

Roadmap for the EU Engagement with Syrian Civil Society

Executive Summary



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The Roadmap for the EU engagement with civil society is based on a combination of desk review, key informant interviews and focus group discussions with local experts from the Syrian civil society (SCS), reflecting the diversity of Syrian CSOs in all fields and locations.

It presents a strategy for the EU's future engagement with Syrian civic actors based on a deep understanding of the eco-system of the Syrian civil society, its interrelationships, as well as its relationships with donors, de- facto authorities, and the community at large. It looks closely at the existing modalities of EU engagement, as well as how the approach could look in the future.

Finally, the Roadmap aims to present a set of priorities and principles for the development of Syrian civil society, and how the EU could support civic actors to achieve their goals.

Main findings of the analysis :

- Civil society in Syria has a long history. However, the uprising in 2011 was a turning point, giving birth to new social forces and civic expression.
- Civil society work creates legitimacy. It is highly contested as it brings credibility and legitimacy to de-facto actors who want to channel this legitimacy for themselves.
- The legal framework in all parts of Syria is very restrictive, but civic actors have learned to manoeuvre around restrictions by focusing on building their relevance to communities.
- With the exception of a few larger NGOs, the relationship of most CSOs inside Syria with donors takes place through the UN, INGOs and larger Syrian CSO intermediaries. As a result, most CSOs have a poor understanding of how different donors work.
- EU and other donors' "red lines" and vetting procedures in Syria are perceived as another form of restriction that civic actors have to manoeuvre around.
- One of the most complicated factors affecting the work of CSOs is the relationship with de-facto authorities. Coordinating with them is inevitable.
- CSOs should be strengthened to manage their complex eco-systems and donors need to be more flexible to allow the civic space to do so.
- The EU is leading in scoping for alternative modalities of aid that would empower communities and not just serve their basic needs.
- CSOs are struggling to shift the timeframe of their operations from short-term funding mostly related to emergency relief to long-term strategies that require longer funding commitments.
- Some donors, such as the EU, attempt to incentivise CSOs to network across the geographic dividing lines.
- Shifting from encouraging the evolution of small networks to creating an awareness of the role of the civil society sector as a whole remains a viable objective, albeit a distant one.
- Some CSOs have managed to build strong capacities, but skills often reside within individuals within the CSOs. Institutional capacities are constantly under threat as brain-drain from small CSOs to large ones occurs.
- The EU and some other donors are starting to launch specific lines of funding to support institutional development among CSOs.
- The EU and other donors are opening up new channels to communicate with Syrian actors collectively and not just on specific projects. Donors and civil society actors still lack strategic communication and advocacy platforms. However, the EU's Brussels conference and the Syrian Civic Space Initiative (virtual platform) are promising communication platforms that should be further developed.
- Monitoring and evaluation systems are mostly done on a project-by-project basis, and few resources are allocated to conducting broader assessments on cumulative impacts.
- Women's empowerment programmes often enable the emergence of strong leadership and knowledge, however, that knowledge is often separated from other civil society programming.

Four priority areas:

Based on the findings above, four priority areas to enhance EU engagement with civil society were defined.

Priority 1: The Representation of Civil Society: Supporting the Development of an Effective and Participatory Civic Space Capable of Leveraging Bottom-Up Community Initiatives.

Priority 2: Deliberative Democracy: Supporting the Evolution of Common Visions for Syrian Civil Society and Its Role in the Future of Syria

Priority 3: Public Wellbeing: Supporting Civic Actors to Work with Their Communities to Develop Local Capacities for Future Recovery and Sustainable Development:

Priority 4: Self Constitution: Support the Innate Capacity of CSOs in a Sustainable Manner to Develop Equitable Partnerships and Knowledge Exchanges to Heighten the Voice and Effectiveness of CSOs

The framework which follows brings all these factors together to guide the roadmap in the future. The Roadmap will remain a living document. It will draw on further dialogue between the EU and CSOs and will be reviewed periodically to assess new trends, risks and opportunities.

