

# SYRIAN DIASPORA GROUPS IN EUROPE

MAPPING THEIR ENGAGEMENT IN DENMARK, FRANCE, GERMANY,  
SWEDEN, SWITZERLAND AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## STUDY BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Diasporas increasingly have been recognized as important actors in the international political arena. As “agents of change” diaspora groups can promote peace and development in their country of origin through financial and social remittances and the transfer of values, know-how, and skills. At the same time, they are often perceived as “long distance nationalists”, who can exacerbate the dynamics of conflict. The motivations diaspora members have and the contributions they make can be diverse and can vary according to the different phases of a conflict. Moreover, different groups and individuals within the same diaspora can differ in terms of approaches, interests, and objectives in their contributions to the homeland, leading to opposing aims and strategies of involvement. Given the context-specific nature of diaspora engagement, it is essential to understand the interests, aspirations, institutions, and objectives of diaspora groups as well as the structural factors by which they are shaped.

This research was commissioned by Danish Refugee Council’s (DRC) Diaspora programme as part of a project with the Durable Solutions Platform (DSP) joint initiative of DRC, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). This study seeks to explore Syrian diaspora mobilisation in six European host countries: Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The report focuses on the organisational framework, transnational links and practices of Syrian diaspora groups, by taking into account both internal dynamics and potential lines of conflict as well as the contextual factors in the country of origin and destination. The mapping and study seeks to provide a basis for further engagement with the most relevant group of Syrians (associations and individual) across Europe for consultations on future solutions scenarios for Syrian refugees, as well as to enable DRC’s Diaspora Programme to develop activities specifically targeting the Syrian diaspora looking towards the reconstruction and development of Syria.

## KEY FINDINGS

Altogether, Syrians in Europe mirror to some extent the situation in Syria, and their heterogeneity has become even more pronounced after 2011, politically, economically and ethnically, among other factors. The Syrian uprising in 2011, can be perceived as a transformative event, which politicised Syrians abroad and sparked collective action aiming to contribute to the social and political transformations happening in the country. Besides, the escalation of the conflict and increasing numbers of Syrians seeking protection in Europe lead to further mobilisation efforts of the diaspora, who try to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people both at home and abroad. While the revolution itself can be perceived as a unifying factor, the conflict escalation, with rising ethnicisation and radicalisation on the ground in Syria also affect the patterns of diaspora mobilisation in Europe. In all the countries represented in this study, it is clearly visible that the same (political, ethnic or religious) tensions that escalated and perpetuate the conflict, are reproduced in the Syrian diaspora in Europe. At the same time, the findings show that host countries can provide a safe and neutral space for rapprochement, reflection and dialogue among the diverse range of Syrian diaspora actors, highlighting the potential role of diasporas as agents of change and peace.

The aspirations and motivations of the Syrian diaspora elaborated in this study show that there is a strong desire and commitment to contribute to peace and reconstruction of the country. In general, the findings indicate that there is a strong desire to return to Syria, especially among those who more recently migrated to Europe. At this stage of the conflict, with high levels of instability and insecurity, the absence of essential freedoms and human rights, and a lack of infrastructure for a decent life, large-scale return and sustainable

reintegration are not perceived as a viable option. Therefore, integration opportunities and an inclusive society for those seeking protection in Europe should be promoted. Interviewees pointed towards access to language courses, education and the labour market as key factors in that regard. What also should not be overlooked are the benefits that the current migration can yield for hosting societies if integration efforts are successful.

Concerning the organisational capacity, the landscape of Syrian diaspora organisations in the six selected destination countries is characterised by great diversity. The majority of organisations started at the “kitchen table”, and have since tried to professionalise and institutionalise their efforts. Interestingly, some organisations in the UK and to a lesser extent in Germany and France successfully mastered the path towards professionalisation, emerging now as key players within the humanitarian response in Syria. Regarding cooperation, Syrian diaspora groups in host countries like Germany, the UK, France and more recently Denmark, are now seeking new forms of cooperation through the creation of umbrella organisations. Through this, the diaspora seeks to bundle resources and respond more efficiently to the various aspects of the crisis. Beside this, other networks have evolved, revolving around specific professions or fields of engagement, often being transnational in nature and involving members that are scattered across the world.

Over the past years, the Syrian diaspora groups across Europe showed strong commitment in alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people, in building a strong basis for social change and political transformation, and in addressing the needs of Syrian newcomers in the host countries. Herein, different patterns can be observed when comparing the countries selected for this study. For instance, Syrian diaspora groups in Sweden and Denmark tend to focus on activities related to integration in the host country, whereas organisations in Switzerland mainly focus on the Syrian context. While promoting integration also plays a role in the context of Germany, the UK and France, Syrian diaspora organisations there are equally involved in the Syrian context, by providing humanitarian aid to those suffering from the conflict and implementing development initiatives that foster self-reliance. The results indicate that several host country specific factors, such as institutional framework and funding mechanisms, asylum and integration policies, as well as the history and composition of the immigrant population, may influence the size, mode and focus of Syrian diaspora in the respective destinations.

As transnational social agents, Syrian diaspora groups play an important role in building bridges between the origin and host countries, hence matching resources across spaces. Further, the transnational involvement contributes to growing the network of institutions and individuals who work in (post-) conflict environments. Given their intimate knowledge of Syria, access to diverse social networks, and higher risk thresholds, Syrian diaspora groups are able to work in areas that the international community is either unable or unwilling to. In the host country, Syrian diaspora organisations serve as a trusted point of contact for newcomers and facilitate their first orientation in the new “home”. Moreover, many of the organisations have a strong desire for professionalisation, yet they also face many challenges that stop them from reaching their full potential.

While political opportunities varied across the countries, one of the major challenges frequently identified in the different destinations was the lack of financial capacity, making it difficult to broaden the scope of activities and to implement long-term action plans. In addition to financial resources, some organisations see a great challenge in the loss of human capital. The fact that the Syrian conflict progresses with no end in sight causes despair, frustration and hopelessness, demotivating many Syrians to take action as it is perceived that the fate of their country is out of the hands of Syrians themselves. The difficulty in mobilising Syrians for collective action is further exacerbated by the general mistrust and fragmentation that continues to characterise relations among Syrians abroad. In the context of Syria, the complex conflict setting, with several regional battlefronts, and great numbers of armed actors, pose challenges to the realisation of diaspora activities in Syria. Moreover, the political and public discourse on the Syrian crisis, which almost exclusively focusses on security threats and terrorism, is perceived as a major challenge to mobilise support by the broader public. Counter-terrorism regulations and “de-risking” measures further complicate access and management of financial resources.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

A sustainable, conflict-sensitive and effective engagement with diasporas require that international organisations/NGOs and governments, who are interested in this engagement, ensure that efforts are long-term rather than ad-hoc, and support the development of a trustful and lasting relationship. Moreover, the following recommendations have been identified:

**1) Strengthen efforts of the Syrian diaspora through the promotion of networks within each destination country and in the transnational sphere**, as this enables peer-to-peer learning, facilitates dialogue between the various organisations and strengthens the advocacy efforts through the formation of a collective voice.

**2) Include Syrian diaspora in decision-making processes**, by involving the Syrian diaspora in political negotiations, peace talks, and the designing of foreign policies.

**3) Provide targeted funding streams for diaspora organisations**, to facilitate access to and management of financial resources

**4) Support diaspora organisations' capacity to develop and manage projects, fundraise and collaborate with each other**, by providing workshops and peer-to-peer learning opportunities.

**5) Support advocacy efforts of the Syrian diaspora** through facilitating networks and contacts with the international community and developing advocacy papers presenting diaspora recommendations on key topics (local integration, voluntary return, conflict resolution, etc.).

Recommendations specific to durable solutions to Syrian displacement

**1) Promote efforts by the Syrian diaspora to strengthen local structures** by providing funding for development-orientated diaspora initiatives implemented in the Syrian context.

**2) Support human capacity development** of Syrians residing in the host countries to build a strong basis for the reconstruction process and to facilitate reintegration upon potential return.

**3) Promote a change of the discourse on integration**, in which integration must be fundamentally understood in the frame of inclusiveness and the right to remain, integration opportunities and a welcoming culture for those seeking protection in Europe is promoted.

**4) Provide targeted support for newcomers**, in which group-specific needs such as psychological distress and trauma are addressed.

**5) Involve the Syrian diaspora in the design and implementation of integration policies**, as the intercultural and linguistic competences of Syrian diaspora members can help to build a bridge between the needs of Syrian newcomers and the support structures offered by the respective governments and civil society actors.



# 1. INTRODUCTION

What started in Syria in 2011 as an initial peaceful movement of people demanding freedom, justice and democracy, has escalated into one of the world's most dramatic humanitarian and security crises. Over the past six years, the Syrian conflict has caused over 400,000 deaths, displaced 11 million people, left 13.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and deepened sectarian violence across the region (European Commission, 2017; United Nations Secretary-General, 2016). There are several regional battlefronts in the country and well over 1,000 armed groups fighting with different factions and with often complex and fluid relationships (Pettersson & Wallensteen, 2015). In the round of peace talks in Astana, Kazakhstan in 2017, Russia, Iran and Turkey have agreed to set up so-called de-escalation zones in Syria, obliging the Syrian government to allow humanitarian aid and the return of refugees to northern Homs, Ghouta, south Dera and Idlib (Hinnebusch & Imady, 2017). In November 2017, the Syrian army and its allies claimed to have recaptured the last major city under the control of the "Islamic State" terrorist militia, making it likely that Assad's power will be maintained (BBC, 2017).

The Syrian diaspora around the world has increasingly been recognized as a fundamental player, who can positively contribute to relief, development, reconstruction and reconciliation. The initial peaceful movement not only encouraged demands for social and political transformations inside the country, but similarly within the diaspora, mobilising Syrians living abroad to take action to shape their origin country's future. Syrian diaspora groups played an important role in the oppositional political movement (Di Bartolomeo, Jaulin, & Perrin, 2012) and have become crucial actors within the humanitarian system (Svoboda & Pantuliano, 2015). In response to increasing numbers of Syrians seeking protection in Europe, initiatives by the Syrian diaspora emerged to assist displaced Syrians in their integration process (Ragab, Rahmeier, & Siegel, 2017). Despite the growing interest in Syrian diaspora mobilisation, there is a considerable lack of literature on Syrian diaspora groups, particularly regarding the nature and dynamics of their engagement with Syria, the impacts of that engagement on supporting durable solutions for displaced Syrians, as well as the potential role such engagement could play in future development and reconstruction of the country.

This study was commissioned by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) Diaspora programme, which facilitates, supports and enhances the role of Diasporas as effective agents of humanitarian assistance, recovery and development, and the Durable Solutions Platform (DSP) joint initiative of DRC, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). The platform based in Amman, Jordan aims to act as a catalyst in stimulating forward thinking and policy development on durable solutions for displaced Syrians. The platform's research will assist NGOs in setting joint programmatic and advocacy principles, mechanisms and strategies.

This study seeks to explore Syrian diaspora mobilisation in six European host countries: Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Next to providing an overview of the characteristics of the Syrian immigrant population in the six host countries, the report focuses on the organisational framework, transnational links and practices of Syrian diaspora groups, by taking into account both internal dynamics and potential lines of conflict as well as the contextual factors in the country of origin and destination. Finally, potentials for constructive cooperation between diaspora groups, the Danish Refugee Council's Diaspora Programme and the Durable Solutions Platform will be identified. The mapping and study seeks to provide a basis for further engagement with the most relevant group of Syrians (associations and individual) across Europe for consultations on future solutions scenarios for Syrian refugees, as well as to enable DRC's DP to develop activities specifically targeting the Syrian diaspora in Denmark looking towards the reconstruction and development of Syria.

In accordance with the Terms of Reference, the specific objectives of the study are:



**1) To develop a comprehensive mapping** of Syrian Diasporas and diaspora-like entities (networks, associations etc.) in selected countries, including references to profiles of Syrian refugees who have arrived in recent years.

**2) To provide a capacity assessment** of, amongst other attributes, the strength, purpose and aims/objectives of Syrian diaspora in order to identify areas of potential collaboration.

**3) To elaborate specific recommendations** for action regarding context-specific and conflict-sensitive ways of involving members of the diaspora

Accordingly, the study will focus on the following research questions:

**TABLE 1: SET OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Topic	Research questions
Characteristics of the diaspora	<p>How is the diaspora comprised (i.e., what is the demographic profile of individuals considered part of the Syrian diaspora)?</p> <p>How has the diaspora been created (through, for instance, origin and/or destination country factors)?</p>
Structure	<p>What are the networks, organisations, umbrella associations, professional associations etc. of the Syrian diaspora in each destination country, and how do/will they pursue involvement with their origin country?</p> <p>What forms of cooperation as well as potential lines of division exist among different groups within the Syrian diaspora?</p>
Transnational practices	<p>What forms of engagement with Syria do different types of diaspora organisations pursue?</p> <p>What factors influence the type of initiatives different organisations pursue (e.g., differences between first – and second-generation diaspora members, between those who migrated before or during the conflict)?</p>
Potentials for cooperation	<p>What are the needs and goals of the Syrian diaspora?</p> <p>What are the objectives of the Danish Refugee Council's Diaspora Programme and the Durable Solutions Platform?</p> <p>How can these goals be connected for constructive involvement and cooperation?</p>

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF DIASPORA MOBILISATION

During the last decades, diasporas have been more and more recognized as important agents of change in the international political arena, who contribute to development through the transfer of financial resources, knowledge and skills. At the same time, and particularly in the context of human-induced crisis, Diasporas are similarly perceived as threats to security, which exacerbate dynamics of conflicts both in the country of origin and destination. Along with the growing attention in the academic and political debate, the term diaspora has become a catch phrase that is frequently applied as a metaphor for immigrant populations, displaced communities, ethnic minorities or transnational social formations (Brubaker, 2005; Dufoix & Waldinger, 2008; Vertovec, 2007). This conceptual stretching has resulted in competing definitions that pose a challenge to the analytical power of the term. Traditionally, diasporas have been defined as:

**“formed by the forcible or voluntary dispersion of people to a number of countries. They constitute a diaspora if they continue to evince a common concern for their ‘homeland’ (sometimes an imagined homeland) and come to share a common fate with their own people, wherever they happen to be” (Cohen & Kennedy, 2013, p. 39).**

In recent years, however, the traditional understanding of diasporas has been highly criticised due to its treatment of diasporas as natural results of migration, implying a homogeneous dispersed population with historically fixed identities, values and practices, which is bounded exclusively based on a “common” religious, ethnic or national origin (Brubaker, 2005). Yet, globalisation and other forms of social transformation led to a diversification of migration patterns and differentiation within an immigrant population, ranging from forced migrants to those seeking labour, education and family unification (Vertovec, 2007). As a result, immigrants are facing different social, economic and political circumstances and conditions in the destination country that, along with different trajectories of displacement, shape identities, political orientations and their capacity of engagement (Al-Ali, Black, & Koser, 2001). Moreover, scholars reject ideas of migrants’ natural rootedness and belonging to places of origin by recognizing identities as fluid, hybrid, multidimensional, personalized complex social constructions, which are shaped not just by ethnicity, religion or nationality, but also by other social locations such as gender, social class, generation and lived experiences (Anthias, 2002).

