indicators frameworks for the priorities. Specifically, the survey also captured the baseline status of practices and capacities around organisational sustainability (Priority 1) and participatory governance (Priority 2) of the actors. The survey also helped gather data for prioritisation of community and CSOs' needs to define Priority 3 and better understand the gaps in their existing work to meet community needs. The CSO survey data is disaggregated by governorate.	352 CSOs
Community Survey	The community survey aimed at establishing quantitative measures of community perceptions at the baseline against indicators established for Priority 1 and Priority 2. Similar to the CSO survey, the community survey also helped prioritise community needs to define Priority 3. The survey	459 community members

Methods	Description of Rationale and Use	Sample Collected
	provided disaggregated data on community perceptions, by governorate, gender, and age groups to identify any demographic-specific findings.	
Capacity Assessment Tool	A tailored capacity assessment tool was developed to provide a snapshot of CSO organisational capacity at the outset across domains. These domains include 1) governance and accountability, 2) structure and staffing, 3) finance, procurement, and operations, 4) sustainability and partnerships, 5) project and programme management, 6) coordination and networking, and 7) safety, security and PSEA policy. This tool which the CSOs self-populated created a baseline 'scorecard' of strengths and gaps across the identified capacity areas.	58 Capacity Assessment Scorecards
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) – community members	FGDs across all 14 governorates helped gather collective perceptions of communities (including women, youth, minority and marginalised groups) about aspects such as CSOs' role in facilitating dialogues, inclusivity, effectiveness of project delivery, etc. These discussions provided insight into how communities experience and assess CSO activities in practice. Additionally, the discussions also focussed on community priorities and needs, to inform priority 3. The FGD questions were designed to elicit direct community perspectives, supporting the validation and triangulation of findings generated through other data collection methods.	16 FGDs
Key Informant Interviews (KII) – CSOs, power-holding actors, and INGOs and donors	KIIs were aimed at capturing qualitative nuanced and detailed views of various stakeholders including CSOs, power-holding actors, and INGOs and donors currently operating in the context. A representative mix of CSOs was consulted. This included CSOs from all governorates and covering all types . Power-holding actors were drawn from four categories :	59 CSOs 35 power-holding actors 11 INGOs and donor organisations

Types of organisations include a) registered CSO / NGO, b) community-based organisation, c) grassroots initiative / local network, d) youth-led organisation / young group, e) women-led organisation / women's group, f) professional association / union, f) media organisation, g) culture / arts collective, h) diaspora-based organisation.

The rationale for using a broad category for powerholding actors reflects the varying levels of power and influence held by different actors within the Syrian context, as well as their association or lack of with both formal power structures, including national authorities, local authorities, and, those within the civil society sector, such as reconciliation or mediation committees.

Methods	Description of Rationale and Use	Sample Collected
	(a) local or tribal leaders; (b) local authority representatives; (c) national authority representatives; and (d) subject-matter experts or technocrats. Among INGOs and donor organisations was a mix of engagement platforms, international organisations, non-profit organisations, donor organisations and UN agencies. Questions for these interviews were designed to address qualitative indicators and to provide contextual depth to the quantitative indicators.	

Table 2: Data Collection Methods

Before the data collection began, a pilot of the data collection tools was conducted. The aim was to test their clarity, relevance, and feasibility in the Syrian context. Enumerators in each governorate administered a structured pilot using at least one survey-based tool and one qualitative tool. The pilot assessed question wording, flow, and contextual appropriateness, as well as the practicality of applying the tools in high-risk and sensitive settings, including coastal areas and As-Suwayda, and under varying connectivity conditions. Feedback was collected from enumerators and reviewed by the research team, leading to targeted revisions to reduce redundancies, improve clarity, and address linguistic and cultural sensitivities. The Arabic tools were refined based on field feedback and then translated into English to ensure consistency in final reporting. This process ensured that both the tools and enumerators were adequately prepared.

During the data collection, strict protocols were applied to ensure fulfilment of ethical standards. Informed consent was systematically integrated into enumerator training. Enumerators received clear guidance on securing voluntary participation, explaining the purpose of the study, and managing both in-person and digital consent procedures to ensure participants were fully informed, including during remote data collection. Confidentiality and data security were prioritised through strict protocols on secure data handling, transmission, and storage. Enumerators were trained to maintain neutrality and protect respondent anonymity, particularly in politically sensitive contexts, and mitigation measures were applied to safeguard personal data throughout the research process. No names were mentioned in the data and transcripts received for analysis. Protection and risk mitigation measures were embedded in field operations. Enumerators were recruited based on security awareness and local social acceptance, and data collection modalities were adapted according to risk levels, including the use of remote methods in high-risk areas. Where necessary, partnerships with registered local organisations provided institutional cover to protect enumerators, while continuous monitoring and regular check-ins enabled rapid responses to emerging security concerns.

Once data collection was completed, all quantitative data, collected through the Capacity Assessment Tool, CSO survey, and community survey, were compiled in Excel format. Each survey submission was stored on a centralised, end-to-end encrypted platform and reviewed by Aleph for completeness and internal consistency. In specific terms, all survey responses were screened for any missing or incomplete values or inconsistencies. Survey data were found to be largely complete, although responses to qualitative questions were sometimes brief. Where entries were incomplete or qualitative responses lacked sufficient detail, these were cross-checked against related survey questions and, where available, supporting qualitative data from within the survey or relevant interview data to inform interpretation. For non-critical questions, entries consisting of minimal qualitative responses (e.g. a few words) were excluded from the overall analysis, as their inclusion did not materially affect the robustness or completeness of the findings. Overall, the raw datasets were cross-checked against sampling lists provided during methodology development to confirm coverage, including verification that approximately.

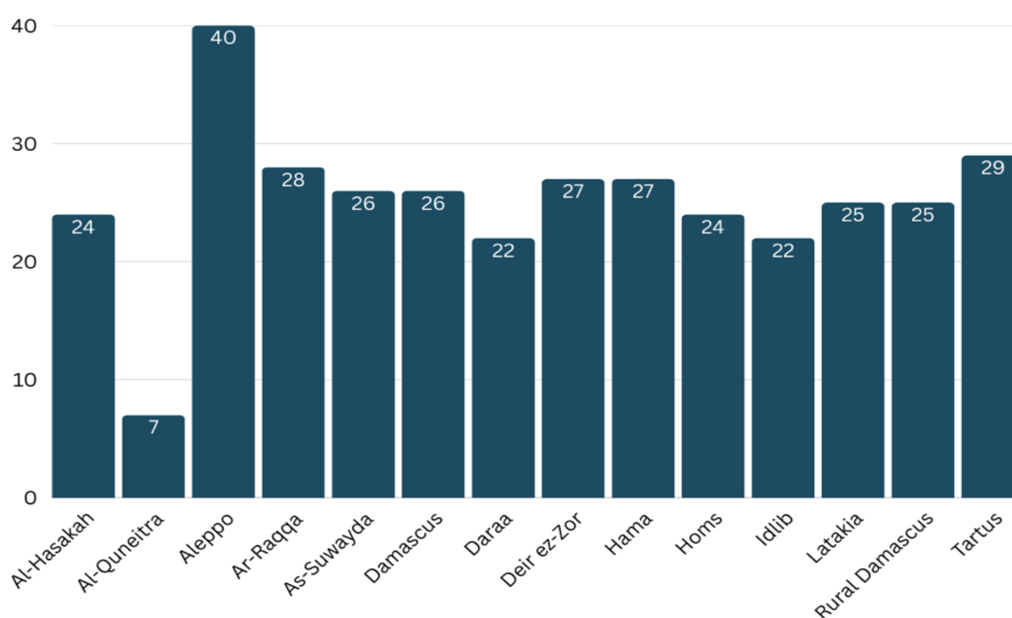
300 CSOs and 385 community members were surveyed, in line with the approved monitoring methodology. Additional checks were conducted to ensure representation across governorates and, for community respondents, by gender and age group. The quantitative data were synthesised in Excel, and descriptive statistics were generated to produce frequency counts and percentages for each indicator. Disaggregated analyses by governorate, gender, and age group were also conducted to inform the findings

All qualitative data, generated through KIIs and FGDs, were stored in Excel or Word format on the same secure shared drive. Data were anonymised prior to coding against the relevant indicators, with each indicator linked to a defined set of guiding questions. Interviews and discussions were initially transcribed in Arabic, the language of data collection, and subsequently translated into English, with unique identifiers assigned to each respondent. A thematic coding framework aligned with the indicator structure was applied to facilitate systematic analysis and enable comparison over time. A data management log was maintained to track file upload, transcription, and translation status, ensuring a transparent audit trail and supporting quality assurance. Coded data were analysed and findings were extracted and organised by indicator, forming the structure for the presentation of key findings.

For analysis, findings from the surveys were compared with evidence from KIIs and FGDs. Survey results were used to identify key trends and differences across governorates, gender, and age groups, wherever relevant for indicators in question, and these were checked against qualitative findings linked to the same indicators. Qualitative data were used to explain survey patterns, particularly where results varied across locations or groups, and provide contextual depth for explanation for specific findings. Where findings were consistent across data sources, confidence in the results increased; where differences appeared, interview and discussion data helped explain contextual factors influencing responses.

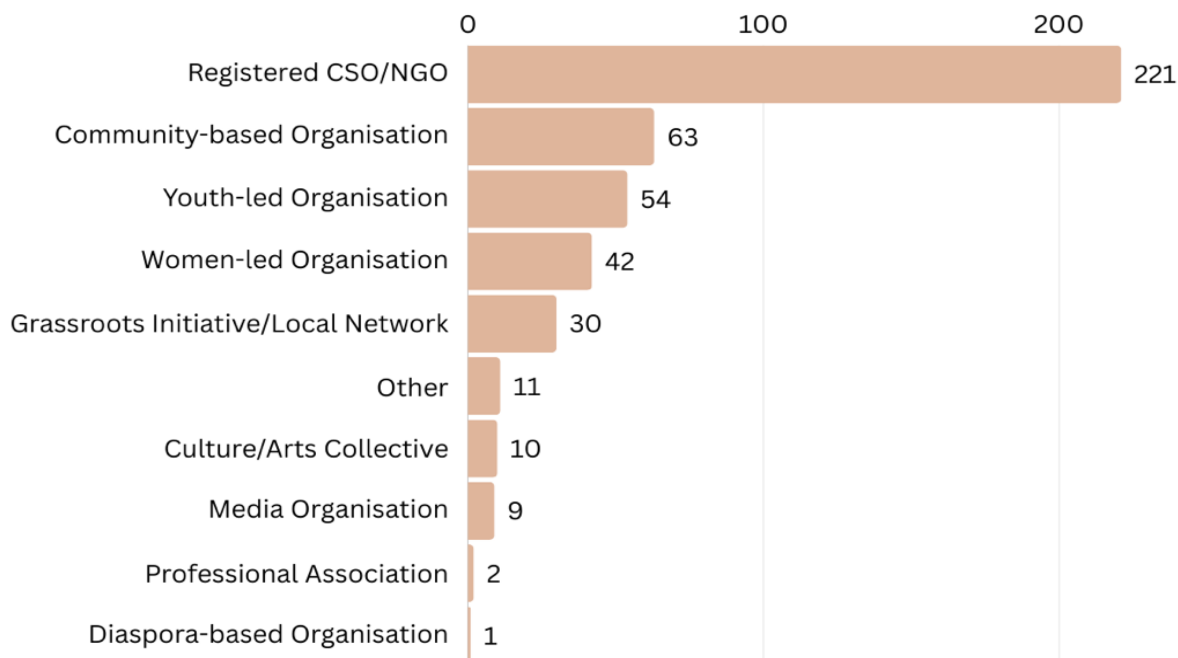
Despite best efforts at presenting a complete picture of Syria's civil society landscape as part of this baseline study, the study faced some limitations. We discuss these below.

CSO Survey. 352 CSOs were consulted through the CSO survey. The lowest number of responses (7) was recorded in Al-Quneitra, reflecting contextual constraints, including security risks and access limitations that restricted movement.



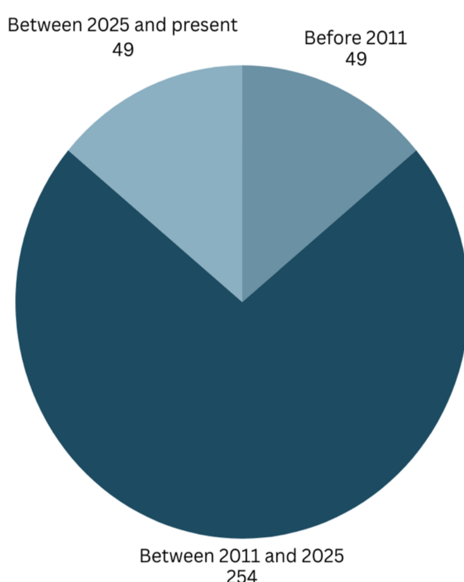
Graph 1: Number of CSO Survey respondents, disaggregated by governorate

Out of the 352 CSO respondents, most of the CSOs identified themselves as more than one type of organisation . The resulting sample reflected a diverse mix of larger, formally registered organisations alongside unregistered grassroots initiatives and community-based organisations. The sample also included strong representation from women-led and youth-led organisations.



Graph 2: Number of CSO Survey respondents, disaggregated by CSO type

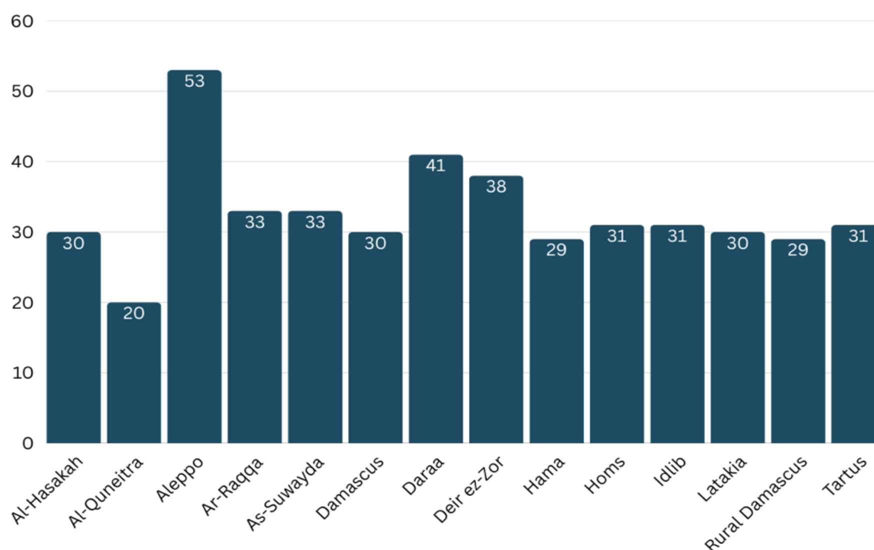
The CSO survey sample also included strong representation from organisations established before 2011, between 2011 and 2025, and from 2025 onwards. The highest proportion of the respondents are from between the 2011-2025 period. This distribution was important to ensure that perspectives were captured from CSOs formed under different governance contexts.



Graph 3: Number of CSO Survey respondents, disaggregated by year of establishment

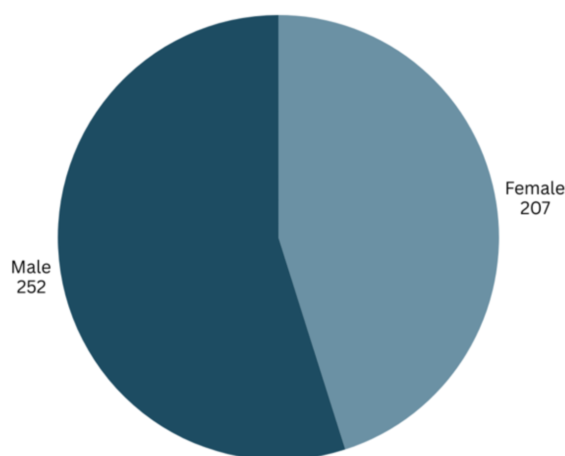
The Capacity Assessment Tool allowed CSOs to self-identify as more than one organisational type, recognising the hybrid and overlapping nature of civil society structures in practice. These included registered CSOs/NGOs, community-based organisations, grassroots initiatives, youth-led organisations, women-led organisations, professional associations, media organisations, culture and arts collectives, and diaspora-based organisations.

Community Survey. The community survey sample of 459 respondents represented a mix of community members from all 14 governorates, the highest being in Aleppo, and lowest in Al-Quneitra.

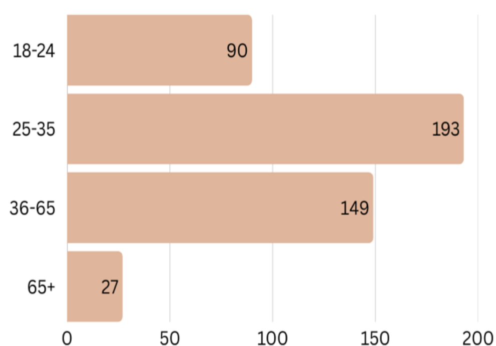


Graph 4: Number of Community Survey respondents, disaggregated by governorate

The community survey sample was nearly evenly split between male and female respondents, and a reasonable representation of the various age-groups.



Graph 5: Number of Community Survey respondents, disaggregated by gender



Graph 6: Number of Community Survey respondents, disaggregated by age-groups

Capacity Assessment Tool.
The Capacity Assessment tool was populated by a total of 58 CSOs across the 14 governorates and representing a mix of the types of CSOs. Details are presented below;

Governorate	Total
Al-Hasakah	4
Al-Quneitra	3
Aleppo	6
Ar-Raqqa	4
As-Suwayda	4
Daraa	4
Damascus	5

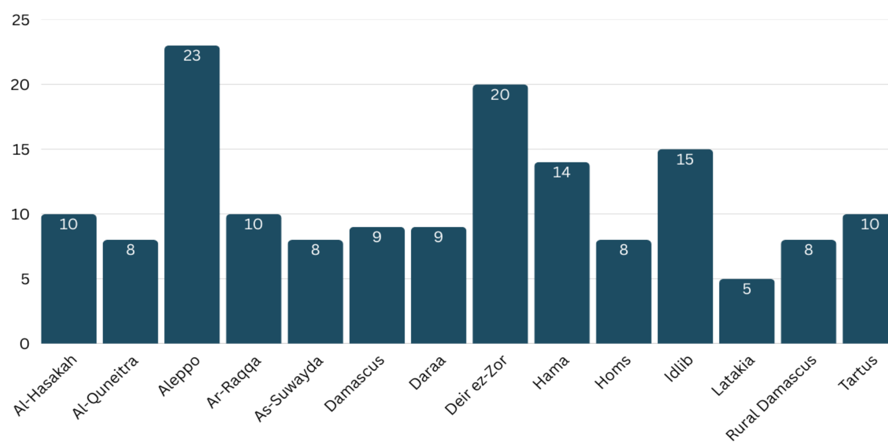
Governorate	Total
Deir ez-Zor	4
Hama	4
Homos	4
Idlib	4
Latakia	4
Rural Damascus	4
Tartus	4

Table 3: Number of Capacity Assessment Tool respondents, disaggregated by governorate

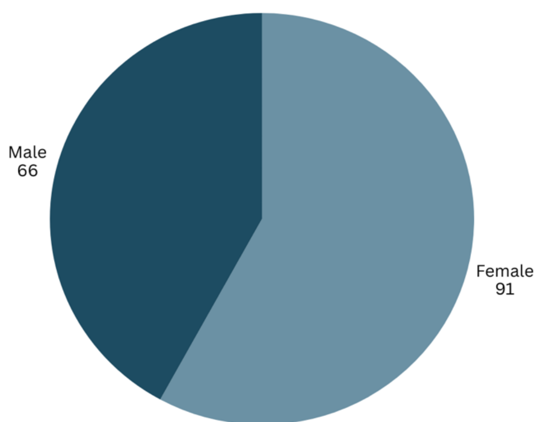
Most CSOs that completed the Capacity Assessment Tool identified themselves as registered CSOs or NGOs (36). In addition, some organisations self-identified as community-based organisations (6), women-led (6), youth-led organisations (3), media organisations (2), and grassroots initiatives (5). One CSO self-identified as ‘unlicensed (unregistered) CSO’.

FGDs.

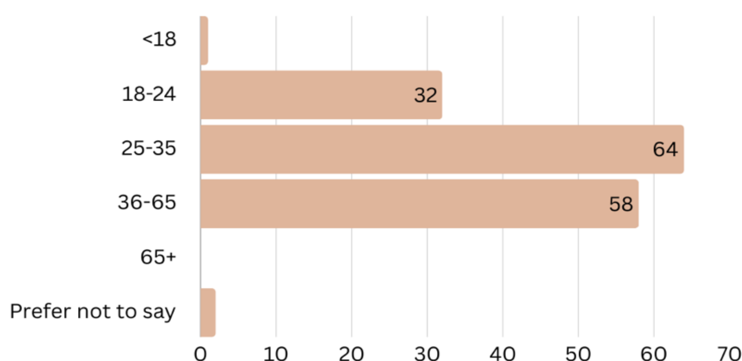
A total of 16 FGDs were conducted across all 14 governorates, reaching 157 community members. The sample included a good mix of men and women, and a representation from all age-groups, except for 65+.



Graph 7: Number of Community FGD respondents, disaggregated by governorate



Graph 8: Number of Community FGD respondents, disaggregated by gender



Graph 9: Number of Community FGD respondents, disaggregated by age-groups

KIIs.
These included 11 for INGOs and donors, 59 KIIs for CSOs, and 35 for power-holding actors. Details for each are indicated below.

International Organisation type	Total
UN Agencies	1
Donor Organisations	1
Civil Society Platforms	2
International Development Organisations	3
Non-Profit Organisations	4

Table 4: Number of INGO / Donor Organisation KII respondents, disaggregated by type

Governorate	Total
Al-Hasakah	4
Al-Quneitra	3
Aleppo	6
Ar-Raqqa	4
As-Suwayda	4
Daraa	5
Damascus	5

Governorate	Total
Deir ez-Zor	5
Hama	3
Homos	4
Idlib	4
Latakia	5
Rural Damascus	4
Tartus	3

Table 5: Number of CSO KII respondents, disaggregated by governorate

International Organisation type	Total
Local / tribal leaders	13
Experts / technocrats	11
Local authority representatives	7
National authority representatives	4

Table 6: Number of Power-holding Actor KIIs, disaggregated by type

In terms of geographic coverage, interviewees represented a wide range of governorates across Syria. Local and tribal leaders were interviewed from Al-Hasakah (1), Al-Quneitra (1), Aleppo (1), Ar-Raqqa (1), As-Suwayda (1), Daraa (2), Deir ez-Zor (1), Hama (1), Homs (1), Latakia (2), and Tartus (1). Experts and technocrats were drawn from Al-Hasakah (1), Ar-Raqqa (1), Damascus (1), Deir ez-Zor (2), Hama (1), Homs (1), Idlib (1), Latakia (1), Rural Damascus (1), and Tartus (1). Local authority representatives came from Aleppo (1), As-Suwayda (1), Deir ez-Zor (1), Hama (1), Homs (1), Idlib (1), and Rural Damascus (1), while national authority representatives were interviewed from Aleppo (2), Damascus (1), and Daraa (1), including two representatives from Ministry of Local Administration in Aleppo, one Member of Parliament from Daraa, and one representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In terms of roles, power-holding actors represented a wide range of positions across administrative, political, civil society, professional, religious, and community spheres. These included local and municipal leadership roles (e.g. heads of city, municipal, and neighbourhood councils; members of governorate and service councils; village and tribal leaders), government and public sector positions (e.g. Ministry of Local Administration, Directorate of Education, school administration, and education facilitators), civil society and advocacy roles (e.g. programme coordinators at NGOs/CSOs, civil and political activists, coordinators of civil society platforms, and civil action authority representatives), professional and technical roles (e.g. lawyers, members of the Lawyers' Syndicate, physicians, medical centre directors, and the Director of the Petroleum Institute), media and communications roles (e.g. journalists and the Vice President of the Syrian Kurdish Journalists Network), and religious leadership (e.g. priests of the Greek Orthodox Church, sheikhs, and representatives of the Islamic Council).

2.3. Challenges and Mitigation Strategy

The baseline data collection faced a set of challenges arising from Syria's limiting governance landscape and ongoing security risks across regions. These constraints affected the scope, depth, and consistency of the data collected. The overall mitigation strategy to mitigate the risks' impact on the baseline analysis is presented here as well, although some limitations such as limited triangulation and existence of self-reported data for some of the data collected still limited the depth of the findings.

Limitations

Operational constraints impacting safety and security.
Data collection was conducted across areas under the control of multiple authorities, including the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), the Syrian Transitional Government (STG), and central government actors, each with distinct governance arrangements and levels of openness. In government-held areas such as Damascus, Homs, and Tartus, stringent administrative and security controls limited access and slowed operations. In Al-Quneitra and Hama, in-person focus group discussions required formal approvals, contributing to delays. In Daraa and Homs, data collection was temporarily suspended after enumerators or CSO representatives reported activities to authorities out of fear, triggering official inquiries before work could resume. In contrast, authorities in STG-controlled areas of Deir ez-Zor declined to participate in interviews altogether, limiting comparative perspectives across governance contexts.

Mistrust and Access Constraints.
High levels of mistrust toward research processes were evident in several regions, particularly in coastal governorates and As-Suwayda. In coastal areas, recent violent conflicts heightened suspicion and reluctance to engage with enumerators. Identity-based sensitivities also shaped participation, including sectarian dynamics in Alawite and Druze areas and tribal dynamics in Al-Quneitra, Ar-Raqqa, and Daraa. In some cases, respondents were hesitant to engage with enumerators who did not share their demographic background.

In addition to mistrust, safety and security considerations significantly constrained outreach and data collection modalities. As a result, the study relied heavily on civil society organisations within the existing networks of the research team and Search for Common Ground to facilitate access and participation. It was not feasible to conduct an open or public call for participation, which limited the ability to reach CSOs and community members who are less visible, less connected to established networks, and unfamiliar with the study stakeholders. A more public and open data collection process would likely have enabled broader representation and engagement of a larger and more diverse group of CSOs and community members.

Capacity constraints.

The availability of qualified local enumerators varied significantly by governorate. In historically isolated areas such as Tartus and Latakia, limited local research experience constrained recruitment. Even where enumerators were available, many lacked methodological experience in systems-level civil society analysis or sensitive stakeholder interviewing, having primarily conducted basic needs assessments. As reported by the research team, heightened security concerns also necessitated greater reliance on remote and online data collection, limiting opportunities for in-depth probing during qualitative interviews. Despite additional training and close mentoring, these factors affected the depth and consistency of qualitative data from the coastal governorates and should be considered when interpreting findings from these areas.

Logistical challenges.

Unstable internet connectivity in several locations limited the effectiveness of digital data collection tools and required additional training on offline data capture and transmission. In high-risk areas, including Latakia, the reliance on remote interviews was necessary to mitigate security risks but reduced opportunities for in-depth engagement and observation compared to in-person methods.

Self-reported data.

Some findings in this report are based on self-reported data collected through CSO surveys and the capacity assessment tool. This is particularly with regards to CSOs capacities across key organisational areas. While qualitative data was gathered from community members, INGOs and power-holding actors to cross-check findings, responses may still be influenced by recall bias or strategic positioning, particularly in a context where access to funding, security considerations, and political sensitivities shape how civil society actors present their roles, capacities, and constraints. An objective verification of the self-reported data was not feasible within the scope of this study since such an exercise requires additional time, resources, and methodological inputs that were not available during the data collection and analysis processes. This is a crucial consideration for the subsequent monitoring processes. Keeping this in view, this may have affected the precision of certain findings and should be considered when interpreting results.

Limited triangulation due to the absence of a desk review. The absence of a desk review for certain indicators limited the study's ability to triangulate primary data, particularly self-reported information from surveys, KIIs, and FGDs, with secondary sources such as existing literature and prior assessments. As a result, findings for these indicators rely primarily on qualitative and quantitative data generated through fieldwork. For example, findings from the Capacity Assessment Tool relied primarily on CSOs' self-reported data, which could not always be validated against organisational documentation or independent assessments.

Broader data availability constraints.

The study was conducted in a context where reliable, up-to-date, and comprehensive data on Syria remains limited. Protracted conflict, restricted access for researchers, political sensitivities, and general fragmentation of national data systems have resulted in significant gaps in publicly available information. This broader data scarcity constrained opportunities for benchmarking and external validation of findings, and reinforces the need to interpret results as indicative rather than exhaustive.

Compressed timeline.

Ongoing security risks led to multiple delays in data collection across several governorates. These disruptions resulted in an overall compressed timeframe for data processing and analysis, limiting opportunities for further

analytical exploration. Nonetheless, the breadth of stakeholder engagement, for the most part, ensured that the findings provide a contextually grounded baseline to serve as a benchmark for future monitoring.