PRIORITY AREAS OF THE ROADMAP

Priority 1: The Representation of Civil Society: Supporting the Development of an Effective and Participatory Civic Space Capable of Leveraging Bottom-Up Community Initiatives:

Most normative standards for measuring civic space are inapplicable in the case of a war-torn country. The mere issuing of laws and regulations is not likely to help CSOs manage the complex and hostile environment surrounding them. Empowerment strategies must be created from the bottom-up, enhancing the linkages of CSOs to the communities they serve and ensuring that CSOs are creating shared spaces and networks to strengthen their collective presence and legitimacy.

Logic of interventions and indicators:

	Intervention logic	Indicators	Possible sources of information/verification
Overall objective: Impact	To support Syrian civic actors in forging a civic space. Expanding the presence of “civiness” within the hostile conflict environment.	<p>An emerging Civic Space</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CSOs forge alliances and networks across the political and social divides to improve and protect their collective role and image, legitimise their work and empower civic actors and civilians to forge alternatives to the chaotic conditions imposed by the de-facto powers. <p>Possible Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Density and diversity of CSO networks. Measured through network analysis. - Public perception of CSOs is harmonised and enhanced across the terrain. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Network mapping. - Periodic review of perception of CSOs through primary and secondary means. - An EU funded facility to support the collection and analysis of CSO data.

	Intervention logic	Indicators	Possible sources of information/verification
Specific objective(s): Outcome(s)	To enhance support to CSO networks ensuring complementarity of resources among them and inclusion of local communities in resourcing and planning their collective projects	<p>CSO networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expand support to CSOs to ensure larger NGOs and local CBOs are collaborating on project planning and implementation and complementing each other's resources. - Promote CSO owned and managed accreditation systems, share knowledge and data, and create collective advocacy for issues of relevance to all. <p>Possible Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of CSO networks that bring Syrians civic actors from across the different geographies to work together. - Equalisation of resource distribution among the different geographies and between the small and large CSOs. - The emergence of collective platforms that produce data on the status of CSOs in the different geographies and sectors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HNO and HRP reports to be disaggregated to identify CSO roles and shares of the plan in each geography. - Various UN country team reports. - An EU funded facility to support the collection and analysis of CSO data. - Harvesting data from individual project reports.
		<p>Communities integrated into resourcing and planning of collective projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relaxing red lines that limit the CSOs work in certain communities and ensuring that red lines are communicated properly - Community resources integrated into project conceptualisation and accounting. Projects must demonstrate how they are integrating communities into their work as active agents and not just as beneficiaries. <p>Possible Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share of project funding obtained from community resources. - Multipliers created through the work of CSOs. - Approval rating of CSOs among beneficiaries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An EU funded facility to support the collection and analysis of CSO data. - Global do no harm studies to map the impact of aid across projects. - Harvesting data from individual project reports. - Third party monitoring reports.
		<p>Mainstreaming women and youth empowerment into different sectoral networks and initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mainstream women and youth empowerment funding across the different sectors. - Support to creation of networks for women and youth leaders across the different geographies and sectors. - Mainstreaming gender as part of project cycle management. <p>Possible Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Percent of women among management boards and Executives of CSOs. - Percentage of women and youth beneficiaries of projects. - Adoption of bylaws stipulating zero tolerance for sexual harassment within CSOs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An EU funded facility to support the collection and analysis of CSO data and aggregating research and indicators on the role of women in the civic space. - Harvesting data from individual project reports. - Third party monitoring reports.
Outputs	To build into project life cycles mechanisms for integrating communities and mainstreaming women empowerment	<p>A global strategy for empowerment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revising funding guidelines to ensure clear integration of planning, implementation and reporting on community engagement and women empowerment. - Supporting the creation of an independent CSO facility(ties) to support CSOs - Commission independent do-no-harm studies to reflect on the impact of funding on society at large. - Funding to networks should focus on complementarity of functions and collective implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reports issued by EU-funded projects/programmes - Reports by an EU funded independent CSO facility on the global impact of EU aid to civil society. - Independent third-party reporting on global impact and do-no-harm.