Rather than imposing a communal identity based on a homogenizing narrative, it is therefore important to investigate the processes through which a diasporic identity may or may not be constructed, and who is claiming community for what purpose. As Lyons & Mandaville (2010) argue, not every migrant who feels connected to the homeland and shares a common identity with others should be considered as part of a diaspora, but only those who are “mobilised to engage in homeland political process” (p.126). Instead of being constructed as a result of migration, diasporas are perceived as products of transnational mobilisation by diasporic political entrepreneurs, who actively engage in the construction of “transnational imagined communities” (Sökefeld, 2006). Central to this approach are the questions of how and why people mobilise for certain collective goals and what the political opportunities and constraints are, that provide the conditions for transnational mobilisation (Adamson, 2008; Sökefeld, 2006).

Within the destination country context, incorporation regimes and multicultural policies shape the opportunities for diaspora mobilisation, with more open and democratic countries that promote cultural pluralism often providing more freedom for diaspora groups to engage in diasporic politics and to cultivate, practices and mobilise their national, religious and ethnic identities (Baser, 2014; Giugni & Passy, 2004;

Kadhum, 2014). Regarding the discursive dimension, diaspora groups may experience more space for mobilisation, if their cause and demands are perceived as justified within the broader political and public debate (M. Koinova, 2014; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). Finally, funding institutions and specific support structures in the country of residence shape and influence the capacity of diasporas to engage in transnational practices and to contribute to the development and reconstruction process (Warnecke, 2010).

At the same time, countries of origin can implement long-distance policies targeting their population abroad that can be both facilitating and constraining diaspora involvement. Some countries seek to control their emigrant population through surveillance and other forms of repression, limiting the opportunities of diasporas to engage in the origin country's political process (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). On the other hand, states may implement diaspora engagement policies that leverage the potential contributions of diaspora groups to the origin country's development and provide means of political engagement through, for example, overseas-voting (Burgess, 2014). Besides policies, critical social and political events, such as revolutionary struggles, conflicts or natural disaster, can shape and influence diaspora consciousness and mobilise members to take action (Hammond et al., 2011; Hess & Korf, 2014; Khayati, 2012; Maria Koinova, 2011).

Alongside these structural aspects, collective identities – alternatively group consciousness – are at the centre of diaspora concepts and seen as the key features that create cohesiveness among the members and trigger transnational engagement. Ethnicity, religion and nationality, thus, are often used, both internally and externally, to set the boundaries of different diaspora groups (Cohen, 2008; Sheffer, 2006). However, diaspora groups and their sources of network identity should not be considered just along national, ethnic and religious lines, but also based on social class, gender, professional networks and political affiliation. Therefore, diaspora groups and their respective institutions are seldom unified and homogenous and there is a need to understand the different aspirations and institutions of diaspora groups as well as the underlying factors such as class, professional, ethnic and gendered hierarchies that create fragmentation, power relations and competition among diaspora groups (Cochrane, Baser, & Swain, 2009; Smith, 2007).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The research has been carried out in form of an exploratory mapping study, which employed a mix of methods. As a first step, a general literature review on diaspora engagement in conflict-settings and their contribution to development and reconciliation has been conducted in order to develop a conceptual framework for the qualitative analysis. Furthermore, extensive desk research identified and analysed existing research and mappings of the Syrian diaspora to generate an overview of the potential roles and contributions of the different Syrian diaspora groups in the respective destination countries. Additionally, desk research examined the policy space of Syrian diaspora mobilisation in each destination country, including responsible institutions, their mandates and programmes, in order to identify distinct contextual aspects of each destination country, shaping diaspora engagement.

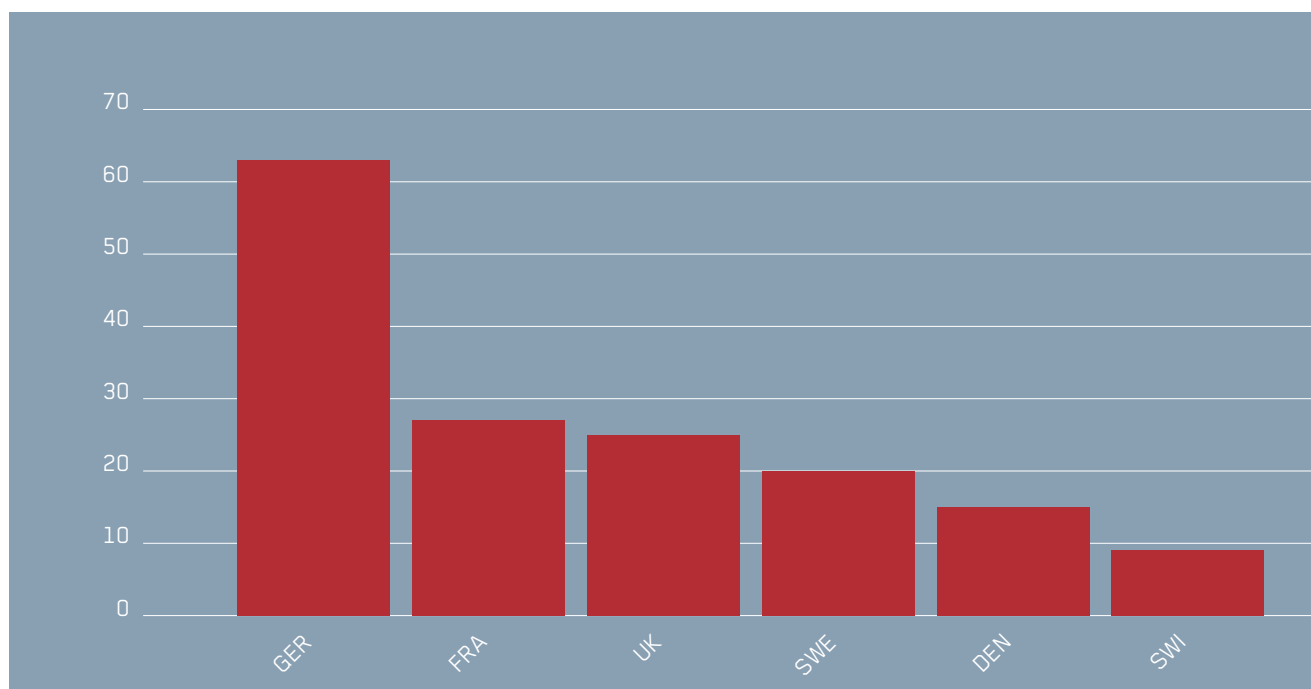
Secondary data and statistics have been reviewed and included in order to provide an overview and comparison of the demographic and socio-economic composition of the Syrian immigrant population in the six selected destination countries Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. Data has been retrieved from other sources from the respective statistical offices and offices for migration and refugees (see Table 2).

**TABLE 2: DATA SOURCES OF SECONDARY STATISTICS PER COUNTRY**

Country	Data sources
Denmark	Statistics Denmark: 1) Immigrants and Descendants 2) Migration to and from Denmark; New to Denmark: Statistical Overview Migration and Asylum
France	National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies: Demography -Foreigners and Immigrants; Ministry of the Interior: Immigration, asylum, reception and support of foreigners in France – statistical data
Germany	German Federal Statistical Office: 1) Foreign population - results of the foreigners' register; 2) Population with a migration background – Results from microcensus 2016
Sweden	Statistics Sweden: Immigration and emigration 1960–2015 and forecast 2016–2060; Swedish Migration Agency: Statistics -overview and time-series
Switzerland	Swiss Federal Statistical office: Migration and Integration, State Secretariat for Migration (SEM); Asylum statistics
United Kingdom	Office for National Statistics: International migration; Minister of State for Immigration - UK Visas and Immigration: Migration statistics

While these official statistics help to provide a general overview of the Syrian population in the respective destination countries, there are inherent limitations that need to be, at the very minimum, recognized. Firstly, data availability by each of the country statistical offices varies, particularly in the case of the UK and France where disaggregated information by key demographics is not made public. In all cases, there appears to be little to no information on socio-economic characteristics including education levels, prior or current economic activity or the like. Such information would go a long way in allowing improved profiling and as such, targeting of policies towards this group. Further to this, despite efforts by each statistical

**FIGURE 1: OVERVIEW OF SYRIAN DIASPORA ORGANISATIONS PER DESTINATION COUNTRY**



office to garner information on the Syrian population, immigrants are known as hard-to-reach populations which may complicate surveying activities. As such, official statistics, including those presented here, need to be taken with caution and assumed to be underestimating the true figures.

The mapping of diaspora organisations started based on contacts shared by DRC and has been expanded by assessing public organisational rosters. Such rosters have been pulled from social media websites such as Facebook and LinkedIn as well as commerce registration databases that list registered organisations/associations, such as the Central Business Register of Denmark, Dataset of Associations in France, the Common Register Portal of the German federal states, and the UK Charity Register. The mapping was completed through active outreach to existing contacts within the Syrian diaspora and other relevant stakeholders, who enabled the identification of additional gate-keepers, relevant organisations and active members of the Syrian diaspora across the six destination countries. The findings presented in this study relate to the 156 organisations, for which contact information (phone, email or a web presence) and comprehensive information on their activities were available. The mapping, therefore, should not be perceived as a complete list of Syrian diaspora organisations and initiatives in the selected countries, but rather provide a rough overview of the more formalised mobilisation patterns. With 63 organisations being identified, Germany represents the country with largest organised Syrian diaspora, followed by France (27), the United Kingdom (25), Sweden (20) and Denmark (12) and Switzerland, who also hosts the smallest amount of Syrian diaspora organisations, with only nine initiatives mapped in this destination (Figure 1).

Given that diaspora groups and their respective institutions are seldom unified and homogenous, there is a need to understand the different aspirations, narratives and institutions of diaspora groups as well as the underlying factors such as class, professional, ethnic and gendered hierarchies that shape their practices and interactions. Consequently, semi-structured in-depth interviews with representatives from Syrian diaspora organisations and key individuals, such as political activists and community leaders, have been conducted to gain further insights into the more underlying dynamics of mobilisation, including potential lines of conflict and divisions within the diaspora. In total, 63 interviews have been conducted (see Appendix A). The interviews were semi-structured, based on an interview guide (see Appendix B), and have been conducted in person, via Skype or phone. To ensure a high-quality analysis, all interviews have been transcribed and coded. The analysis was based mainly on the qualitative interview findings and other relevant information obtained through the mapping exercise. Additional insights were gathered through

group discussions during roundtables on durable solutions for displaced Syrians organized by the Danish Refugee Council in the six selected host countries. The main aim of the events was to discuss the main challenges Syrians are facing in finding long-term solutions to their displacement and to explore how DRC can support Syrian diaspora organisations and initiatives in playing a role in addressing those challenges.

**TABLE 3: OVERVIEW OF ROUNDTABLES**

Country	Location	Date	Number of diaspora participants
Denmark	Copenhagen	22.07.2017	13
Germany	Berlin	29.07.2017	8
United Kingdom	London	05.08.2017	12
Sweden	Stockholm	16.09.2017	10
France	Paris	23.09.2017	8

Since an explorative approach is used, the study does not claim to make representative statements. However, the aim is to contribute to the understanding of Syrian diaspora engagement in the conflict and seeks then to identify the potential for constructive involvement and cooperation.