Mitigation Strategy

Access constraints were managed through contingency planning and local partnerships. In government-controlled areas where direct fieldwork was restricted or raised concerns, such as Damascus, Daraa, Homs, Hama, Tartus, and Latakia, the research was conducted by working with registered local organisations to provide institutional cover and enable continued data collection. Where possible, the team also engaged with relevant authorities to explain the purpose of the exercise. In locations where in-person access was not safe or feasible, remote or online data collection methods were used. Flexible scheduling, remote follow-up, and the use of community intermediaries were applied in areas affected by movement restrictions, including Al-Quneitra.

Security and safety risks were addressed by relying on local enumerators and field protocols. Enumerators were recruited from the communities where they worked and selected based on their local acceptance and understanding of the context. In sensitive areas, enumerators' profiles were matched to local dynamics to reduce risk. Confidentiality measures were strictly followed, including the use of secure digital tools and remote interviews where needed. An ongoing communication channel was put in place to allow enumerators to report concerns and receive guidance quickly.

Community mistrust and social tensions were managed through trusted local engagement and clear communication. Enumerators with strong community ties helped reassure participants and reduce fears around participation. In areas with internal tensions within civil society, neutral enumerators with links to different groups were selected to ensure balanced access. Enumerators clearly explained the purpose of the study and how information would be used and protected.

Capacity gaps among enumerators, wherever possible, were addressed through targeted recruitment, training, and close support. Enumerators were selected for their basic civil society knowledge and experience and technical skills and received training on methods, ethics, sampling, and digital tools. Ongoing support was provided through regular check-ins and real-time problem-solving, and data quality checks were carried out throughout the process. However, this challenge persisted affecting the quality of data for some governorates.

Different governance systems across areas required tailored approaches. Before starting fieldwork, context was reviewed carefully in each governorate and adjusted recruitment, sampling, and data collection methods accordingly. In areas with divided control, such as Deir ez-Zor, the team worked with organisations able to operate across different authorities and adapted the sample to reflect these realities. In complex urban settings, enumerators were chosen for their ability to navigate administrative boundaries.

Remaining limitations have been documented and reported. Despite these measures, some access and security constraints led to data gaps or uneven coverage in certain locations. These limitations are noted wherever they affect the findings. The team used different data sources to cross-check information where possible and clearly highlighted remaining gaps to support transparent interpretation of the results.

3. Defining Civil Society

Below, we draw on baseline data to explore how CSOs and their role is perceived by CSOs themselves, community members, and donors and INGOs operating in Syria.

3.1. Meaning of Civil Society

CSOs are described by community members in functional terms, emphasising their presence on the ground and their role in addressing everyday needs. Civil society was commonly associated with service delivery, assistance, and community support, rather than abstract notions of advocacy or rights. As one participant noted: "They are the organisations that help people directly, especially when there is no one else" (FGD, Aleppo). In several governorates, civil society was also described as a collective effort rather than as formal organisations, encompassing volunteer groups, initiatives, and informal community actors.

Respondents emphasized that CSOs fill critical gaps, especially during periods of crisis or heightened vulnerability. However, quantitative data shows that across all governorates, 80% of CSOs rate their responsiveness as strong, while only 18% of community members share this assessment. Conversely, 43% of community respondents rate CSO responsiveness as low, compared to just 4% of CSOs. Medium ratings are also more common among communities (39%) than among CSOs (16%), suggesting ambivalence rather than outright rejection.

CSO leaders, by contrast, articulated a broader understanding of civic space as the **room available for collective action, representation, and expression,** shaped by political, security, and funding constraints. Civic space was rarely described as a fixed or guaranteed environment; instead, it was portrayed as negotiated and uneven, expanding or contracting depending on context. One CSO leader explained: "Civic space exists, but it is fragile and conditional. It depends on how visible you are and what issues you work on" (KII, Damascus). Several respondents emphasised that civic space is not evenly distributed across governorates, with greater latitude in some areas for service-linked civic action than for overt advocacy.

Donor and INGO KIIs reinforced this view, describing civic space in Syria as **highly constrained but not absent.** External actors noted that while formal civic space remains limited, CSOs continue to operate within informal or localised spaces of influence. One donor representative observed: "Civic space is not open in a formal sense, but it exists through local initiatives, community engagement, and issue-based advocacy" (KII, Donor).

Across all stakeholder groups, independence emerged as a defining feature of civil society. CSOs frequently described their legitimacy as rooted in being non-affiliated with governing authorities, which enables trust-building with communities. As one CSO leader noted: "What gives us space is that we are not part of any authority. People see us as closer to them" (KII, Deir ez-Zor). Community members echoed this sentiment, associating trust with perceived neutrality and consistency of presence.

3.2. Perceived Role of CSOs within Civic Space

Qualitative data indicates that stakeholders perceive the role of CSOs within civic space as multifaceted and adaptive, shaped by contextual constraints as well as by community expectations. While roles vary by governorate and thematic focus, there is strong convergence around CSOs acting as intermediaries, facilitators, and representatives rather than as purely service-delivery actors. This aspect echoes throughout the analysis below.

CSO leaders consistently described their organisations as occupying a bridging role between communities and other stakeholders, including local authorities, donors, and coordination platforms. This intermediary function was particularly emphasised in governorates affected by displacement, limited public services, or fragmented governance. As one CSO leader explained: "We act as a link between the community and decision-makers. People come to us because they don't know where else to go" (KII, Homs). In this framing, civic space is less about formal advocacy and more about enabling communities to articulate concerns and access support.

Community FGDs largely corroborated these self-perceptions. Participants described CSOs as organisations that "listen," "respond," and "stand with the community," particularly in contexts where state institutions are absent or distrusted. In multiple governorates, community members emphasised that CSOs are seen as closer and more accessible than formal authorities. As one participant stated: "They are closer to us than the authorities. We can talk to them" (FGD, Deir ez-Zor). This proximity reinforces CSOs' legitimacy within civic space, even when their formal influence is limited.

However, both CSOs and community members acknowledged limits to this role. CSO leaders noted that their influence is often issue-specific and bounded, with greater acceptance for service-linked civic action than for overt political advocacy. One respondent observed: "We have space when we talk about services or community issues, but less when it comes to rights or policies" (KII, Aleppo). This reflects a broader pattern in which civic space is navigated strategically, with CSOs calibrating their role according to perceived risks.

Donor and INGO perspectives further contextualised these dynamics. External actors generally recognised CSOs as key local civic actors, particularly in terms of outreach, legitimacy, and contextual knowledge. At the same time, some donors cautioned that CSOs' roles are sometimes constrained by limited resources and by the need to align with donor priorities. As one donor representative noted: "CSOs play an important civic role locally, but their space is often shaped by what is fundable" (KII, Donor).

Conclusively, CSOs occupy a pragmatic and negotiated position within civic space, balancing community expectations, contextual constraints, and external incentives. Their role is widely perceived as legitimate and necessary, particularly as intermediaries and representatives of community concerns. However, the scope of this role remains uneven and contingent, reinforcing the importance of supportive conditions, such as coordination, accountability, and equitable funding, to enable CSOs to sustain and expand their civic function. We explore these aspects in more detail in our discussion of the key findings under **Priority 1 and Priority 2.**

4. Key Findings

4.1. Baseline Values

A summary of the baseline values calculated for each quantitative indicator included in the baseline study for the priorities 1 and 2 is presented below. Since this study aimed to conduct needs assessment to determine priority 3, no baseline data was collected for it. Disaggregated data on governorate, gender and age-groups wherever relevant is presented in the Appendix 3 and Appendix 4.

Priority 1: Organisational Sustainability

	Indicator	Baseline Value
Impact	Percentage of CSOs reporting having led or co-led civic initiatives or advocacy campaigns over the last three years	85% (298 out of 352 surveyed CSOs)
	Percentage of CSOs reporting confidence in their ability to make positive change in the civic space	85% (298 out of 352 surveyed CSOs)

Priority 1: Organisational Sustainability		
	Indicator	**Baseline Value**
Outcome 1	Number of documented and publicly acknowledged joint initiatives or partnerships established between CSOs across governorates and sectors	66 (as reported in KIIs)
Output 1.1	Number of coordination networks created and active for 12+ months	~23 (as reported in KIIs)
Output 1.2	Number of donor-funded grants explicitly requiring partnerships between large and small CSOs	*Data is not available for this indicator as desk review was not conducted.*
Outcome 2	Percentage of community members reporting increased engagement with CSOs	69% (316 out of 459 community members, as reported in community survey)
Output 2.1	Number of CSOs with functioning accountability mechanisms *(Note: the mechanisms are not mutually exclusive categories. The baseline value shown represents how often each mechanism was referenced).*	Community consultations: 159 (45%) Safeguarding / PSEA policies: 214 (61%) Complaint & feedback mechanisms: 123 (35%) (as reported in CSO survey targeting 352 CSOs)
Output 2.2	Number of CSOs that developed or revised programme strategies, project plans, or proposals aligned with community needs	311 CSOs (88%) (as reported in the CSO survey targeting 352 CSOs)
Outcome 3	Percentage of CSOs reporting improved scores in organisational capacity areas *(Note: future monitoring is needed to measure the improvement in scores across the organisational capacity areas)*	Average baseline scores per organisational capacity areas: Governance and accountability: 3.62 Structure and staffing: 3.28 Finance, procurement and operations: 3.28 Sustainability and partnership: 2.23 Project and programme management: 3.51

Priority 1: Organisational Sustainability		
	Indicator	**Baseline Value**
Output 3.1	Number of CSOs participating in capacity assessments and peer learning events.	228 (77%) (as reported in CSO survey, targeting 352 CSOs)
Output 3.2	Number of CSOs reporting at least two different funding streams (e.g., donor grants, services, private sector partnership)	175 (63%) (as reported in CSO survey, targeting 352 CSOs)
Output 1.2	Number of donor-funded grants explicitly requiring partnerships between large and small CSOs	*Data is not available for this indicator as desk review was not conducted.*

Priority 2 – Participatory Governance		
Impact	Percentage of community members who feel their voices are being relayed for decision-making.	39% (as reported in community survey, targeting 459 community members)
	Percentage of CSOs reporting active participation and leadership in inclusive dialogue efforts	71% (as reported in CSO survey, targeting 352 CSOs)
Outcome	Percentage of community members actively participating in community consultations	59% (as reported in community survey, targeting 459 community members)
Output 1.1	Percentage of CSOs reporting having held inclusive forums at least once in the last three years	81% (as reported in CSO survey, targeting 352 CSOs)
Output 1.2	Percentage of CSOs reporting that community priorities raised in dialogues / forums are formally communicated to local authorities	83% (as reported in CSO survey, targeting 352 CSOs)

Table 7: Baseline Values

1.1. Priority 1 – Organisational Sustainability

Section Summary: The baseline shows that Syrian CSOs remain active, adaptive, and locally legitimate despite operating in a highly constrained and volatile environment. They are engaged in service delivery, civic initiatives, and advocacy across governorates, and report confidence in their ability to influence civic space. However, the core challenge is not a lack of civic action, but the fragility of the systems needed to sustain it, shaped by fragmentation, donor-driven competition, and weak long-term sustainability. Collaboration among CSOs is common and valued, but often informal, project-based, and unequal, with smaller organisations holding limited influence. Community engagement with CSOs is strong and trust is largely relational, yet accountability mechanisms remain weak and oriented more toward donors than communities. Organisational capacities are established in core areas, but staffing, financial management, and sustainability remain significant pressure points. Overall, the findings point to the need for systemic approaches that strengthen collaboration, accountability, and sustainability alongside organisational capacity building.

Box 1: Priority 1 - Summary Findings

Impact: Syrian CSOs and civic actors reshape and sustain civic space

At the impact level for priority 1, the baseline examines whether and how Syrian CSOs and civic actors shape, sustain, and expand civic space. It therefore considers not only whether civic initiatives exist, but also how CSOs understand their role, how communities perceive civil society, and how external actors assess the current state of civic engagement.

Overall, 298 of the 352 surveyed CSOs (85%) reported having initiated or co-led at least one civic initiative or advocacy campaign during the past three years. However, of the 59 CSOs interviewed, only 12 reported multiple initiatives in that time frame. As the data collection tools do not consistently distinguish between "civic initiatives" and "advocacy campaigns," both are treated as a single category capturing intentional civic action beyond service delivery. High participation rates are observed across most governorates, with particularly high levels in Al-Hasakah, Ar-Raqqa, Aleppo, Damascus, and Deir ez-Zor, where more than 90 percent of surveyed CSOs reported civic engagement. Examples of such initiatives include: Beit Al-Kul Forum in Al-Bab, Aleppo, which successfully advocated to authorities to reverse a decision to relocate the city courthouse by issuing a unified community statement; CSOs in Raqqa that mobilised public and media pressure leading to the suspension and amendment of a fuel price increase decision; the Hauran Women's Gathering in Daraa, which advocated for women's inclusion in security services, resulting in the appointment of 90 women across police and security departments; the Environmental Coordination Group in Al-Hasakah, which halted plans to close the Jaghjagh River through a community-backed environmental campaign; and Al-Birr Association in Homs, which successfully pushed for the establishment of decentralized village medical units to improve access to healthcare amid security constraints.

In addition to reported civic engagement, the baseline assesses CSOs' confidence in their ability to positively influence civic space within their geographical areas of work. This indicator captures perceived agency and self-positioning of CSOs as civic actors, complementing the data on initiatives and advocacy. Based on the CSO survey, confidence levels are predominantly high (85%). High confidence scores (4–5) were particularly common among CSOs reporting sustained community engagement, repeated civic initiatives, or recognition by local stakeholders. Lower confidence ratings (1–2) were reported by a smaller share of CSOs and were more frequently associated with environments characterised by heightened security risks, restricted civic space, or limited access to decision-making channels.

Qualitative findings indicate strong convergence among CSO leaders regarding the nature of their influence in civic space. Across governorates and thematic areas, CSOs consistently described themselves less as service providers and more as intermediaries and facilitators, linking communities to decision-makers, donors, and coordination platforms. This role was particularly emphasised in contexts affected by displacement, limited public services, or fragmented governance. As one CSO leader explained, "we act as a link between the community and decision-makers. People come to us because they don't know where else to go" (KII, Homs). In this framing, influence is exerted primarily by empowering communities to speak up, voice their needs and concerns, and access support effectively, while formal advocacy continues to play a complementary role.

CSOs also described a representative and protective role, particularly for groups perceived as underrepresented through formal channels. Women, youth, displaced populations, and persons with disabilities were frequently cited as constituencies whose interests CSOs seek to amplify. One respondent noted, "our role is to represent women and youth who are excluded from decision-making spaces" (KII, As-Suwayda). Community FGDs largely corroborated these self-perceptions, with participants describing CSOs as actors who "listen," "respond," and remain accessible in contexts where state institutions are absent or distrusted: "They are closer to us than the authorities. We can talk to them" (FGD, Deir ez-Zor).

CSO leaders consistently framed civic action as purpose-driven and closely linked to concrete community concerns rather than visibility or political positioning. Initiatives most commonly addressed access to services, protection of local resources, social cohesion, women's rights, youth participation, and environmental issues. As one respondent explained, "Our initiatives usually start when there is a concrete problem affecting the community" (KII, Hama). Several KIIs described initiatives that achieved tangible local effects, even when broader policy change was not possible. In Deir ez-Zor, coordinated advocacy contributed to improved responses to service gaps affecting displaced communities: "The campaign didn't change policies, but it forced actors to respond and coordinate better" (KII, Deir ez-Zor). Community FGDs echoed these perceptions, associating civic initiatives with awareness-raising and collective mobilisation rather than immediate material outcomes:
"Even if the problem is not solved completely, these campaigns make people speak and think together" (FGD, Aleppo). This suggests that CSO initiatives contribute to sustaining civic space by reinforcing dialogue, trust, and collective agency.

Engagement with communities was widely described as accessible. CSOs reported that communities both approach them directly and are actively mobilised through activities and meetings: "People come to us directly with problems, and we also go to them through activities" (KII, Daraa). However, inclusivity within civic space remains uneven. Both CSOs and community members noted that women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised groups face barriers related to social norms, safety, mobility, and resources. While participation may be visible, influence over decisions is more limited: "women attend activities, but decisions are still taken by others" (FGD, Rural Damascus).

Across all data sources, civic space was consistently described as fragile and conditional. CSOs reported that civic action is generally tolerated when focused on services or community issues, but becomes sensitive when addressing rights, accountability, or policy matters: "the space exists as long as you don't cross certain lines" (KII, Damascus). As a result, CSOs calibrate their visibility and messaging to manage risk. Security-related constraints further limit civic action, particularly in relation to movement and public activities: "Sometimes the risk is not the activity itself, but the movement and who sees you doing it" (KII, Deir ez-Zor). Economic and funding pressures were also cited as indirect threats, as reliance on short-term, project-based funding undermines sustained engagement: "When funding ends, the space we had to work with the community also shrinks" (KII, Homs).

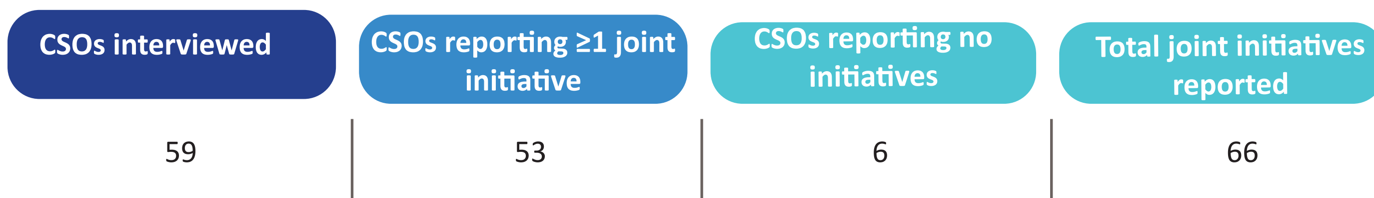
Respondents additionally highlighted emerging risks linked to governance centralisation and reconstruction processes, raising concerns that local CSOs may be side-lined in favour of larger or formally recognised actors. Underpinning these constraints is a pervasive sense of fear and self-censorship. Even in the absence of explicit restrictions, CSOs adjust behaviour to avoid repercussions: "Sometimes the limitation is not written anywhere, but everyone knows it" (KII, Aleppo).

Outcome 1

Strengthened cross-disciplinary and trans-regional collaboration among CSOs and civic actors

Outcome 1 assesses the extent to which CSOs in Syria engage in cross-disciplinary and trans-regional collaboration, as reflected through joint initiatives and partnerships involving organisations from different sectors and governorates. In a context marked by territorial fragmentation, differentiated governance systems, and constrained civic space, such collaboration is a key indicator of civil society's collective capacity and cohesion.

53 CSOs (90%) reported participation in at least one joint initiative or partnership with other CSOs; and 6 CSOs (10%) explicitly reported that they had not engaged in joint initiatives. Most organisations described one joint initiative, typically linked to a specific campaign, advocacy effort, or coordinated activity. Taken together, the quantitative data indicates that collaboration among CSOs is the norm rather than the exception at baseline, but that it is typically episodic and initiative-based, with sustained, multi-initiative partnerships concentrated in a smaller number of contexts.



CSOs interviewed	CSOs reporting ≥1 joint initiative	CSOs reporting no initiatives	Total joint initiatives reported
59	53	6	66

Table 8: Number of CSOs reporting joint initiatives and partnerships in KIIs, by governorate

Responses on collaboration and recognition provide a nuanced picture of how CSO partnerships function in practice. While most CSOs reported participating in joint initiatives, assessments of collaboration quality varied significantly, shaped by trust, role clarity, power relations, and recognition of contributions.

Collaboration was generally described as functional and purpose-driven rather than strategic or institutionalised. Positive experiences were linked to partnerships with clear objectives and complementary roles, enabling CSOs to extend geographic reach, strengthen advocacy, or increase impact. As one CSO leader noted, “Through cooperation, we launched service-support initiatives across multiple governorates” (Deir ez-Zor), while another emphasised that “Networking and coordination among organisations generally yield stronger results and impact” (Aleppo).

However, high-quality collaboration was not uniform. Many partnerships remain informal and discreet, particularly in sensitive contexts. While this enables cooperation under restrictive conditions, it limits visibility, documentation, and learning. As one respondent explained, “We cooperate, but not everything can be publicly acknowledged” (Damascus), reducing perceived long-term value when efforts are not externally recognised

Recognition emerged as a key determinant of collaboration quality. Positive partnerships were characterised by mutual acknowledgment through shared visibility, advocacy, or community recognition, reinforcing organisational legitimacy: “Partnerships have strengthened our institution’s role and positive influence within the community” (KII, Latakia). In contrast, recognition was uneven in partnerships involving organisations of different sizes or donor access, with smaller CSOs often reporting that their contributions were overshadowed: “Individual organisational projects tend to overshadow collective efforts” (KII, Homs).

Power imbalances further affected collaboration quality. Several CSOs described asymmetrical partnerships in which larger organisations shaped agendas and decision-making, limiting shared ownership. While collaboration still delivered short-term results, these dynamics reduced incentives for sustained engagement.

Trust consistently emerged as a central enabling factor. CSOs with repeated or long-term partnerships were more likely to describe collaboration as effective and mutually reinforcing: “The trust and collaboration built within this coordination group made that possible” (KII, Deir ez-Zor). Where trust was absent or partnerships were externally driven, collaboration tended to be more transactional.

Overall, KIIs indicate that CSOs value collaboration and see it as effective, but constrained by informality, uneven recognition, and power imbalances. Strengthening collaboration will require focused efforts to improve quality, balance, and visibility, not only the frequency, of partnerships.

Output 1.1

Coordination platforms of CSOs and other civic actors are strengthened

This output examines the existence, reach, and perceived effectiveness and inclusivity of coordination platforms that bring together CSOs and other civic actors across sectors and regions. Coordination platforms are a critical entry point for strengthening collective civic action, reducing fragmentation, and enabling more coherent engagement with communities, donors, and authorities.

Quantitative data indicates that participation in coordination platforms is relatively widespread but uneven across governorates, and varies significantly in terms of network maturity and geographic coverage.

Data source	Total respondents	Part of a network
CSO Surveys	352	265
KIIs	59	45

Table 9: Number of CSOs reporting being a part of a coordination network

A basic literature review combined with the names of networks provided by CSOs identified 29 coordination networks operating across the country . Of the coordination networks reported by CSOs, 53% have been active for more than three years, 29% for one to three years, and 18% for less than one year. This distribution suggests that while a substantial proportion of coordination platforms demonstrate relative longevity, a significant share remains recent or potentially unstable, particularly in contexts affected by shifting funding priorities and operational constraints.

Importantly, KIIs qualify these figures by indicating that several networks cited by CSOs are no longer operational, despite being referenced as existing coordination structures, often due to lack of funding, weak governance, or declining participation. At the same time, KIIs indicate that coordination, even when platforms are inactive, often continues through informal channels or initiative-based collaboration.

Survey data shows that CSOs generally assess coordination platforms as moderately to highly effective, though with notable variation. On a scale of 1 (not effective at all) to 5 (very effective), responses from 352 CSOs were distributed as follows:

Effectiveness score	Number of CSOs (n=352)
1 – Not effective	8
2 – Slightly effective	42
3 – Moderately effective	102
4 – Effective	133
5 – Very effective	67

Table 10: Rating of networks' effectiveness in CSO surveys

Overall, 302 out of 352 CSOs (approximately 86%) rated coordination platforms at 3 or above, indicating that a large majority perceive coordination as delivering at least some added value in terms of collaboration and inclusivity. At the same time, 50 CSOs (14%) rated platforms at 1 or 2, pointing to significant dissatisfaction among a minority of respondents. Survey and KII data together indicate that coordination and information-sharing networks are generally perceived as effective, but in specific and bounded ways.

Coordination platforms were described as spaces that facilitate information exchange, knowledge sharing, exposure to different operational contexts, and mutual learning across regions governed by different authorities. Respondents linked these functions directly to higher effectiveness scores, noting that networks help reduce isolation and improve contextual understanding. As one CSO explained, coordination enables a "better understanding of different contexts shaped by governance structures" (CSO survey, Idlib), while another emphasised "knowledge exchange, trust-building, and sustainable partnerships" (CSO survey, Aleppo) as the primary added value of network participation. These functions appear sufficiently institutionalised to generate consistent benefits, even in highly constrained operating environments.

Effectiveness is also most visible in advocacy and thematic coordination, particularly where collective action offers a clear advantage over individual organisational efforts. CSOs cited successful joint initiatives and advocacy campaigns in areas such as environmental protection, displacement, and gender-based violence. One respondent noted that "advocacy campaigns stopping harmful infrastructure projects would not have been possible without coordination" (KII, Al-Hasakah), illustrating how coordination delivers tangible results when objectives are clearly defined, time-bound, and shared among members.

Trust and relational continuity emerge as key enablers of effective coordination. Respondents frequently emphasised that long-standing relationships and stable membership compensate for weak formal structures, as reflected in the observation that "the trust and collaboration built within this coordination group made that possible" (KII, Deir ez-Zor). At the same time, this reliance on informal trust renders coordination fragile and difficult to replicate or scale across contexts.

CSOs reporting moderate effectiveness highlighted an expectation gap rather than outright failure. While acknowledging the value of coordination for information sharing and advocacy, respondents pointed to limited follow-through, irregular participation, and unclear roles, noting that coordination often remains "limited to advocacy efforts and not operational integration" (Rural Damascus, CSO survey). Low effectiveness ratings, reported by a minority of respondents, were closely associated with project-based and short-lived coordination, governance concerns, and leadership constraints. As one respondent explained, networks are often "established only during project implementation, and dissolved once the project ends" (CSO survey, Homs). Across governorates, sustainability is consistently identified as a major weakness of coordination platforms. Networks are widely described as dependent on external funding cycles, with limited institutional anchoring beyond donor-supported projects. Platforms often demonstrate early momentum but weaken or become inactive once funding declines or coordination roles are no longer resourced. As one respondent noted, "These structures began with promising ideas and objectives but ceased operations due to lack of support" (KII, Al-Hasakah). This fragility is reinforced by the absence of dedicated coordination resources, leaving platforms reliant on the voluntary engagement of senior CSO staff, which constrains continuity, institutional memory, and follow-up. Divided control zones, mobility restrictions, and administrative barriers further exacerbate these challenges, particularly for cross-regional networks. Inclusivity remains uneven across coordination platforms. While platforms are frequently described as bringing together diverse organisations, influence and benefits are not equally distributed. Smaller or newer CSOs often report limited voice in decision-making, with participation favouring larger, better-connected organisations. Women-led and youth-led organisations are also underrepresented in leadership and strategic decision-making spaces, even when formally present. As one respondent stated, "We do not find sufficient representation of women in decision-making positions, and the same applies to youth" (KII, Al-Hasakah). Where women and youth are engaged, participation is often concentrated in implementation roles rather than leadership, limiting their influence over priorities. Perceived legitimacy and trust are closely linked to inclusivity, sustainability, and good governance. KIIs indicate that platforms demonstrating transparency, shared decision-making, and responsiveness retain higher levels of trust and participation, even in low-resource contexts. Conversely, perceptions of favouritism, opaque governance, and individual interests erode trust and discourage sustained engagement. Such positive governance practices, however, remain context-specific rather than systemic.

Output 1.2

Donor funding is designed to promote collaboration between large and small CSOs

Output 1.2 examines whether donor funding mechanisms currently support and incentivise collaboration between large and small CSOs, with particular attention to partnership requirements, equitable participation, and perceived accessibility of donor-funded opportunities. In the Syrian context, where competition for limited funding is acute and power asymmetries between CSOs are pronounced, the design of donor funding mechanisms plays a decisive role in shaping collaboration dynamics.

Quantitative evidence indicates that donor-funded grants explicitly requiring partnerships between CSOs remain limited. Based on KII data, only 16 CSOs (27%) reported having accessed donor-funded grants that formally required collaboration with other CSOs. In contrast, 39 CSOs (66%) reported that they had not accessed such grants. This indicates that, at baseline, mandatory partnership requirements are not a common feature of donor funding mechanisms.

At the same time, a larger share of CSOs reported that donor-funded initiatives promoted or encouraged collaboration in practice, even when collaboration was not formally required. A total of 38 CSOs (64%) indicated that donor-funded initiatives had promoted collaboration between large and small CSOs, compared to 13 CSOs (22%) who reported no such promotion. This suggests that collaboration is often facilitated informally or through project implementation modalities rather than embedded as an explicit requirement within grant design.

KII question (n=59)	Yes	No	Mixed / Conditional	No
Accessed donor-funded grants explicitly requiring collaboration between CSOs	16 (27%)	39 (66%)	-	4 (7%)
Donor-funded initiatives promoted collaboration between large and small CSOs	38 (64%)	13 (22%)	-	8 (14%)

Table 11: CSO perceptions of donor funding mechanisms and collaboration

Qualitative evidence demonstrates that while donor-funded initiatives often involve collaboration, the quality, balance, and equity of these partnerships vary significantly.