Priority 2: Deliberative Democracy: Supporting the Evolution of Common Visions for the Syrian Civil Society and Its Role in the Future of Syria

During the conflict most governance indicators regressed in Syria well below the already low levels they exhibited before the conflict. Rule of law and channels to expand democratic rights including those of women have virtually dissipated. Demands and advocacy for reform are falling on deaf ears as the conflict drivers are well beyond the reach of civic actors. Supporting civil society to push for democratisation runs against major challenges including the fact that conflict is still ongoing and that many of the grievances related to violence, the fate of the detainees, kidnapped and missing persons are still highly contentious issues. To promote a peace and justice agenda would require that civil society in Syria collaborates across the political divides to create common visions, practical solutions, local peace infrastructure. The role of the youth is also essential in this regard. Ensuring a more just and democratic outcome to the conflict will take years of social and political engagement on their part. They should be in the forefront of defining their own future.

Logic of interventions and indicators:

	Intervention logic	Indicators	Possible sources of information/verification
Overall objective: Impact	To support Syrian civic actors to work together to expand spaces for dialogue and to devise practical approaches to conflict resolution and establishing entry points and common visions for democratic reforms	<p>Conflict Transformation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CSOs work together across the dividing lines to develop common visions and practical approaches to transform the conflict towards peaceful outcomes that meet the need for deep democratic transformations. <p>Possible Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outcomes of political negotiations include agreed inputs by civil society networks. - Women leaders emerge in local and national elections and political appointments. - Youth voices are empowered to participate in debate over the future of the country. - Freedom of expression measure (UNESCO). - SDG 16 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - World Bank indicators on political voice. - World Bank governance indicators. - UN OCHA Reports on violence in Syria - Minutes of the Constitutional Committee. - Independent research on women Status in Syria (UNWomen). - Independent report by civil society networks on the outcomes of the political process. - Shadow reporting on SDG 16



Intervention logic

To ensure that funding and grant design to Civil Society networks is inclusive and linking CSOs to create incentives to bridge the different divides. Political empowerment of women to be mainstreamed.

Indicators

CSO peace, justice and reconciliation networks

- Expand support to CSOs in a manner to ensure that different and divergent political and ideological groups have platforms to deliberate and devise common solutions to problems.
- Link track 2 and 3 dialogues to the track 1, directly and effectively by supporting different CSO platforms in the political process (the CSSR, the WAB and the Middle Third of the Constitutional Committee) and ensuing resources are available to aggregate their voices across the political divide. Support should focus on helping civic actors to access the track 1 through collective advocacy.
- Promote mutually agreed local solutions to difficult political problems to support practical approaches with direct impact on peoples' lives.

Possible Indicators:

- Diversity and network coherence indicators.
- Relevance analysis of track 2 diplomacy.

Civil peace infrastructure

- Linking different peace initiatives and helping them to aggregate their work on the ground.
- Provide seed funding for peace asset networks to lay the foundation of the peace infrastructure needed to sustain and monitor any political deal that may emerge in the country.
- Support to early warning systems for monitoring different types of violence.
- Ensure that funding to CSOs is not creating indirect harm on a global level hindering the territorial integrity of the country, contributing to new layers of violence, creating intractable moral and political divides.

Possible Indicators:

- Devising a complex index on conflict intensity by measuring different barometers to track conflict drivers.
- GBV monitoring.

Strengthening the support base of women political leaders

- Supporting the emergence of women leaders in all sectors and geographies.
- Supporting networking of women political leaders across political and ideological divides.
- Linking local women leaders to formal platforms representing civil society and women in the political process.
- Widening the debate between different women empowerment networks and encouraging closer collaboration among them.

Possible Indicators:

- The percentage of women in the different political bodies involved in the political process.
- The percentage of women in the leadership of any bodies and institutions that may emerge from the political process.
- The outcomes of political agreements have incorporated inputs with wide consensus advocated by women empowerment networks and platforms.

Possible sources of information/verification

- An EU funded facility to support the collection and analysis of CSO data.
- Harvesting data from individual project reports.
- Independent reports on the role of Civil Society actors in the political process.