## 4. DIASPORA MOBILISATION IN SELECTED DESTINATION COUNTRIES

### 4.1. GERMANY

#### 4.1.1. MIGRATION AND POLICY CONTEXT

Already prior to the conflict, Germany was one of Europe's largest receivers of Syrian immigrants, hosting a total 30,133 Syrian citizens in the year 2010. In response to sharply increasing numbers of displaced persons in Europe since 2014, the German government pursued an "open doors" policy, with Chancellor Merkel actively advocating for a welcoming culture for those seeking protection in Germany. Since 2010, the stock of Syrian nationals increased more than tenfold, with the number of Syrian nationals reaching 637,845 in the year 2016. Regarding the geographic distribution, North Rhine-Westphalia hosted 174,020 Syrian nationals, the highest share of Syrian citizens residing in Germany in December 2016, followed by Baden-Wuerttemberg (68,085), Lower Saxony (68,005) and Bavaria (62,450). Syrian immigration to Germany tends to be male-dominated, with men representing 64 percent of Syrian migrants. Moreover, with 78 percent being under the age of 35 and an average age of 24.3, young people make up by far the largest share of Syrian nationals in Germany. In 2016, the vast majority of Syrian citizens had a limited residence permit. More than half (54%) received temporary protection based on humanitarian grounds, whereas 84,375 were granted a residence permit based on their admission to the asylum procedure. In addition, 90,425 persons were residing in Germany without legal status. This category includes registered asylum seekers who have not yet filed an application for asylum or who have not yet been granted a preliminary residence permit on the grounds of seeking asylum (Aufenthaltsgestattung) (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2017). Data collected by the Federal Office on Migration and Refugees also provides a rough overview of the level of qualification and employment of first-time asylum applicants. In 2015, 27 percent of Syrian first-time asylum applicants had attained higher education (i.e. university or technical college) which was around ten percentage points higher than the overall average of applicants from all countries of origin. Concerning the profession last exercised, around a quarter of all applicants surveyed most recently worked in technical, medical, engineering, teaching and administrative professions. Across genders, about 73 percent of male applicants and 29 percent of female applicants had most recently been in work (Rich, 2016).

Within the Ministry of Interior (BMI), the Directorate Migration, Refugees, Return Policy is responsible for the migration and refugee policy of the Federal Government, including residence and asylum regulations, return related policies as well as issues regarding European harmonisation. The department supervises the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), which is responsible for the management of asylum procedure and the promotion of migrant integration (BMI, 2017). BAMF provides structural funds for migrant organisations to strengthen their role and participation in promoting migrant incorporation and social cohesion. For the year 2017, particular attention has been given to migrant organisations active in refugee aid (BAMF, 2016). As an example at the regional level, the Ministry of Labour, Integration and Social Issues of the German Federal State of NRW provides capacity development and financial resources, explicitly targeted towards the needs of migrant organisation (MAIS NRW, 2017).

In Germany, the topic of Migration and Development is high on the political agenda, with the Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and its implementing agency GIZ being the lead organisations in this field. The Centre for International Migration and Development (CIM), a joint operation of GIZ and the German Federal Employment Agency, implements the BMZ commissioned programme



'Migration for Development' (PME). The programme operates in five fields of action 1) Knowledge transfer by returning experts, 2) Diaspora cooperation, 3) Migrants as Entrepreneurs 4) Migration Advice, and 5) Migration Policy Advice. CIM's Sector Project Migration and Development is responsible for the development of instruments and concepts promoting the developmental potential of migration and advises the BMZ in this regard. Within the diaspora cooperation field of action, migrant organisations can apply for financial support for implementing projects in their countries of origin (ICMPD & ECDPM, 2013). In addition to this targeted support, diaspora organisations can access funding through general BMZ funding schemes for NGOs active in development cooperation. BMZ funds for NGOs registered in West Germany are administrated by Schmitz Stiftungen, while Stiftung Nord-Süd-Brücken is responsible for the allocation of financial resources to eastern-German based NGOs (Schmitz Stiftung, 2016; Stiftung Nord-Süd-Brücken, 2016).

In 2013, the German Federal Foreign Office provided financial funds to Berghof Foundation to facilitate the establishment of an umbrella organisation of German-Syrian relief organisations in Germany (Verband Deutsch-Syrischer Hilfsvereine eV, VDSH). At the time of writing, VDSH represented around 22 associations and can be perceived as the largest network within the Syrian diaspora in Germany. Within the recent project "Capacity building for civil society actors in Syrian relief aid", supported by the German development Cooperation (GIZ) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), members of VDHS receive training in project management, accounting, and proposal writing to promote professionalisation as well as capacity development of Syrian diaspora organisations in Germany. Moreover, selected projects have received seed funding for a six-month period.

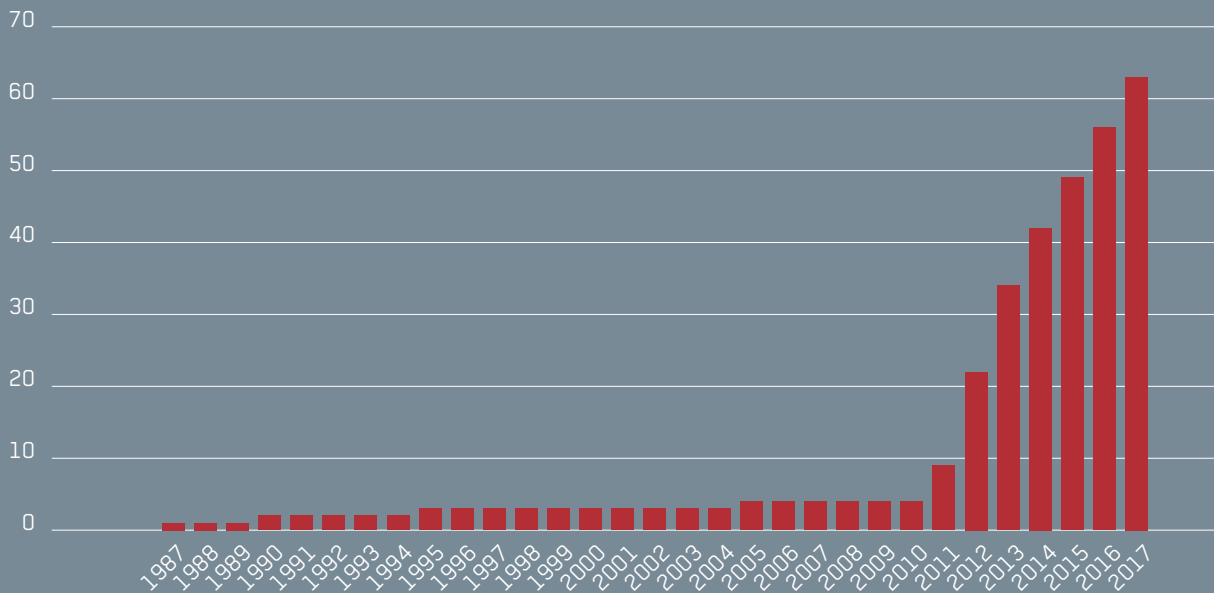
#### **4.1.2. SUBJECTIVE VIEW ON THE SYRIAN DIASPORA**

The Syrian immigrant population in Germany is characterised by great heterogeneity regarding religion, ethnicity, socio-economic characteristics and trajectories of displacement. Syrian migration patterns have been both conflict-fuelled and more voluntary in nature for the purpose of work, studying and family reunification. Migration from the 70s onwards was marked by student migration, particularly in the field of health science and engineering. In the earlier 1980s, political unrests in the city of Hama forced many involved in the oppositional movement to seek political exile in Germany, leading to the first phase of forced displacement. The violent conflict that has ravaged the country since 2011 engendered the second phase, in which Germany has become the major destination country of displaced Syrians in Europe. While many respondents state that the pre-conflict Syrian immigrants tended to be more medium and highly skilled, the newly displaced Syrian population in Germany tends to comprise both persons with high and lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Some respondents stated that Syrians of the 70s and 80s generations, regardless of the reasons for migration, established communities with strong internal ties, cultivating Syrian traditions and customs in Germany. In addition, networks emerged along ethnic lines, such as Syrian Kurdish or Aramaic organisations that aimed at preserving their cultural heritage and identity and promoting awareness of minority and human rights violations in the Syrian context. However, until the Syrian uprising in 2011, mobilisation was limited to the social-cultural sphere, as many Syrians in Germany feared regime repression even abroad. Those Syrian-German friendship associations that existed before 2011 were seen by many as prolonged arms of the Syrian government, which tried to exercise control over the Syrian population in Germany to repress the emergence of an oppositional movement from abroad. When the Syrian uprising started in 2011, many Syrians in Germany felt obliged to support the initial non-violent movement. Syrians came together to discuss the recent transformations in the origin country and to organise demonstrations, protests and information events, to raise awareness on the situation and developments in Syria, and to mobilise support for a peaceful and democratic transition of the country.

Although the organised diaspora was united on a common ground, namely being in opposition to the regime of Assad, conflicting ideas, narratives and visions for a peaceful Syria lead to fragmentation among members of the Syrian diaspora in Germany. Other lines of division emerged with the increasing number of Syrians seeking protection in Germany. Among them, there are many young activists, who have been

**FIGURE 2: STOCK OF SYRIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN GERMANY, 1987-2017**



involved in the non-violent and civil society movement in Syria or the neighbouring countries, and who continue their engagement abroad. Unlike generations of Syrians that migrated in the 70s and 80s, the younger generation perceives a different kind of ownership of the conflict, given that they have experienced recent transitions in Syria.

Within the Syrian diaspora in Germany different conflict narratives, aspirations and divergent solutions to the crisis exist that are shaped not just by cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds, but also by age, social class and different trajectories of displacement. With the further escalation of the conflict, many respondents perceived that peace could only be achieved through finding ways of collaboration and respect. As a result, many organisations in Germany now are seeking forms of cooperation to bundle resources and respond more efficiently to the various aspects of the crisis.

#### **4.1.3. ASPIRATIONS AND MOTIVATIONS**

Many respondents stated that they wanted to be part of the change that happened in the country by supporting the peaceful movements towards a free and democratic Syria. Others felt obliged to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian populations by assisting those most affected by the conflict. While the emergence of the initial non-violent resistance against the government of Assad raised hopes of a transition towards democracy and freedom, a peaceful Syria is difficult to imagine for many respondents at this stage of the conflict. The conflict has escalated into a proxy war in which, for many, the solution lies not in the hands of Syrians themselves. Given the protracted nature of the conflict, with increasing intensification, internationalisation and spill-over of the conflict within the region, cessation of the conflict and sustainable return seems unlikely in the near future. Although many organisations see strong potential in the Syrian diaspora to engage in the reconstruction process of the country, sustainable contributions can only be realised upon a resolution of the immediate conflict.

**“I believe that strongly, that there is no peace without justice. And justice, it needs accountability. And I think that was the mistake, the big fault, that the international community did when it just closed the eyes” (DE7, personal interview, Berlin, November 2017),**

There is a clear need to end the death, displacement and destruction and to find a durable political solution to this conflict on the international level, in which those who committed atrocities and crimes against humanity are held accountable. For the majority, transitional justice, however, cannot be achieved as long as the regime of Assad stays in power. Moreover, the increasing intensification and ‘ethnitisation’ of the conflict, in which power is more and more mobilised along ethnic and religious lines, is perceived as a major challenge for achieving sustainable peace in Syria.

Many therefore argue that at this stage of the conflict, respondents return to Syria is not a realistic option, yet might be a desirable opportunity in the future. However, it is generally perceived that the process of reconstruction has to already be supported in Germany. For the majority of respondents, the potentials of the Syrian diaspora to contribute to peace, reconstruction and development can only be promoted through successful integration of the displaced Syrians in Germany. Only if people can generate knowledge and experiences and build up their capacity then can they promote social, economic and political transitions in Syria, upon return or from Germany.

**“The people who came to Germany now gain experience and learn here in Germany and that is all a very good basis for the future of Syria” (DE2a, personal interview, Dusseldorf, November 2016)**

Regarding the integration of Syrian newcomers in Germany, the roundtable discussion identified several conditions and challenges. Learning the new language is considered as the first step in the integrational process and the essential for communication, education and finding a job. Moreover, a lack of safe spaces for dialogue and exchange about issues related to belonging and local integration, like identity or religion has been identified. In general, there is a feeling of stereotypes and prejudice against the Syrian refugees, but also vice versa against the hosting society by the Syrians that impedes intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding. Moreover, the insecurity of residency, on the one hand, limits the willingness to invest in building a new life in an unstable environment, while on the other it also negatively affects the feeling of belonging to the new society. Further, it is perceived that targeted support is needed for vulnerable groups in dealing with trauma and other forms of psychological distress.

#### **4.1.4. ORGANISATIONAL LANDSCAPE**

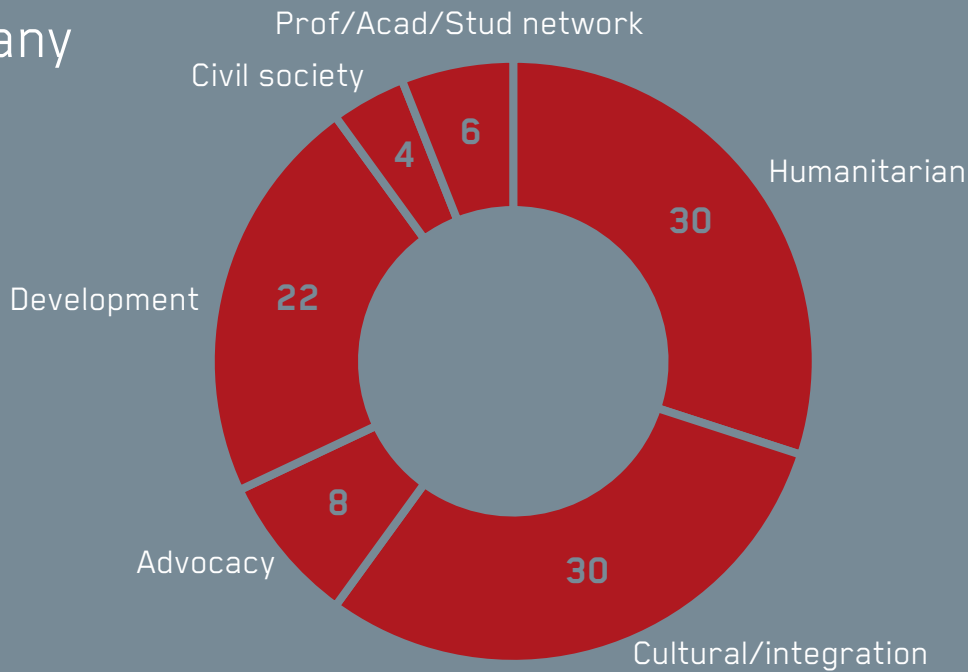
As a result of the recent transformation, a diverse landscape of diaspora organisations emerged, marked by the different political identities of the Syrian population, which were also reflected in the diaspora. As shown in Figure 2, one can observe a sharp increase in the number of Syrian civil society organisations established in Germany since the year 2011.