KII question (n=59)	Yes	No	Mixed / Conditional	No
Funding mechanisms allow equitable participation for both small and large CSOs	18 (31%)	33 (56%)	8 (13%)	4 (7%)
Donor-funded initiatives promoted collaboration between large and small CSOs	14 (24%)	31 (53%)	10 (17%)	4 (7%)
Donor-funded initiatives promoted collaboration between large and small CSOs	17 (29%)	28 (47%)	9 (15%)	5 (8%)

Table 12: CSO perceptions on the quality, balance and equity of CSO partnerships

CSOs described collaboration as largely project-driven and frequently initiated by organisations themselves rather than required or structured by donors. Partnerships are commonly formed to meet practical implementation needs, such as geographic access or community outreach, rather than as part of a deliberate strategy to promote equitable collaboration. It is less intentional or structured as part of project delivery. As one CSO noted, "Collaboration happens, but it is not something donors clearly require or structure [as part of the project]" (KII, Aleppo).

Systemic barriers embedded in donor funding mechanisms were repeatedly cited as limiting equitable participation. Eligibility criteria related to registration history, financial turnover, prior donor experience, and audit requirements disproportionately exclude smaller or newer CSOs, regardless of their relevance or effectiveness on the ground. Unequal access to information about funding opportunities further reinforces advantages for larger or better-connected organisations. As one respondent explained, "funding is linked to the number of years of experience, not to actual field expertise" (KII, Idlib).

Even where partnerships are formed, collaboration is frequently unbalanced. Larger organisations typically lead proposal development, donor engagement, and reporting, while smaller CSOs are engaged primarily for implementation or community access, with limited influence over decision-making, budgets, or visibility. As one respondent stated, "We are invited to implement, not to design" (KII, Rural Damascus). While CSOs acknowledged benefits from donor-funded collaboration, such as access to funding, expanded reach, and learning opportunities, these were often described as partial, particularly where recognition of contributions was limited.

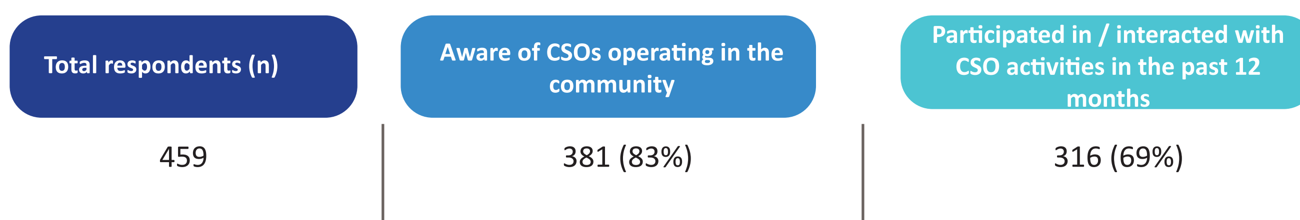
Examples of equitable collaboration were reported by a smaller number of CSOs and were consistently linked to specific donor practices, including joint planning from the outset, clear role definition, and shared decision-making. However, respondents emphasised that such experiences remain isolated rather than systemic. Donor and INGO KIIs corroborated these findings, acknowledging that while partnerships are encouraged, funding systems constrained by risk management, compliance, and short-term delivery priorities rarely support equal roles or long-term investment in equitable collaboration.

Outcome 2

Increased engagement of communities with CSOs as legitimate actors

Outcome 2 assesses the extent to which communities engage with CSOs and perceive them as legitimate actors in addressing local needs.
The quantitative findings indicate that CSOs are broadly visible across surveyed governorates, confirming their presence as recognised actors within local communities. However, the data also highlights a clear distinction between recognition and active engagement. While awareness of CSOs is consistently high, participation in CSO activities is more uneven and varies significantly by location.

The variation observed across governorates underscores that community engagement is shaped by local conditions, including the intensity of CSO presence, the types of interventions implemented, and the broader operating environment. At baseline, the data suggests that CSOs have established legitimacy through presence and recognition, but that deeper and more consistent engagement remains uneven, reinforcing the importance of strengthening accountability, responsiveness, and outreach mechanisms under Outputs 2.1 and 2.2.



Total respondents (n)	Aware of CSOs operating in the community	Participated in / interacted with CSO activities in the past 12 months
459	381 (83%)	316 (69%)

Table 13: Number and percentage of community members who reported awareness and interaction with CSOs

Qualitative evidence from FGDs and CSO KIIs indicates that CSO legitimacy at community level is not derived from visibility alone, but from perceived relevance to local needs, continuity of engagement, and the quality of interaction with communities. While CSOs are widely recognised as active actors, legitimacy is experienced as conditional and shaped by day-to-day practices rather than organisational presence.

Community members primarily associated CSOs with addressing immediate and practical needs, particularly in contexts where public services are absent or insufficient. CSO activities were most often linked to humanitarian assistance, social support, awareness-raising, and community initiatives. In several governorates, participants emphasised that CSOs fill critical gaps during periods of crisis and vulnerability, noting that "their work is connected to what people actually need here" (FGD, Daraa). Where CSOs were perceived as close to communities and responsive to urgent needs, legitimacy was stronger.

Trust was consistently linked to continuity and follow-up. Community members expressed higher levels of trust where CSOs maintained a sustained presence and followed up on activities, while short-term or sporadic engagement limited perceived impact: "We benefitted from their activities, especially when they followed up and did not stop after one visit" (FGD, Al-Hasakah). In contrast, in some locations participants described more cautious trust where projects were perceived as brief or externally driven, with limited communication about objectives or next steps.

Communication and responsiveness emerged as key mediating factors shaping legitimacy. FGDs indicate that trust increases when CSOs explain their activities, clarify constraints, and listen to community input: "When they listen to us and explain what they are doing, people trust them more" (FGD, Aleppo). Where information was limited or activities appeared opaque, legitimacy weakened, even when benefits were acknowledged: "Not everyone benefits equally, and sometimes there is no explanation" (FGD, Latakia).

CSO KIIs broadly corroborate these perceptions. CSOs consistently described legitimacy as something that must be earned through relevance, presence, and responsiveness rather than assumed through donor recognition. As one CSO leader noted, "Our legitimacy comes from being present on the ground and responding when people need us, not from having a logo or a project" (KII, Deir ez-Zor). At the same time, CSOs highlighted structural constraints - particularly ***short-term funding cycles, insecurity, and movement restrictions -*** that limit their ability to sustain engagement and visibility. As one CSO noted, "People expect continuity, but projects end. This affects how communities see us" (KII, Homs). Several CSOs also acknowledged that insufficient communication and limited community involvement in defining priorities can unintentionally undermine trust: "Sometimes we do good work, but we don't explain it well, and that creates doubts" (KII, Latakia).

While FGDs identified some negative effects of CSO engagement, such as duplication of activities, unequal access to assistance, and short project cycles, these were generally framed as expectations for improved engagement rather than rejection of CSOs' role. Communities expressed a clear desire for CSOs to remain active, while calling for stronger communication, inclusivity, and follow-up.

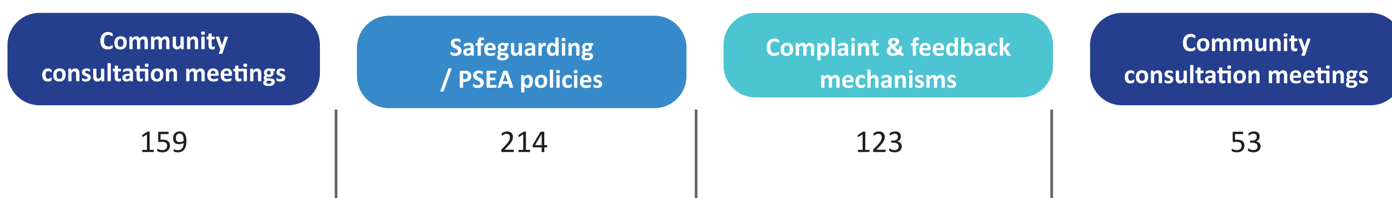
Output 2.1

Transparency and accountability mechanisms are developed and implemented

Output 2.1 examines whether CSOs have established and operationalised transparency and accountability mechanisms, and whether communities view them as meaningful, accessible, and trustworthy. In contexts where institutional trust is fragile, these mechanisms are central to CSOs' legitimacy and sustaining community engagement.

The analysis separates the existence of mechanisms from their effective use, recognising that formal tools do not guarantee accountability without accessibility, trust, and responsiveness. It therefore reviews the mechanisms CSOs report (all surveyed CSOs reported at least one formal accountability mechanism) and then assesses how well they function and how communities perceive them.

The following table disaggregates the types of accountability mechanisms in place, reflecting how accountability is operationalised in practice. As CSOs were able to report multiple mechanisms, the table captures the diversity of approaches rather than mutually exclusive categories.



Community consultation meetings	Safeguarding / PSEA policies	Complaint & feedback mechanisms	Community consultation meetings
159	214	123	53

Table 14: Types of accountability and transparency mechanisms reported by CSOs

Analysis of CSO survey responses indicates that accountability mechanisms are predominantly framed around consultative practices and safeguarding policies, rather than formal complaint or grievance systems. Across all governorates, community consultation meetings are the most frequently cited mechanism, reflecting an emphasis on dialogue and participation in reviewing activities. Safeguarding and PSEA-related policies are also widely reported, particularly among CSOs operating in high-risk or donor-funded environments.

By contrast, complaint and feedback mechanisms are reported less consistently, suggesting that downward accountability remains more informal and less systematised. Importantly, a non-negligible number of CSOs explicitly noted that accountability mechanisms exist but are not enforced in practice, pointing to implementation gaps rather than absence of policy. These patterns reinforce the need to distinguish between formal accountability structures and their effective operationalisation, which is further explored through qualitative evidence from KIIs and FGDs.

Qualitative evidence indicates that while accountability mechanisms are widely referenced, their function and depth remain limited. Across data sources, a clear distinction emerges between mechanisms that enable participatory feedback and those that allow complaint, challenge, or redress. At baseline, accountability is primarily understood and practiced as consultation rather than as a means of downward accountability or protection.

Community members most frequently described accountability mechanisms as opportunities to provide feedback on activity implementation, such as relevance, timing, or logistics. These exchanges were typically informal and embedded in ongoing interaction with CSOs: “They ask us what we thought about the session and if something could be improved next time” (FGD, Al-Hasakah). This type of feedback was generally perceived as safe and welcomed.

By contrast, explicit references to complaint mechanisms or to the ability to raise negative feedback were limited. Several participants distinguished clearly between sharing opinions and formally complaining, expressing uncertainty about whether the latter was possible or appropriate: “We can give our opinion, but complaining is different. We don’t know if that is really allowed” (FGD, Homs). Instances where communities actively challenged decisions, most often related to targeting or perceived fairness, were reported, but remained exceptional rather than routine.

While most organisations reported having feedback or complaint mechanisms in place, they acknowledged that complaints are rare and often handled informally: “Most of the feedback we receive is about activities. Complaints are not common” (Latakia, KII). Several CSOs explicitly cautioned against interpreting low complaint rates as satisfaction, noting that dependency on assistance, power asymmetries, and fear of repercussions discourage open criticism: “People hesitate to complain because they are afraid it might affect their relationship with the organisation” (KII, Deir ez-Zor). As one CSO leader summarised, “Silence doesn’t always mean agreement; sometimes people don’t feel safe to speak” (KII, Damascus).

Access to accountability mechanisms is uneven. Women, youth, and other marginalised groups were consistently described as less likely to raise concerns, particularly negative ones, due to social norms, fear of repercussions, or lack of adapted channels. As one CSO noted, "Women often prefer to raise issues privately, not in public meetings" (KII, Daraa), while another observed that "young people may comment online, but they avoid direct confrontation" (KII, Idlib).

Donor and INGO KIIs reinforce these findings, noting that while feedback is encouraged, accountability mechanisms often lack safeguards, resourcing, and protective features required to function as effective grievance systems: "Feedback is encouraged, but complaint mechanisms that protect communities are much weaker" (KII, INGO). Respondents highlighted limited funding, insecurity, and low community awareness as key barriers, particularly in the absence of anonymity and follow-up.

Output 2.2

CSOs' capacity is strengthened to relay and respond effectively to community needs

Output 2.2 examines the extent to which CSOs are able to identify, relay, and respond effectively to community needs, and whether their programming, strategies, and operational decisions are perceived by communities as relevant, responsive, and efficient. In the Syrian context, where needs are evolving rapidly due to protracted crisis, displacement, and economic deterioration, CSO legitimacy is closely tied to their capacity to adapt interventions based on community input rather than predefined project designs.

Responsiveness to community needs is a core dimension of CSOs' legitimacy and effectiveness under Outcome 2. The baseline assessment examines responsiveness from two complementary perspectives: (i) CSOs' self-assessment of how responsive they are to community needs; and (ii) community members' perceptions of whether CSOs listen to and act on those needs. This dual perspective allows the baseline to capture both intent and practice on the CSO side, and experience and perception on the community side, highlighting areas of convergence as well as gaps. Across all governorates, CSOs generally rate their responsiveness to community needs positively, while community perceptions present a more cautious assessment:

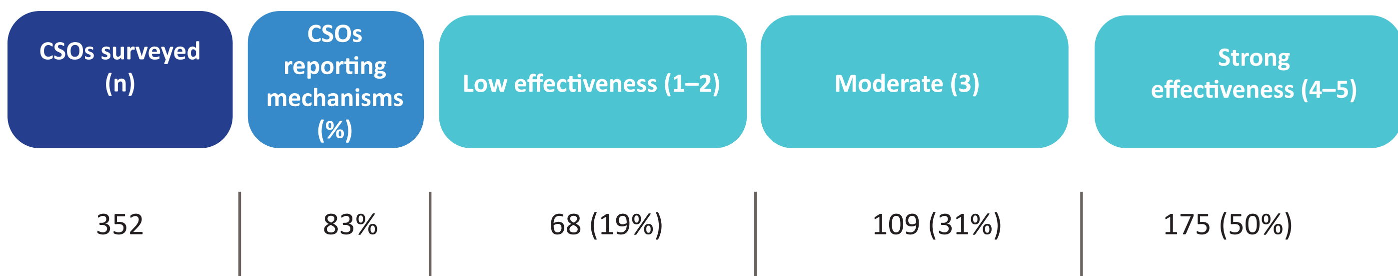
Respondent group	Responses (n)	Low level of CSO responsiveness to community needs (1–2)	Medium level of CSO responsiveness to community needs (3)	High level of CSO responsiveness to community needs (4–5)
CSOs	352	15 (4%)	57 (16%)	280 (80%)
Community members	459	197 (43%)	181 (39%)	81 (18%)

Table 15: Comparative table CSO self-assessment vs. community members' perceived responsiveness to community needs

Furthermore, the CSO survey indicates a high level of self-reported adaptation to community needs over the past three years. Out of 352 CSOs surveyed, 311 organisations (88%) reported having developed or revised programme strategies, project plans, or proposals in response to community needs.

This divergence highlighted by the comparative table, and in perspective of the data measuring internal adaptability, suggests that while CSOs widely perceive themselves as adaptive and responsive, often based on internal planning, consultations, or programme adjustments, these efforts are not consistently visible, felt, or experienced by communities. Responsiveness may therefore be occurring at a procedural or organisational level without translating into recognisable changes from a community perspective.

The below table illustrates how formal mechanisms to relay community priorities are widely reported, but their perceived effectiveness is more uneven. While more than four out of five CSOs indicate that such mechanisms exist, only half assess them as highly effective.



CSOs surveyed (n)	CSOs reporting mechanisms (%)	Low effectiveness (1–2)	Moderate (3)	Strong effectiveness (4–5)
352	83%	68 (19%)	109 (31%)	175 (50%)

Table 16: CSO mechanisms to convey community priorities to decision-makers and perceived effectiveness (CSO survey)

Overall, the data suggests that relay mechanisms are often procedural rather than transformative: they provide channels for communication, but do not consistently translate into influence over decision-making or tangible outcomes.

Qualitative findings provide critical depth to the quantitative baseline, helping explain both the relatively high levels of CSO self-assessed responsiveness and the more cautious perceptions expressed by community members. Across data sources, CSOs are widely recognised as active and present actors, yet their ability to translate community needs into sustained, visible change is shaped by structural, financial, and contextual constraints.

Community needs are primarily identified through direct interaction and informal processes, rather than through standardised or systematic assessment frameworks. While this proximity-based approach is widely viewed as a strength, stakeholders differ in how they assess its depth, inclusivity, and reliability over time.

CSOs consistently described needs identification as an ongoing process embedded in daily engagement, outreach activities, and informal dialogue. This proximity-based approach is widely viewed as a strength, particularly in volatile or crisis-prone environments: "We don't wait for assessments. Needs appear through daily interaction with the community" (KII, Deir ez-Zor). At the same time, communities described needs identification as uneven and selective. Several FGD participants noted that consultations tend to involve the same individuals repeatedly, often community leaders or those already engaged with CSOs, while others—particularly women, youth, and persons with disabilities—participate less. As noted by a community member, "not everyone speaks in these meetings. Some people stay silent" (FGD, Damascus).

However, CSO KIIs also revealed that needs identification is often filtered through organisational mandates and donor priorities, even at the earliest stages. Some CSOs acknowledged that while communities raise a wide range of concerns, only those aligned with funding windows or approved sectors are formally documented and pursued: "People raise many issues, but we focus on what we can realistically address within the project." (KII, Homs).

INGO and donor KIIs provided a more critical and system-level perspective. External actors largely rely on local CSOs as intermediaries for needs identification, particularly in areas where access is restricted or politically sensitive: "We depend heavily on local partners to understand community needs" (KII INGO). However, several INGOs and donors expressed concerns about the consistency and rigour of needs identification processes. Respondents noted that while CSOs are close to communities, needs assessments are often informal, undocumented, or insufficiently disaggregated, making it difficult to verify representativeness or track changes over time: "There is a lot of anecdotal information, but not always structured analysis." (KII Donor) Some donors also highlighted the risk that needs identification becomes donor-driven in practice, with CSOs framing needs to align with anticipated funding priorities rather than reflecting the full spectrum of community concerns: "Sometimes needs are described in ways that fit calls for proposals" (KII INGO).

Qualitative evidence indicates that CSOs are widely perceived as effective within defined and short-term scopes, particularly in humanitarian and service-oriented interventions. Community members across governorates consistently acknowledged tangible benefits from CSO activities: "Without these organisations, many people would have no support at all" (FGD, Al-Hasakah). These perceptions align with survey findings showing high levels of reported benefit from CSO interventions.

However, effectiveness is often framed as partial rather than transformative. Community members emphasised that while CSOs address immediate needs, underlying conditions remain unchanged: “They help, but the problems remain” (FGD, Tartus). This signifies that CSOs are normally focusing on mitigation and short-term support rather than building solid bases and infrastructure for long-term change. This distinction helps explain why only a minority of community respondents rated CSOs as highly responsive or effective, despite recognising their contributions.

CSO KIIs corroborate this assessment, describing effectiveness as constrained by project design and donor requirements. CSOs emphasised that they can deliver efficiently within funded activities, but have limited ability to adapt, scale, or sustain responses as needs evolve: “We implement well what is funded, but we cannot go beyond the project” (KII, Latakia). Effectiveness was described as strongest where needs are clearly defined and time-bound, and weakest in addressing complex or long-term challenges such as livelihoods sustainability, youth unemployment, or social cohesion: “We respond quickly, but not always sustainably” (KII, Deir ez-Zor).

Donor and INGO KIIs reinforced this perspective, recognising CSOs’ operational effectiveness while questioning the durability of outcomes: “Local CSOs are effective implementers, but their influence on broader change is limited” (KII Donor). Several donors noted that effectiveness is often measured through activity completion rather than longer-term outcomes.

A consistent set of factors emerges that enables CSOs to respond effectively to community needs. Most prominently, and in alignment with previous findings, proximity to communities and sustained presence over time are repeatedly cited as key strengths. CSOs that are physically embedded in communities are better able to understand evolving needs, navigate local dynamics, and adjust activities informally as situations change. Reliance on local human resources facilitates communication, improves targeting, and helps identify vulnerable groups that may otherwise be overlooked. CSOs reported that community participation in implementation, volunteering, and peer support strengthens ownership and sustainability: “When people participate, activities are more successful” (As-Suwayda, FGD). CSOs emphasised that community engagement reduces resistance, improves targeting, and enhances efficiency, particularly in sensitive contexts.

Coordination and partnerships further support responsiveness, particularly where joint initiatives, referrals, or informal collaboration allow CSOs to address gaps beyond their individual capacity. Respondents noted that collaboration can reduce duplication and extend reach, reinforcing earlier findings under Outcome 1 that coordination is most effective when based on trust and clear, practical roles. Flexible funding arrangements, where available, were also described as enabling more responsive programming by allowing CSOs to adapt activities or reallocate resources as priorities shift.

The data presents several structural constraints that limit the depth and sustainability of CSO responses. Funding rigidity and short project cycles were the most frequently cited challenges, restricting CSOs’ ability to adapt programming when community priorities change and reinforcing reactive rather than strategic responses. As one CSO explained, “even if priorities change, we cannot change the project design” (KII, Latakia). Donors acknowledged that compliance and reporting requirements often prioritise delivery over adaptation, leaving limited space for learning or longer-term planning.

Limited access to decision-making and advocacy spaces further constrains responsiveness, particularly in fragmented or politically sensitive contexts. While CSOs may relay community concerns, their influence on outcomes is often indirect or unclear, contributing to perceptions that engagement does not always lead to tangible change. Uneven participation also affects responsiveness, as women, youth, and persons with disabilities face social, cultural, or logistical barriers to participation, influencing which needs are prioritised and addressed.

Additional constraints include staff overload and uneven organisational capacity, especially among smaller

CSOs, which affect follow-up, documentation, and continuity. Security conditions, mobility restrictions, and administrative barriers continue to limit operational reach and consistent engagement in several governorates.

Outcome 3

Enhanced organisational capacities and sustainable management of CSOs

Outcome 3 assesses the extent to which Syrian CSOs possess the organisational capacities and internal systems required to operate effectively and sustainably in a protracted crisis context. While Outcomes 1 and 2 focus on external collaboration and community engagement, Outcome 3 examines the internal foundations of civil society action, including governance, management structures, financial and operational systems, partnerships, and safeguarding.

The scoring was done from a scale of 1 to 4, and was tailored based on the function and sub-component under each function . Refer to Appendix 5 for the Capacity Assessment Tool, organisational areas assessed, and their respective scoring matrix.

Section	Score
Governance and accountability	3.62
Structure and staffing	3.28
Finance, procurement and operations	3.28
Sustainability and partnership	2.23
Project and programme management	3.51

Table 17: Average scores per organisational capacity and sustainable management section

Governance and accountability

While formal governance and accountability structures are widely present, in practice, these mechanisms are often activated primarily to meet donor requirements rather than serving as routine tools for strategic oversight or internal accountability. As one CSO leader noted, governance structures are “activated when required by donors, not as part of regular internal reflection” (KII, Homs), reflecting a largely compliance-driven approach. Across qualitative sources, governance quality was closely linked to organisational stability and access to resources. More established CSOs described gradual improvements through experience, donor engagement, and peer learning, while newer or smaller organisations highlighted limited administrative capacity and the difficulty of prioritising governance in crisis-driven contexts: “We know governance matters, but when survival is the priority, systems come second” (KII, Rural Damascus).

Accountability practices were consistently described as stronger upward than downward, in alignment with findings under Outcome 2: most CSOs reported having feedback or complaint mechanisms, but their use remains uneven and largely informal (refer to Outcome 2 for additional analysis).

In general, a score of 1 indicated that a sub-component did not exist, while a score of 4 represented the ideal situation. For example, under the Governance and Accountability dimension, one question asked: “Does your organisation have a Board or governing body that oversees strategy and major decisions?” A score of 1 indicated that no board exists, while a score of 4 indicated that a board exists, meets regularly, and actively oversees organisational decisions.

Structure and staffing

Evidence indicates that organisational structures are generally in place but under strain. Most CSOs reported having defined structures and staffing frameworks; however, core staff frequently assume multiple roles simultaneously. As one CSO leader explained, "staff often handle administration, reporting, and field work at the same time" (KII, Aleppo). While this multitasking supports short-term survival, it limits specialisation and places sustained pressure on staff. Contracts are typically tied to short-term grants, resulting in high turnover and loss of institutional memory when funding ends: "when funding ends, staff leave, even if the structure remains" (KII, Idlib). This dynamic undermines continuity and weakens the consolidation of organisational capacity over time.

Volunteers play an important role in addressing staffing gaps, particularly for community outreach and implementation. However, qualitative evidence consistently indicates that volunteers cannot replace stable core staff, especially for administrative and strategic functions: "volunteers are committed, but turnover is high and training must be repeated" (KII, Deir ez-Zor).

CSO leaders linked stretched staffing structures to burnout, reduced efficiency, and challenges in maintaining quality standards: "The structure exists, but the people inside it are under constant pressure" (KII, Homs). Donor and INGO perspectives largely corroborated these findings, noting that while many Syrian CSOs demonstrate strong organisational discipline, human resource capacity is often insufficient for sustained operations. As one donor summarised, "Local CSOs are organised, but their human resources are often stretched beyond capacity" (KII Donor).

Finance, procurement and operations

Many CSOs have established core systems in finance, procurement, and operations, but they remain unevenly institutionalised. Quantitative capacity scores point to solid foundations, while qualitative findings suggest that practice varies across organisations. Most CSOs reported basic financial management - budgeting, bookkeeping, and payment documentation - yet leaders often said these systems emerged in response to donor requirements and operational necessity, rather than through long-term organisational planning.

Procurement emerged as a particularly fragile area. While many CSOs reported having procurement policies on paper, these are not always applied consistently, especially under time pressure or in emergency contexts. Smaller organisations described adapting procedures to access and security constraints, sometimes prioritising speed and feasibility over formal compliance: "We know the procedures, but in urgent situations we sometimes have to work around them" (KII, Deir ez-Zor). Donors echoed this concern, identifying procurement as a key area of residual risk, particularly for newer CSOs.

A recurring issue is the concentration of financial responsibilities within a very small number of staff. In several cases, financial management depends on a single individual, creating operational risk and limiting internal controls. As one CSO leader noted, "Everything related to finance depends on one person; if they leave, the system collapses" (KII, Aleppo).

Access to banking services also remains a structural challenge. CSOs operating in areas with restricted banking access or complex regulatory environments reported relying on intermediary accounts or informal transfer mechanisms. These practices were described as constraints rather than choices: "It's not that we don't want a bank account; it's that access is not always possible" (KII, Idlib).

Sustainability and partnership

Data indicates a clear imbalance in sustainability capacity. While medium-term sustainability planning is relatively common, practical mechanisms to generate or diversify resources beyond donor funding remain limited. Many CSOs reported having 3–5 year plans, particularly those with more stable leadership or sustained donor engagement. These plans are typically flexible and frequently revised, reflecting uncertainty

around funding, access, and political conditions, and function more as guiding frameworks than fixed roadmaps. However, fundraising beyond donor projects is largely aspirational and rarely supported by dedicated staff, tools, or viable funding pathways, reflected in the fact that over 60% of CSOs fall within the low-capacity range.

Project and programme management

Quantitative data highlights a clear gap between programme implementation capacity and needs-based project design. While most CSOs demonstrate strong capacity in M&E, risk management, reporting, and sensitivity approaches, fewer report systematically designing projects based on articulated community priorities. Qualitative evidence from capacity assessments and KIIs confirms that implementation capacity is generally stronger than design capacity. This gap reflects patterns already identified in earlier sections: although CSOs maintain close proximity to communities and engage in frequent informal consultation, project priorities are often shaped by donor calls and funding parameters rather than by structured, community-driven planning.

CSOs consistently described solid experience in managing donor-funded projects, particularly in reporting, compliance, and basic monitoring practices. M&E systems, though sometimes simplified, were widely considered sufficient to meet donor requirements and support internal learning. As one CSO noted, "we are used to donor reporting and monitoring; this part of the work is clear to us" (KII, Aleppo). This aligns with the high proportion of CSOs scoring in the moderate to high range on M&E, risk management, and reporting indicators.

Conflict sensitivity, gender sensitivity, and inclusivity were widely recognised as core programming principles and were often applied through experience rather than formal frameworks. While this supports adaptation in volatile contexts, qualitative data suggests that such considerations are not consistently documented or embedded in design and learning cycles. Donors similarly observed that sensitivity is more visible during implementation than at the design stage: "Sensitivity is present on the ground, but it is not always reflected in how projects are designed or reviewed" (KII Donor).