- An EU funded facility to support the collection and analysis of CSO data.
- Global do no harm studies to map conflict transformations and to study the impact of aid on conflict drivers.
- Harvesting data from individual project reports.
- OCHA supported reported on GBV.

- UN Women reports
- Until a verifiable data is made available for typical global indicators on women political empowerment (such as the OECD or the Global Gender Gap Report) are made available, the EU could consider launching independent research on the political status of women.

	Intervention logic	Indicators	Possible sources of information/verification
Outputs	To support civil society to forge collective bottom-up approaches to conflict mitigation, peace building and advocacy for democratic reforms.	Laying the infrastructure for peace and democracy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue and expand support to civil-society-based monitoring of violence and abuse and ensure that reporting is aggregated and developed into nation-wide indicators. - Support to initiatives promoting the role of women as local leaders. - Mainstreaming women political empowerment into different peace and reconciliation networks - Commission independent do-no-harm studies to reflect on the impact of funding on conflict drivers. - Funding to networks should focus on bridging political and ideological divides. - Support the development of shadow reporting on SDG 16 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reports issued by EU-funded projects/programmes - Reports by an EU funded independent CSO facility on the global impact of EU aid to civil society - Independent third-party reporting on global impact and do-no-harm. - UN women reports

Priority 3: Public Wellbeing: Supporting Civic Actors to Work with Their Communities to Develop Local Capacities for Future Recovery and Sustainable Development

Despite tremendous efforts by donors to provide humanitarian aid to Syrians in need, the overwhelming majority of the population has slipped into poverty and many of the remaining sources of resilience are disappearing. Young people are migrating, and women and girls are bearing the brunt of the impact of the conflict. The country is gradually losing decades worth of investments in its human development, economic growth and infrastructure. A generation of young people, especially girls are deprived of basic education, as many can no longer afford to send their children to school. Humanitarian aid cannot cover the needs, and the gap between what resources are available and what communities need to survive is tremendous. A transition towards more sustainable approaches based on empowering CSOs to work with their communities to leverage local resources and recreate basic support for community survival and not just for delivering individual aid packages is essential to help communities regain their footing.

Logic of interventions and indicators:

	Intervention logic	Indicators	Possible sources of information/verification
Overall objective: Impact	To enable civic actors to work with their communities to focus on supporting local solutions, creating multipliers, recovering their resilience and vitality to withstand the impact of the conflict	Recovering Community Resilience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expanding the humanitarian aid to Syria to include more focus on local resilience and development enabling local communities to incorporate their own resources and energy and to create economic multipliers that would reduce their dependency on humanitarian aid and regain local agency for their wellbeing. Possible Indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Percentage of population living in poverty. - Dropout rate from schools (especially for girls). - Life expectancy for women and men. - SDGs especially SDG 5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UN reporting on poverty in Syria - Syrian official and shadow reporting on the SDGs. - UN Women reports.

Intervention logic

Indicators

Possible sources of information/verification

To gradually expand the scope of humanitarian aid to include more focus on resilience, recovery and re-development, and to empower Syrian CSOs to establish local agency and not be entirely dependent on aid delivery fluctuations.

New modalities for aid

- Humanitarian aid needs to be better rationalised, monitored and justified.
- New modalities of aid need to be tested and evaluated. The current modalities of delivering aid are not suitable to handle projects focused on community resilience, recovery and development. New operating procedures with project cycle management focused on the longer term, vetting processes, human resources and administrative structures are needed.

Possible Indicators:

- Finely granulated reporting on HNO and HRP delivery in Syria.
- Percentage of aid delivered through CSOs.
- Percentage of aid focusing on local resilience, recovery and development.

- UN Reports
- Harvesting data from individual project reports.