Due to the recent emergence of Syrian organisations in Germany and the dynamic and multi-layered nature of the Syrian conflict, a clear-cut categorisation of the organisations is difficult to undertake. Many organisations try to address the various aspects of the Syrian crisis, becoming engaged in various fields of action in Syria, the neighbouring countries and in Germany. Rather than providing a typology of organisations, the following categorisation presents an overview of the main fields of engagement that have been identified during the mapping (Figure 3).

With increasing numbers of Syrians seeking protection in Germany, supporting integration emerged as another one of the major areas of engagement (30%), with more than one third of the organisations being active in this field. Given the high levels of violence and destruction, 30 percent of the engagement takes place in the humanitarian sector in Syria or in the neighbouring countries, with more 30 Syrian diaspora

**FIGURE 3: FIELDS OF ENGAGEMENT OF SYRIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN GERMANY (CATEGORIES EXPLAINED ON PAGE 69)**

## Germany



organisations being active in this area. Relief aid ranges from clothes, baby milk, and medicine to medical equipment like ambulances and medical devices. After more than six years of conflict, 35 percent of the organisations perceive the need for more sustainable efforts by engaging in development activities (22% of total engagement), to alleviate peoples' dependency in favour of a more self-determined life. Moreover, eight organisations engage in advocacy work (8% percent of total engagement), to show solidarity with the nonviolent movement in Syria, to raise awareness for the Syrian cause in the broader public and to lobby for a political solution to the conflict. Six professional/academic/student networks have been identified, aiming to pool the expertise of Syrians abroad in a specific field and to promote cooperation between Syrian professionals and other professionals in Germany or Syria. Finally, a small section of organisations (4%) and four percent of the total engagement aims at promoting the development of Syrian civil society either in Germany and/or abroad, mainly through capacity development of Syrian civil society actors, and the fostering of networks and cooperation.

Looking at the membership of the organisations, in the vast majority, a smaller number of members is preferred, as this allows a more flexible response in the dynamic context of the Syrian conflict. Often the core work is realised by a small proportion of very active individuals, while at the same time many organisations stated that they are able to mobilise hundreds of people when bigger events such as fundraising campaigns or demonstration and protest are planned. The majority of organisations foster inclusive membership policies and promote the involvement of Syrians with diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. Moreover, many members of the diaspora organisations are equipped with important skills and resources, in diverse fields ranging from medicine, psychology, engineering and law, to economic, social and political sciences. With regard to the organisational capacity, the vast majority of Syrian diaspora organisations heavily rely on membership fees and donations and work continues to be done mainly on a voluntary basis. While the project supported by GIZ and BMZ (mentioned above) may be an important step towards supporting the capacity development and professionalisation of Syrian diaspora organisations in Germany, the sustainability might be hampered by its project-based nature. In the few cases of organisations, which were able to successfully access public funds from government or international organisations, cooperation with more established German or international organisations as well as a field office in Turkey have been identified as major success factors.

In 2014, the Federation of German-Syrian aid organisations (Verband Deutsch-Syrischer Hilfsvereine, often referred to as the Dachverband) was founded to connect, unite and represent Syrian organisations in Germany. For the success and work of the Dachverband it is important that it acts strictly as a neutral coordination and capacity building mechanism in order to “unify” the (politically) divided landscape of diaspora organisations. At the stage of writing, the federation represents 22 organisations in Germany. Next to this, other networks have evolved, revolving around specific professions or specific aims, such as the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment, often being transnational in nature and involving members that are scattered across the world.

#### **4.1.5. ACTIVITIES AND PRACTICES**

With the emergence of the initial peaceful resistance in Syria in 2011, many Syrians in Germany felt obliged to support the movement from abroad and saw the opportunity to shape the origin countries future. Demonstrations, protest and information events were organised to raise awareness among the broader German public and contacts with German politicians were established to influence decision making on the Syrian cause and to lobby for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. While advocacy continues to be an important field of engagement, the escalation of the conflict shifted the focus towards the delivery of humanitarian aid, to alleviate the suffering of those affected by the conflict. Relief aid ranged from clothes, baby milk, medicine and medical equipment to ambulances and medical devices. Other initiatives provide financial support for widows and orphans to ensure their livelihood. However, humanitarian assistance becomes more and more difficult to realise, due to the frequent closing of borders, as well as complex bureaucratic procedures in the neighbouring countries.

In addition, after more than six years of conflict, many organisations see the need for more sustainable efforts, which promote the well-being and development of the Syrian population beyond the pure delivery of aid. Increasingly, diaspora organisations are becoming involved in more development-orientated activities, in the areas of health, employment, education, gender and community development. To ensure the maintenance and development of the Syrian health sector, organisation like DSV, DSÄ and UOSSOM financed the construction and maintenance of hospitals, including the funding of medical staff and electricity, and delivered training for medical practitioners to develop skills and human capital. New media resources (e.g. WhatsApp, Skype) enable knowledge transfer on a regular basis, through which doctors in Syria consult with Syrian doctors abroad, discuss the diagnosis or even receive assistance in surgeries.

Other initiatives aim to lead people out of dependency, often focussing on displaced Syrians living in the neighbouring countries, as these tend to face difficult socio-economic conditions. This group is particularly vulnerable due to scarce livelihood resources and limited access to public services such as healthcare and education. Many organisations, therefore, implemented projects aimed at enhancing Syrian refugees’ access to employment opportunities and livelihoods support. Targeting displaced women, the German-Syrian Forum (Deutsch- Syrisches Forum) and Homs League Abroad, provide professional training in, among other things, tailoring, health care and hairdressing to enable them to become self-reliant and to live independently from aid.

After more than six years of conflict, there is an increased risk of an entire generation of children being deprived of their basic right to education. Children will be the ones to lead the country towards a peaceful future. Therefore, many diaspora organisations see the need for promoting the education of children, through the establishment and financing of schools and educational centres both in Syria and in the neighbouring countries. Beside traditional subjects, such as languages and natural sciences, organisations put emphasis on strengthening the awareness of human rights, women’s rights and principles of democracy and freedom.

Other organisations focus on building a more inclusive and resilient society through the promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment and the strengthening of civil society, promotion of peacebuilding and reconciliation. For instance, Unabhängiges Komitee für Sozialentwicklung und selbstorganisierte Demokratie, UKSSD, established four community centres in northern Syria to counter

divisions within the Syrian society through activities that promote co-existence and tolerance among all Syrian community members and groups. The Syrian Women's Network implements projects that enable women to play a leading role in Syria's social and political transformation. In addition to projects targeting both women in Syria and in displacement, SWN lobbies for a commitment to gender-sensitive peacebuilding and reconstruction on the international level.

Given the increasing numbers of Syrians migrating to Germany in search of protection, many initiatives emerged to support those who have newly arrived. Activities range from assistance with government agencies and doctors' visits, the organisation of information events on asylum procedures, and provision of legal advice to psycho-social support. Moreover, some organisations offer German language and orientation courses, as language plays an important part in the process of integration. In addition to the support for refugees in their daily life, some initiatives also focus on the professional integration of Syrian refugees into the labour market. For instance, the organisation Alkawakibi advises around 450 Syrian doctors with a refugee background on questions regarding approbation and the recognition of diplomas. In their mentoring programme, doctors volunteer to provide support for Syrian doctors in building their career in Germany. Other initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue between locals and refugees and fostering an understanding of the root causes of forced displacement among the German society. One main objective is to change the perceptions of integration and to show that those who newly arrived in Germany are also bringing crucial resources with them and can successfully contribute to German society.

Some initiatives tackle the need to promote a process of peacebuilding, dialogue and reconciliation among members of the wider diaspora in Germany, laying the groundwork for a successful future reconstruction process. The project „Young leaders for Syria”, jointly implemented by Citizens Diplomats for Syria, Friedenskreis Syrien and The European Foundation for Democracy targets young Syrians with diverse backgrounds, who have been coming to Germany since 2011. In a range of workshops, participants discuss topics such as identity, sectarianism, conflict narratives and conflict resolution. The main aim of this project is to develop capacities for a democratic and inclusive development basis within the young Syrian population in Germany. Also, the objective is to promote participation and integration into the local community through civic education and professional/capacity building. At a global level, the organisation Citizens for Syria aims at empowering Syrian civil society actors across the world, by promoting capacity building and networking to create a strong base for social change. The organisation is also engaged in research activities, and produced a capacity assessment of Syrian civil society organisations in order to develop an interactive database of the Syrian civil society actors across the globe (Citizens for Syria, 2017).

#### **4.1.6. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

The Syrian diaspora in Germany shows a strong desire and high commitment to address the various aspects of the Syrian crisis, in Syria, the neighbouring countries and Germany. Due to their extensive networks to local communities, diaspora organisations are able to reach areas that are inaccessible to other actors, hence, often helping those who are the most affected by the crisis. At the same time, Syrian diaspora organisations in Germany are confronted with several challenges that limit their potential of contributing to peace, reconciliation and reconstruction.

First and foremost, the devastating security situation in Syria, and the inability of the international community to find a political solution to the conflict are perceived by many as the greatest challenge for constructive involvement. Due to frequent attacks on civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and schools built by the diaspora, sustainable efforts beyond the short-term delivery of relief aid are difficult to implement. Moreover, the fluid and complex nature of the conflict, with constantly changing battlefronts and an uncountable number of armed groups, makes countrywide coverage impossible to realise, leading to unintended selectivity in aid delivery. The urgent necessity to address the most basic needs of those suffering the consequences of the conflict also limits the space for initiating debates and initiatives related to more long-term efforts such as gender equality, transitional justice and reconciliation. At the same time, many perceive that sustainable peace can only be achieved with initiatives that move beyond the delivery

of humanitarian aid and the pure cessation of violent conflict, by also tackling the underlying causes and broader effects of the conflict.

The second major challenge is seen in the lack of capacity as a result of limited infrastructure as well as scarce human and financial resources. As mentioned earlier, the vast majority of the organisations, do their work on a voluntary basis, while donations and membership fees constitute the primary sources of income. While some organisations see in this the added value of diaspora organisations, as this allows a more flexible response and a higher proximity to local communities, other organisations express a strong desire for more professionalisation. Capacity development, including the promotion of human resources with administrative skills such as proposal writing and accounting, monitoring and evaluations, but also more strategic management skills and leadership, are seen as crucial to professionalise involvement of the Syrian diaspora in Germany.

A lack of information on funding opportunities as well as high bureaucratic burdens associated with fund applications and management, have been identified as significant barriers to capacity building and professionalisation. The support given by GIZ and BMZ to the project mentioned above can be perceived as a necessary step in enhancing the effectiveness of the Syrian diaspora as peace-builders and development cooperation partners. The project-based nature of funding available to diaspora organisations in Germany leads to constant insecurity regarding the predictability and continuation of engagement in the future.

#### **4.1.7. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Over the past years, a vibrant Syrian civil society emerged in Germany, which is characterised by great diversity concerning aspiration, visions, capacity and fields of engagement. Collective action cannot only be observed among the older more established Syrian immigrant population but also by those who more recently arrived in Germany. The path of Syrian diaspora mobilisation was marked by a moment of unification in response to the Syrian revolutions and a period of fragmentation, due to the escalation of the Syrian conflict. Given the protracted nature of the crisis, many organisations are now seeking to find ways of collaboration to increase the efficiency of their contributions.

The Syrian diaspora in Germany shows high commitment to address the various aspects of the Syrian crisis, by being engaged both in the Syrian and the German context. While many organisations that started to alleviate the suffering of those being the most affected by the conflict, activities in the context of Syria are now moving towards more development orientated efforts through, among other things, the provision of health care and education and the promotion of community cohesion and women empowerment. More recently, many initiatives focus on the promotion of integration through assisting displaced Syrians in their integration process and strengthening intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding between the displaced Syrian population and the broader German society.

Despite these efforts, the real potential of the Syrian diaspora can only be realised once there is an end to the violent conflict. At this stage, questions on return and reintegration can only be addressed through promoting the capacity of Syrian diaspora organisations in Germany. Through their engagement, these organisations not only contribute to the creation of the necessary structures for sustainable return but also build a strong basis of individual capacity for the reconstruction process among those who more recently arrived in Germany.



## 4.2. FRANCE

### 4.2.1. MIGRATION AND POLICY CONTEXT

Despite their colonial ties, with Syria being under French mandate before its independence, France does not appear to be a traditional destination country of Syrian immigrants. Before the conflict, France ranked third among the six countries represented in this study, hosting a total 15,492 Syrian-born persons in 2010. This number only slightly increased, with the stock of Syrian-born migrants reaching 16,758 in 2015, out of which slightly more than half (57%) were male (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015). In addition, according to the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA, 2016), more than 10,350 Syrians have applied for asylum in France, between the outbreak of the conflict in March 2011 and December 2015, with accompanying minors representing one-third of the total asylum applicants. The recognition rate of all applications submitted in this period was estimated at 95.7 percent. 64 percent of recognised asylum seekers were granted protection under the Geneva Convention while 36 percent received subsidiary protection. Unfortunately, disaggregated statistics on the Syrian immigrant (including asylum seekers and refugees) population in France are not readily available.