Output 3.1

Tailored capacity assessment processes and peer learning mechanisms are developed and implemented

Output 3.1 examines the extent to which CSOs engage in structured capacity development processes, with a focus on participation in peer learning activities and the perceived usefulness of these experiences. Peer learning and training are key mechanisms for strengthening organisational practice, especially in contexts where formal capacity support is uneven, donor-driven, or episodic. This output therefore provides an important baseline on both reach (who participates) and relevance (how useful CSOs perceive these processes to be). The below analysis reflects on both indicators 1 and 2: Number of CSOs participating in capacity assessments and peer learning events; and CSO feedback on the usefulness and relevance of capacity assessments and peer learning.

Survey data indicates that a substantial proportion of CSOs (77% of CSOs surveyed) have participated in at least one peer learning activity or training over the past three years, although participation levels vary across governorates. Participation is generally higher in areas with stronger donor presence or more active coordination platforms, and lower in governorates where access constraints, insecurity, or limited organisational density restrict opportunities for engagement.

Among CSOs that reported participation in peer learning or training, perceived usefulness is predominantly positive, with 73.7% of respondents rating these activities in the mid-to-high range of the 1–5 scale (rating 4 or 5). Qualitative evidence from CSO KIIs reinforces the quantitative findings, highlighting peer learning and training as one of the most valued forms of capacity support, particularly when it is practical, context-specific, and facilitated among peers facing similar operational constraints.

CSO leaders emphasised that peer learning provides opportunities to exchange real experiences rather than abstract guidance, especially in areas such as financial management, safeguarding, reporting, and community engagement. One respondent explained: "Learning from other organisations working in similar conditions is more useful than theoretical training" (KII, Aleppo). Several CSOs also highlighted that peer learning is most effective when it allows horizontal exchange rather than top-down instruction. Informal exchanges, mentoring relationships, and learning within coordination platforms were often described as more impactful than one-off workshops. One respondent observed: "When learning is shared between equals, it feels more relevant and applicable" (KII, Deir Ez-Zor).

Depth and continuity of peer learning remain uneven. Many CSOs described trainings as short-term, donor-driven, or disconnected from follow-up support. While useful in the moment, these activities were not always embedded into longer-term organisational change. As one CSO leader noted: "The training was useful, but after that, we were on our own" (KII, Homs). Constraints to participation were also noted. CSOs cited time pressure, staffing limitations, and travel or security restrictions as factors limiting sustained engagement in peer learning activities. Smaller or newer organisations reported particular difficulty maintaining continuity, despite high motivation to participate.

Output 3.2

Financial diversification is integrated into CSO operations

This section examines the extent to which CSOs have diversified their funding base beyond a single source, as an indicator of organisational resilience in a volatile funding environment. This section analyses answers to respond to both indicators 1 and 2: Number of CSOs reporting at least two different funding streams (e.g., donor grants, services, private sector partnership); and CSO leaders' reflections on opportunities and barriers to diversifying funding.

Survey data indicates that 63% of CSOs reported having at least two funding streams. However, CSOs frequently described diversification as a response to funding instability rather than a deliberate strategic choice. Multiple funding streams were often assembled to reduce short-term risk associated with donor dependence, rather than to build independent revenue models: "We try to combine small grants, community support, and sometimes services, because relying on one donor is too risky" (KII, As-Suwayda).

Despite these efforts, structural barriers continue to constrain meaningful diversification, particularly for smaller or newer organisations. Access to non-donor funding, such as private sector partnerships, service provision, or diaspora support, was described as limited by regulatory uncertainty, weak local economies, and political sensitivities. As one respondent noted, "Private sector support is talked about a lot, but in practice it is very limited in our area" (Ar-Raqqa, KII). Income-generating activities represent the weakest dimension of sustainability capacity, with most CSOs describing such initiatives as small-scale, experimental, or peripheral to core operations. Even CSOs reporting multiple funding streams often described these as several short-term donor grants rather than genuinely distinct sources: "We may have more than one donor, but it is still the same system and the same risks" (KII, Aleppo).

4.3. Priority 2 – Participatory Governance

Section Summary: The findings suggest that Syrian CSOs are widely engaged in inclusive dialogue and often see themselves as conveners and intermediaries between communities and decision-makers. Overall, 71% of surveyed CSOs report active participation and/or leadership in dialogue initiatives. Coordination with authorities is also described as widespread and often mandatory for permissions and operational access, shaping when, how, and whether CSOs can convene inclusive forums. At the same time, community representation and feedback loops appear present but fragile. Participation in consultations is more common (59% report often/occasionally participating), yet inclusivity is widely viewed as partial and constrained by security fears, informal power relations, leaving women, youth, IDPs, people with disabilities, underrepresented in practice even where meetings occur. Finally, while 83% of CSOs report formally communicating community priorities to decision-makers, the main bottleneck is weak follow-through: feedback may reach authorities but does not reliably translate into action, undermining the credibility of 'closing the loop'.

Box 2: Priority 2 - Summary Findings

Impact: Civil society's role in driving inclusive dialogue for decision-making

The role of civil society in driving inclusive dialogue for decision-making is assessed through three key indicators: 1) the extent to which CSOs demonstrate active participation and leadership in inclusive dialogue efforts; 2) perceptions on CSOs' role in shaping decisions at the local, regional, and national levels through dialogue, and 2) the proportion of community members who feel their voices are being relayed into decision-making processes.

Most CSOs report active participation and/or leadership in inclusive dialogue. Overall, 71% of surveyed CSOs (249 out of 352) report active participation and leadership in inclusive dialogue initiatives. Qualitative evidence indicates that CSOs view leadership in inclusive dialogue as a core function, often positioning themselves as key conveners and intermediaries between communities and decision-makers. Many organisations report leading forums that bring together local authorities, tribal leaders, political actors, and marginalised groups to address service delivery, conflict resolution, and advocacy. For example, in Deir ez-Zor, organisations have reportedly led dialogue sessions with local councils and political parties, while in Aleppo, a local civil society actor facilitated inclusive dialogue to address rising tensions between community members and service providers (KII, Aleppo). Following widespread dissatisfaction with the quality of public health services, the organisation convened discussions with community representatives to document concerns and then relayed these issues to relevant authorities.

CSOs surveyed (n)	# of CSOs reporting active participation/leadership	% of CSOs reporting active participation / leadership
352	249	71%

Table 18: Number and percentage of CSOs reporting active participation/leadership in inclusive dialogue efforts

Significant regional variations prevail. As illustrated above, the baseline data shows that engagement is highest in Deir ez-Zor (100%), followed by Al-Hasakah (96%), Ar-Raqqa (82%), Idlib (77%), Latakia (76%), and Homs (75%). This presents an interesting pattern. Historically, Deir ez-Zor and Ar-Raqqa have experienced limited civil society engagement due to prolonged insecurity. However, throughout this study, CSOs have reported increased activity, including greater participation in dialogue spaces and, in some cases, the mobilisation of community members to engage in these processes.

The finding for the rest of the governorates is less surprising, given the relatively greater influx of civil society activism in recent years. Moderate levels are reported in Aleppo (70%) and As-Suwayda (69%), while lower levels are observed in Daraa (50%), Tartus (52%), Al-Quneitra (57%), Damascus (58%), Hama (59%), and Rural Damascus (60%). In parts of southern and central Syria, including Daraa, Tartus, and the Rural Damascus–southern belt, insecurity, fragmented armed-actor control, and ongoing protection risks make public-facing dialogue significantly riskier for CSOs and participants. In Daraa, since the transition in Syria's government, reports describe continued abuses and contested security arrangements, conditions that undermine trust and discourage CSOs from convening inclusive forums that rely on community participation. Similarly, in Rural Damascus and areas near Al-Quneitra, recurrent hostilities and access constraints disrupt operations and limit the feasibility of dialogue efforts. Within this broader protection climate, characterised by persistent violence and weak accountability, CSOs are more likely to shift engagement into ad hoc channels or reduce public convening altogether. At baseline, these contextual constraints help explain lower reported levels of CSO leadership in inclusive dialogue in certain governorates, and encourage an interpretation of the observations against a politically tense context.

The perceived strength of CSO influence varies by governorate. Among the 163 CSOs reporting strong or very strong influence, higher proportions were reported in Deir ez-Zor (74%), Idlib (64%), Al-Hasakah (58%), Ar-Raqqa (54%), and Aleppo (50%), indicating relatively more enabling environments for dialogue-led influence. In contrast, lower proportions were reported in Hama (26%), Daraa (36%), Tartus (34%), and Damascus (35%), where engagement with authorities is often described as more constrained or bureaucratic.

In coastal governorates such as Latakia and Tartus, as well as in Daraa and Al-Quneitra, participants described a profound disconnect between CSOs and authorities. In Latakia, one participant stated, “civil society is always on one side, and the authorities are on the other… I do not think there is any form of cooperation.” (KII, Latakia). In Daraa, engagement was characterised as bureaucratic, with participants reporting that ‘the authorities’ response has been non-existent,’ despite documented complaints (FGD, Daraa). In Al-Quneitra, participants noted that “such platforms or dialogues between residents and government officials have not been provided.” (FGD, Al-Quneitra). These findings highlight significant regional constraints on civil society influence and underscore the fragmented nature of dialogue across Syria.These geographic differences indicate that CSO influence is not uniform and is closely shaped by local governance dynamics, levels of trust, and space for civic engagement rather than by CSO capacity alone.

While CSOs are widely recognised as intermediaries, community members, in some cases, emphasised a gap between dialogue and outcomes. In Al-Hasakah, one participant noted that “engagement is present but it is formal and lacks tangible impact.” (FGD, Al-Hasakah). In contrast, in Suwayda, CSOs were described as “a catalyst for the change process and policy making,” while in Deir ez-Zor, structured dialogue through the Diwan (Madafa) was credited with decisions that “actually reach the authorities,” (FGD, Deir ez-Zor). Conversely, in Latakia, Tartus, Daraa, and Al-Quneitra, participants reported a lack of meaningful response from authorities, with dialogue described as disconnected. At baseline, these contrasting experiences highlight that CSOs’ role in shaping decisions through dialogue exists but unevenly so.

CSOs surveyed (n)	# of CSOs reporting strong or very strong influence in dialogues (4-5)	% of CSOs reporting strong or very strong influence in dialogues (4-5)
352	163	46%

Table 19: Number and percentage of CSOs reporting strong or very strong influence in dialogues

According to direct feedback from the communities, the CSOs gather input through needs assessments, surveys, field teams, and dialogue sessions, and present consolidated messages to authorities. In Al-Hasakah, one respondent noted that “CSOs are considered the most effective and influential channel… the voice of the local community and the voice of civil society are conveyed simultaneously.” (FGD, Al-Hasakah). Similarly, in Rural Damascus, they described their role as “the link between the community, authorities, and organisations,” (FGD, Rural Damascus), while in Idlib, residents reported that contact with authorities often occurs through CSO-led assessments rather than direct interaction. Community members echoed this perception in some contexts. In Homs, a participant explained, “When we attend such dialogues, we feel that the concept of ‘citizen’ is strengthened… even if your voice doesn’t reach the final decision, it’s enough that you are able to express your opinion without fear,” (FGD, Homs), highlighting the value of CSO-facilitated dialogue as both a feedback channel and a space for civic expression.

Data at the baseline presents some examples of tangible changes to policies, administrative decisions, and service provision owing to CSO-led dialogue. CSOs reported multiple instances where dialogue translated into concrete outcomes. In Aleppo, a CSO convened dignitaries, elders, councils, activists, and unions to oppose the relocation of a courthouse, resulting in a unified statement that successfully halted the decision. In Ar-Raqqa, sustained dialogue and advocacy around Decision No. 119 on fuel price increases, combined with public campaigns and media pressure, led authorities to suspend and revise the decision. At the national level, CSOs also reported contributing to legislative processes, including the redrafting of Syria’s disability law, where civil society observations were “addressed and included in the final version of the law approved by the Syrian government in 2024” (KII, Homs). These examples illustrate that, at baseline, CSO influence has extended and can further extend beyond consultation to shaping governance outcomes.

At the baseline, coordination between CSOs and local authorities is perceived to be widespread and largely mandatory. Almost all CSOs reported some level of coordination with authorities, primarily as a legal requirement for licensing, approvals, and access to communities. One respondent stated that "no work can be carried out in any area without coordination with the local authority; otherwise, this could expose the organisation to accountability measures." (KII, Deir ez-Zor). Similar requirements were reported in Al-Hasakah, where approvals are needed for virtually all activities. Community members confirmed that in places such as Daraa, "every project or initiative requires approvals from governmental authorities." (KII, Daraa). While a small number of organisations, particularly in Tartus, reject deeper coordination on ideological grounds, stating that "we do not believe in the role of governments" (KII, Tartus), for most CSOs, coordination is not optional and directly conditions their ability to operate and convene dialogue.

The nature of CSO - authority relationships varies widely by region. CSOs and representatives from local and national authorities described different interaction models depending on political and administrative contexts. In Rural Damascus and Deir ez-Zor, some organisations reported strong or constructive relationships, noting that "a strong and constructive relationship with the authorities has also enhanced our credibility," (KII, Rural Damascus), and that coordination "helps us identify community needs." (KII, Deir ez-Zor). In Suwayda, CSOs described the relationship with the Legal Committee who they work with as "horizontal and complementary, rather than hierarchical," (KII, As-Suwayda) based on shared interests and collaboration. By contrast, many CSOs described relationships as strictly bureaucratic. In Homs, one organisation explained, "Our relationship with the authorities is purely supervisory and facilitative; they have no direct authority or role in implementing any agenda," (KII, Homs), while in Al-Quneitra interaction was described as "merely to facilitate work, not genuine cooperation." (KII, Al-Quneitra). In Idlib and Aleppo, coordination often occurs through local councils or delegates, which some community members felt marginalised direct community voices. We discuss this in more detail when we talk about inclusion of demographic groups.

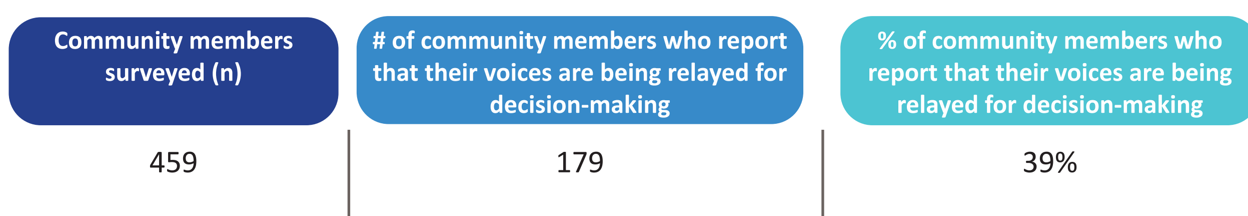
Access to authorities is uneven and highly mediated, shaping how CSOs engage in dialogue. Across data sources, access to decision-makers was consistently described as dependent on personal networks rather than transparent or institutionalised channels, disadvantageising smaller or marginalised organisations that struggle to secure entry points for dialogue. Engagement strategies vary by geography. In Northeast governorates, such as Al-Hasakah, Deir ez-Zor, Ar-Raqqa, respondents described more established practices, such as recurring forums with local administrations, suggesting a relatively more institutionalised, though still constrained, dialogue culture. By contrast, organisations operating in Damascus, As-Suwayda, and Tartus reported navigating highly politicised and centralised environments, while actors in northern areas expressed concern that increasing international and diplomatic attention to Damascus is marginalising dialogue spaces elsewhere. To maintain access, CSOs rely on pragmatic and adaptive approaches, engaging through technical or service-oriented entry points and using careful language to avoid backlash around sensitive issues. Interactions were described as "very process-driven and very bureaucratic," with respondents warning that the space for engagement is tightening, marked by "more regulation and more pressure" and unclear "red lines" that make inclusive dialogue increasingly risky at baseline.

Trust deficits constrain CSO participation in dialogue. In some regions, particularly Tartus and Suwayda, CSOs described deep mistrust of authorities and fear of persecution as major obstacles to meaningful engagement. Some organisations reportedly explicitly avoid coordination with government actors, arguing that dialogue processes are used to politicise interventions or to confer legitimacy on authorities. One organisation stated, "the fundamental problem with the authorities is that they want to politicise all interventions… as they seek to legitimise themselves through this… and we reject that." (KII, Tartus). INGOs echoed these concerns, stating that government engagement currently appears to be largely 'transactional', driven by the pursuit of funding, reconstruction support, or sanctions relief rather than a genuine commitment to dialogue. Requests for civil society oversight, such as election observation, were reported to be denied on sovereignty grounds, contributing to further tightening of spaces for inclusive dialogue.

Reflecting these dynamics, less than half of surveyed community members perceive that their voices are currently being relayed for decision-making. Overall, 39% of surveyed respondents (179 out of 459) reported that they feel their views are conveyed into decision-making. Perceptions differ markedly by governorate,

with higher levels reported in Al-Quneitra (65%), Deir ez-Zor (58%), and Al-Hasakah (57%), compared to substantially lower levels in Tartus (13%), Damascus (20%), Rural Damascus (24%), and Idlib (26%). Gender-disaggregated data indicates that 46% of women perceive their voices to be relayed, compared to 33% of men.

The higher proportion of women reflects CSOs' focus on women's empowerment and participation. Across governorates, organisations have created dedicated platforms for women's political, economic, and social engagement, as confirmed by community FGDs, increasing their visibility and sense of influence. In some areas such as Idlib, it appears that men reported feeling deprioritised due to donor emphasis on women and female-headed households, which may contribute to lower perceptions of representation among men. By age group, perceptions are highest among respondents aged 25 - 35 years (42%) and 36 - 65 years (42%), while lower levels are reported among those aged 18 - 24 years (31%) and 65 years and above (26%). Differences are also evident by displacement status, with 41% of host community members reporting that their voices are relayed, compared to 36% of internally displaced respondents and 38% of returnees. Collectively, this evidence indicates that, at baseline, perceptions of voice in decision-making are limited overall and unevenly distributed across geographic and demographic groups.



Community members surveyed (n)	# of community members who report that their voices are being relayed for decision-making	% of community members who report that their voices are being relayed for decision-making
459	179	39%

Table 20: Number and percentage of community members reporting that their voices are relayed for decision-making

	Gender		Age Groups			
	Female	Male	18-24	25-34	35-65	65+
Total (n=459)	**207**	**252**	**90**	**193**	**149**	**27**
# of respondents who reported that they feel their voices are being relayed for decision-making	**95**	**84**	**28**	**82**	**62**	**7**
% of respondents who reported that they feel their voices are being relayed for decision-making	**46%**	**33%**	**31%**	**42%**	**42%**	**26%**

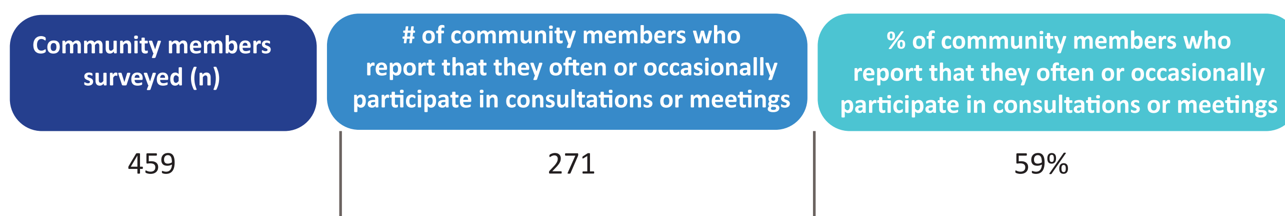
Table 21: Number and percentage of community members reporting that their voices are relayed for decision-making, disaggregated by gender and age groups

Outcome

Improved processes that enable community involvement in decision making

At the outcome level, community representation in decision-making processes is assessed through two key indicators: 1) percentage of community members who report that they have participated in community meetings and 2) community perceptions on inclusiveness and effectiveness of forums and feedback channels in representing community voices.

A majority of community members report some level of participation in discussions or consultations related to local decisions and needs. Overall, 59% of surveyed respondents (271 out of 459) reported that they often or occasionally take part in community discussions, consultations, or meetings. A further 21% (96 respondents) indicated that they do not participate directly but are aware that other family members or community representatives attend on their behalf, while 20% (92 respondents) reported that they have not heard of such meetings. Participation rates vary by governorate, with particularly high levels reported in Ar-Raqqa (91%), Al-Hasakah (83%), Aleppo (72%), and Deir ez-Zor (66%), compared to notably lower levels in Tartus (29%), Idlib (42%), Latakia (43%), and Rural Damascus (48%).



Community members surveyed (n)	# of community members who report that they often or occasionally participate in consultations or meetings	% of community members who report that they often or occasionally participate in consultations or meetings
459	271	59%

Table 23: Number and percentage of community members who reported that they often or occasionally participate in consultations or meetings, disaggregated by gender and age groups

Participation in dialogues differs across demographic groups. Gender-disaggregated data shows similar participation levels among women (60%) and men (58%). By age group, participation is highest among respondents aged 36 - 65 years (68%) and 25–35 years (62%), while relatively lower levels are reported among those aged 18–24 years (42%) and 65 years and above (44%). By displacement status, participation is reported by 57% of host community members, 60% of internally displaced respondents, and 64% of returnees. These patterns indicate that while participatory engagement is relatively widespread at baseline, it is not evenly experienced across all age groups and locations.

Dialogues are perceived as partially inclusive. Survey data indicates a mixed assessment of inclusivity among participants. While 11% of respondents perceived meetings as fully inclusive and 27% as mostly inclusive, the largest proportion (37%) described them as only moderately inclusive, suggesting limited inclusion that does not extend equally across groups. A further 21% viewed meetings as slightly inclusive and 4% as not inclusive at all, indicating that exclusion remains a common experience. Qualitative findings add important nuance to these perceptions. Across regions, community members and INGOs acknowledged that CSOs and authorities often articulate commitments to diversity and participation, and in some contexts have introduced mechanisms intended to broaden engagement. However, these efforts are frequently undermined by informal power relations, political considerations, and social hierarchies that shape who is invited, heard, and able to influence outcomes.

Security concerns further constrain participation, with participants noting “fear among community members to participate in government authority meetings for security reasons, as they do not allow for the free expression of opinion.” In Latakia, respondents reported hesitation to raise a “civilian voice” due to fear of arrest or uncertainty around “red lines,” while in As-Suwayda, one participant observed that “young people and women are often marginalised by the local community in some consultative sessions… as a result of the authoritarian thinking among some leaders.” (FGD, As-Suwayda). Larger, well-established organisations were also reported to dominate access to dialogue spaces, acting as gatekeepers, while smaller grassroots actors remain excluded. These dynamics indicate that, at baseline, inclusivity in community consultations is highly uneven and constrained by security fears, power relations, and social norms, despite formal commitments to participatory dialogue.

One reason explaining uneven inclusivity relates to the concentration of international engagement and dialogue spaces in Damascus. INGOs described a "Damascus bubble" in which international attention, funding, and consultation processes are largely centred in the capital, limiting opportunities for community inclusion from other governorates. This concentration affects who is able to participate in dialogue and whose voices are represented, as CSOs and community representatives based outside Damascus, particularly in the governorates in Northwest and Northeast of Syria, face greater barriers to access and visibility, affecting access to resources as well. One INGO noted that consultations held in Damascus are often presented as nationally representative, despite practical constraints that prevent communities from remote or insecure areas from attending (KII INGO). As a result, community perspectives from peripheral regions are underrepresented in decision-making processes, reinforcing geographic and political inequalities in participation. This dynamic constrains inclusive community engagement by privileging proximity to international and political centres over broad-based representation.

Despite similar levels of participation being reported among men and women, qualitative evidence reveals that women's participation still remains constrained by social norms. Women are largely excluded from decision-making spaces. In several contexts, women's participation was described as symbolic rather than substantive. In Al-Hasakah, one reported that "even when women are present, they do not express their genuine opinions and ideas," with their role limited to "signing and stamping documents." (FGD, Al-Hasakah). Social customs further restrict women's participation in Al-Quneitra and parts of Damascus, where mixed-gender meetings, particularly those held in traditional guesthouses (Madafas), are considered culturally inappropriate. In As-Suwayda, women's marginalisation persists despite CSO efforts, attributed to entrenched "authoritarian" thinking among some leaders, as explained by community respondents. Community members in Damascus reinforced this view, stating, "Yes, [groups are excluded], especially women, and often the reason is the customs and traditions in the area or refusal by their husbands." (FGD, Damascus). These findings indicate that, at baseline, cultural norms and local power relations continue to limit women's ability to participate meaningfully in dialogue and decision-making processes.

Youth participation in community dialogue remains limited. Across governorates, youth were widely perceived as marginalised from dialogue and committee structures, not due to lack of interest but because of exclusionary practices. In Al-Hasakah, participants noted that youth were initially excluded because they were viewed as 'inexperienced' or 'unqualified'. In Al-Quneitra, economic constraints prevent many young people - particularly daily wage workers - from attending meetings, as participation requires time away from income-generating activities. In As-Suwayda, youth were reported to be frequently excluded from committees formed by local leaders, reinforcing perceptions that decision-making remains dominated by older actors. Similar dynamics were reported in Hama, where decision-making circles are often dominated by the elderly or traditional leaders who have the free time to attend, unlike working-age youth. INGOs further highlighted that young people often lack clear entry points into civil society engagement and information about how to participate. As one participant in Al-Quneitra stated, "The community members possess great potential, but there is no entity to invest in this potential. Young people . . . wide capacity for contribution, but there are no opportunities for their inclusion." (FGD, Al-Quneitra)

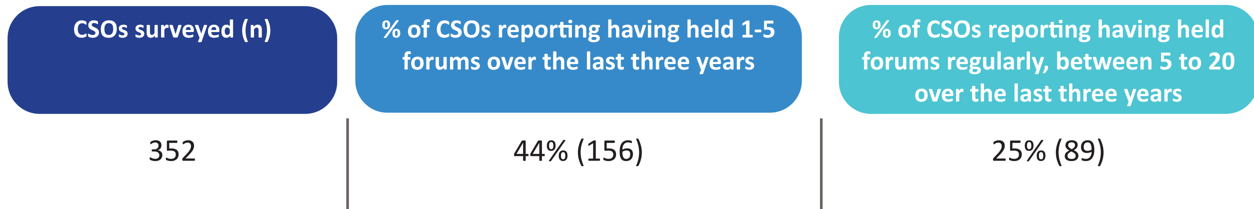
IDPs, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups appear to be underrepresented. Less than half of internally displaced respondents reported participating in consultations they perceived as moderately to fully inclusive, indicating persistent barriers to meaningful inclusion. IDPs, particularly those from the Golan and northern Syria, were described as a "highly marginalised category," often facing poor services and weak representation. In Al-Quneitra, IDP-hosting areas such as Al-Asbah and Al-Eshsha were described as "forgotten," with residents reporting that organisations rarely enter these areas to consult communities directly. Even where IDPs are formally consulted, participation is often indirect, relying on delegates, Mukhtars, or appointed leaders perceived as unrepresentative of displaced populations' priorities.

Beyond displacement, elitism limits participation across Damascus, Homs, and Idlib, where poorer and less educated community members reported exclusion, with one participant stating, "I cannot be chosen as a representative because I am not educated." People with disabilities and older persons were also widely absent from meetings due to physical inaccessibility, high transport costs, and limited outreach. In Al-Quneitra, the cost of transport was described as leading to ***"significant marginalization of blind persons,"***

Output 1

Forums convened by CSOs

The output is assessed through two key indicators: 1) percentage of CSOs reporting having held at least one forum and 2) community reflections on whether forums foster joint decision-making.



CSOs surveyed (n)	% of CSOs reporting having held 1-5 forums over the last three years	% of CSOs reporting having held forums regularly, between 5 to 20 over the last three years
352	44% (156)	25% (89)

Table 24: Percentage of CSOs reporting having held at least one forum or 5 to 20 forums over the last three years

Over the last three years, a substantially high number of CSOs have held at least one forum. At baseline, 81% of CSOs (288 out of 352) reported convening at least one forum over the past three years, indicating that forums are a commonly used mechanism for dialogue across civil society. However, the majority of this engagement was limited in scale: 44% of CSOs (156) held only 1–5 forums, suggesting ad hoc or project-based activity rather than sustained dialogue. A further 18% (64 CSOs) reported holding no forums, highlighting a significant minority with no experience convening dialogue spaces during the reference period. Engagement levels varied across governorates, with higher proportions of CSOs reporting at least one forum in Tartus, As-Suwayda, Hama, and Deir ez-Zor, and lower proportions in Damascus, Al-Quneitra, and Idlib. By organisational type, registered CSOs/NGOs and community-based organisations were more likely to have convened forums than youth-led or women-led organisations, reflecting differing mandates and capacities.