Supporting communities and not just individuals in need

- Interventions for both humanitarian and recovery purposes need to be assessed based on the short, intermediate and long-term needs of communities.
- Aid programmes must present more precise case analysis for identifying community needs, identifying risks and harm and calculating multipliers and opportunity costs.
- Local tangible and intangible community resources need to be leveraged in project design. Impact should be calculated on the basis of multipliers created in local community resources to assess the sustainability of projects.
- Supply and value chains should be supported to create and retain local value added in the communities.
- Working with people with disabilities should extend to fully integrate them in the mainstream of civil society work whenever possible.

Possible Indicators:

- Cumulative multipliers (jobs and financial) created through the EU aid in Syria.
- Cumulative value of community inputs to match EU funds.
- Pilot multi-level poverty index in select targeted communities.

- An EU funded facility to support the collection and analysis of CSO data.
- Harvesting data from individual project reports.

Women as active agents of local recovery, resilience and community wellbeing

- Supporting women as active agents of change and not just as victims and people in need.
- Providing resources for women led projects both
- Supporting women networks and professional associations.
- Promoting the economic empowerment of women as a cross cutting issue in all recovery and resilience programming.
- Ensure women empowerment programmes are carefully linked to other community-based programming in a socially sensitive manner.

Possible Indicators:

- The percentage of women and girls as beneficiaries of economic and recovery programmes.
- The share of EU funding going to support women.
- Sustainable jobs created for women.
- Average years of education for females vs. males.

- UN Women reports
- Aggregating data from project reports.
- An EU funded facility to support the collection and analysis of CSO data.

	Intervention logic	Indicators	Possible sources of information/verification
Outputs	New modalities for distributing aid to encourage local synergies, leverage local resources sustainably and provide more accountability on the impact of aid.	The primacy of community in project design, implementation and evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consult with CSOs to develop new standard processes for appraising and monitoring projects - Piloting new approaches where CSOs are challenged to work with other local actors and expand their support base for projects. - Pilot the creation of cross geography value chains and collaboration on project implementation - Pilot experiments to assess the impact of local recovery and resilience work. - Focus funding on mainstreaming women economic and social empowerment into community resilience and recovery projects. - Increase the share of resilience and recovery programming as part of the total package of aid to Syria. - Support the CSOs to develop more advanced accreditation systems based on voluntary and collective assessments of their impacts. - Assess the impact of banking over-compliance on the work of CSOs and work with CSOs on mechanisms to transfer funds safely to Syria. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reports issued by EU-funded projects/programmes - Reports by an EU funded independent CSO facility on the global impact of EU aid to civil society. - Independent third-party reporting on global impact and do-no-harm. - UN women reports.

Priority 4: Self Constitution: Support the Innate Capacity of CSOs in a Sustainable Manner to Develop Equitable Partnerships and Knowledge Exchanges to Heighten the Voice and Effectiveness of CSOs

CSOs in Syria have a long and tumultuous history. However, the majority were created after 2011 because of the developing challenges and opportunities. Many lacked the experience and resources, and their initial enthusiasm was not sufficient to sustain their operations. A high dependency on donor funds resulted and this forces CSOs to align their internal procedures to donors vetting processes and selection criteria. Knowledge was often valued if it is relevant to donors' due diligence requirements; local knowledge was undervalued. Gained knowledge from the last eleven years of operation was not aggregated nor mainstreamed, especially knowledge created to empower women, and to enhance their roles within their communities and the civil society in general. The EU expanded dialogue to reverse the situation and to help CSOs to develop their capacities more sustainably. Gender mainstreaming knowledge in the sector cannot happen by small funding for women led and women focused CSOs away from the rest of the sector. Focus should also be on the youth to ensure the sustainability of human resources. Close attention should be given to empower dialogue among CSOs on these issues to bridge their differences.