France's response to the Syrian conflict and the long-lasting refugee crisis has been threefold, as detailed on the country's Foreign Affairs Ministry website: humanitarian assistance, cessation of hostilities and political transition (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016). France upholds the respect of international humanitarian law in the conflicted areas as well as negotiations, with a view to bringing a regime transition. Paris has been focusing much more on its foreign policy while potentially neglecting the welcoming and support of about 3,403 Syrian asylum seekers at the end of 2015 (OFPRA, 2016). Though the number of asylum claims has been steadily increasing since 2011, it nonetheless remains quantitatively limited.

France is one of those countries which choose not to employ the term "diasporas", instead preferring "national communities established abroad" (IOM, 2013). France, as a host country, has long been involved in favouring dialogue between established diasporas and their communities in origin countries. Immigrant integration programmes are under the responsibility of the Interior Ministry and are designed to serve newcomers, that is, those people who have resided in the country for less than five years (Escafré-Dublet, 2014). The Office for Integration, Reception and Citizenship is the main institution in charge of integration and it manages programmes for legal newcomers, mostly young immigrants. After those initial years, integration needs are addressed through general policies within particular area-based interventions targeting "disadvantaged" neighbourhoods which bear a higher proportion of foreign-born. The Agency for Social Cohesion and Equal Opportunity (L'Agence pour la Cohésion Sociale et l'Égalité des Chances, or ACSE) also deals with immigrants' integration and is under the guidance of the City Ministry. The latter conducts the "city policy", that is, aiming at allocating more means to disadvantaged areas.

Since the 2007 signing of a major migration and development instrument, the "concerted management agreements for migration flows and co-development", France has considerably improved its diaspora engagement policies, by "facilitating human mobility, encouraging temporary migration and stimulating the return of competences and investments" (ECDPM and ICMPD, 2013). The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs has developed an analysis document specifying various policy options to harness the skills of diaspora and migrants. These are, among others, to improve data to better understand and identify their skills, to facilitate key skill transfers and mobility, to ease recruiting processes and lifting obstacles to return, to improve the match between the job and skills, and to bolster cooperation and coordination amongst stakeholders (for instance, migrants and their representatives, national and local authorities in the countries of origin and destination, aid agencies, educational institutions, and public and private-sector employers) (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs & OECD, 2012).



#### 4.2.2. SUBJECTIVE VIEW ON THE SYRIAN DIASPORA

Syrians in France are no exception, bearing demographics of those that are long-established and well-integrated migrants and others that have been forced to flee their country since 2011 onwards. The very existence of a diaspora is a question that was raised repeatedly throughout interviews. The term of (isolated) communities was sometimes preferred to describe a different reality that better accounts for the variations across its members and the lack of unity it characterizes. In this way, the Syrian diaspora in France is par excellence heterogeneous, where all social classes, individuals of all faiths, older generations and newcomers, multiple ethnicities, are represented. As a reflection of the current situation in Syria, one may not be able to apply the same standards to all categories alike – thus underlying the importance of taking into account differences across socioeconomic or ethno-religious categories.

Given regime repression, many respondents emphasised that Syrians abroad were afraid to talk and organise politically before the outbreak of the revolution. The social and political transformations triggered by the Syrian revolution in 2011, activated Syrians in France to collectively engage in shaping the home country's future. Yet, the conflict potentially brought both unification and fragmentation tendencies. Initially, joint efforts have been made to strengthen the networks of the Syria diaspora to work together towards political change in Syria:

**“I would say that there was a momentum at the beginning, at the early 2011-2012, when the diaspora organized itself, wanted to do things together, build things together, and similar to this war that is exhausting, that exhausts us all, motivations vanished” (FR1, personal interview, Paris, May 2017).**

At the same time, the uprisings did not unify the diaspora as a whole, but rather created polarisation along political lines, namely those opposing and those favouring the ruling Assad regime. There are very little, if any, relationships between pro and anti-regime diaspora members, highlighting a real break between these two categories. There also are a few diaspora associations that agree to cooperate with the regime in order to achieve greater security and stability as well as the country's unity. They feign impartiality and are often considered “anti-anarchist” or anti-conflict organisations that value order over liberty. Similarly, they are suspected to be early supporters of the revolution. For them, the only way to eliminate all radical groups (religious, military) is through Assad's regular army and the state system.

As the Syrian conflict escalated, religious belonging, as well as ethnic and linguistic distinctiveness, have become important aspects of self-identification, leading to tensions and divisions emerging based on religious and ethnic boundary creation and maintenance. These are not just perceived between the different ethnic or religious groups but also along the secular and religious divides. As a result, political views of the Syrian diaspora differ considerably as well between pro and anti-regime. For the latter, there are disparities and political differences regarding different vision of the country, different views on the future, and different approaches to the situation:

**“Probably the tears and wounds from the current situation, with its religious dimensions, had consequences on Syrians even abroad, even if these consequences are less strong compared to Syrians living in Syria. But we still feel, even here, many difficulties to organized, to create a community that would manage itself or support itself” (FR12, personal interview, Toulouse, June 2017).**

Multiple rapprochements to defend the revolution and bring help to Syrians were witnessed, while at the same time, many conflicts arose, sometimes even within the same families, between pro and anti-partisans. Other observers argue that a first period was characterized by a fragmentation between the two sides (2011-2013), but, over time, there might have been a rapprochement between these in search of new solutions:

**“Overall, politically, I get the feeling that Syrians abroad are more flexible and start dialogue between themselves. Even those who arrived anti-regime, who demonstrated, who suffered, they start to meet other Syrians are neutral. Before they wouldn’t even meet them but now there is a dialogue” (FR8, personal interview, Paris, June 2017).**

Hence, differences appear to be less marked in France than in Syria, with people now starting to more readily discuss potential solutions to the conflict. This greater flexibility may be shaped by the environment; knowing that what mostly brings Syrians together is their belonging to the country and their nationality (the fact of “being Syrian”). Factors such as ethnicity, religion or political aspirations have been reported to play a minor role in fostering solidarity among Syrians; rather it is an instinctive feeling of solidarity when people are faced with shared grievances.

But for those who remain firmly anchored to their positions, it is still too difficult to have reconciliations. Today, the long-lasting conflict weighs down on everyone and all efforts seem to be easily discouraged – it is thus difficult to revive a momentum of cooperation to gather and create projects together. Efforts that focused on emergency aid now have to move towards new phases of accompaniment (integration, development, understanding needs, etc.) and for most actors, it is a real challenge to maintain strong focus and motivation where impacts, important as they are, are not nearly enough.

#### **4.2.3. ASPIRATIONS AND MOTIVATIONS**

In general, it seemed that the Syrian diaspora was activated by the various aspects of the Syrian crisis. For some respondents, the revolution in Syria in 2011 marked a turning point, where many felt the need to support the initial peaceful movement from abroad:

**“When the revolutions started in the Arab world, we had a lot of hope for a better future. To see young people going out on the streets and fight for freedom, it led me to want to engage” (FR9, Skype interview, June 2017).**

Others stated that with the escalation of the conflict, they felt obliged to contribute to the alleviation of the suffering of the most vulnerable sections of the Syrian society, by providing humanitarian assistance in Syria or the neighbouring countries. Finally, the increasing number of Syrians seeking protection in Europe motivated Syrians in France to facilitate the receptions of the newcomers and to ease their integrational process into the host society.

With regard to peace, there seems a general consensus about how to pacify and stabilize Syria in the way the diaspora envisages it. A regime transition is more than necessary: For many, Syrians cannot be forced to live with the current regime of peace over the long-term. There must be no imposed or unbalanced peace as is currently being negotiated, or at least believed to be by many diaspora members. The regime transition is sensitive and detrimental as if someone from the same clan as Assad were to assume power next; it is believed that nothing much will change. Another shared feeling is that the solution cannot lie in Syrians’ hands for a conflict that has been internationalised for some time already: to start with, the need for a political will has become more and more urgent. It is essential to reach a political solution from all stakeholders engaged in the conflict such as the EU, the US, and Russia, but also from the regional powers such as Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia or Qatar:

**“Syria’s future is not in the hands of Syrians anymore [...] The solution cannot be Syrian for a conflict that is international. An international conflict has an international solution and must be resolved with the concerned parties. Today, there are imposed and impossible solutions. It is not just because we obtain a ceasefire that we obtain peace” (FR1, personal interview, Paris, May 2017).**

However, it is often believed that the situation will remain as it is for now: a fragmented country with disputed territories under multiple local authorities. In this scenario, the first goal is to stabilise these unstable borders and start establishing a dialogue. Hence, it is generally believed that despite people longing to return, the reality on the ground in Syria prevents many people practically from doing so. While some see security and stability as the primary conditions for return, others perceive the need for more fundamental political transitions. In particular, Syrians who have been politically active in the oppositional movement find themselves in forced exile, with no possibility to return under the current regime. Further, many believe that return will also be less likely in the case of families, who have sent their children to school and have established their lives in France.

The roundtable discussions identified political instability and the lack of clear and pragmatic vision for the transitional period as one of the major challenges for potential return as a future scenario. Also, it seems that the post-conflict period will be marked by reoccurring periods of violence, unsafety and instability, accompanied by slow economic growth, with insufficient work opportunities. Moreover, destroyed infrastructure and limited access to social and medical services are posing additional challenges to sustainable reintegration. Hence, training specialists in key areas (medicine, engineering, teaching, etc.) can already be seen as a good starting point for addressing post-war critical needs:

**“I think it’s about valuing their experiences here, whether it is linguistically or professionally. This may smooth their return in Syria and enrich the Syrian society, as well as tomorrow’s political construction in a long-term perspective” (FR12, personal interview, Toulouse, June 2017).**

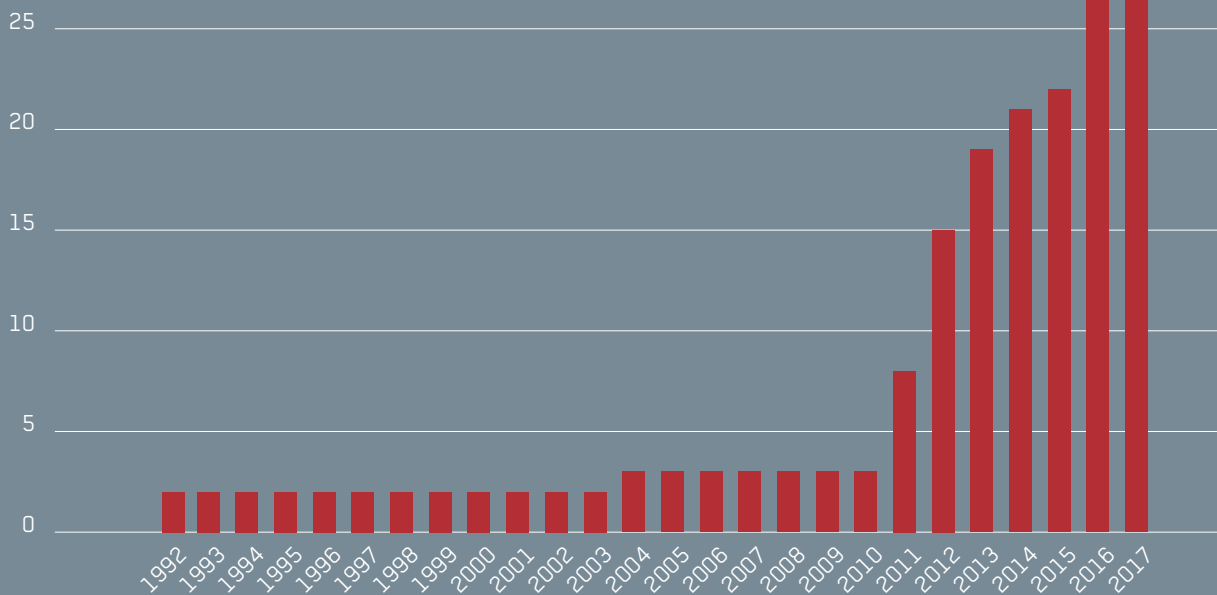
Regarding integration, respondents emphasised that there has to be a more differentiated approach when assessing the willingness and capacity of Syrians to integrate into the host society. In general, young people may be more willing but also more capable to adapt to a new context. In terms of gender, women may face more challenges due to cultural norms that might hinder them to participate fully in the host society. Further, targeted support is needed for vulnerable groups in dealing with trauma and other forms of psychological distress.

The discussion of the roundtable highlighted several challenges Syrian newcomers are facing in the integration process in France. Speaking the language of the host society is seen as the most crucial aspect to foster integration of Syrian newcomers in France. However, the language training offered to newcomers seems to be characterized by a poor quality and not tailored to the different needs of the target population, as there are no specialised classes for illiterate persons. Opportunities for higher education are also limited, as registering for a university would stop the reception of the solidarity income (RSA) and study grants are generally difficult to access. While, according to the participants, many Syrian newcomers are highly educated, they often face difficulties in finding job opportunities in their specialisations. The economic integration is further impeded due to a lack of recognition of diplomas and limited access to complementary training. Also, there is no (or very difficult) access to work during the asylum determination process.

Moreover, many respondents perceive that France pursues an unwelcoming policy for refugees, with racism and right-wing parties being particularly on the rise since the Paris terrorist attacks of November 2015. The reception in the host country is further impeded by highly bureaucratic and difficult administrative procedures, in which the state counts a lot on associations to support the newcomers, without providing sufficient support for civil society actors:

**“The reality of Syrian newcomers’ situation arriving in France, and who are completely lost with a disconnected bureaucracy, with neo-colonialist practices, racist attitudes, with increasing documents’ claims, is abstruse, traumatizing, and time-consuming” (FR7, personal interview, Paris, June 2017).**

**FIGURE 4: STOCK OF SYRIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN FRANCE, 1992-2017**



#### 4.2.4. ORGANISATIONAL LANDSCAPE

Based on the mapping, 27 Syrian civil society organisations have been identified in France, with the majority having been established since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011 (see Figure 4).