Regular convening of forums has been concentrated among a smaller group of CSOs. Only 25% of CSOs (89 out of 352) reported holding forums regularly (defined as 5–20 over three years), and just 12% (43 CSOs) reported convening more than 20 forums during this period. Regular engagement was more common in Ar-Raqqa, Latakia, Idlib, and Deir ez-Zor, suggesting stronger prevalence of dialogue practices in these contexts. In contrast, regular forum convening was rare in Tartus, Daraa, and Al-Quneitra. By organisational type, registered CSOs/NGOs accounted for the largest share of regular conveners, though notable proportions of CSOs categorising themselves as youth-led (28%) and women-led organisations (36%) also reported strong engagement. At baseline, these findings indicate that while forums are widely used, consistent and repeated convening remains limited to a relatively small group of organisations, pointing to uneven capacity to sustain dialogue over time.

CSOs report financial constraints that limit their ability to convene inclusive forums. Several organisations reported that the cost of organising inclusive forums—particularly those that bring together community members and authorities, poses a significant barrier. For example, CSOs in Aleppo and Al-Hasakah noted that large-scale forums require substantial funding for venues, transportation, security, and facilitation, which is often unavailable. As one CSO explained, "Holding forums that include the local community and local authorities requires financial resources... Currently, what is happening is that the authority is the one that holds meetings." (KII, Aleppo). These constraints limit the frequency and scale of CSO-led dialogue, pushing some organisations toward smaller or ad hoc engagements, or excluding them from convening roles altogether.

Some informants presented positive perceptions on forums demonstrating the potential to enable joint decision-making. INGOs and CSOs identified a small number of forums where relatively open exchange between communities and authorities has occurred. In Damascus, several organisations cited the EU-supported "Day of Dialogue" as a notable, though early, attempt to convene civil society actors and senior government representatives. One respondent described it as

"the first time in Damascus where civil society actors came together with high-level representatives from the Syrian government," adding that it was "a really good opportunity for CSOs to voice community needs to the government." (KII INGO). Another organisation viewed it as "an initial experiment that can be built upon," rather than a sustained mechanism (KII INGO). Elsewhere, traditional or semi-formal platforms have enabled some dialogue, such as the Deir ez-Zor Diwan (Madafa), where governors, security officials, and community representatives meet, and the biweekly "Homs Wednesday Meetings" that bring together associations and officials. Isolated examples of effective feedback were also reported, including a hospital complaint in Hama that was followed up and a complaint in Deir ez-Zor that led to the immediate replacement of unsuitable hospital beds. These cases suggest that equitable dialogue is possible where access, responsiveness, and follow-up align.

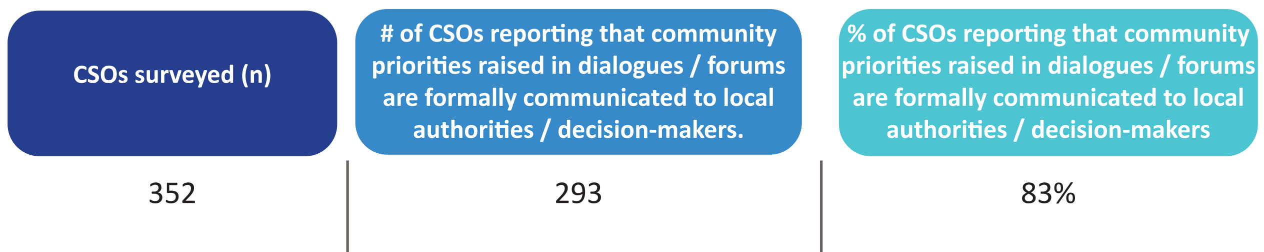
This differs from the perspectives of the community members. In most contexts, they report that while forums and feedback channels do exist but are perceived as 'nominal'. Across governorates, community members acknowledged the presence of feedback mechanisms such as complaint boxes, hotlines, WhatsApp numbers, and email addresses, but widely described them as "procedural" or "ink on paper." In Al-Hasakah and Deir ez-Zor, participants noted that complaint policies exist largely because they are "required by the donor," rather than driven by local accountability. In Daraa, one participant described the complaint system as "fake and imaginary," recounting that a formal complaint submitted with contact details received no response. Similar frustrations were reported in Idlib, where complaints about aid registration produced "no benefit or response," and in Tartus, where a participant stated that a complaint was "falsified" and covered up. Community members and INGOs also highlighted tokenism in dialogue forums, with one organisation noting, "They brought us for the photos, but we do not feel heard… we do not feel that we have any ownership." Barriers to equity were reinforced by fear and exclusion: women were prevented from attending Madafa meetings in Al-Quneitra due to social norms, IDPs in Aleppo were marginalised and pressured to return rather than consulted, and non-elites in Daraa reported that Mukhtars discussed "personal problems" instead of community needs. Taken together, these findings indicate that, at baseline, most forums and feedback channels fall short of enabling equitable dialogue, functioning more as formalities than as credible spaces for shared decision-making.

Nepotism plays a big part in limiting the ability of forums as spaces for equitable decision-making. Across data sources, INGOs and community members identified exclusionary practices that constrain dialogue. INGOs highlighted limited government interest in genuine engagement, describing interactions driven by financial or diplomatic considerations rather than accountability. At the community level, exclusion is reinforced through the repeated participation of the same individuals and networks. In Al-Hasakah and Ar-Raqqa, participants reported that invitations to meetings and workshops are often extended to a closed circle of acquaintances, relying on pre-existing relationships rather than representative outreach. In Deir ez-Zor, community members reported that the authorities tend to summon members of major tribes while excluding individuals from weaker tribes. In Al-Quneitra, participation is sometimes limited to "one representative from each family," restricting broader community engagement. Similar patterns were reported in Daraa, where "training depends on connections, friends, or family relationships," (KII, Daraa) and in Damascus, where participants cited "the selection of inappropriate individuals to speak on behalf of the community." (KII, Damascus). In Tartus, opportunities were described as increasingly dependent on personal connections, with one participant noting that returnees "shared the positions among themselves and did not announce vacancies." (KII, Tartus). At baseline, these practices constrain inclusivity and limit the extent to which forums move beyond consultation toward genuine joint decision-making.

Output 2

Channels for community input to reach decision makers

The output is assessed through two key indicators: 1) Percentage of CSOs reporting that community priorities raised in dialogues / forums are formally communicated to local authorities / decision-makers and 2) Perceptions of CSOs and community members on whether credible feedback loops exist and their effectiveness.



CSOs surveyed (n)	# of CSOs reporting that community priorities raised in dialogues / forums are formally communicated to local authorities / decision-makers.	% of CSOs reporting that community priorities raised in dialogues / forums are formally communicated to local authorities / decision-makers
352	293	83%

Table 25: Number and percentage of community members reporting that community priorities raised in dialogues / forums are formally communicated to local authorities / decision-makers

At baseline, most CSOs report that community priorities raised through dialogues and forums are formally communicated to decision-makers. Survey results show that 83% of CSOs (293 out of 352) reported formally communicating community priorities from dialogues or forums to local authorities or decision-makers. This pattern is consistent across most governorates, with particularly high reporting in Deir ez-Zor (100%), Al-Hasakah (96%), Ar-Raqqa (96%), Aleppo (88%), Rural Damascus (92%), and Idlib (91%). Slightly lower proportions were reported in Damascus (54%) and Latakia (68%), though a majority of CSOs in these areas still indicated that community inputs are formally conveyed. These findings suggest that, at baseline, the transmission of community priorities is widely embedded as a practice among CSOs.

Formal communication of community priorities occurs across diverse CSO types. Reporting was high across organisational categories, indicating that this practice is not limited to large or established CSOs. 83% of respondent CSOs who categorised themselves as registered CSOs/NGOs (183 out of 221) reported formally conveying community priorities, alongside 73% of those who categorised themselves as community-based organisations, 77% of grassroots initiatives, and 74% of youth-led organisations. Notably, 74% of women-led organisations and 100% of professional associations and media organisations reported formal communication of priorities, while 70% of culture and arts collectives also indicated doing so. At baseline, these findings suggest that, regardless of size or focus, most CSOs see formal communication of community priorities as a core part of their role, even though the effectiveness of follow-up and response may vary across contexts.

Where trust and direct access exist, feedback loops are perceived as more credible. In some contexts, feedback mechanisms are viewed as relatively effective. In Homs, channels were described as **"reliable because it stems from the needs of the community and is conveyed by its representatives."** In Suwayda, sub-committees were considered effective because they convey information directly to decision-making bodies. These cases suggest that credibility is enhanced where feedback is perceived as representative, timely, and connected to decision-making authority.

However, most appear to be uneven and inconsistent in producing responses or action. At baseline, evidence from CSOs, community members, INGOs, and powerholding actors indicates that channels for conveying community feedback are present in many areas. In some contexts, direct, traditional, or digital mechanisms supplement CSO-led feedback channels. In a limited number of areas, additional feedback mechanisms exist alongside CSO mediation. In Homs, a digital platform ("Sila") allows residents to submit complaints anonymously, lowering barriers to participation. In Deir ez-Zor, traditional Madafas and neighbourhood councils enable weekly meetings with governors or political bodies, while in Suwayda, communication with the Legal Committee and its sub-committees is described as relatively direct and "widely present on the ground." These mechanisms are generally perceived as more immediate, though their effectiveness still depends on the willingness of authorities to respond.

The effectiveness of feedback loops is widely perceived as constrained by weak responsiveness rather than lack of transmission. A consistent finding across CSOs and powerholding actors is that feedback often reaches decision-makers but does not reliably result in action. In Deir ez-Zor, one respondent noted that channels are "effective in transmitting priorities; however, most of the priorities and complaints raised have not been met with a response." (KII, Deir ez-Zor).). In Ar-Raqqa, existing bodies such as communes or the Women's Union

were described as *"merely symbolic and nothing more."* In Latakia, one respondent stated, *"The problem isn't conveying of needs; the needs are glaringly obvious. The government's response is always questionable."* (KII Power-holding Actor). These perceptions suggest that credibility is weakened not by absence of channels, but by inconsistent or absent follow-up. However, these channels are rarely direct or institutionalised and are often mediated through CSOs, informal relationships, or ad hoc mechanisms. While information frequently reaches authorities, the credibility of feedback loops is undermined by weak responsiveness, delays, and limited follow-through. As a result, at the baseline, feedback loops are seen as more effective at transmitting concerns than at closing the loop through visible decisions.

A mix of political and operational factors affect the effectiveness of feedback loops. Fear of reprisal and resource constraints significantly weaken the functioning of feedback loops. Across regions, psychological trauma, fear of security services, and lack of trust were repeatedly cited as major barriers. In Homs, one respondent reflected that "sixty years of oppression and fear still haunt the people," (FGD, Homs) while in Tartus, "anyone who voices criticism or raises problems remains under suspicion and fear." (FGD, Tartus) Administrative barriers further slow feedback loops, with responses in Rural Damascus taking "twenty days to a full month," and bureaucratic decision-making in Deir ez-Zor limiting timely responses.

FGD participants across governorates articulated a clear desire for more credible and visible feedback loops. Many emphasised the need for elected and legitimate representation, with calls in Al-Quneitra for "elected local councils that genuinely represent the community and directly convey its voice," (FGD, Al-Quneitra) and in Idlib for elections that ensure different segments are represented. Others stressed the importance of regular and public interaction, including "open sessions that are broadcast live" to ensure accountability. In contexts where formal channels are blocked, participants highlighted media and digital advocacy as the only remaining tools, with one respondent in Al-Hasakah stating that "the only remaining course of action is mobilisation, advocacy, and digital campaigns." (FGD, Al-Hasakah). These perspectives indicate that, at baseline, communities often look outside existing feedback mechanisms to ensure their voices are heard.

At baseline, then, feedback loops are present but fragile. Their credibility depends less on the existence of channels and more on whether communities can observe tangible responses and accountability.

4.4. Priority 3 - Community Resilience

Section Summary: Community needs across Syria are overwhelmingly driven by economic insecurity, with livelihoods and economic recovery consistently identified as the top priority by both CSOs and community members, alongside education and skills development, basic services, and the need for peacebuilding and social cohesion. While these priorities are broadly shared, their relative importance varies by governorate and demographic group, reflecting differences in infrastructure collapse, insecurity, and social fragmentation. CSOs are widely perceived as essential actors filling gaps left by the state, but their ability to respond is constrained and often seen as short-term and insufficient in scale. Heavy reliance on donor funding, limited sustainability planning, uneven geographic coverage, coordination gaps, and legal and security restrictions all limit impact, particularly for recovery-oriented interventions. As a result, despite strong alignment between community needs and CSO priorities, systemic constraints continue to undermine consistent, accountable, and long-term responses.

Box 3: Priority 3 - Summary Findings

All consultations conducted through key informant interviews and workshops produced highly varied perspectives on what this priority – initially framed as 'public-well-being' - should exactly encompass. Stakeholders emphasised different thematic entry points;

● Reconciliation and dialogue, viewed as an urgent element of recovery in post-regime Syria.
● Transitional justice, raised as a priority to ensure accountability against human rights violations and provide pathways to community healing.
● Livelihoods and economic recovery, seen as vital to address poverty, restore dignity, and make peacebuilding efforts tangible.
● Peacebuilding as a cross-cutting factor, considered essential to integrate across all programming.
● Education and health, identified by some as critical needs but also seen as responsibilities that should ultimately rest with authorities rather than CSOs.

It is clear that Syria requires it all. The challenge is therefore not the absence of needs, but the difficulty of determining where EU support to civil society can add the most value. It also acknowledged that the aim is for de facto authorities to take responsibility for delivering basic services. However, given the socio-political dynamics and fragmented power and distrust, in the short to medium term (2025 - 2029 and beyond), civil society will likely need to continue bridging critical gaps in essential sectors.

Rather than narrowing prematurely from a wide array of views on where EU's support could best fit, the approach was to let evidence guide the definition of this priority. To that end, data gathered through the nationwide baseline study helped determine what community needs should be prioritised, and how civil society can be best supported by the EU and other donors.

The needs assessment detailed below reflects that significant weight given by both civil society actors and community members to themes such as livelihoods, early recovery, and the fulfilment of the basic needs. At the same time, peacebuilding and social cohesion are widely acknowledged as critical prerequisites for well-being, dignity, and safe and equitable access to services and resources. However, the assessment also highlights that communities require a certain level of resilience in order to be ready and willing to engage in dialogue, reconciliation, and longer-term peace processes.

For this reason, the assessment recommends that the third priority focus on community resilience. This priority focuses on enabling CSOs to pursue locally defined reconciliation efforts and to link economic recovery with peacebuilding in ways that respond to community realities in a more sustainable manner. By supporting flexible and evidence-informed approaches, the priority recognises CSOs as key actors in addressing both social tensions and economic stress, contributing to more resilient communities.

Top needs currently faced by communities

		Livelihoods and Economic Recovery	Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion	Access to Basic Needs	Education and training
CSOs (n=352)	% of respondents who prioritised the specific need	72% (255)	64% (224)	53% (186)	63% (221)
Community Members (n=459)	% of respondents who prioritised the specific need	71% (326)	54% (247)	60% (274)	49% (223)

Table 26: Top needs faced by communities, reported by CSOs and communities across all governorates

Both CSO and community survey data consistently identify livelihoods and economic recovery as the top priority. Among CSOs, 255 out of 352 prioritised livelihoods and economic recovery, while 325 out of 459 community respondents identified it as their most pressing need. This urgency is reinforced qualitatively across regions. In Daraa, community members reported requesting financial compensation simply to attend dialogue or training sessions, describing unpaid participation as a "luxury" they can no longer afford (FGD,

Daraa). In Suwayda, a CSO noted that "the blockade has effectively obstructed all pathways for sustaining life and rebuilding the community." (KII, As-Suwayda). CSOs in Aleppo highlighted the need to "support the development of residents' capabilities to enable them to enter the job market… and establish small businesses to provide for their families." (KII, Aleppo). INGOs echoed this framing, with one noting that people require "food, security, electricity, heating, work… only when these basic needs are met can they think about attending a civic activity." (KII INGO). These findings indicate that, at baseline, economic insecurity underpins nearly all other needs and shapes communities' capacity to engage in dialogue and civic life.

Education, vocational training, and skills development were prioritised by 221 CSOs and 223 community respondents, often linked directly to employment and self-reliance. CSOs described the education sector as "collapsed" or "catastrophic," particularly in Deir ez-Zor, where schools are severely affected by ongoing crises, and in Ar-Raqqa, where education was cited as the first priority. Community members emphasised education as "building the human being," with concerns over adolescent illiteracy, overcrowded classrooms, lack of heating, and teacher shortages due to low wages. In Al-Quneitra, as reported by CSOs, blind students face exclusion due to the high cost of transport to specialised schools, while in Al-Suwayda, instability has disrupted university access. These findings suggest that, at baseline, education remains a critical economic and survival need.

Access to basic needs ranked among the top needs for both CSOs and communities, with 186 CSOs and 274 community respondents prioritising basic services such as electricity, water, healthcare, and shelter. Across regions, infrastructure damage was described as severe. In Deir ez-Zor, community members report, electricity is available for only about one hour per day, and water contamination is widespread. In Rural Damascus, community members reported sewage mixing with drinking water, while in Suwayda and Al-Quneitra, lack of fuel (mazot) affects heating, water pumps, and bread production. Housing and reconstruction were also prominent concerns, particularly for returnees in Idlib, Aleppo, and Rural Damascus, where destroyed homes prevent safe return. INGOs described these conditions as "tangible misery," with one noting that without electricity and heating, communities are unable to stabilise. These service gaps underscore the scale of basic needs at baseline.

Peacebuilding and social cohesion remain foundational needs that shape all other priorities. Peacebuilding and social cohesion were prioritised by 224 CSOs and 247 community respondents, reflecting fractured social relations and persistent insecurity. In Al-Hasakah, CSOs linked weak livelihoods directly to political instability and the need for peacebuilding. In Latakia and Tartus, "security and safety" were cited as the primary concern due to kidnappings, killings, and a pervasive "barrier of fear." Community members in Hama described safety as the prerequisite for all other needs, while in Ar-Raqqa, participants noted that fear of renewed conflict paralyses economic investment. Protection needs also include support for detainees' families, legal documentation, child protection, and psychosocial care, with CSOs reporting that mental health services are almost entirely absent despite widespread trauma. INGOs reinforced this view, noting that for many communities, especially minorities and women, physical security is inseparable from access to services and livelihoods. At baseline, these findings highlight that economic recovery, services, and education cannot be addressed in isolation from security and social cohesion challenges.

Governorate	Livelihood and Economic Recovery		Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion		Access to Basic Needs	
	CSOs	Community Members	CSOs	Community Members	CSOs	Community Members
Al-Hasakah	75% (18 out of 24)	60% (18 out of 30)	71% (17 out of 24)	73% (22 out of 30)	42% (10 out of 24)	53% (16 out of 30)
Al-Quneitra	86% (6 out of 7)	90% (18 out of 20)	57% (4 out of 7)	45% (9 out of 20)	43% (3 out of 7)	75% (15 out of 20)

Aleppo	53% (21 out of 40)	68% (36 out of 53)	73% (29 out of 40)	51% (27 out of 53)	38% (15 out of 40)	64% (34 out of 53)
Ar-Raqqa	79% (22 out of 28)	67% (22 out of 33)	71% (20 out of 28)	58% (19 out of 33)	57% (16 out of 28)	58% (19 out of 33)
As-Suwayda	69% (20 out of 26)	73% (24 out of 33)	85% (18 out of 26)	58% (19 out of 33)	77% (22 out of 26)	79% (26 out of 33)
Damascus	65% (17 out of 26)	53% (16 out of 30)	65% (17 out of 26)	63% (19 out of 30)	35% (9 out of 26)	57% (17 out of 30)
Daraa	73% (16 out of 22)	90% (37 out of 41)	64% (14 out of 22)	49% (20 out of 41)	55% (12 out of 22)	54% (22 out of 41)
Deir ez-Zor	89% (24 out of 27)	89% (34 out of 38)	74% (20 out of 27)	37% (14 out of 38)	56% (15 out of 27)	71% (27 out of 38)
Hama	78% (21 out of 27)	79% (23 out of 29)	63% (15 out of 21)	52% (15 out of 29)	56% (17 out of 21)	52% (15 out of 29)
Homs	88% (21 out of 24)	68% (21 out of 31)	63% (15 out of 24)	61% (19 out of 31)	54% (13 out of 24)	52% (16 out of 31)
Idlib	77% (17 out of 22)	58% (18 out of 31)	59% (11 out of 22)	39% (12 out of 31)	50% (13 out of 22)	52% (16 out of 31)
Latakia	64% (16 out of 25)	70% (21 out of 30)	68% (17 out of 25)	60% (18 out of 30)	48% (12 out of 25)	70% (21 out of 30)
Rural Damascus	60% (15 out of 25)	59% (17 out of 29)	28% (7 out of 25)	31% (9 out of 29)	56% (14 out of 25)	62% (18 out of 29)
Tartus	69% (20 out of 29)	65% (20 out of 31)	52% (15 out of 29)	81% (25 out of 31)	52% (15 out of 29)	39% (12 out of 31)

Table 27: Top needs faced by communities, reported by CSO and communities, disaggregated by governorates

Community survey data shows that livelihoods and economic recovery are prioritised by a majority of respondents in every governorate, most notably in Daraa (90%), Al-Quneitra (90%), Deir ez-Zor (89%), Hama (79%), As-Suwayda (73%), Latakia (70%), Homs (68%), and Aleppo (68%). This pattern is strongly

reflected in CSO responses, with 89% of CSOs in Deir ez-Zor, 88% in Homs, 86% in Al-Quneitra, identifying livelihoods as a top need. At the same time, regional variations are evident. In As-Suwayda, access to basic services was prioritised by 79% of community members and 85% of CSOs, reflecting shortages of fuel and essential infrastructure. In Al-Hasakah, peacebuilding and social cohesion were prioritised by 73% of community respondents and 71% of CSOs, underscoring the impact of political instability and social tensions. Peacebuilding also featured prominently in Tartus (81% of community members; 52% of CSOs) and Latakia (60% of community members; 68% of CSOs), where insecurity and fear shape daily life. These findings indicate that while economic survival dominates baseline needs nationwide, priorities shift by governorate in response to service gaps and insecurity.

	Gender		Age Groups			
	Female	Male	18-24	25-34	35-65	65+
Livelihoods and Economic Recovery	68% (140)	73% (185)	67% (60)	72% (139)	73% (109)	63% (17)
Access to Basic Needs	63% (130)	57% (144)	62% (56)	59% (113)	58% (86)	70% (19)
Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion	49% (101)	58% (146)	54% (49)	54% (105)	52% (78)	56% (15)

Table 27: Top needs faced by communities, reported by CSO and communities, disaggregated by governorates

Livelihoods are the top priority across all gender and age groups, while access to basic services and peacebuilding needs vary by demographic. Both women and men prioritise livelihoods and economic recovery, with 68% of women and 73% of men identifying this as a key need. This priority is consistent across age groups, particularly among those of working age: 72% of respondents aged 25–35 and 73% of those aged 36–65 prioritised livelihoods, compared to 67% of youth aged 18–24 and 63% of respondents aged 65 and above. Access to basic services is the second most cited need, prioritised by 63% of women and 57% of men, with higher concern among older respondents (70% of those aged 65+) and those aged 18-24 (62%). Peacebuilding and social cohesion show clearer demographic differences: 58% of men identified this as a priority compared to 49% of women. By age, peacebuilding concerns are most prominent among 25-35-year-olds (54%), followed by 18-24-year-olds (54%), suggesting that younger and early working-age groups are particularly sensitive to social tensions and instability. Overall, the data indicates that while economic survival is a shared baseline concern, needs related to services and social cohesion are shaped by gendered and age-related vulnerabilities.

The analysis also reveals important variations, especially in relation to longer-term, structural, or less visible needs. While core needs are consistent across regions, the emphasis and urgency of specific needs vary by governorate, shaping how alignment with CSO priorities is perceived. In northern and north-eastern governorates (Idlib, Ar-Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, Al-Hasakah), FGDs highlighted livelihoods, displacement-related needs, and protection as dominant concerns. Communities in these areas often referenced repeated displacement, loss of income, and insecurity: “People need work more than anything. Assistance helps, but it doesn’t last” (FGD, Deir ez-Zor). In these contexts, CSO focus on humanitarian assistance and livelihoods was generally perceived as appropriate, though some participants expressed frustration that responses remain short-term. In coastal and central governorates (Latakia, Tartus, Homs, Hama), community members emphasised economic hardship, rising living costs, and access to services, particularly health care. Here, needs were often framed less as emergency response and more as chronic vulnerability: “Life is becoming harder every day. What we need is stability, not just occasional support” (FGD, Tartus). In these governorates, some community members felt that CSO activities did not always fully match evolving needs, especially when programmes remained framed as humanitarian despite shifting socioeconomic realities. In southern governorates (Daraa, As-Suwayda, Al-Quneitra), FGDs placed greater emphasis on social cohesion, youth opportunities, and dignity, alongside basic needs. Participants highlighted frustration with lack of opportunities for young people and limited participation in decision-making: “Young people need chances, not just assistance” (FGD, Daraa). Here, alignment with CSO priorities was more mixed. While communities recognised CSO efforts, they also perceived gaps in addressing stability-related or longer-term needs.

Overall, community members' articulation of needs largely aligns with CSO-identified priorities. However, local context strongly shapes which needs are most salient, and qualitative evidence indicates that alignment weakens when needs are structural, long-term, or politically sensitive.

Areas where CSOs can play the strongest role

CSOs are perceived as central actors in peacebuilding and social cohesion efforts. Both CSOs and community members consistently identify peacebuilding as one of the strongest and most legitimate roles for civil society. Respondents emphasised that dialogue-led peacebuilding helps shift attitudes away from hostility and fear toward cooperation. As one CSO in Al-Quneitra explained, "When a person is provided with peace, security, and economic stability, they move from a mindset of hostility… to one of positive and constructive engagement." (KII, Al-Quneitra). Community members echoed this view, stressing the importance of regular forums that bring together civil society, authorities, and communities to "find radical and sustainable solutions that serve the community." In Al-Hasakah, respondents highlighted opportunities for CSOs to lead dialogue-based activities that involve all segments of society, including women, youth, and religious figures. However, several respondents noted that this role is most effective where freedom of expression is protected; an Aleppo participant observed that meaningful peacebuilding requires "the ceiling of freedom of expression in the country [to be] raised" so dialogue can occur without fear (FGD, Aleppo). In Deir ez-Zor and Hama, communities reported that dialogue sessions and public gatherings are increasingly possible and can be conducted safely, creating space for CSOs to mediate tensions, address hate speech, and strengthen social cohesion.

CSOs play a critical role in representing community voices and linking them to decision-making processes. As has been reinforced by findings under Priority 1 and Priority 2, CSOs are widely recognised as intermediaries between communities and authorities, particularly where direct political participation is limited. INGOs noted that CSOs contribute to policy dialogue by producing position papers on election laws, constitutional issues, and human rights, and by facilitating platforms such as Youth Forums that enable direct engagement with decision-makers. Community respondents reinforced this role, emphasising the need for "safe space[s] for dialogue where people can freely express their concerns and discuss negative issues without fear" (KII, Deir ez-Zor). In Al-Hasakah, participants highlighted the importance of CSOs working on political awareness and countering hate speech, warning that unresolved political divisions threaten stability. Across contexts, civil society is therefore seen not only as a service provider, but as a representative actor capable of aggregating community priorities, amplifying marginalised voices, and sustaining dialogue where formal political channels remain constrained.

CSOs can play a strong role in livelihoods support and skills development linked to economic recovery. Communities across multiple governorates identified training, vocational skills, and livelihood support as areas where CSOs can make a tangible contribution. In Daraa, respondents pointed to professional and skills-based training offered by local and international organisations as critical for helping people "support and develop [themselves]" and access the job market, while also noting persistent funding gaps. Practical examples were cited in Tartus, where CSOs deliver free workshops for youth on CV writing and creating LinkedIn profiles to improve employability. In Homs, respondents linked education and skills development to long-term national recovery, stating that "if genuine educational opportunities, both academic and practical, are available, the country will rise on solid foundations." (FGD, Homs). These findings indicate that CSOs are viewed as credible actors for bridging immediate humanitarian needs with longer-term economic resilience.

CSOs' current effectiveness in meeting the needs

CSOs are only partially effective in meeting urgent humanitarian needs. Across the community survey, 51% of respondents (233 out of 459) reported that services and assistance are not sufficient, with gaps most pronounced in Al-Hasakah (77%), Daraa (54%), Aleppo (53%), and Deir ez-Zor (55%).