Logic of interventions and indicators:

	Intervention logic	Indicators	Possible sources of information/verification
Overall objective: Impact	To leverage internal resources within the civil society to work together and create synergies allowing civic actors to learn from each other and to develop new normative frameworks to empower knowledge creation and internal capacities for the third sector at large.	Institutional capacity of the civil society sector and not just of CSOs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To support civic actors to collaborate, share knowledge, create synergies and build new normative approaches based on their local experiences. - To support the creation and retention of knowledge in the civil society as an eco-system and not just within individual CSOs. - To help CSOs develop collective visions for new regulatory and governance models to guide their work in the future and to help them aggregate their presence as a unifying social force that can impact the future of the country. Possible Indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share of the third sector in the national economy. - Numbers and turnover in the numbers of civil society organisations. - Percentage of women leaders on the boards and management teams of CSOs. - Number of CSOs with relevant accreditation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National Statistical Abstract. - An EU funded facility to support the collection and analysis of CSO data. - Harvesting data from individual project reports. - UNWomen reports.

Intervention logic

To encourage CSOs to work together on developing solutions and complementarities and to evolve their own resources and ability to assess their own capacity in a manner that would reflect on their own evolution and growth.

Indicators

Transforming the vetting process

- *Matching the expectation of donors and CSOs must be lined up systematically beyond the individual vetting of individual projects.*
- *CSOs should be encouraged their own self-assessment processes and to create verifiable indicators to assess their impact and to link inputs to outcomes and not just to direct project outputs and deliverables.*
- *Different accreditation models could be tested including those of voluntary accreditation clubs. The EU should act as an enabler to allow Syrian CSOs reach transparent and verifiable accreditation standards.*
- *Resources should made available to transform the M&E into MEA&L processes where learning is happening to benefit the CSOs and not just the donors' due diligence processes.*
- *Encourage CSOs to report against global indicators relevant to the sector as a whole (possibly along the four priorities defined in this roadmap and not just against project deliverables): Yearly report, contributions towards the SDGs etc.*

Possible Indicators:

- The number of Syrian CSOs with recognised international accreditation.
- The SDGs.

Possible sources of information/verification

- Harvesting data from individual project reports.
- An EU funded facility to support the collection and analysis of CSO data.
- Future Syrian accreditation clubs for CSOs.
- Shadow reports on the SDGs in Syria

Incentivising synergies for knowledge creation and learning

- *Increase the share of funding that goes into core support to CSOs*
- *Support CSOs to develop internal succession planning and to develop human resource management capacities and tools.*
- *Encourage intra-sectoral exchanges among CSOs to learn from each other and to share knowledge and resources.*
- *Develop the virtual platform for CSOs as place of exchange*
- *Encouraging CSOs and CSO networks to create and publish knowledge products.*

Possible Indicators:

- The percentage of funding that goes into the R&D and personnel development budgets of CSOs.
- Turnover of CSO staff.
- Percentage of projects implemented through co-creation among CSOs.

- An EU funded facility to support the collection and analysis of CSO data.
- Harvesting data from individual project reports.
- Future Syrian accreditation clubs for CSOs.

Gender mainstreaming knowledge

- *Incentivising CSOs to work with women led and women focused CSOs to generate relevant knowledge on women and gender mainstream their outputs.*
- *Incorporate women empowerment and gender sensitive succession planning into the vetting processes of CSOs.*
- *Support women led and women focused CSOs to work together and develop dialogues among each other, created synergies and bridge ideological differences.*

Possible Indicators:

- The share of EU funding going to support women.
- The number of women in top leadership positions in CSOs.
- Wage difference between men and women in the CS sector.

- UN Women reports
- Aggregating data from project reports.
- An EU funded facility to support the collection and analysis of CSO data.

To mainstream CSO empowerment and internal development into project life cycle design

Leveraging internal resources to enhance collective learning

- Increase core funding and focus it to support internal development, governance, R&D and human resource management.
 - Support the digital platform to become a leader in knowledge co-creation and knowledge exchange.
 - Work with other donors to harmonise core funding and to create value added and avoid duplication of resources.
 - Encourage the UN and INGOs to prioritise funding to empower Syrian CSOs and improve their performance and self-assessment.
 - Continue to support the interaction of Syrian CSOs with other donors and international stakeholders (such as the Brussels conference).
- Reports issued by EU-funded projects/ programmes
 - EU funded independent CSO facility.
 - Harvesting data from individual project reports.
 - Reports of other donors.





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