The majority of organisations in France have their work oriented towards domestic Syria and the contacts they may have within particular areas of the country. This much-targeted involvement often takes place in opposition-controlled areas. A large majority have their offices headquartered in Paris where most of the newcomers arrive. There are also other notable associations developing assistance in areas where Syrians are less concentrated (Strasbourg, Lyon, Marseille, Toulouse, Bordeaux).

As Figure 5 indicates, one-third of the engagement takes place in the humanitarian system in Syria or the neighbouring, with more than half (18) of the organisations being active in this field. Increasingly, organisations become active in the field of culture/integration (23%), with 13 out of 27 organisations aiming at easing the arrival of Syrian newcomers in France, or at promoting Syrian culture and communal ties. Often culture and integration tend not to be the sole focus of organisations, as the majority of organisations combine it with other fields of engagement. Similarly, advocacy work, which comprises 20 percent of total engagement, tends to be a component of engagement, rather than a sole focus of the organisations. Raising awareness on the humanitarian crisis in Syria, informing about the situation of displaced Syrians and calling for solidarity in finding a political solution to the conflict, have been identified as the main objective. Moreover, six organisations engage in development-orientated activities (11% of total engagement), ranging from the defence of human rights, promotion of female empowerment and education to maintenance of the health sector in Syria. Six organisations state that they aim to support and empower grassroots movements and civil society actors (11% of total engagement), by developing the capacity of Syrian civil society actors in both the origin and the host country. Finally, one professional network has been identified, pooling the expertise of Syrian health care professionals in France.

The majority of organisations tend to have a rather small size of membership, where a handful of key individuals realise the regular activities. Regarding the composition, many pursue an inclusive membership policy, seeking to engage Syrians regardless of their ethnic or religious background. In addition, persons

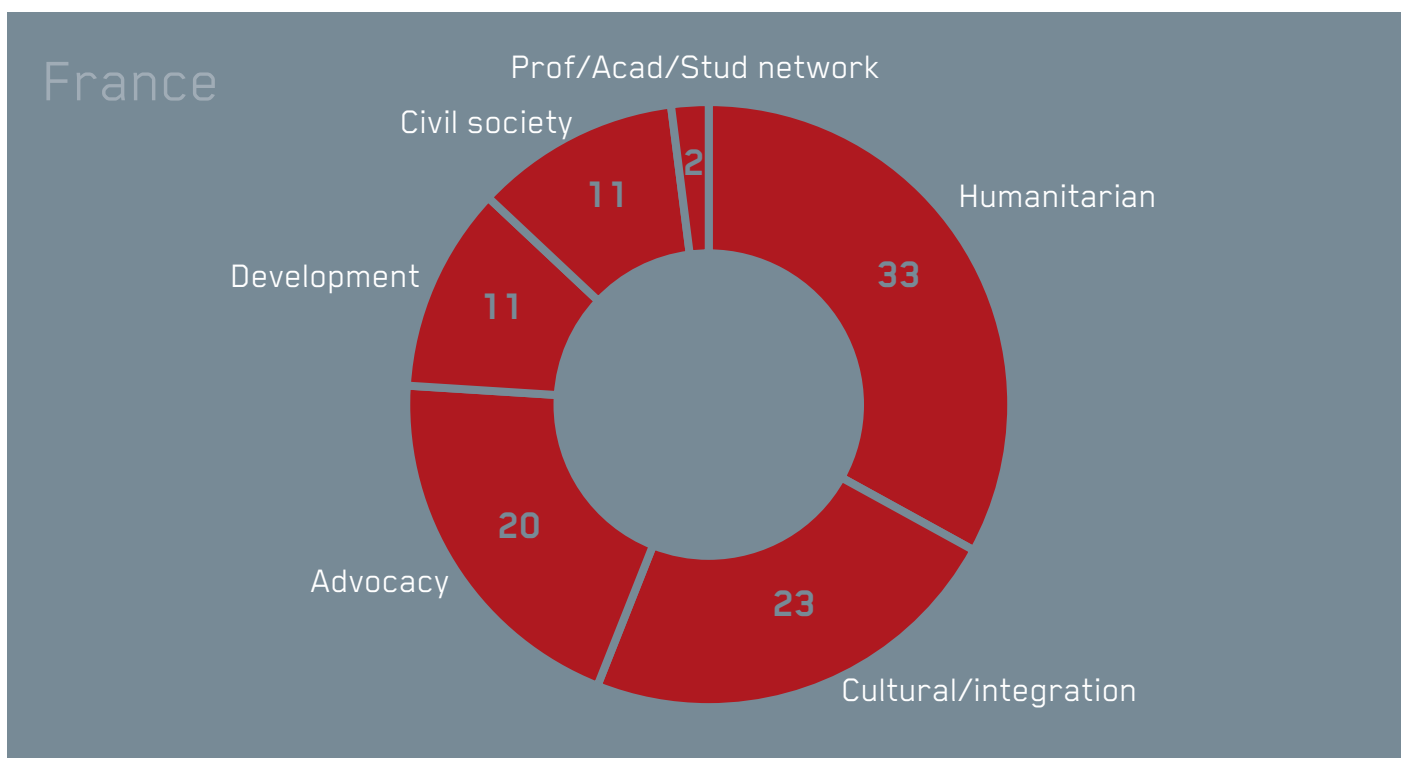
with a non-Syrian background tend to comprise a significant proportion of the members. In terms of gender, seven out of the twelve organisations interviewed stated that they have more women than men involved.

Most associations have very limited access to public funding and have to cope with limited and small budgets originating from fundraising events/donations. Public funding (state, region, municipalities, and public agencies) is very restrictive in terms of acceptance criteria and funds availability. Those who generally are able to benefit from these, are organisations that have managed to develop a solid structured and institutionalised functioning. Volunteering is the most common form of participation within the associative milieu, while paid staffs are only to be found in larger or stronger entities that either receive public funding or donations from foreign bodies. Since 2015-2016, it has been reported that there has been a decrease in volunteer participation due to a generalized exhaustion, which can be attributed to the long-lasting conflict that pull-down energies and synergies.

Established in 2012, the Collectif de Développement et Secours Syrien or CODSSY (Syrian Development and Aid Collective) is a successful attempt to bring together several associations sharing common working methods and objectives in order to foster mutual cooperation and to pool resources, contacts and expertise. After moving from 10 to 7 member associations last year, CODSSY is now restructuring itself to identify best matching partners and aims at developing relevant activities covering current and urgent needs on the ground in Syria and France. It should soon welcome 5 new member associations, and with its considerably large network of contacts and working partners in multiple countries (France, other European states, Syria and neighbouring countries), CODSSY is currently the main (and only) umbrella association in the country.

Some other associations have been reported to collaborate on a more informal level, often times with combined efforts to pursue common objectives on project-to-project bases. Given that these punctual partnerships are non-registered officially, they can rather be considered as regular rapprochements and collaborations to increase efforts on specific issues. Among the most cited organisations in this sphere are notably Souria Houria (Paris), Revivre (Paris), Alwane (Lyon), Toulouse-Syrie Solidarité (Toulouse) and

**FIGURE 5: FIELDS OF ENGAGEMENT OF SYRIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN FRANCE (CATEGORIES EXPLAINED ON PAGE 69)**



Alsace-Syrie Solidarité (Strasbourg). These associations often work with one another and even with non-Syrian organisations that have a dedicated department for Syria, such as Amnesty International, Médecins Sans Frontières, Médecins du Monde, etc.

That being said, not all associations collaborate with each other, in particular when differences in terms of working methods or approach to supporting the revolution arise. Also, several associations have been found to work on quite specific issues (awareness-raising through arts, children, supporting women, online media, etc.) or areas in which they are not part of any larger group. Eventually, it is quite relevant to assert that in this fast-changing environment, many associations 'are born' and 'die' within short spaces of time: it thus appears difficult to keep long-term focus and motivation when impacts are hardly measurable and loss of motivation comes to replace hope.

#### 4.2.5. ACTIVITIES AND PRACTICES

The Syrian diaspora in France can be characterised as reactive, in the sense that it seeks to meet the demands of the moment. Respondents who have been active since the outbreak of the revolution stated that their activities highly changed, adapting to the needs of an ever-changing reality:

**“At first, our association started in order to demonstrate against the regime. Later, the situation evolved, and given the terrible war in Syria, we were forced to send food, medical devices to Syria. Then, we saw that refugees were coming, so we adapted ourselves to help these refugees integrate to the French society” (FR10, personal interview, Strasbourg, June 2017).**

The diaspora, through its organisations, reaches out to the population in Syria through their network of contacts, usually via an affinity network as has been previously mentioned. Claims stemming from the Syrian revolution are voiced through multiple cultural/art events in order to sensitize an increasing number of persons in the host country (e.g. secularity, democracy and modern institutions). Organisations thus act as a focal point between two countries, two populations, and assist the Syrian civil society in defining and relaying its acute needs.

The conflict in Syria is complex and the objectives of associations have become more complex over time, mostly because needs have evolved and new ones appeared. CODSSY, since its setting up in 2012, has maintained a similar approach and aim, though its means and scope of work have considerably increased thanks to additional partnering institutions and donations. Their strong focus on supporting and funding humanitarian/development projects in Syria is thanks to the reliability of local partners. Similarly, the organisation has recently started cultural/integration activities in France. Here, finding the right partners for collaboration is perceived as crucial to building a trustful and lasting relationship. Whenever possible, the same partners will be kept for future cooperation. When choosing a new partner, it is important to verify its past, its activities and its political line. Then, once approved, a commission within CODSSY studies proposals when a project is submitted for approval in order to decide whether financing would be granted or not, or if a fundraising activity would be set up to make new funds available, etc. Follow-up is organized accordingly with the production of a report and on-site visits whenever possible. CODSSY, therefore, operates this way via local partner associations in Syria, Lebanon or Turkey, and works towards unifying stakeholders in Syria, strengthening peace-building activities, and mostly building and expanding educational projects for children in Syria and neighbouring countries.

Other organisations usually work in a similar way, with previously made contacts, funding projects or directly channelling funds. However, their modus operandi is often times less structured/institutionalised and rely more on personal affinities/pre-conflict trust relationships. Their engagement towards specific areas is the result of an evolution of discussions between several stakeholders and an active listening to the populations concerned for their needs.

#### 4.2.6. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Among the most often cited challenges is notably the lack of available funding, hindering the capacity of organisations to efficiently provide adequate aid to Syrians, especially in Syria. Given that most of the current needs are to be found in Syria, there is an increased necessity to find additional financial and material means to cover them. With not enough donors, not enough funds, and quite irregular money flows, there is an increasing difficulty to implement long-term action plans. Thus, most organisations work on a project-by-project basis. More financial visibility over time would help build sustainable schemes and not just answer punctual needs. In addition, the policy line of funders can sometimes be a barrier when certain identified needs are not privileged and others are preferred for various political, economic or security reasons.

Moreover, the devastating situation in Syria, with large scale of violence, displacement and destructing is perceived as a major challenge with regard to the origin country context. The needs in Syria are enormous, at the same time Syrian diaspora groups face difficulties in gaining access to regime-controlled areas, leading to unintended selectivity and politicisation of diaspora humanitarian action. Next to access, the lack of reliable and trustful partners is perceived to be difficult to manage from a distance. Other organisations reported a loss of partners, that have been targeted by the different conflict actors.

The lack of motivation is another key issue that has to be addressed. Motivation has been decreasing over time, and members and partners need to be constantly convinced to offer additional energy to obtain results that are not yet visible. Overall, participation in associations is decreasing, particularly after 2015 and the temporarily heightened media coverage that made the massive refugee flows from the Western Balkan Route highly visible. This progressively led to the depletion of the functioning of organisations with contacts themselves leaving Syria and greater distance being created. Contact is therefore not made anymore with primary acquaintances but increasingly with intermediaries, leading to a working atmosphere less favourable to trust and efficiency. Apart from that, spontaneous action has to evolve towards new forms of initiatives (sustainable work, humanitarian aid, etc.) or risks becoming lost.

#### 4.2.7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Syrian diaspora in France is par excellence heterogeneous, where all social classes, individuals of all faiths, older generations and newcomers, multiple ethnicities, are represented. As a reflection of the current situation in Syria, one may not be able to apply the same standards to all categories alike – thus underlying the importance of taking into account differences across socioeconomic or ethnoreligious categories. The very existence of a diaspora is a question that was raised repeatedly throughout interviews. The term of (isolated) communities was sometimes preferred to describe a different reality that better accounts for the variations across its members and the lack of unity it characterizes.

The Syrian diaspora in France can be characterised as reactive, in the sense that it seeks to meet the demands of the moment. Respondents who have been active since the outbreak of the crisis stated that their activities highly changed, adapting to the needs of an ever-changing reality. In that sense, diaspora groups in France, not just raise awareness on the situation in Syria, calling for a peaceful resolution to the conflict, but also provide humanitarian to those suffering from the consequences of the conflict and help newcomers to settle in the French society.

It is, at this stage, important to continue efforts towards bringing multiple stakeholders around the same table and try to establish dialogue and foster cooperation attempts. CODSSY is a good example of a working system to pool efforts towards achieving similar goals and should be assisted in fulfilling its objectives. Despite the different political aspirations that characterize France's Syrian diaspora, there is hope that these people may work together. With time and efforts, things shall slowly fall into place and should bring increased partnerships. Current projects/initiatives have already proved it could lead to positive achievements already.