Governorate	% of community members who report that services and assistance are not sufficient	% of community members who report that support is temporary and unsustainable
Al-Hasakah (n=30)	77% (23)	63% (19)
Al-Quneitra (n=20)	35% (7)	55% (11)
Aleppo (n=53)	53% (28)	42% (22)
Ar-Raqqa (n=33)	48% (16)	55% (18)
As-Suwayda (n=33)	58% (19)	42% (14)
Damascus (n=30)	40% (12)	33% (10)
Daraa (n=41)	54% (22)	66% (27)
Deir ez-Zor (n=38)	55% (21)	58% (22)
Hama (n=29)	62% (18)	38% (11)
Homs (n=31)	52% (16)	42% (13)
Idlib (n=31)	42% (13)	26% (8)
Latakia (n=30)	37% (11)	30% (9)
Rural Damas-cus (n=29)	55% (16)	48% (14)
Tartus (n=31)	35% (11)	23% (9)

Table 29: Percentage of community members who report insufficiency and unsustainability of current services

This was indeed the most important gap identified by the community members across all governorates. Community members consistently described CSOs as filling critical gaps left by the state, particularly in food assistance, cash grants, dialogue sessions, and basic services. However, these efforts were widely described as inadequate in scale. In Aleppo, one respondent noted that "organisations are currently performing the state's work," yet lack the resources to do so effectively. In Al-Bab, while some financial grants continue, "the lack of funding… and the relocation of many civil society organisations… has led to a decline in local activities and created a clear gap." (FGD, Aleppo). These findings suggest that CSOs are active but overstretched, with demand far exceeding current delivery capacity.

CSO support is perceived as temporary and unsustainable. Nearly 45% of community respondents (205 out of 459) reported that support is short-term and does not lead to durable improvements. This concern is especially acute in Daraa (66%), Deir ez-Zor (58%), Ar-Raqqa (55%), and Aleppo (42%). Respondents repeatedly highlighted that projects rarely extend beyond a few months, particularly in insecure or underfunded areas. In Ar-Raqqa, participants noted that CSO projects "rarely exceed three or four months," (FGD, Ar-Raqqa), forcing organisations to prioritise short-term training or awareness activities over sustained service delivery. In Rural Damascus and Tartus, community members emphasised that without job creation and financial support, "prospects for meaningful improvement remain limited." (FGD, Rural Damascus). The emphasis on temporary relief reflects both donor funding cycles and the broader economic collapse, constraining CSOs' ability to support recovery-oriented outcomes.

Funding constraints significantly reduce CSOs' effectiveness. Across surveys and FGDs, inadequate and uneven funding emerged as a central limitation. In Aleppo, volunteer groups reported operating "entirely at the team's own expense," with transportation and mobility costs further reducing reach. In Daraa and Suwayda, respondents noted that donor funding support is often geographically selective, leaving some governorates "completely uncovered." Community members and CSOs also criticised misalignment between funded activities and actual needs. In Al-Hasakah, training programmes were described as "formulaic" and poorly matched to labour market demand, while in Aleppo respondents stated that "available training opportunities do not align with the community's actual needs." INGOs and community members alike noted that "ready-made" donor projects frequently prioritise visibility or soft activities over livelihoods, reconstruction, or essential services, reducing perceived relevance and impact.

Weak coordination between CSOs undermines effectiveness. 36% of respondents (165 out of 459) identified lack of coordination as a major gap, with high levels reported in Daraa (61%), Aleppo (49%), Deir ez-Zor (58%), and Ar-Raqqa (61%). CSOs and community members described duplication of efforts in some areas and total absence of services in others. In Daraa, respondents noted that partnerships decline when "trust between stakeholders is weak and clear coordination mechanisms are lacking." (FGD, Daraa). In Hama, resources were described as concentrated within large organisations that "know how to communicate with donors," sidelining smaller actors (KII, Hama). Several respondents also highlighted a clear divide between registered and non-registered organisations, with the latter facing restricted access to funding and authorities. These coordination gaps reduce overall coverage and limit collective impact.

Legal and infrastructure constraints restrict CSOs' effectiveness. CSOs across multiple regions reported that unstable legal frameworks and weak infrastructure disrupt implementation. In Ar-Raqqa, organisations cited challenges related to licensing, banking access, and security approvals, while in Suwayda respondents emphasised the need for "safe and enabling legal environments." In Latakia and coastal areas, security practices, including questioning of CSO staff without clear justification, were reported to deter engagement. Infrastructure constraints further limit reach: in Deir ez-Zor, deteriorating roads, electricity shortages, and poor communication networks affect fieldwork and beneficiary access. In As-Suwayda, prolonged blockades and infrastructure destruction have "created a wide gap between existing realities and actual needs," (KII, As-Suwayda) further stretching CSO capacity.

Trust deficits between communities and CSOs affect legitimacy of interventions. Across several governorates, community members expressed skepticism toward CSOs' motives, transparency, and representativeness. In Damascus, participants stated that organisations often appear more focused on "building relationships with authorities or polishing their image" (FGD, Damascus), than representing community priorities. In Latakia, respondents described some organisations as "small kingdoms" (FGD, Latakia), governed by favouritism, with corruption undermining credibility despite service delivery. 26% of respondents (120 out of 459) cited lack of information or communication as a key gap, while 36% (167 out of 459) pointed to corruption or unfair aid distribution. These perceptions reduce participation, fuel suspicion, and limit CSOs' ability to mobilise communities effectively. In most cases, the assistance is adequate, though not for all groups.

The concentration of CSOs and funding in Damascus has weakened service delivery in other governorates. Multiple respondents reported that the opening of licensing and funding opportunities in Damascus has incentivised CSOs to relocate from other regions, resulting in the closure or downsizing of local initiatives. In Al-Hasakah, participants noted that "after the decision to open licensing for organisations in Damascus… many organisations cancelled their projects and relocated to Damascus to secure funding,"(FGD, Al-Hasakah), leaving displaced populations in areas such as Aleppo, Hama, and Afrin without adequate support. One respondent in Al-Qamishli explained that the absence of organisations has discouraged IDPs from returning, as "there are no organisations supporting their return or providing essential services, in addition to their homes being destroyed." (FGD, Al-Hasakah). Similar concerns were raised in Aleppo, where community members reported that the relocation of CSOs to newly prioritised areas "led to a decline in local activities and created a clear gap within the scope of civil society work." (FGD, Aleppo). While respondents generally acknowledged that increased openness has enabled more inclusive partnerships and access to skilled actors, this shift has simultaneously contributed to geographic inequities in coverage, limiting CSOs' effectiveness in meeting needs outside the capital at baseline.

Sufficiency of resources available to the CSOs

Training opportunities and human resources are the most widely available resources. According to the CSO survey, 66% of organisations (233 out of 352) reported having access to training opportunities, and 51% (181 out of 352) cited the availability of skilled or experienced members. Networks and partnerships were also relatively common, reported by 46% of CSOs (162 out of 352), alongside safe spaces for dialogue and participation (45%, 158 out of 352). In contrast, financial support was reported as available by only 45% of CSOs (159 out of 352), while access to information (36%, 128 out of 352) and support from local authorities (35%, 123 out of 352) were less frequently cited. Qualitative evidence reinforces this pattern. In Ar-Raqqa, respondents noted the presence of "experienced and qualified individuals" and some "safe locations," but emphasised that expertise is often underused. The community possesses highly skilled and experienced individuals in all fields, but their expertise is not being utilised effectively.

Informal community structures and local networks function as practical resources for implementation and access. Across community FGDs, local leaders, committees, and traditional representatives were repeatedly described as enabling coordination and helping address basic needs. In Aleppo, participants highlighted that "local leaders and committees are the foundation for interaction between the residents and organisations," (FGD, Aleppo), because they are continuously present and informed of needs. Another Aleppo participant noted that Mukhtars can play a constructive facilitation role, describing how their village Mukhtar made "regular visits to institutions" to help secure necessities. In Ar-Raqqa, local leaders were described as influential figures who facilitate coordination with authorities and strengthen engagement (FGD, Ar-Raqqa).

Available resources are widely viewed as insufficient compared to the scale and severity of needs. Across governorates, respondents emphasised that resources are not reaching the scale required, particularly in rural or heavily conflict-affected areas. In Deir ez-Zor, participants described needs as immense, noting that the city is largely destroyed, and concluded that resources are "entirely insufficient." In Aleppo, respondents reported that existing initiatives "remain far below the actual needs," describing support as short-term, limited in reach, and not based on long-term plans. In Idlib, respondents similarly described civil society support as limited relative to the "magnitude and diversity of the crises." In Homs, while opportunities exist, they were described as partial: "Solutions are always partial, not comprehensive. Projects are time-bound and not sustainable." (KII, Homs). In Hama, one respondent cited a cash-transfer example where over 1,000 families registered but only 150 received services, illustrating constrained coverage even when programmes exist. This mismatch highlights a significant gap, underscoring the need for scaled efforts to meet existing needs.

Syrian communities widely view youth capacity as a major resource for recovery, but the extent to which this is leveraged is limited. Multiple respondents in community FGDs described youth skills and energy as a key asset for meeting needs and supporting recovery. In Rural Damascus, respondents stated that the community has "diverse youth expertise and skills across all fields." (FGD, Rural Damascus). In Aleppo, participants linked the influx of people from other governorates to an exchange of expertise that expanded dialogue spaces and strengthened coexistence. However, in Al-Hasakah, participants cautioned that favouritism and restrictions can lead to "the wrong person in the wrong place," (FGD, Al-Hasakah), limiting the effectiveness of human resource potential. This suggests that the availability of capable people is not the binding constraint on its own; rather, enabling systems, fair selection, and sustained opportunities determine whether this resource can be mobilised.

Current gaps faced by the CSOs

Across all governorates, CSOs consistently identified lack of funding as the primary constraint on effectiveness, sustainability, and scale. A respondent in Al-Quneitra described funding as "the primary and ultimate foundation for turning ideas into action," (KII, Al-Quneitra), noting that vision and partnerships exist but cannot be operationalised without resources. In Aleppo, organisations reported that available funding is "intermittent and short-term," often restricted to pilot projects that do not cover core operating costs or build institutional capacity. CSOs in Ar-Raqqa similarly stated that "there is no foundation upon which

progress or growth can be built" (KII, Ar-Raqqa) due to the absence of funding for economic recovery and community development. Marginalised groups are disproportionately affected: a disability-led initiative in Ar-Raqqa reported that the "lack of financial support… prevents us from making our voices heard by relevant authorities," reinforcing exclusion (KII, Ar-Raqqa). Funding constraints also undermine sustainability, with some organisations operating for years on a voluntary basis, which "negatively affects civil work and its sustainable impact." These findings indicate that at baseline, financial scarcity is systemic, geographically uneven, and a major barrier to long-term community impact.

A CSO respondent in Damascus stated that there is "no fair distribution of support," leaving many beneficiaries without assistance (KII, Damascus). In Homs, participants reported "a relatively low level of support compared to some other cities," noting that local authorities have limited capacity and that organisations increasingly seek funding outside state structures. Respondents in Homs also pointed to broader external pressures, including the redirection of international funding to other global crises and operational challenges linked to non-cash funding modalities. In Daraa, participants noted that donor support is often channelled to specific geographic areas "to the exclusion of others," while several respondents across regions observed that larger organisations tend to capture a disproportionate share of resources due to their familiarity with donor systems. Together, these findings suggest that while technical and human capacities exist at baseline, financial constraints significantly limit the effective and sustained use of available resources.

Poor coordination and, in some cases, direct obstruction by authorities emerged as a second major gap. In Tartus, a CSO cited "poor coordination with other organisations, difficulty in accessing necessary information, and lack of support from local authorities." (KII, Tartus). In Damascus, community members reported that authorities often position themselves as "patrons of civil work," seizing externally funded projects and re-implementing them through official structures. In Manbij, for example, civil society presence remains minimal because permits were not granted to CSOs. In Ar-Raqqa, civil society activity was described as "curtailed as a result of security practices and a policy of silencing dissent," (KII, Ar-Raqqa) with space increasingly dominated by actors aligned with the de facto authority. These dynamics constrain access, undermine independence, and reduce CSOs' ability to engage openly with communities and decision-makers.

Capacity-building gaps persist despite the presence of skilled individuals and training opportunities. As highlighted above, while many regions report a strong base of qualified and experienced individuals, CSOs and communities highlighted gaps in how this capacity is utilised and sustained. Respondents in Al-Hasakah and Tartus noted that "highly skilled individuals are not being utilised effectively," despite an enabling social environment for partnerships and civic networks. Community members in Ar-Raqqa and Damascus similarly reported that many people are "eager to contribute" but remain marginalised due to lack of structured opportunities. CSOs also expressed concern about over-reliance on external donors, with one Deir ez-Zor respondent warning that international interest "is temporary and will eventually fade," making current support insufficient and unsustainable. INGOs confirmed these gaps, noting that much of their support focuses on institutional strengthening, such as financial management, safeguarding, advocacy, and M&E, indicating that local capacity remains uneven at baseline and requires sustained investment beyond ad hoc training.

The absence of shared needs data and coordinated planning creates a wide gap between resources and actual community priorities. Multiple respondents highlighted the lack of an integrated, community-driven needs database as a major barrier to effective action. In Al-Hasakah, participants stressed that "if a community relies on its own members to identify its needs, it will be better positioned to meet them," (FGD, Al-Hasakah), pointing to the importance of bottom-up assessment. In Homs, respondents noted that without a national information system, CSOs rely on fragmented data from agencies such as UNICEF or WFP, limiting strategic planning. In Latakia, the "incomplete understanding of the community context prior to interventions" (FGD, Latakia) was cited as a reason why projects fail to address real needs. Several regions, including Deir ez-Zor and Suwayda, reported a growing mismatch between humanitarian priorities and longer-term development needs, as funding shifts toward short-term relief. This results in "partial solutions, not comprehensive ones," reinforcing the gap between available resources and the scale of needs.

Women-led, disability-focused, and minority initiatives face compounded barriers to participation and support.

Support for women-specific and disability-specific initiatives remains limited and inconsistent. In Rural Damascus, respondents noted that women's initiatives face "societal resistance and, at times, hostility," alongside limited acceptance of training and dialogue activities. A disability-led group in Ar-Raqqa reported that lack of funding excludes them from decision-making spaces altogether, despite their aim to influence local authorities. Community members in Al-Hasakah also raised concerns about ensuring that qualified individuals are not marginalised based on religious affiliation. More broadly, respondents in Aleppo noted that while training and dialogue spaces exist, "some groups may not easily access these opportunities," (KII, Aleppo) and financial and institutional support is insufficient to expand reach. These findings indicate that at baseline, inclusivity gaps are structural rather than incidental.

5. Implications

Drawing on key findings above, we present a list of implications for the Roadmap implementation below.

Financial fragility, not lack of capacity, is the primary bottleneck to CSO effectiveness. Across Syria, as the baseline study shows, CSOs demonstrate vision, technical skills, and community legitimacy, but remain structurally constrained by insufficient, short-term, and unevenly distributed funding. This means that the constraint is less about a capacity to act, but an "ability to sustain and scale." For the EU Roadmap, this implies that ambitions around participatory governance, social cohesion, and accountability cannot be realised through projectised funding alone. Without longer-term, flexible financing that covers core costs and institutional development, CSOs will remain reactive, fragmented, and unable to move beyond humanitarian stopgaps into more sustainable recovery during this transitional period. This also limits CSOs' ability to invest in needs-based design, inclusive engagement, and accountability mechanisms, reinforcing short-term delivery over structural change.

State - civil society relations are enablers or conversely, inhibitors, of reform. Evidence shows that CSO effectiveness varies less by geography and more by the nature of interaction with authorities. Where interaction is limited and more ad-hoc, dialogue itself tends to be constrained and risk-sensitive reducing opportunities for engagement beyond security processes. This has direct implications for the EU Roadmap. Progress depends on whether civic actors can operate in a collaborative, engaging, and transparent environment with local stakeholders to better target not only service-linked action, but also participate in collectively informing policies. More efforts at constructive engagement between civil society and authorities strengthens CSOs' access, safety, and autonomy.

There appears a lack of shared, community-driven evidence base for prioritisation. While CSOs regularly conduct needs assessments, these are often conducted in isolation and not consolidated into a collective, continuously updated, knowledge base. As a result, gaps persist between identified needs, available resources, and implemented interventions. This fragmentation undermines coordination, contributes to duplication in some areas and neglect in others, and weakens the perceived legitimacy of prioritisation processes. For the EU Roadmap, this implies that national-level priorities will struggle to translate into local impact unless there is investment in shared data and CSO-led knowledge generation. In practice, this could mean supporting CSO-led research that generate and publicly share locally grounded data, as well as fostering open networks and coordination mechanisms that enable CSOs to exchange evidence and harmonise needs assessments.

Inclusion remains constrained, not simply a matter of outreach. Women-led initiatives, disability-focused groups, and minority actors face compounded barriers; financial, social, institutional, and political. These often appear as systemic exclusions that distort whose voices shape reform. Presence does not equal influence: participation without decision-making power risks reinforcing existing hierarchies rather than transforming them. For the EU Roadmap, this means that commitments to inclusivity will remain rhetorical unless accompanied by targeted resourcing and recognition mechanisms for these actors. By encouraging consultation mechanisms, cross-regional dialogue platforms, and recognition of diverse civic actors within coordination frameworks, the Roadmap can help broaden whose voices inform reform processes and policy priorities.

Lack of coordination limits impact more than individual organisational weakness. The evidence points to fragmentation across CSOs, governance actors, and communities as a major limiter of scale and equity. Importantly, this fragmentation is not due to unwillingness to coordinate, but to absence of incentives, platforms, and trusted intermediaries. Competition over limited resources and funding opportunities further undermines coordination, encouraging organisations to prioritise organisational survival over collective action. At the same time, power imbalances between larger, better-resourced CSOs and smaller or newer organisations affect whose voices shape coordination agendas, often limiting equitable participation, shared decision-making, and equal access to resources. For the EU Roadmap, this suggests that outcomes (peacebuilding, equity in service delivery) will not emerge organically. They require investment in cross-regional platforms and norms of responsibility that cut across political and geographic divides.

Economic survival is the most urgent need across communities. Across Syria, the most urgent need identified by communities is economic survival, not as a long-term aspiration but as an immediate condition for dignity, participation, and stability. Livelihoods, income generation, and access to work are consistently framed as prerequisites for meeting basic needs, remaining engaged in civic life, and avoiding short-term coping such as aid dependency. For the EU Roadmap, this underscores that economic recovery is the primary entry point for impact at community level. Interventions that do not tangibly improve household economic security risk being deprioritised by communities themselves, regardless of their technical merit or political relevance.

The most urgent gap among CSOs is sustainable financing with a margin of flexibility that is supported by contextual community needs. While CSOs demonstrate strong contextual knowledge, human capital, and community trust, the most critical gap limiting their effectiveness is short-term programming due to limited resources. This gap constrains their ability to move beyond short-term, donor-driven activities toward sustained responses that match the scale and urgency of community needs. Funding rigidity also shapes how CSOs design interventions, reinforcing project designs driven by donor calls rather than by structured, community-defined priorities. This constrains their ability to establish a solid and structured internal system that would contribute to an equal CSO-donor alignment, weakening internal and external coordination. For EU Roadmap implementation, this implies that the policies of resource distribution would be more effective if informed by contextual needs of communities and CSOs, and provide a flexibility margin for CSOs to solidify their internal structure.
Addressing financing constraints while supporting structural internal stability would equip CSOs to build on their acquired knowledge and come up with income-generating programming that would serve a less donor-dependent environment.

Basic services and infrastructure gaps constrain all recovery efforts. The baseline study shows that deficits in electricity, water, health, housing, and fuel remain pervasive and systemic concerns, cutting across regions and demographics. These gaps undermine economic recovery, education access, health outcomes, and social stability, all simultaneously. CSOs are widely perceived by communities as central actors in filling these service gaps, particularly where public provision is absent or inconsistent. For the EU Roadmap, this implies that service delivery should not be viewed solely as humanitarian backstopping, but as a stabilisation issue. Without improvements in basic services, investments in livelihoods or participatory governance are likely to have limited durability. At the same time, the reliance on CSOs to substitute for public systems raises sustainability and legitimacy risks, reinforcing the need for clearer transition pathways as authorities gradually re-engage.

Needs are consistent at the national level, but shaped locally. While livelihoods dominate across all governorates, the assessment shows that the relative weight of services and peacebuilding shifts depending on local conditions, and that gender and age shape how needs are experienced. This suggests that a whole-of-Syria approach is viable and necessary, but only if it allows context-sensitive prioritisation within a shared national framework. For the EU Roadmap, this argues against rigid geographic or thematic silos and in favour of adaptive programming that responds to local manifestations of nationally shared crises.

CSO capacity gaps are systemic, not technical. The baseline findings indicate that gaps in CSO performance are rarely driven by lack of technical skills or organisational awareness. Across coordination, programme

management, accountability, and sustainability, CSOs demonstrate functional competence and contextual understanding. The primary constraints are systemic: short funding cycles, rigid donor requirements, limited space for adaptation, and weak incentives for collaboration. For the EU Roadmap, this implies that capacity-building framed narrowly around skills transfer or training risks misdiagnosing the problem. Strengthening CSO effectiveness will require addressing the systems in which capacities are exercised, including funding modalities, coordination incentives, and decision-making power, rather than focusing solely on organisational deficits.

Accountability is constrained by power, not intent. Findings show that accountability mechanisms and inclusive practices exist but remain shallow, informal, and unevenly used. Low levels of complaint, limited challenge to decisions, and uneven participation of women, youth, and marginalised groups reflect power asymmetries and dependency dynamics rather than satisfaction or lack of awareness. For the EU Roadmap, this implies that strengthening accountability and inclusion cannot rely on the mere presence of feedback and protection mechanisms. It requires addressing power imbalances within funding relationships, coordination spaces, and community engagement processes, and creating protected space for dissent, feedback, and representation.

6. Recommendations

6.1. For the Donors

Incentivise coordination and collective action:
Support coordination as a collective function rather than an assumed by-product of project delivery. Donors should resource coordination explicitly, including facilitation, documentation, and follow-up, and prioritise strengthening existing platforms rather than creating parallel structures. Funding mechanisms should incentivise collective outcomes, such as joint analysis, advocacy positions, or referral systems, while addressing power asymmetries within networks through transparent governance requirements and safeguards for equitable participation.

Position CSOs as community drivers: Move beyond engaging grassroots CSOs primarily as sources of community data or as implementers of pre-designed projects. While donors and INGOs recognise the value of local CSOs for needs assessment and access, current funding and partnership models often confine them to subcontracting roles with limited influence over priorities, design, and decision-making. To strengthen impact and legitimacy, funding mechanisms and partnerships should explicitly position CSOs as drivers of community-based change, with meaningful roles in agenda-setting, programme design, adaptation, and learning. However, this also necessitates donors to closely accompany grassroot CSOs in structuring their internal system, and set a clear monitoring and evaluation framework that is oriented towards organizational sustainability beyond the funding period. development. Empowering CSOs in this way is essential to shift from output-level delivery toward outcomes that reflect community priorities and sustain local ownership.

Purposefully enable and support equitable partnerships: Move from encouraging collaboration to structurally enabling equitable partnerships between large and small CSOs. Enabling each CSO to act within its area of expertise, internal capacities and talents, and clear accountability and risk assessments and risk mitigation policies allows for a clearer distribution of work between partners and an informed joint decision-making mechanism. Eligibility and compliance requirements should be adapted to enable participation by smaller and community-based organisations, rather than reinforcing subcontracting dynamics. Partnership quality should be monitored not only through delivery outputs, but through how roles, influence, and risk are distributed, to avoid reproducing existing power imbalances within funded consortia.

Enable contextual sustainability and inclusive access to funding: Align sustainability expectations with the economic, regulatory, and political realities in which Syrian CSOs operate. Diversification and income generation remain structurally constrained, and sustainability should therefore be understood primarily as organisational resilience and continuity rather than self-financing. At the same time, access to funding must be made more inclusive by revisiting compliance and eligibility requirements (such as registration, audit obligations, and years of registration) that disproportionately exclude smaller, newer, and community-based organisations. Reducing these barriers is essential to broaden participation, rebalance power within civil society, and prevent sustainability from becoming a privilege of a few well-resourced actors.

Enable institutional sustainability:
Move beyond short-term, project-based funding toward multi-year and flexible financing that supports institutional sustainability. Without time and predictability, CSOs remain locked in reactive delivery cycles and are unable to consolidate governance, retain staff, or invest in coordination, accountability, and learning. Funding should explicitly cover institutional functions, not only activities, including core staff, coordination roles, internal systems, and community engagement. Supporting these functions as legitimate programme components is essential to strengthen organisational continuity, reduce fragmentation, and enable civil society to grow, stabilise, and anchor itself sustainably within communities. Fairness can be ensured through clear eligibility criteria (such as demonstrable experience, sound governance, and financial management capacity), open and competitive selection processes, performance-based continuation, and regular reviews. The eligibility criteria could be proportionate to organisational size. For smaller organisations, this could mean simplified requirements, smaller funding windows, capacity-strengthening components, or phased support that allows organisations to build governance and financial systems over time. In this way, fairness would mean ensuring equitable access to support while maintaining accountability.

Encourage needs-based design, accountability, and inclusive civic space: Invest in shared, CSO-led needs analysis that reduces fragmentation and strengthens prioritisation, coordination, and legitimacy. Community engagement should move beyond consultation toward structured decision-making, with design processes that explicitly link community input to prioritisation, trade-offs, and adaptation over time. Accountability mechanisms should be treated as protective systems that enable communities to raise concerns safely, particularly in contexts marked by dependency, fear, or power asymmetries, and should be explicitly resourced to support communication, grievance handling, and follow-up. Together, these shifts are essential to move communities from passive recipients of assistance toward proactive actors in civic space, where participation translates into influence, particularly for women, youth, and marginalised groups whose voices are often present but insufficiently reflected in decisions.

6.2. For the Syrian Civil Society

Prioritise coordination:
Prioritise coordination that leads to concrete collective outcomes rather than broad but shallow participation. CSOs should focus on selective joint action, such as coordinated advocacy, referrals, shared standards, or collective analysis, where trust already exists. Formalising coordination arrangements, including roles, decision-making processes, and representation, can reduce reliance on personal relationships and mitigate power imbalances. Actively supporting the participation and leadership of smaller, women-led, and youth-led organisations within coordination spaces is essential to strengthen collective positioning and legitimacy.

Ensure needs-based programme design:
Strengthen the translation of community engagement into structured, needs-based programme design. CSOs should move beyond informal consultation by documenting priorities, trade-offs, and constraints, and by ensuring that community input meaningfully informs project objectives and sequencing. Consultation approaches should be diversified to avoid over-reliance on the same interlocutors and to reach women, youth, persons with disabilities, and less visible groups. Clear communication with communities about what can and cannot be addressed, timelines, and decision-making processes is essential to manage expectations and sustain trust, particularly in contexts where needs exceed available resources.

Prioritise sustainability and organisational consolidation:
Prioritise building internal systems that are useful, realistic, and durable, rather than primarily designed to meet donor compliance requirements. Governance, documentation, accountability, and learning systems should serve organisational decision-making and continuity first, even when resources are limited. Use sustainability planning as a tool for prioritisation rather than aspiration. Focus on stabilising core functions before pursuing diversification or expansion. Where diversification is explored, it should be incremental and aligned with organisational capacity. Reduce dependence on individuals by clarifying roles, documenting processes, and strengthening institutional memory.

Emphasise inclusivity beyond presence:
Mainstream inclusive participatory structures across all departments (finance, communication, representation, decision-making), recognising that women, youth, persons with disabilities, and marginalised groups often attend activities without influencing outcomes. Addressing this gap requires adapting engagement methods to social, cultural, and power dynamics, including separate consultations, trusted intermediaries, and safe spaces for dissent. Inclusion should be reflected in agenda-setting, decision-making, and accountability processes, not only in outreach figures. Strengthening efficient participation is essential to legitimacy and high quality results, particularly in contexts where civic space is constrained and engagement is easily reduced to symbolic presence.

6.3. For Future Monitoring

6.1. For the Donors

The baseline findings point to a civil society ecosystem that is active but fluid, relational, and highly context-dependent. As such, future monitoring frameworks should move beyond static, one-off measurement approaches and adopt methods that are better suited to capturing change over time, uneven progress, and qualitative shifts.

Maintain systematic triangulation across data sources: Future monitoring exercises should triangulate quantitative and qualitative data collected through surveys, KIIs, and FGDs with targeted secondary research and desk review. The baseline demonstrated that primary data collection tools alone are insufficient to fully capture complex dynamics such as collaboration quality, accountability practices, power relations, or perceived legitimacy. While quantitative indicators provide scale and comparability, and qualitative tools capture lived experience and perception, secondary research and desk review remain essential to validate, contextualize, and cross-check self-reported information. Even where desk review is constrained by limited public documentation, it plays a critical role in corroborating claims related to coordination platforms, joint initiatives, advocacy efforts, and organisational practices, and in identifying discrepancies between reported and documented activity.

Integrate CSO-generated evidence directly into data collection tools: Future monitoring should aim to systematically collect relevant organisational data directly from CSOs as part of the primary data collection process. The baseline shows that CSOs hold significant internal knowledge and documentation on coordination, partnerships, accountability mechanisms, community engagement, and advocacy initiatives, but this information is not consistently captured through standard survey or KII questions. Future exercises should therefore treat CSO-generated data as a core monitoring input by designing tools that explicitly invite organisations to share structured evidence and documentation during data collection. This approach would reduce data gaps, improve consistency, and strengthen the evidentiary basis of monitoring, while also recognising CSOs as knowledge holders rather than passive respondents.

Treat monitoring as a rolling learning exercise: Given the volatility of Syria's political, security, and funding environment, monitoring should be framed as a continuous learning process rather than a one-off compliance exercise. The baseline shows that mechanisms such as coordination platforms, accountability systems, and partnership models often exist in form but evolve significantly in function over time. Periodic light-touch monitoring, combined with deeper learning reviews at key intervals, would allow programmes to adapt to emerging risks, opportunities, and shifts in civic space.

Prioritise longitudinal tracking of existing mechanisms: The baseline confirms the presence of coordination platforms, community engagement mechanisms, and organisational systems across many CSOs. Future monitoring should therefore prioritise longitudinal tracking of a defined set of mechanisms rather than repeated mapping of their existence. Following the same platforms, partnerships, and CSOs over time will allow monitoring to capture meaningful change, including sustainability, dormancy, transformation, or institutionalisation. This approach is particularly important for assessing whether coordination platforms remain active beyond project cycles and whether accountability mechanisms move from informal practice to embedded systems.

Balance indicator stability with contextual adaptability: To enable comparison over time, core indicators should remain stable across monitoring rounds. However, the baseline also demonstrates that rigid indicator

frameworks risk missing emergent dynamics, particularly in relation to civic space, informal collaboration, and community trust. Future iterations should therefore retain a small number of adaptive qualitative questions that can be revised in response to contextual change, while preserving core quantitative indicators for trend analysis.

Embed feedback loops with CSOs and communities: Finally, future monitoring exercises should include longer and more structured feedback loops with CSOs and, where appropriate, community representatives. Sharing findings, validating interpretations, and jointly reflecting on trends can enhance data quality, strengthen ownership, and reinforce monitoring as a collective learning tool rather than an extractive process. This is particularly important in contexts where trust, legitimacy, and participation are themselves core objectives of the programme.

7. Appendices

7.1. Appendix 1: Detailed Results Frameworks

Priority 1 – Organisational Sustainability

This priority responds directly to the structural challenges facing civil society in Syria, where fragmentation, donor-driven competition, and weak coordination undermine the collective influence of local actors. By strengthening platforms for collaboration and promoting equitable partnership incentives, the priority addresses the lack of trust and duplication among CSOs, while creating space for inclusive participation. In a context of protracted conflict, shrinking civic space, and limited funding, embedding accountability practices is essential to building legitimacy with communities. Moreover, by sequencing capacity support and financial sustainability focus after coordination and trust are established, the priority ensures that Syrian CSOs are not only better resourced but also positioned to advocate more effectively and sustain their work beyond short-term project cycles.

Impact: Syrian CSOs and civic actors reshape and sustain civic space

	1	2	3
Outcome	Strengthened cross-disciplinary and trans-regional collaboration among CSOs and civic actors	Increased engagement of communities with CSOs as legitimate actors	Enhanced organisational capacities and sustainable management of CSOs
Outputs	1.1: Coordination platforms of CSOs and other civic actors are strengthened 1.2: Donor funding is designed to promote collaboration between large and small CSOs	2.1: Transparency and accountability mechanisms are developed and implemented 2.2: CSOs’ capacity is strengthened to relay and respond effectively to community needs	3.1: Tailored capacity assessment processes and peer learning mechanisms are developed and implemented 3.2: Financial diversification is integrated into CSO operations
Activities	١,١,١: Support and adapt existing coordination platforms at cross-disciplinary and trans-regional levels	٢,١,١: Develop and promote accountability guidelines with community representatives on transparency and safeguarding for CSOs to adopt	٣,١,١: Support capacity assessments with CSOs to identify strengths and gaps in technical and programmatic capacities

Impact: Syrian CSOs and civic actors reshape and sustain civic space

	1	2	3
Activities	١,١,٢: Support the CSO consortia through funding, facilitation, and technical assistance ١,٢,١: Revise funding guidelines to include provisions for equal share of resources and decisions between large and small CSOs ١,٢,٢: Pilot funding schemes that encourage collaboration between large and small CSOs	٢,١,٢: Facilitate exchanges between CSOs to share good practices on transparency and accountability ٢,٢,١: Ensure the uptake of conflict-sensitive approaches in CSO strategies and operations ٢,٢,٢: Support CSOs in developing the skills to design and deliver programmes that respond to community needs	٣,١,٢: Facilitate peer-to-peer mentoring between established and emerging CSOs ٣,٢,١: Support CSOs in accessing alternative resources, including diaspora networks and private sector partnerships ٣,٢,٢: Support networking and consortia opportunities for CSOs to jointly fundraise and share resources

Priority 2 – Participatory Governance

This priority is essential in Syria's highly polarised environment, where communities are deeply divided along political, geographic, and social lines. The absence of inclusive and trusted spaces for dialogue has left civic actors with limited channels to influence decision-making. By fostering inclusive dialogues and ensuring that marginalised groups such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities co-lead these, this priority tackles exclusion and representation gaps that fuel conflict dynamics. Moreover, by creating sustainable pathways for community deliberation outcomes to feed into decision-making, it addresses the disconnect between local communities and decision-making structures. In a context of eroded trust and limited participation, strengthening dialogue processes not only builds legitimacy but also lays the groundwork for future democratic reform.

Impact: Syrian CSOs drive inclusive dialogue for shared decision-making

	1
Outcome	Improved processes that enables community involvement in decision-making
Outputs	1.1: Inclusive forums are convened by CSOs for communities and local authorities for dialogue. 1.2: Channels are created by CSOs for community input to reach decision-makers.
Activities	1.1.1: Facilitate mapping of CSOs and local institutions at the governorate level to identify readiness for community dialogue. 1.1.2: Encourage CSOs and local institutions to co-convene discussion forums. 1.1.3: Support minority-led organisations to lead the discussion forums. 1.2.1: Support CSOs to create and maintain ways for community input to feed into local and regional decisions.

Priority 3 – Community Resilience

This priority addresses the need to strengthen the role of Syrian civil society in supporting recovery and resilience at community level, in a context where social divisions and economic pressures continue to undermine stability. We confirm this through the baseline analysis and needs assessment. While Syrian CSOs are already engaged in reconciliation, social cohesion, and livelihoods-related work, their ability to sustain and expand these initiatives is constrained by inflexible support modalities. This priority focuses on enabling CSOs to pursue locally defined reconciliation efforts and to link economic recovery with peacebuilding in ways that respond to community realities in a more sustainable manner. By supporting flexible and evidence-informed approaches, the priority recognises CSOs as key actors in addressing both social tensions and economic stress, contributing to more resilient communities.

Impact: Syrian communities experience resilience through CSO-led peace and recovery efforts.

	1
Outcome	Enhanced contribution by CSOs to peace and recovery by addressing social tensions and economic stress at community level.
Outputs	1.1: CSO-led reconciliation and social cohesion initiatives are sustained in conflict-affected communities. 1.2: Livelihoods and economic recovery initiatives and small-scale rehabilitation projects led by CSOs are expanded.
Activities	1.1.1: Provide flexible support and accompaniment to CSOs to pursue locally defined reconciliation initiatives. 1.2.1: Enable CSOs to integrate livelihoods into peacebuilding initiatives and peacebuilding into livelihoods initiatives. 1.2.2: Support evidence generation on the role of livelihoods in strengthening resilience.

Table 29: Proposed Results Framework for Priority 3

7.2. Appendix 2: Indicator Frameworks

Priority 1 – Organisational Sustainability

Result Level	Statement	Quantitative Indicator	Qualitative Indicator	Data Collection
Impact	Syrian CSOs and civic actors reshape and sustain civic space	Percentage of CSOs reporting having led or co-led civic initiatives or advocacy campaigns over a defined period Percentage of CSOs reporting increased confidence in their ability to make positive change in the civic space	Narratives from CSO leaders on their perceived positive influence	Desk review of CSO activity records / reports published KIIs with CSO leaders CSO survey
Outcome 1	Strengthened cross-disciplinary and trans-regional collaboration among CSOs and civic actors	Number of documented and publicly acknowledged joint initiatives or partnerships established between CSOs across governorates and sectors	Narratives from CSOs on the quality of collaboration and recognition of CSOs work	Desk review of CSO activity records / reports published KIIs with CSO leaders
Output 1.1	Coordination platforms of CSOs and other civic actors are strengthened	Number of coordination networks created and active for 12+ months	Feedback from CSOs on the inclusivity of the platforms and results and effectiveness of coordination and inclusivity	Desk review on networks CSO survey KIIs with CSO leaders
Output 1.2	Donor funding is designed to promote collaboration between large and small CSOs	Number of donor-funded grants explicitly requiring partnerships between large and small CSOs	Perceptions of CSOs on whether donor funding mechanisms allow equitable participation.	Desk review of donor calls for proposals KIIs with CSO leaders
Outcome 2	Increased engagement of communities with CSOs as legitimate actors	Percentage of community members reporting increased engagement with CSOs (Disaggregated by gender and governorate)	Perceptions of communities on CSOs legitimacy in responding to the community needs	Community Survey FGDs with community members KIIs with donors / other actors
Output 2.1	Transparency and accountability mechanisms are developed and implemented	Number of CSOs with functioning accountability mechanisms (Disaggregated by governorates)	Reflections from community members on whether accountability mechanisms are meaningful and used	CSO survey FGDs with communities KIIs with CSO leaders

Result Level	Statement	Quantitative Indicator	Qualitative Indicator	Data Collection
Output 2.2	CSOs' capacity is strengthened to relay and respond effectively to community needs	Number of CSOs that developed or revised programme strategies, project plans, or proposals aligned with community needs	Community perceptions on CSOs' responsiveness, effectiveness, or efficiency in programme delivery.	CSO survey FGDs with communities
Outcome 3	Enhanced organisational capacities and sustainable management of CSOs	Percentage of CSOs reporting improved scores in organisational capacity areas[1] (Disaggregated by governorate)	Perspectives of CSOs on how organisational practices have strengthened and what sustainability challenges remain	CSO capacity assessment tool[2] KIIs with CSO leaders / staff Desk review of CSO documents / records
Output 3.1	Tailored capacity assessment processes and peer learning mechanisms are developed and implemented	Number of CSOs participating in capacity assessments and peer learning events. (Disaggregated by governorate)	CSO feedback on the usefulness and relevance of capacity assessments and peer learning.	CSO survey Desk review of attendance lists / event reports KIIs with CSO leaders
Output 3.2	Financial diversification is integrated into CSO operations	Number of CSOs reporting at least two different funding streams (e.g., donor grants, services, private sector partnership) (Disaggregated by governorate)	CSO leaders' reflections on opportunities and barriers to diversifying funding	CSO survey KIIs with CSO leaders

Priority 2 – Participatory Governance

Result Level	Statement	Quantitative Indicator	Qualitative Indicator	Data Collection
Impact	Syrian CSOs drive inclusive dialogue for shared decision-making	Percentage of community members who feel their voices are being relayed for decision-making. Percentage of CSOs demonstrating active participation and leadership in inclusive dialogue efforts	Community perceptions of CSOs' role in shaping local, regional, and national-level decisions through dialogue.	Community survey CSO survey FGDs with community members KIIs with CSOs

[1] The Capacity Assessment Tool captures organisational capacity in the following seven areas; a) governance and accountability, b) structure and staffing, c) finance, procurement and operations, d) sustainability and partnerships, e) project and programme management, f) coordination and networks, and e) PSEA, safety and security.

[2] The Capacity Assessment Tool will be populated by the selected CSOs themselves. It will then be independently reviewed and re-populated by the research team to ensure validation and triangulation.

Result Level	Statement	Quantitative Indicator	Qualitative Indicator	Data Collection
Outcome	Improved processes that enable community involvement in decision-making	Percentage of respondent community members actively participating in processes. (disaggregated by governorates, gender and age of community representatives)	Community perceptions on diversity, inclusiveness, and effectiveness of forums and feedback channels in representing community voices	Community survey
				FGDs with community members
Output 1.1	Inclusive forums are convened by CSOs for communities and local authorities for dialogue.	Percentage of CSOs reporting having held inclusive forums over a defined period	Participant reflections on whether forums foster joint decision-making and equitable dialogue.	CSO survey
				Desk review of forums reports
				FGDs with community members
Output 1.2	Channels are created by CSOs for community input to reach decision-makers.	Percentage of CSOs reporting that community priorities raised in dialogues / forums are formally communicated to local authorities / decision-makers	Perceptions of CSOs and community members on whether credible feedback loops exist and their effectiveness	CSO survey
				FGDs with community members
				KIIs with CSOs
				KIIs with local authority representatives

7.3. Appendix 3: Priority 1 - Disaggregated Data

Impact: Syrian CSOs and civic actors reshape and sustain civic space

Governorate	CSOs surveyed	CSOs reporting ≥1 civic initiative / campaign	% of CSOs
Al-Hasakah	24	24	100%
Al-Quneitra	7	5	71%
Aleppo	40	38	95%
Ar-Raqqa	28	28	100%
As-Suwayda	26	22	85%
Damascus	26	24	92%
Daraa	22	16	73%
Deir ez-Zor	27	26	96%
Hama	27	23	85%
Homs	24	15	63%
Idlib	22	18	82%
Latakia	25	18	72%
Rural Damascus	25	20	80%
Tartus	29	21	72%
Total	**352**	**298**	**85%**

Table 1: CSOs reporting civic initiatives or advocacy campaigns, disaggregated by governorate (CSO Survey)

Governorate	CSOs surveyed	CSOs reporting ≥1 civic initiative / campaign	% of CSOs
Al-Hasakah	4	4	3
Aleppo	6	2	0
Ar-Raqqa	4	3	3
As-Suwayda	4	2	2
Damascus	5	2	0
Daraa	5	3	0
Deir ez-Zor	5	1	0
Hama	3	2	1
Homs	4	1	1
Idlib	4	0	0
Latakia	5	2	0
Quneitra	3	1	0
Rural Damascus	4	2	0
Tartus	3	3	1
Total	**59**	**34**	**12**

Table 2: CSO leadership in civic initiatives and advocacy campaigns, disaggregated by governorate (CSO KIIs)

Governorate	CSOs surveyed	Low confidence (1–2)	Moderate (3)	High confidence (4–5)
Al-Hasakah	24	0	4	20
Al-Quneitra	7	0	1	6
Aleppo	40	0	4	36
Ar-Raqqa	28	0	3	25
As-Suwayda	26	0	1	25
Damascus	26	0	2	24
Daraa	22	0	4	18
Deir ez-Zor	27	0	3	24
Hama	27	2	7	18
Homs	24	1	5	18
Idlib	22	0	3	19
Latakia	25	2	5	18
Rural Damascus	25	1	2	22
Tartus	29	3	9	17
Total	**352**	**9**	**43**	**300**

Table 3: CSO confidence in ability to positively influence civic space, disaggregated by governorate

Outcome 1
Strengthened cross-disciplinary and trans-regional collaboration among CSOs and civic actors

Governorate	CSOs interviewed	CSOs reporting ≥1 joint initiative	CSOs reporting no initiatives	Total joint initiatives reported
Al-Hasakah	4	4	0	2
Aleppo	4	4	0	4
Ar-Raqqa	4	4	0	4
As-Suwayda	5	4	1	9
Damascus	5	5	0	5
Daraa	4	4	0	4
Deir ez-Zor	4	4	0	5
Hama	3	3	0	2
Homs	4	3	1	4
Idlib	4	4	0	4
Latakia	5	5	0	8
Quneitra	3	2	1	2
Rural Damascus	4	4	0	4
Tartus	4	3	1	3
Total / Average	**59**	**53**	**6**	**66**

Table 4: Joint initiatives and partnerships reported in KIIs, disaggregated by governorate

Output 1.1: Coordination platforms of CSOs and other civic actors are strengthened

Governorate	Data source	Total CSOs / KIIs	CSOs / KIIs part of a network	Network age <1 year	1–3 years	>3 years
Al-Hasakah	CSO survey	24	22	4	9	8
	KII	4	4	–	–	–
Aleppo	CSO survey	40	37	7	13	17
	KII	6	3	–	–	–
Ar-Raqqa	CSO survey	28	25	0	12	13
	KII	4	1	–	–	–
As-Suwayda	CSO survey	26	19	5	5	9
	KII	4	3	–	–	–
Damascus	CSO survey	26	17	3	7	6
	KII	5	3	–	–	–
Daraa	CSO survey	22	15	1	4	10
	KII	5	3	–	–	–
Deir ez-Zor	CSO survey	27	26	2	8	16

Governorate	Data source	Total CSOs / KIIs	CSOs / KIIs part of a network	Network age <1 year	1–3 years	>3 years
	KII	5	4	–	–	–
Hama	CSO survey	27	21	0	2	17
	KII	3	3	–	–	–
Homs	CSO survey	24	12	3	2	7
	KII	4	4	–	–	–
Idlib	CSO survey	22	20	3	4	13
	KII	4	3	–	–	–
Latakia	CSO survey	25	15	5	3	7
	KII	5	4	–	–	–
Rural Damascus	CSO survey	25	18	5	4	9
	KII	4	4	–	–	–
Tartous	CSO survey	29	12	7	1	4
	KII	3	1	–	–	–
Quneitra	CSO survey	7	6	1	2	3
	KII	3	0	–	–	–
Total	CSO survey	**352**	**265**	**46**	**76**	**139**
	KII	**59**	**45**	–	–	–

Table 5: Coordination participation and network age, disaggregated by governorate

	Network / platform	Geographic scope	Source	Operational status (as reported in KIIs)
1	Syria NGO Forum	National / cross-border	Desk review	Active
2	Syria INGO Regional Forum (SIRF)	Regional	Desk review	Active
3	Damascus INGO Forum (DINGO)	Government-controlled areas	Desk review	Dissolved mid 2025
4	Northwest Syria NGO Forum	Northwest Syria	Desk review	Dissolved mid 2025
5	Northeast Syria NGO Platform	Northeast Syria	Desk review / KIIs	Partially active
6	Syrian NGO Alliance (SNA)	Cross-regional	Desk review	Active
7	Syrian Networks League (SNL)	National	Desk review	Active
8	International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)	Global / regional	Desk review	Active
9	Civil Society Organizations Platform in North East Syria	Northeast Syria	KIIs	Dormant / inactive
10	Environmental Protection Coordination Group	Northeast Syria	KIIs	Active

Table 6: Coordination platforms and networks identified at baseline (KIIs and desk review)

11	Women Peace Leaders Network Coalition	Multi-regional	KIIs	Active
12	Women's Cooperation Network	As-Suwayda	KIIs	Partially active
13	ASO Platform	Multi-regional	KIIs	Dormant / inactive
14	Civil Society Organisations Alliance	Multi-regional	KIIs	Dormant / inactive
15	Union of Organizations in North East Syria	Northeast Syria	KIIs	Partially active
16	Deir ez-Zor Civil Society Organizations Coalition	Deir ez-Zor	KIIs	Partially active
17	Localization Working Group	Deir ez-Zor	KIIs	Active
18	Search for Common Ground partner network	Multi-regional	KIIs	Active
19	Madaniya Network	Multi-governorate	KIIs	Active
20	Reviving Civil Society Network	As-Suwayda	KIIs	Active
21	Civil Alliance	As-Suwayda	KIIs	Partially active
22	Northwest Syria Organizations Alliance	Northwest Syria	KIIs	Active
23	Syrian Forum	National	KIIs	Active
24	Wasl Network	Multi-regional	KIIs	Active
25	WILPF Forum	National / women-led	KIIs	Active
26	Education Sector Platform	Thematic	KIIs	Partially active
27	Cultural Forum	Local	KIIs	Partially active
28	Entrepreneurial Business Forum	Local / thematic	KIIs	Partially active
29	Beit Al-Kul Forum	Local	KIIs	Partially active

Perceived effectiveness of coordination platforms (CSO survey and CSO KIIs)

Effectiveness score	***Number of CSOs***
1 – Not effective	8
2 – Slightly effective	42
3 – Moderately effective	102
4 – Effective	133
5 – Very effective	67

Table 7: Rating of networks' effectiveness in CSO surveys

"Mixed / Conditional" responses reflect answers indicating that equitable participation or balanced collaboration occurred only under specific conditions (e.g. donor intervention, particular partners, or isolated projects), rather than as a standard feature of funding mechanisms.

Governorate	Average effectiveness rating / area
Al-Hasakah	3.4
Al-Quneitra	4.6
Aleppo	3.5
Raqqah	2.7
As-Suwayda	3.5
Damascus	3.6
Daraa	4.2
Deir Ezzor	3.6
Hama	4.1
Homs	3.5
Idlib	3.9
Latakia	3.6
Rural Damascus	4.3
Tartous	3.6
Total	**4**

Table 8: Average rating of networks' effectiveness in CSO surveys, disaggregated per governorate

Perceived legitimacy and trust

Dimension	Theme	What works	What does not work / limitations
Effectiveness	Overall performance	A large majority of CSOs perceive coordination platforms as effective: 302 out of 352 CSOs (86%) rated platforms at level 3 or above, with strong performance linked to specific functions.	Effectiveness is uneven and function-specific; platforms are not perceived as comprehensively effective across all dimensions of coordination.
	Information exchange & learning	Platforms are consistently valued as spaces for knowledge exchange, peer learning, and understanding diverse governance and operational contexts. Respondents link these functions directly to higher effectiveness ratings.	Learning outcomes are rarely formalized or systematized, limiting transfer beyond active members.
	Advocacy & thematic coordination	Coordination is most effective when mobilized around clear, shared advocacy objectives or thematic priorities, producing tangible results (e.g. halted projects, joint campaigns).	Effectiveness declines when objectives are diffuse or when coordination is expected to extend into long-term operational integration.
	Trust-based collaboration	Networks with stable membership and long-standing relationships demonstrate higher effectiveness, even in the absence of strong formal structures.	Reliance on informal trust makes effectiveness fragile and difficult to replicate or scale across contexts.
Sustainability	Continuity over time	Some platforms demonstrate longevity where trust and shared purpose are maintained.	Many platforms weaken or cease activity once project-based funding ends, reflecting limited institutional anchoring and long-term planning.

Dimension	Theme	What works	What does not work / limitations
	Resourcing of coordination	Informal coordination continues even in low-resource contexts, particularly during crises or campaigns.	Lack of dedicated coordination resources and overreliance on voluntary engagement undermine continuity, follow-up, and institutional memory.
	Structural context	Coordination adapts flexibly to changing contexts and crises.	Divided control zones, mobility restrictions, and political sensitivities constrain sustained cross-regional coordination.
Inclusivity	Organizational diversity	Platforms bring together organizations from different regions and sectors, creating potential for diverse participation.	Influence within platforms is uneven, with larger or better-connected CSOs often dominating agenda-setting and access to opportunities.
	Small and newly established CSOs	Formal inclusion of smaller and newer CSOs is reported in several platforms.	Smaller CSOs often report limited voice and decision-making power, resulting in nominal rather than substantive inclusion.
	Women-led organizations	Women's participation is visible, particularly in thematic networks related to gender or social cohesion.	Women remain underrepresented in leadership and strategic decision-making roles within broader coordination platforms.
	Youth participation	Youth are engaged in implementation and volunteer roles within coordinated initiatives.	Limited pathways exist for youth to influence priorities or assume leadership roles within platforms.
	Geographic inclusion	Platforms enable some degree of cross-regional exchange and coordination.	CSOs in eastern, southern, and hard-to-reach areas report weaker access to active coordination spaces.
Legitimacy & trust	Governance & transparency	Platforms perceived as transparent and collectively owned retain higher levels of trust and participation.	Perceptions of favouritism, personal interests, and opaque decision-making undermine trust and discourage engagement.

Table 9: Summary of key findings under output 1.1, disaggregated by theme

Output 1.2
Donor funding is designed to promote collaboration between large and small CSOs

KII question	Yes	No	Mixed / Conditional	No response
Accessed donor-funded grants explicitly requiring collaboration between CSOs (AN)	16 (27%)	39 (66%)	–	4 (7%)
Donor-funded initiatives promoted collaboration between large and small CSOs (AO)	38 (64%)	13 (22%)	–	8 (14%)
Funding mechanisms allow equitable participation for both small and large CSOs (AQ)	18 (31%)	33 (56%)	8 (13%)	–
Collaboration between large and small CSOs was balanced (AT)	14 (24%)	31 (53%)	10 (17%)	4 (7%)
Equitable participation was successfully facilitated in at least one partnership (AX)	17 (29%)	28 (47%)	9 (15%)	5 (8%)

Table 10: CSO perceptions of donor funding mechanisms and collaboration (KII data)

Outcome 2
Increased engagement of communities with CSOs as legitimate actors

Governorate	Total respondents	Aware of CSOs operating in the community	Participated in / interacted with CSO activities in the past 12 months
Aleppo	53 (27M - 26F)	47 (23M - 24 F) - 89%	39 (19M - 20F) - 74%
Ar-Raqqa	33 (18M - 15F)	31 - (17M - 14F) - 94%	32 (17M - 15F) - 97%
Al-Hasakah	30 (12M - 18 F)	29 (11M - 18F) - 97%	28 (10M - 18F) - 93%
Daraa	41 (16M - 25F)	33 (14M - 19F) - 80%	32 (14M - 18F) - 78%
Deir ez-Zor	38 (22M - 16F)	30 (17M - 13F) - 79%	26 (15M - 11F) - 68%
Damascus	30 (23M - 7F)	26 (21M - 5F) - 87%	23 (18M - 5F) - 77%
Rural Damascus	29 (14M - 15F)	19 (9M - 10 F) - 66%	16 (8M - 8F) - 55%
Homs	31 (16M - 15F)	23 (14M - 9F) - 74%	19 (14M - 9F) - 61%
Hama	29 (9M - 20F)	22 (8M - 14F) - 76%	18 (4M - 12F) - 62%
Idlib	31 (21M - 10F)	27 (22M - 9F) - 87%	13 (6M - 7F) - 42%
Latakia	30 (20M - 10F)	21 (13M - 8F) - 70%	13 (8M - 5F) - 43%
Quneitra	20 (18M- 2 F)	17 (15M - 2F) - 85%	11 (10M - 1F) - 55%
Suwayda	33 (14M - 19F)	29 (12M - 17F) - 88%	29 (11M - 18F) - 88%
Tartous	31 (22M-9F)	27 (18M - 9F) - 87%	17 (10M - 7F) - 55%
Total	**459 (252M - 207F)**	**381 (210M - 171F) - 83%**	**316 (162M - 154F) - 69%**

Table 11: Overview of community members' awareness and interaction with CSOs, disaggregated by governorates and gender

Output 2.1
Transparency and accountability mechanisms are developed and implemented

Governorate	CSOs surveyed	CSOs reporting accountability mechanisms	Percentage
Aleppo	40	40	100%
Ar-Raqqa	28	28	100%
Al-Hasakah	24	24	100%
Daraa	22	22	100%
Deir ez-Zor	27	27	100%
Damascus	26	26	100%
Rural Damascus	25	25	100%
Homs	24	24	100%
Hama	27	27	100%
Idlib	22	22	100%
Latakia	25	25	100%
Tartous	29	29	100%
As-Suwayda	26	26	100%
Al-Quneitra	7	7	100%
Total	**352**	**352**	**100%**

Table 12: CSOs reporting formal accountability mechanisms, disaggregated by governorate (CSO Survey)

Governorate	Community consultation meetings	Safeguarding / PSEA policies	Complaint & feedback mechanisms	Mechanisms exist but not enforced
Aleppo	22	34	18	6
Ar-Raqqa	16	20	11	4
Al-Hasakah	16	19	12	5
Deir ez-Zor	16	23	14	6
Damascus	9	12	7	3
Rural Damascus	10	15	8	4
Homs	11	13	9	3
Hama	11	13	8	4
Idlib	12	17	9	5
Latakia	7	11	6	3
Tartous	10	7	6	2
As-Suwayda	10	14	7	4
Daraa	6	12	6	3
Al-Quneitra	3	4	2	1
Total	**159**	**214**	**123**	**53**

Note: Totals exceed the number of CSOs per governorate as multiple mechanisms could be reported by the same organisation.