## 4.3. THE UNITED KINGDOM

### 4.3.1. MIGRATION AND POLICIES CONTEXT

With 7,000 Syrian-born individuals residing in the United Kingdom in 2010, the pre-conflict Syrian immigrant population can be considered as rather small when compared to other European destination countries such as Germany, Sweden and France. With regard to the Syrian displacement crisis, the initial stance of the UK was not to offer any resettlement, instead, providing humanitarian aid to Syria and the neighbouring countries. Yet, in January 2014, the Home Secretary launched the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Program. This program aims to aid the resettlement of vulnerable Syrian refugees in the UK. In September 2015, the Vulnerable Person Resettlement Program was announced to be extended, meaning that up to 20,000 Syrian refugees would be welcomed in the UK (McGuinness, 2017). Despite these efforts, the overall public discourse in the last years was marked by less open attitudes towards immigration, with more control over migration flows being one of the main arguments of the 'leave' campaign (Wadsworth, Dhingra, Ottaviano, & Van Reenen, 2016). This restrictive policy response is also reflected in Syrian migration patterns to the UK, since the number of Syrian-born migrants has increased only moderately since 2011, reaching 22,000 in 2015 (UK Office for National Statistics, 2016). Unfortunately, statistics disaggregated by gender and age categories are not publicly available. Yet, a summary of findings on refugee resettlement in 2014 noted that the Syrian population in the UK tends to be young, while males outnumber females (Jannesari, Macpherson, & Tah, 2014).

The Home Office's UK Visas and Immigration section is responsible for immigration-related policies, including visa, residence and asylum regulations. The main priorities lie in securing borders, reducing immigration and combatting terrorism (Home Office, 2017). Integration policies are implemented decentralised, with the Department for Communities and Local Government being the lead actor in this field. In partnership with the Church Urban Fund, the department launched the Near Neighbours initiative in 2011, which provides small grants to local grassroots organisations and multi-faith communities that promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue and community cohesion (Church Urban Fund, 2017). Next to this, local governments and private charity organisations have been identified as main actors providing support for migrant organisations active in the area of integration.

The leading player in the field of Migration and Development is the Department for International Development (DfID). The current UK government does not have a specific policy addressing Migration and Development and the recent DfID "Single departmental plan: 2015 to 2020" focuses on tackling the root causes of mass migration, rather than on how to harness the development potential of migration (Department for International Development, 2016). A noteworthy initiative co-funded by Comic Relief and the Department for International Development (DFID) is the Common Ground Initiative. This programme mainly aims at awarding grants to notable migrant organisations that work toward creating significant changes to underprivileged and disadvantaged communities in Africa. The main aim is to increase the capacity of migrant organisations. Next to this, diaspora organisations are also eligible to access funding through other thematic schemes of DfID, such as the UK Aid Direct Fund, the Global Innovation Fund or the Disability Rights Fund (Department for International Development, 2017).

The UK government does not provide any specific program targeting Syrian diaspora groups. Yet, there are several NGO's that work toward a better cooperation with Syrian diaspora groups in the UK in order to provide better relief aid in the conflict areas. International Alert is an example of such an organisation. This organisation identifies Syrian diaspora groups as one of the most important actors in peacebuilding. One concrete example of their initiatives is the Conflict Ideas Forum, which discussed how strengthening the relationship between Syrian diaspora groups and the UK government could lead to better peacebuilding activities in the conflict areas. Another main goal is the establishment of a more formal network of Syrian Diaspora groups in the UK (International Alert, 2014). The European Commission funded project 'Active Voices' is a noteworthy initiative by the British Council, International Alert and other implementing partners. The project aims at ameliorating the skills of young Syrian leaders and enables them to participate in the



peacebuilding in conflict areas. It works with Syrian diaspora groups in the UK, Germany and Belgium (British Council, 2016).

#### 4.3.2. SUBJECTIVE VIEW ON THE SYRIAN DIASPORA

The rich socio-cultural diversity of Syria is also reflected in the Syrian immigrant population in the UK. In general, Syrian migration patterns to the UK were marked by different waves of migration, ranging from current forced displacement and conflict-fuelled migration in the 1980s, to migration in search for better economic and educational opportunities (International Alert, 2015). While no formal statistics on socio-economic characteristics of the Syrian immigrant population exist, the interviews indicate that the pre-conflict population, in particular, tends to be rather skilled and affluent when compared to other immigrant groups in the UK.

Similar to other destination countries, mobilisation based on a collective Syrian identity was almost absent prior to the conflict, and Syrians in the UK tended to be connected rather to wider ethno-religious networks of Arab, Muslim or Kurdish communities. Repression by the Syrian regime prevented not just major political mobilisation of Syrians abroad, but also created a lack of cohesion among Syrians living in the UK. General mistrust towards the other, along with a fragmented sense of solidarity, limited the ability to generate and maintain a common identity and can be seen as major stumbling blocks for diaspora mobilisation. The social and political transformations triggered by the Syrian revolution in 2011 can be seen as a unifying factor, which initially brought Syrians in the UK closer together to take action to shape the origin country's future.

As the conflict has escalated, religious belonging, as well as ethnic and linguistic distinctiveness, have become important aspects of self-identification, risking fragmentation of the Syrian national identity both in the country of origin and in the diaspora. Yet, divisions have not just emerged along ethnic and religious lines, but more importantly based on ideological and political differences. Conflicting solutions to the conflict and visions on the future of Syria among members of the Syrian diaspora, as well as polarisations that emerged between those who supported militarisation of the conflict and the non-violence advocates reflect the general conflicts dynamics on the ground in Syria. Many see the reasons for this fragmentation in the historical experience of repression, through which Syrians did not learn to deal with the diversity in constructive means. Simultaneously, members of the Syrian diaspora in the UK engage actively to promote and create an inclusive community, which overcomes the ethnic, religious and political divides, and can be seen as important steps towards reconciliation within the Syrian conflict.

#### 4.3.3. ASPIRATION AND MOTIVATIONS

The initial peaceful resistance against the Assad regime raised hopes for a democratic transition of the origin country among many members of the Syrian diaspora in the UK. The main objectives of mobilisation were to express solidarity with the population in Syria, to raise awareness on the suffering of the Syrian people and to call for an end to the Syrian conflict. With the escalation of the conflict, many felt obliged to contribute to the alleviation of the suffering of the most vulnerable sections of the Syrian society. Having the privilege of political freedoms and safety in Europe, members of the Syrian diaspora see their responsibility to raise their voice and to advocate openly for a solution to the crisis. At the same time, the devastating situation in Syria, with unceasing violence, large-scale destruction and rising sectarianism, crushed the hopes of many, who advocated for peaceful change and an end to dictatorship:

**“Our hopes, our wishes, our dreams, our optimism is brushed under the... let me say, the bigger political, military conflict. So, you would rely now on the analysts, strategists to give a picture of how your country would look like. There is no space for your own picture. Of course, there is hope that one day the killing would stop, or would become minimum, so I think that is the hope now” (UK5, Skype interview, April 2017).**

At this stage of the conflict, the demands for freedom, justice and democracy have been replaced by the need of ending the killing and destruction. Many perceive that Syria will continue to be a major source of instability throughout the region and that an end to the violent conflict and sustainable peace will not be achieved in the near future:

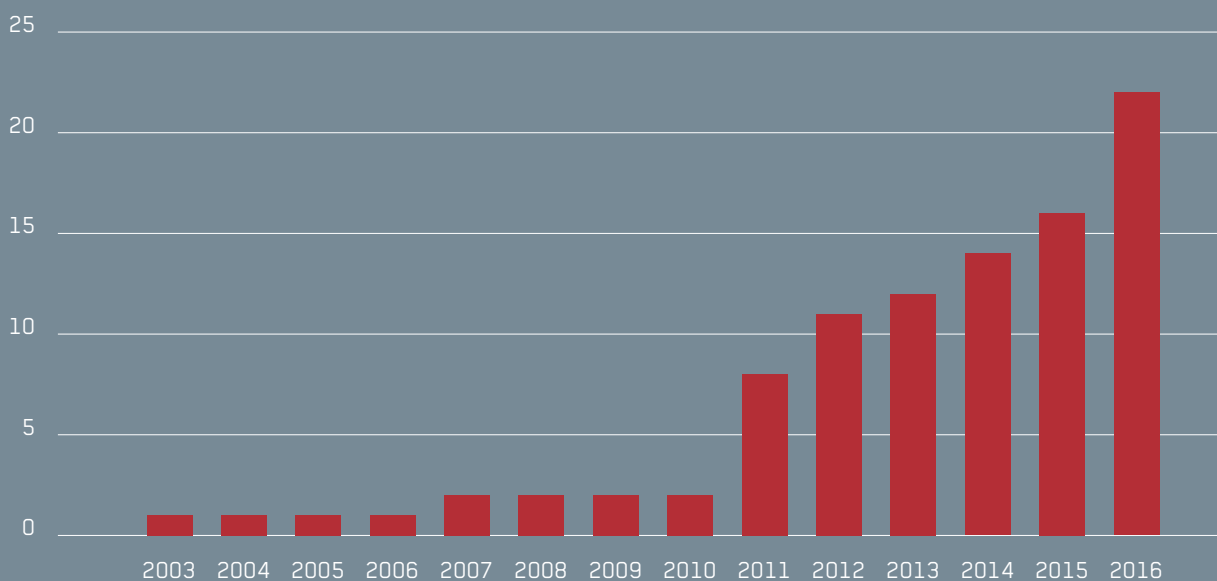
**“So, the government is staying in place. And that is not a recipe for a peaceful Syria. You have millions of people who are inside the country who do not want to be ruled by the government; you have millions of Syrians outside of the country who do not think that they will go back if nothing has changed” (UK4, Skype interview, April 2017).**

Although, as the following quote of a respondent who left Syria in 2015 indicates, there is a strong desire among those who more recently migrated to the UK to return to Syria in particular, this will only be feasible if structures for sustainable return and reintegration are created:

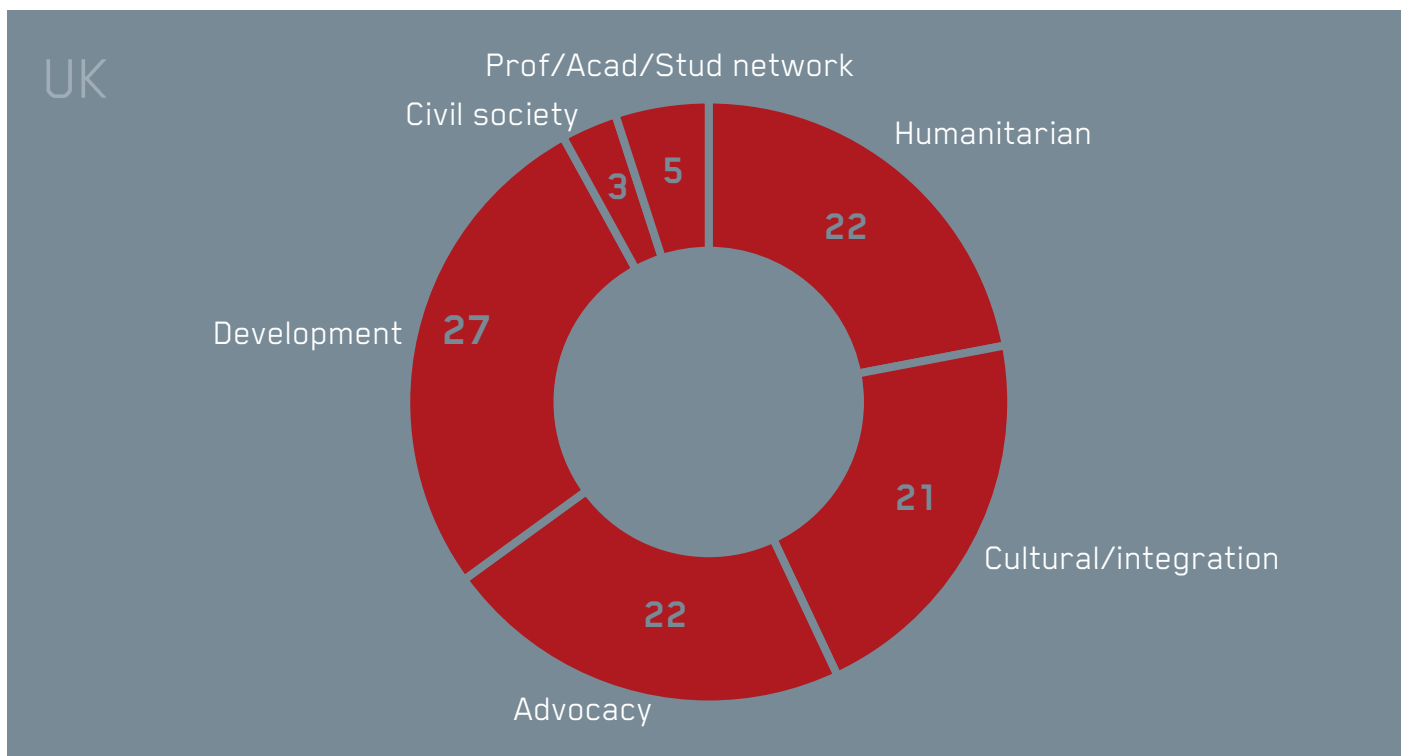
**“Actually, most of the Syrians realised what home means, when they face the difficulties in the culture they immigrate to. [...] None would have imagined that this would happen to Syria. Most of the Syrians are hard workers. Most of the Syrians now dream about going back to Syria, and they want to give something back. Because, you will never find something like your home, like your country [...] One day we want to go back. But not during this crisis” (UK6, personal interview, Cardiff, June 2017).**

**FIGURE 6: STOCK OF SYRIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN THE UK, 2003-2016**

Next to finding a political resolution to the conflict, the roundtable identified various challenges that have to be addressed to ensure sustainable return and reintegration of displaced Syrians in the future. These include among others, poor living conditions resulting from a damaged public infrastructure, the destruction and loss of homes as well a potentially weak economy with a lack of employment opportunities.