Output 2.2
CSOs' capacity is strengthened to relay and respond effectively to community needs

Governorate	Respondent group	Responses (n)	Low 1–2	Medium 3	High 4–5
Al-Hasakah	CSOs	24	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	21 (88%)
	Community members	30	14 (47%)	11 (37%)	5 (17%)
Aleppo	CSOs	40	3 (8%)	4 (10%)	33 (83%)
	Community members	57	28 (49%)	20 (35%)	9 (16%)
Ar-Raqqa	CSOs	28	5 (18%)	5 (18%)	18 (64%)
	Community members	33	17 (52%)	9 (27%)	7 (21%)
Damascus	CSOs	26	4 (15%)	4 (15%)	18 (69%)
	Community members	32	18 (56%)	11 (34%)	3 (9%)
Deir ez-Zor	CSOs	27	4 (15%)	3 (11%)	20 (74%)
	Community members	39	20 (51%)	9 (23%)	10 (26%)
Idlib	CSOs	22	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	21 (96%)
	Community members	31	7 (23%)	10 (32%)	14 (45%)
Homs	CSOs	24	1 (4%)	2 (8%)	21 (88%)
	Community members	32	16 (50%)	11 (34%)	5 (16%)
Latakia	CSOs	25	2 (8%)	2 (8%)	21 (84%)
	Community members	30	17 (57%)	9 (30%)	4 (13%)
Tartous	CSOs	29	6 (21%)	4 (14%)	19 (66%)
	Community members	31	20 (65%)	9 (29%)	2 (7%)

Table 14: Comparative table CSO self-assessment vs. community members' perceived responsiveness to community needs, disaggregated by governorate (CSO and community survey)

Governorate	Respondent group	Medium 3	High 4–5
Al-Hasakah	24	24	100%
Al-Quneitra	7	6	86%
Aleppo	40	38	95%
Ar-Raqqa	28	28	100%
As-Suwayda	26	22	85%
Damascus	26	21	81%
Daraa	22	19	86%
Deir ez-Zor	27	24	89%
Hama	27	23	85%
Homs	24	18	75%
Idlib	22	22	100%
Latakia	25	18	72%
Rural Damascus	25	23	92%
Tartous	29	25	86%
Total	**352**	**311**	**88%**

Table 15: CSOs reporting programme or strategy adaptations based on community needs, disaggregated by governorate (CSO survey)

Governorate	CSOs surveyed (n)	CSOs reporting mechanisms (%)	Low effectiveness (1–2)	Moderate (3)	Strong effectiveness (4–5)
Al-Hasakah	24	87.5%	5 (21%)	7 (29%)	12 (50%)
Al-Quneitra	7	57.1%	3 (43%)	2 (29%)	2 (29%)
Aleppo	40	80.0%	8 (20%)	12 (30%)	20 (50%)
Ar-Raqqa	28	71.4%	7 (25%)	10 (36%)	11 (39%)
As-Suwayda	26	84.6%	4 (15%)	7 (27%)	15 (58%)
Damascus	26	73.1%	6 (23%)	9 (35%)	11 (42%)
Daraa	22	77.3%	4 (18%)	7 (32%)	11 (50%)
Deir ez-Zor	27	81.5%	6 (22%)	9 (33%)	12 (44%)
Hama	27	81.5%	5 (19%)	8 (30%)	14 (52%)
Homs	24	83.3%	4 (17%)	6 (25%)	14 (58%)
Idlib	22	95.5%	2 (9%)	4 (18%)	16 (73%)
Latakia	25	80.0%	5 (20%)	7 (28%)	13 (52%)
Rural Damascus	25	88.0%	3 (12%)	6 (24%)	16 (64%)
Tartous	29	65.5%	6 (21%)	8 (28%)	15 (52%)
Total	352	83.2%	68 (19%)	109 (31%)	175 (50%)

Table 16: CSO mechanisms to convey community priorities to decision-makers and perceived effectiveness, disaggregated by governorate (CSO survey)

Outcome 3
Enhanced organisational capacities and sustainable management of CSOs

Governance and accountability

Governance and accountability are foundational to organisational effectiveness, legitimacy, and sustainability, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected contexts such as Syria. This capacity area assesses the extent to which CSOs have established formal governance structures, accountability mechanisms, and internal policies to guide decision-making, oversight, and ethical conduct.

Capacity Assessment Questions	*Answers' Ratings*	*Average Scores*	*Nb (%) of lower scores (1-2)*	*Nb (%) of higher scores (3-4)*
	1 = No board exists 2 = Board exists but meets rarely or is not active 3 = Board exists and meets occasionally 4 = Board exists, meets regularly, and actively oversees decisions	3.52	2 (3.4%)	56 (96.6%)
1.2 Are key decisions (strategic plans, budgets, partnerships) shared with staff and stakeholders?	1 = Major decisions are not shared with staff or stakeholders. 2 = Decisions are rarely shared. 3 = Decisions are sometimes shared, but not consistently. 4 = Decisions are always shared clearly and in a timely manner with staff and stakeholders.	3.52	2 (3.4%)	56 (96.6%)
1.3 Does your organisation ensure women and youth are represented in decision-making?	1 = No representation of women or youth. 2 = Limited representation, not consistent. 3 = Some representation in certain decisions or bodies. 4 = Women and youth are actively and consistently represented in decision-making.	3.79	2 (3.4%)	56 (96.6%)
1.4 Does your organisation gather feedback from staff or beneficiaries about its performance?	1 = No feedback is collected from staff or beneficiaries. 2 = Feedback is collected occasionally or informally, but follow-up needs improvement. 3 = Feedback is collected regularly, but responses or improvements are inconsistent. 4 = Feedback is systematically collected from staff and beneficiaries, regularly reviewed, and actively used to improve organizational performance.	3.55	9 (15.5%)	49 (84.5%)

Table 17: Overview of capacity assessment responses to the 'governance and accountability' questions

Structure and staffing

This capacity area examines the extent to which CSOs have defined organisational structures, human resource systems, and staffing arrangements that support effective programme delivery and internal management. In a context characterized by funding volatility and operational instability, structure and staffing are critical determinants of organisational continuity, workload management, and institutional memory.

Capacity Assessment Questions	*Answers' Ratings*	*Average Scores*	*Nb (%) of lower scores (1-2)*	*Nb (%) of higher scores (3-4)*
2.1 Does your organisation have an organogram that clearly shows reporting lines?	1 = No 2 = Exists but unclear or outdated 3 = Clear, but not widely known or used 4 = Clear, up-to-date, and known to all staff	3.55	4 (6.9%)	54 (93.1%)
2.2 Does your organisation have an HR policy outlining recruitment and staff management processes?	1 = No HR policy exists. 2 = HR practices are informal. 3 = Some written policies exist but are partially implemented. 4 = A formal HR policy is fully implemented and guides staff management consistently.	3.28	10 (17.2%)	48 (82.8%)
2.3 Does every staff position have a clear job description?	1 = No job descriptions exist. 2 = Only some positions have descriptions. 3 = Most positions have descriptions, but not all. 4 = All positions have clear, up-to-date job descriptions.	3.28	10 (17.2%)	48 (82.8%)
2.4 Is your organisation gender-inclusive in its policies and practices?	1 = No particular attention to gender; women and men are treated the same by default, no policy exists. 2 = Some efforts to include women and gender considerations exist, but inconsistently applied and not guided by formal policy. 3 = Gender inclusion is actively considered in most policies and practices, but some gaps remain. 4 = Gender inclusion is fully embedded in policies and practices, applied consistently across recruitment, decision-making, programming, and operations.	3.31	8 (13.8%)	50 (86.2%)
2.5 How would you rate your organisation's ability to retain staff?	1 = Very high turnover; both staff and leadership positions (including Board members) are unstable. 2 = High turnover of some staff or occasional loss of key leadership positions; retention strategies are minimal. 3 = Moderate turnover; most staff and leadership positions are retained, with some formal retention measures. 4 = Strong retention across all levels, including leadership and Board positions; retention strategies are actively implemented and effective.	3.14	13 (22.4%)	45 (77.6%)

Table 18: Overview of capacity assessment responses to the 'structure and staffing' questions

Finance, procurement and operations

Strong performance in this area is critical not only for donor compliance, but also for organisational stability, risk management, and long-term sustainability. The quantitative analysis below draws on capacity assessment scores (1–4 scale) across eleven indicators, capturing both the presence of formal systems and their level of operationalization at baseline.

Capacity Assessment Questions	Answers' Ratings	Average Scores	Nb (%) of lower scores (1-2)	Nb (%) of higher scores (3-4)
3.1 Does your organisation have staff dedicated to financial management?	1 = No staff are assigned to financial management; responsibilities are ad hoc or shared among unrelated roles. 2 = Some staff have financial duties, but they are part-time or combined with other responsibilities. 3 = There are dedicated financial staff, but coverage is partial or limited in scope. 4 = Financial management is handled by fully dedicated, trained staff with clear responsibilities and accountability.	3.33	12 (20.7%)	46 (79.3%)
3.2 Does your organisation have financial management policies or guidelines?	1 = No financial policies or guidelines exist. 2 = Informal or partial financial practices exist but are not documented. 3 = Written financial policies/guidelines exist, but implementation is inconsistent. 4 = Comprehensive financial management policies are in place, clearly communicated, and consistently applied across the organization.	3.28	10 (17.2%)	48 (82.8%)
3.3 Does your organisation have a procurement policy or clear procedures for purchases?	1 = No procurement policy exists; purchases are made ad hoc. 2 = Informal procurement practices exist but are inconsistent. 3 = Written procedures exist and are sometimes followed. 4 = A formal procurement policy is in place, followed consistently, and ensures transparency and accountability.	3.07	15 (25.9%)	43 (74.1%)
3.4 Does your organisation use a dedicated bank account for its operations?	1 = No dedicated bank account exists; funds are handled informally or mixed with personal accounts. 2 = A bank account exists but access is limited or inconsistent due to operational/contextual challenges. 3 = A dedicated bank account is used for most operations, though some payments may still be handled through alternative means due to contextual constraints. 4 = A dedicated bank account is used for all organizational operations whenever possible, with proper oversight, and alternative arrangements are documented and managed responsibly where banking is difficult.	2.72	21 (36.8%)	36 (63.2%)
3.5 Are financial and procurement responsibilities clearly separated among staff?	1 = No clear separation; the same person handles multiple conflicting roles. 2 = Responsibilities are somewhat separated, but overlaps occur. 3 = Separation exists but is not consistently applied or monitored. 4 = Clear separation of duties exists for all financial and procurement roles, consistently applied and monitored.	3.29	1 6 (27.6%)	4 2 (72.4%)
3.6 Does your organisation prepare annual or project-based budgets?	1 = No budgets prepared. 2 = Budgets exist informally or for some projects only. 3 = Most projects and operations have budgets, but implementation or monitoring is limited. 4 = Budgets are prepared for all projects and operations, approved, and regularly monitored.	3.64	3 (5.2%)	5 5 (94.8%)

Capacity Assessment Questions	*Answers' Ratings*	*Average Scores*	*Nb (%) of lower scores (1-2)*	*Nb (%) of higher scores (3-4)*
3.6 Does your organisation prepare annual or project-based budgets?	1 = No budgets prepared. 2 = Budgets exist informally or for some projects only. 3 = Most projects and operations have budgets, but implementation or monitoring is limited. 4 = Budgets are prepared for all projects and operations, approved, and regularly monitored.	3.64	3 (5.2%)	55 (94.8%)
3.7 Does your organisation use tools to track, forecast, or project budgets?	1 = No tools or systems in place; financial tracking is ad hoc. 2 = Basic tools used irregularly; forecasting is minimal. 3 = Tools are used for some tracking or forecasting, but not consistently. 4 = Comprehensive tools and systems are used regularly for tracking, forecasting, and planning.	3.28	9 (15.5%)	49 (84.5%)
3.8 Are there clear guidelines on the documentation needed for payments?	1 = No guidelines; documentation is inconsistent or absent. 2 = Some guidance exists, but not consistently applied. 3 = Clear guidelines exist, but implementation may be partial. 4 = Clear, detailed guidelines are in place and consistently followed for all payments.	3.64	3 (5.2%)	55 (94.8%)
3.9 Does your organisation have a policy to prevent conflicts of interest?	1 = No policy exists. 2 = Awareness exists, but no formal policy or enforcement. 3 = Written policy exists, but enforcement is partial. 4 = Clear conflict of interest policy exists, is implemented consistently, and monitored regularly.	3.38	13 (22.4%)	45 (77.6%)
3.10 Does your organisation have a system to track and manage assets and equipment?	1 = No system to track assets or equipment. 2 = Assets tracked informally, inconsistently, or partially. 3 = Assets tracked with a formal system, but coverage is incomplete. 4 = Comprehensive asset management system in place; all assets and equipment are tracked, monitored, and regularly audited.	3.19	13 (22.4%)	45 (77.6%)
3.11 How would you rate your organization's IT skills, from basic to advanced?	1 = Basic computer literacy only (e.g., emails, word processing). 2 = Some IT skills; limited ability to use software for financial or operational management. 3 = Competent in key software tools; able to perform most organisational tasks effectively. 4 = Advanced IT proficiency; staff can use multiple tools and software for finance, operations, and reporting efficiently.	3.02	17 (29.3%)	41 (70.7%)

Table 19: Overview of capacity assessment responses to the 'Finance, procurement and operations' questions

Sustainability and partnership

The quantitative data shows a clear pattern: while medium-term sustainability planning is relatively widespread, practical mechanisms to generate or diversify resources beyond donor funding remain limited.

Capacity Assessment Questions	*Answers' Ratings*	*Average Scores(1-4)*	*Nb (%) of lower scores (1-2)*	*Nb (%) of higher scores (3-4)*
4.1 Does your organisation have a fundraising or resource mobilisation strategy beyond donor projects?	1 = No fundraising plan exists; efforts rely entirely on single donors or ad hoc contributions. 2 = Some ideas for fundraising exist, but there is no structured or formal plan. 3 = A basic fundraising plan exists and is partially implemented, but results are limited. 4 = A comprehensive, formal fundraising plan exists, is regularly updated, and actively guides resource mobilisation beyond donor projects.	2.19	35 CSOs (60.3%)	23 CSOs (39.7%)
4.2 Has your organisation diversified its funding sources?	1 = Organisation relies entirely on one donor or source of funding. 2 = Organisation has 2–3 funding sources but remains heavily dependent on one main source. 3 = Organisation has multiple funding sources, including local contributions, diaspora, or other partners, though dependency on some sources remains. 4 = Organisation has diversified, stable funding from multiple types of sources (donors, private sector, community contributions), reducing reliance on any single source.	2.29	34 CSOs (58.6%)	24 CSOs (41.4%)
4.3 Has your organisation developed income-generating activities?	1 = No income-generating activities or services exist. 2 = Very limited or occasional efforts, not structured or sustained. 3 = Some income-generating activities exist and are implemented occasionally. 4 = Income-generating activities or services are regularly planned, implemented, and contribute to organisational sustainability.	2.00	41 CSOs (70.7%)	17 CSOs (29.3%)
4.4 Does your organisation have a 3–5 year financial and operational sustainability plan?	1 = No sustainability measures or plans exist. 2 = Some ad hoc efforts exist, but not systematic or formalised. 3 = Limited sustainability measures exist and function to some extent, but gaps remain. 4 = Clear, formalised strategies and systems are in place to ensure long-term financial and operational sustainability, regularly reviewed and updated.	3.55	9 CSOs (15.5%)	49 CSOs (84.5%)

Table 20: Sustainability and partnership capacity

Project and programme management

The quantitative data highlights a clear distinction between technical programme management capacity and needs-based design. While most CSOs demonstrate strong capacity in M&E, risk management, reporting, and sensitivity approaches, fewer report systematically designing projects based on articulated community priorities.

Capacity Assessment Questions	*Answers' Ratings*	*Average Scores(1-4)*	*Nb (%) of lower scores (1-2)*	*Nb (%) of higher scores (3-4)*
5.1 Are projects designed based on community needs and priorities?	1 = Projects are designed without consulting the community; priorities are assumed by the organization. 2 = Some community input is gathered informally, but it rarely influences project design. 3 = Community needs are considered in project design, but consultation is limited or inconsistent. 4 = Projects are fully designed based on systematic consultation with the community, and priorities directly shape programming.	2.29	34 CSOs (58.6%)	24 CSOs (41.4%)
5.2 Does your organisation have monitoring and evaluation practices?	1 = No monitoring or evaluation practices exist. 2 = Limited or informal M&E practices exist, with little follow-up or learning. 3 = Some structured M&E practices exist and provide useful data occasionally. 4 = Comprehensive M&E systems are in place, regularly applied, and results inform learning and decision-making.	3.40	6 CSOs (10.3%)	52 CSOs (89.7%)
5.3 Does your organisation identify and manage project risks?	1 = Risks are not considered; no formal approach exists. 2 = Some risks are acknowledged, but management is inconsistent or ad hoc. 3 = Risks are identified and mitigated for most projects, but coverage is partial. 4 = Risks are systematically identified, assessed, and mitigated for all projects, with clear processes and accountability.	3.48	3 CSOs (5.2%)	55 CSOs (94.8%)
5.4 Ability to report on projects linking outputs to impact	1 = Reporting is minimal and not linked to program outcomes. 2 = Basic reporting exists but rarely connects outputs to wider impact. 3 = Reporting is adequate, links outputs to some impact, but consistency is limited. 4 = Strong reporting capacity; outputs are clearly linked to programmatic and structural impact, and reports are used for learning and accountability.	3.48	6 CSOs (10.3%)	52 CSOs (89.7%)
5.5 Does your organisation use conflict-sensitive approaches?	1 = No attention to conflict sensitivity in program design or implementation. 2 = Some consideration is given, but it is inconsistent. 3 = Conflict sensitivity is applied in some projects but not systematically. 4 = Conflict-sensitive approaches are integrated into all programming and actively guide design and implementation.	3.38	13 CSOs (22.4%)	45 CSOs (77.6%)
5.6 Understanding and integration of gender sensitivity	1 = Gender is not or rarely considered in programming. 2 = Awareness of gender issues exists, but integration is minimal. 3 = Gender sensitivity is applied in some programs, but not consistently. 4 = Gender sensitivity is fully integrated and actively guides project design, implementation, and monitoring.	3.14	13 CSOs (22.4%)	45 CSOs (77.6%)

5.7 Inclusivity in programming	1 = Programming focuses on the same group repeatedly; few or no efforts to reach other stakeholders. 2 = Some efforts are made to include women, youth, or other groups, but reach is limited. 3 = Minority or underrepresented groups are considered, but outreach is inconsistent. 4 = All community groups are mapped and consistently included, with concrete steps taken to ensure equitable access to programs.	3.14	13 CSOs (22.4%)	45 CSOs (77.6%)

Table 21: Project and programme management capacity

Coordination and networks

This capacity area examines the extent to which CSOs engage in coordination, information-sharing, and collaboration with other civil society actors. While coordination outcomes are analysed in detail under Outcome 1, this section focuses specifically on organisational capacity to participate in networks and collaborative processes as an internal competency.

Capacity assessment question	*Average score (1–4)*	*Low capacity (1–2)*	*Moderate–High capacity (3–4)*
6.2 How often does your organisation take part in coordination meetings or joint advocacy initiatives?	3.07	14 CSOs (24.1%)	44 CSOs (75.9%)
6.3 To what extent does your organisations have information or resources with other CSOs?	3.64	3 CSOs (5.2%)	55 CSOs (94.8%)
6.4 Has your organisation collaborated with others on project design or implementation?	3.10	12 CSOs (20.7%)	46 CSOs (79.3%)

Table 22: Coordination and network capacity (n = 58)

Note: *Question 6.1 is captured as a descriptive/binary item and analysed qualitatively rather than scored.*

PSEA, Safety, and Security

This capacity area assesses whether CSOs have established policies and mechanisms to prevent misconduct, protect affected populations, and ensure safe reporting environments. Indicators focus on codes of conduct, safeguarding and PSEA policies, complaint mechanisms, and whistle-blower protection.

Capacity assessment question	*Average score (1–4)*	*Low capacity (1–2)*	*Moderate–High capacity (3–4)*
7.1 Does your organisation have a code of conduct?	3.67	4 CSOs (6.9%)	54 CSOs (93.1%)
7.2 Does your organisation have a PSEA / safeguarding policy?	3.40	11 CSOs (19.0%)	47 CSOs (81.0%)
7.3 Does your organisation have a feedback and response mechanism?	3.67	5 CSOs (8.6%)	53 CSOs (91.4%)
7.4 Does your organisation have a whistle-blower protection policy?	3.44	13 CSOs (22.8%)	44 CSOs (77.2%)

Table 23: PSEA, safety, and safeguarding capacity (n = 58 unless otherwise stated)

Governorate	CSOs surveyed (n)	CSOs participated (n)	CSOs participated (%)
Aleppo	44	35	79.5%
Damascus	33	25	75.8%
Rural Damascus	10	6	60.0%
Idlib	27	21	77.8%
Homs	21	16	76.2%
Hama	15	12	80.0%
Deir ez-Zor	11	7	63.6%
Ar-Raqqa	28	20	71.4%
Al-Hasakah	23	17	73.9%
Latakia	21	16	76.2%
Daraa	13	10	76.9%
As-Suwayda	26	20	76.9%
Quneitra	4	3	75.0%
Total	**296**	**228**	**77.0%**

Table 24: CSO participation in peer learning / training, disaggregated by governorate

Governorate	Average score	% rating 1–2	% rating 4–5
Aleppo	3.98	5.1%	71.8%
Damascus	3.91	3.0%	75.8%
Rural Damascus	3.60	10.0%	60.0%
Idlib	4.05	0.0%	76.9%
Homs	4.00	0.0%	76.2%
Hama	4.07	0.0%	80.0%
Deir ez-Zor	3.73	9.1%	63.6%
Ar-Raqqa	3.89	0.0%	71.4%
Al-Hasakah	3.87	0.0%	69.6%
Latakia	4.02	0.0%	76.2%
Daraa	3.92	0.0%	76.9%
As-Suwayda	3.95	0.0%	76.0%
Quneitra	4.00	0.0%	75.0%
Overall	**3.95**	**3.5%**	**73.7%**

Table 25: Perceived usefulness of peer learning / training, disaggregated by governorate - Only CSOs that reported participation

Output 3.2
Financial diversification is integrated into CSO operations

Governorate	CSOs surveyed (n)	CSOs with ≥2 funding streams (n)	%
Aleppo	44	28	**63.6%**
Damascus	33	21	**63.6%**
Rural Damascus	10	4	**40.0%**
Idlib	27	17	**63.0%**
Homs	21	13	**61.9%**
Hama	15	7	**46.7%**
Deir ez-Zor	14	9	**64.3%**
Ar-Raqqa	28	10	**35.7%**
Al-Hasakah	23	14	**60.9%**
Latakia	21	17	**81.0%**
Daraa	13	10	**76.9%**
As-Suwayda	26	23	**88.5%**
Al-Quneitra	4	3	**75.0%**
Total (Syrian governorates)	**279**	**175**	**62.7%**

Table 26: Number of CSOs reporting at least two different funding streams (e.g., donor grants, services, private sector partnership), disaggregated by governorate

7.4. Appendix 4: Priority 2 - Disaggregated Data

Impact: Syrian CSOs drive inclusive dialogue for shared decision-making

Governorate	CSOs surveyed	# of CSOs reporting active participation/leadership	% of CSOs reporting active participation / leadership
Al-Hasakah	24	23	96%
Al-Quneitra	7	4	57%
Aleppo	40	28	70%
Ar-Raqqa	28	23	82%
As-Suwayda	26	18	69%
Damascus	26	15	58%
Daraa	22	11	50%
Deir ez-Zor	27	27	100%
Hama	27	16	59%
Homs	24	18	75%
Idlib	22	17	77%
Latakia	25	19	76%
Rural Damascus	25	15	60%
Tartus	29	15	52%
Total	**352**	**249**	**71%**

Table 27: Number and percentage of CSOs reporting active participation and leadership in inclusive dialogue efforts, disaggregated by governorate

Governorate	CSOs surveyed	# of CSOs reporting strong or very strong influence in dialogues (4-5)	% of CSOs reporting strong or very strong influence in dialogues (4-5)
Al-Hasakah	24	14	58%
Al-Quneitra	7	3	43%
Aleppo	40	20	50%
Ar-Raqqa	28	15	54%
As-Suwayda	26	9	35%
Damascus	26	9	35%
Daraa	22	8	36%
Deir ez-Zor	27	20	74%
Hama	27	7	26%
Homs	24	8	33%
Idlib	22	14	64%
Latakia	25	13	52%
Rural Damascus	25	13	52%
Tartus	29	10	35%
Total	**352**	**163**	**46%**

Table 28: Number and percentage of CSOs reporting strong or very strong influence in dialogue for decision-making, disaggregated by governorate

Governorate	Community members surveyed	# of community members who report that their voices are being relayed for decision-making	% of community members who report that their voices are being relayed for decision-making
Al-Hasakah	30	17	57%
Al-Quneitra	20	13	65%
Aleppo	53	16	30%
Ar-Raqqa	33	11	33%
As-Suwayda	33	14	42%
Damascus	30	6	20%
Daraa	41	17	41%
Deir ez-Zor	38	22	58%
Hama	29	9	31%
Homs	31	15	48%
Idlib	31	8	26%
Latakia	30	10	33%
Rural Damascus	29	7	24%
Tartus	31	29	13%
Total	**459**	**179**	**39%**

Table 29: Number and percentage of community members who feel their voices are being relayed for decision-making, disaggregated by governorate

	Gender		Age Groups			
	Female	Male	18-24	25-34	35-65	65+
Total	207	252	90	193	149	27
# of respondents who reported that they feel their voices are being relayed for decision-making	95	84	28	82	62	7
% of respondents who reported that they feel their voices are being relayed for decision-making	46%	33%	31%	42%	42%	26%

Table 30: Number and percentage of community members who feel their voices are being relayed for decision-making, disaggregated by gender and age groups

Outcome
Improved processes that enables community involvement in decision-making

Governorate	Community members surveyed	# of community members who report that they often or occasionally participate in consultations or meetings	% of community members who report that they often or occasionally participate in consultations or meetings
Al-Hasakah	30	25	83%
Al-Quneitra	20	13	65%
Aleppo	53	38	72%
Ar-Raqqa	33	30	91%
As-Suwayda	33	19	58%
Damascus	30	16	53%
Daraa	41	25	61%
Deir ez-Zor	38	25	66%
Hama	29	15	52%
Homs	31	16	52%
Idlib	31	13	42%
Latakia	30	13	43%
Rural Damascus	29	14	48%
Tartus	31	9	29%
Total	**459**	**271**	**59%**

Table 31: Number and percentage of community members who report that they often or occasionally participate in consultations or meetings for decision-making, disaggregated by governorate

	Gender		Age Groups			
	Female	Male	18-24	25-34	35-65	65+
Total	207	252	90	193	149	27
# of community members who report that they often or occasionally participate in consultations or meetings	124	147	38	120	101	12
% of community members who report that they often or occasionally participate in consultations or meetings	60%	58%	42%	62%	68%	44%

Table 32: Number and percentage of community members who report that they often or occasionally participate in consultations or meetings for decision-making, disaggregated by gender and age groups

Output 1.1
Inclusive fora are convened by CSOs for communities and local authorities for dialogue

Governorate	Community members surveyed	% of CSOs reporting having held at least one forum over the last three years	% of CSOs reporting having held held forums regularly, between 5 to 20 over the last three years
Al-Hasakah	24	42%	29%
Al-Quneitra	7	29%	14%
Aleppo	40	40%	23%
Ar-Raqqa	28	39%	43%
As-Suwayda	26	54%	27%
Damascus	26	23%	27%
Daraa	22	32%	14%
Deir ez-Zor	27	48%	33%
Hama	27	52%	19%
Homs	24	42%	17%
Idlib	22	32%	36%
Latakia	25	44%	40%
Rural Damascus	25	52%	24%
Tartus	29	76%	3%
Total	**352**	**44%**	**25%**

Table 33: Number and percentage of CSOs who report that they have held inclusive forums over the last three years, disaggregated by governorate

Output 1.2
Channels are created by CSOs for community input to reach decision-makers.

Governorate	*Community members surveyed*	*# of CSOs reporting that community priorities raised in dialogues / forums are formally communicated to local authorities / decision-makers.*	*% of CSOs reporting that community priorities raised in dialogues / forums are formally communicated to local authorities / decision-makers*
Al-Hasakah	24	23	96%
Al-Quneitra	7	6	86%
Aleppo	40	35	88%
Ar-Raqqa	28	27	96%
As-Suwayda	26	21	54%
Damascus	26	14	81%
Daraa	22	16	73%
Deir ez-Zor	27	27	100%
Hama	27	20	74%
Homs	24	20	83%
Idlib	22	20	91%
Latakia	25	17	68%
Rural Damascus	25	23	92%
Tartus	29	24	83%
Total	**352**	**293**	**83%**

Table 34: Number and percentage of CSOs who report that community priorities raised in dialogues / forums are formally communicated to local authorities / decision-makers.

7.5. Appendix 5: Data Collection Tools

The data collection tools are attached alongside the report.