**FIGURE 7: FIELDS OF ENGAGEMENT OF SYRIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN THE UK (CATEGORIES EXPLAINED ON PAGE 69)**



Reoccurring instability and violence despite conflict resolution, may contribute to a context of unsafety and insecurity, posing another obstacle to sustainable return. Further, participants emphasised the emotional, social and cultural aspects of return migration and highlighted the need for promoting a culture of forgiveness, reconciliation and peace. In general, empowering and rebuilding local institutions, actors and authorities were seen as crucial for addressing these challenges.

Organisations active in integration see the need to develop skills and human capital of Syrians abroad to enable them to establish themselves in the host society and to constructively contribute to the rebuilding of the country once the violent conflict finds an end. The discussion of the roundtable revealed several challenges regarding the integration of Syrian refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. While it was emphasised initially that there has to be a differentiation between challenges faced by those who came to the UK through the resettlement program and those who migrated individually, the detailed discussions revealed that both groups face very similar challenges in their integration process. Next, to language acquisition, which was seen as a crucial aspect of integration, challenges were also related to hurdles in the asylum process, such as the delay in asylum procedures, difficulties in family reunification and the ban of employment for the first six months of the asylum process. Moreover, participants perceived challenges regarding economic integration of refugees and asylum seekers, in particular, related to access to employment and discrimination based on an “Arabic name”. Finally, the need for promoting social and cultural integration has been discussed. In particular, differences in cultures and lifestyles between Syria and the UK might contribute to a feeling of being lost and isolated, if no space for intercultural dialogue and encounters is created between displaced Syrians and the host community. Here it seems important to tackle stereotypes and racism within the host society on the one hand, while also engaging in educational work with Syrian newcomers to inform them about their rights and duties in the host society.

#### 4.3.4. ORGANISATIONAL LANDSCAPE

The initially peaceful Syrian uprising in 2011 can be perceived as a turning point leading to the politicisation of Syrians living in the UK and activating them to take action to shape the origin country's future. This is also reflected in the organisational landscape, as the stock of Syrian civil society organisations established in the UK steadily increased since the outbreak of the crisis in 2011. Based on the mapping only two organisations, the Syrian British Medical Society (SBMS) and British Syrian Society, have been established prior to the conflict, to foster the relations between Syria and the UK at various levels through a wide range of social, cultural, business and academic activities.

With regard to the categorisations of Syrian civil society organisations, one can observe that slightly less than half of Syrian diaspora organisation and initiatives in the UK focus on a single field of engagement, whereas the other half engages in more than one field, by addressing the various aspects of the Syrian crisis.

Entering the seventh year of conflict, civilians in Syria and in the neighbouring countries continue to be the most affected by the Syrian crisis. As a result, 22 percent of the total engagement of the Syrian diaspora in the UK takes place in the humanitarian sector. However, many organisations started to combine humanitarian assistance with more sustainable efforts by engaging in development-orientated activities (27% of total engagement). Next to this, supporting the integration of those newly arrived and strengthening the Syrian community in the UK emerged as another important field of action, representing just over a fifth of total engagement. Slightly more than 60 percent of the organisations active in this field have culture and integration as their single focus of engagement, while the rest combine it with advocacy work to protect the interest of Syrian community in the British landscape. In addition, grassroots advocacy groups emerged, aiming at amplifying the voices of Syrians struggle for peace and freedom through means of non-violent actions, such as campaigns, protests and demonstrations. Moreover, two professional networks have been identified, that bundle the resources of Syrian medical health professionals in the UK. Finally, only one organisation has been identified that supports, next to humanitarian and development projects, civil society structures in Syria.

With regard to the organisational capacity, the landscape of Syrian diaspora organisations in the UK is characterised by great diversity. Starting from the "kitchen table", some organisations successfully mastered the path towards professionalisation, emerging now as key players within the Syrian humanitarian system. Working with an annual budget surpassing 10 million Euros, organisations like Syria Relief and Hand In Hand for Aid and Development have employed paid staff in UK offices, regional offices in Turkey and field offices in Syria. Next to the general culture of charity and giving in the UK, the proximity to donors in Turkey, as well as strong commitment from the founders, who at an early stage started to work full-time for the organisation, have been identified as the main success factors. On the other hand, organisations in the field of integration and advocacy tend to rely on membership fees and donations to finance their activities and work is predominantly done on a voluntary basis. At the same time, many express the desire for more financial security to broaden their scope of activities and to ensure sustainability of their efforts.

At an early stage of the conflict, the UK Home Office tried to initiate a network among members of the Syrian diaspora, by gathering Syrian civil society organisations and other relevant diaspora representatives in the UK. According to an informant, who was involved in this initiative, the process was perceived as rather top-down than participatory, mainly serving the interest of the UK government. Another initiative is the Syrian Platform for Peace, which was established in 2014 with the support of International Alert to strengthen the relationships between Syrians and Syrian civil society organisations in the UK, and to foster collaboration and exchange between the Syrian diaspora, policy-makers, and international relief and development agencies. A second network that has been identified is the Syrian Charities and Associations Network in the United Kingdom, SCAN UK. Established in 2015, SCAN UK serves as a platform for seven Syrian civil society organisations, mainly active in integration, community building and advocacy. Next to UK based initiatives, some of the humanitarian organisations are members of Syrian humanitarian NGOs networks, such as Syria NGO Alliances and Syria Relief Network, which coordinate the humanitarian action of Syrian civil society working inside Syria and neighbouring countries.

#### 4.3.5. ACTIVITIES AND PRACTICES

In response to the social and political transformations happening in Syria in 2011, several grassroots initiatives emerged in solidarity with Syrian revolution to promote peace, justice and human rights in the Syrian context. By using means of nonviolent action, such as demonstrations, protests, information events and campaigns, these organisations seek to support the Syrian cause at both social and political levels and to raise awareness of the situation in Syria among the broader public in the UK. For instance, the organisation Rethink Rebuild Society puts, next to their work in community building and education promotion, a strong focus on advocacy to promote the Syrian issues within the British landscape through work on policy and media. Among the main aims is to show the complexity of the Syrian conflict and to lobby for a peaceful solution to the conflict. One example is the initiative From Syria With Love, which organizes art exhibitions, educational workshops and published a printed book, to bring the voice of displaced Syrians to the public. The money which is collected through these activities goes directly to educational programs in Syria to provide children affected by the conflict with better opportunities.

In order to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian population affected by the violent conflict, organisations have been established in the UK to provide relief in various areas in Syria. Initially, aid delivery was organised ad-hoc often facilitated through personal and family networks and contacts. With the escalation of the conflict, organisations active in this field saw the need to professionalise and institutionalise their involvement to respond to the crisis more effectively. As mentioned earlier, some organisations mastered this path successfully and can be perceived as important actors in the Syrian humanitarian system. Next to relief aid in the form of shelter, food and non-food items, one can recently observe a tendency towards more development-orientated efforts, with some organisation being active now in the promotion of education, economic empowerment, health and infrastructure. As local partners play a crucial role in the implementation of the projects, some organisations additionally seek to promote the capacity development of civil society actors in Syria. In addition, three of the development-orientated initiatives identified were initially established in Syria, but became transnational in nature, due to the migrations of their founders. For instance, the initiative Qibaab was founded in 2013 and aims to create sustainable and affordable housing for internally displaced Syrians in the periphery of Aleppo in northern Syria. Using a participatory approach, in which deprived local communities are involved in the planning and construction of the houses, Qibaab employs a hybrid model between market and aid. Moreover, through research on building materials made of renewable resources, the initiative seeks to contribute to enhanced knowledge on sustainable urban planning and development in the Syrian context. Sanad, another local initiative, aims at promoting livelihood opportunities for displaced people inside Syria, in order to enable them to lead an independent life. The initiative provides microfinance to displaced persons in Syria through a trust-based system.

With increasing numbers of Syrians seeking protection in the UK, initiatives emerged to support the integrational process of those who newly arrived. The interviewed organisations active in this field mentioned that they implement a diverse spectrum of activities, ranging from providing assistance in dealing with government agencies, social services, public institutions like schools and doctors, to offering language courses and other educational programs to displaced Syrian population in the UK. Another important element is to strengthen ties among members of the Syrian community in a specific city or region, to preserve the Syrian culture and identity and to foster social cohesion. As bridge-builders, these initiatives promote intercultural dialogue to strengthen the relationship with the British society. For instance, the Oxford Kurdish and Syrian Association aims at providing a community space where all the Syrians in Oxford can meet, share information and access whatever support is needed. Next to this more practical assistance, the primary objective is to bring Syrians with diverse backgrounds together to strengthen their social relations and to combat the cultural and social divisions present in the Syrian society. By promoting education among those newly arrived, the organisation tries to build a broad basis for the reconstruction process, as an educated population is seen as crucial for an inclusive and resilient society.







#### 4.3.6. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Through their engagement, the Syrian diaspora in the UK addresses the various aspects of the Syrian crisis, by being involved both in the context of Syria and increasingly also in the support of Syrian newcomers in the UK. Some diaspora organisations successfully mastered the path towards professionalisation, emerging now as key players within the Syrian humanitarian system. Herein, the general culture of giving and charity in the UK provides a crucial opportunity for organisations to mobilise financial resources among the broader public.

At the same time, a lack of capacity was identified as one of the main challenges, in particular for smaller organisations active in the British context. Due to a lack of knowledge on funding opportunities and limited experience in the management of public funds, organisations have to finance their activities mainly through private contributions. As a result, engagement tends to focus on smaller social activities, while at the same time a desire for more long-term efforts and a broader scope of activities is clearly expressed. For those organisations, which were able to access funding from international organisations and government agency, the project-based nature of funding poses another challenge since it results in insecurities when it comes to strategic planning.

Moreover, the political and public discourse which almost exclusively focusses on security threats and terrorism is perceived as a major challenge to mobilise support by the broader public. On the one hand, this constrains the potential to raise donations within British society, limiting the financial capacity of many organisations. In addition, one organisation stated that banks refused to open an account, due to counter-terrorism regulations and “de-risking” measures. This poses not just a practical challenge on the involvement, but also has unintended yet severe consequences for the people inside Syria, who highly depend on the financial contributions of the diaspora.

On the other hand, the focus on the security crisis also restricts the space of political influence, as it neglects potential positive contributions of the Syrian diaspora. Some respondents stated that the Syrian diaspora does not have an impact on the decision-making process in the international arena and is not included in finding a solution to the conflict:

**“Syrians are not part of any discussions here or in Europe. A lot of people speak on behalf of Syrians. Syrians are not present. And I think part of that is our fault. We did not have the agency to actually capitalise on what was happening inside the country and give us the legitimate voice to say: This is what the Syrians want, and this is what we can achieve” (UK4, Skype interview, April 2017).**

As the quote indicates, the limited political power of the Syrian diaspora in the UK is not only a result of a lack of interest by the international community to include the Syrian diaspora in the discussion making process, but rather political influence is also deteriorated by the fragmented nature and the lack of clear leadership within the Syrian diaspora, and the oppositional movement more in general.

#### 4.3.7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Several waves of Syrian migration to the UK, characterised by both voluntary and forced displacement, resulted in the construction of a very diverse Syrian immigrant population, where immigrants are facing now different social, economic and political circumstances and conditions in the destination country. Moreover, the Syrian immigrant population in the UK also mirrors the rich religious and ethnic diversity of the Syrian society. Similar, to other contexts, diaspora mobilisation based on a collective Syrian identity was almost absent prior to the conflict. Syrians in the UK, either were not collectively engaged at all, or identified themselves with wider ethnoreligious identity markers such as Kurdish, Assyrians or Muslim communities. Regime repression prevented not just major political mobilisation of the Syrian diaspora, but also created a lack of cohesion among Syrians in the UK. A general mistrust towards the other, along with a fragmented solidarity among Syrians in the UK limited the ability to generate and maintain a collective national identity



and can be seen as major stumbling blocks for diaspora mobilisation. Initially, the Syrian uprising was a unifying factor, sparking the rise of collective action among Syrians in the UK. Yet, with increasing escalation, ethnicisation, and radicalisation, Syrian conflict dynamics were reproduced in the diaspora, leading to fragmentation based on ethnic, religious and political divisions. More recently, there has been a strong desire for more collaboration, as many members feel that a solution to the conflict and a strong voice of the diaspora can only be achieved through a strong more unified network.

The organisational landscape of the Syrian diaspora is characterised by great diversity. Syrian diaspora groups seem to respond to the various aspects of the Syrian crisis, by being engaged both in Syria through the provision of humanitarian aid and the implementation of more development-orientated projects, as well as in the UK, where they promote the integration of Syrian newcomers and raise awareness on the Syrian conflict. Some organisations active in humanitarian aid mastered the path from informal initiatives at the “kitchen table” to leading actors within the Syrian humanitarian system. Other more recently established organisations that address the needs of Syrian newcomers in the UK struggle to receive financial support and to achieve sustainability and institutionalisation of their effort.

Next to the lack of capacity of some organisations, fragmentation due to conflicting ideas and continuous mistrust among Syrians in the UK can be seen as major obstacles for diaspora mobilisation. First, the lack of unified voices weakens the position of the Syrian diaspora in the international political arena and reduces the potential of contributing to the political solution of the conflict. In addition, networks and cooperation would also increase the capacity of organisations and initiative and enable them to respond more effectively to the diverse aspects of the Syrian crisis.

## 4.4. SWEDEN

### 4.4.1. MIGRATION AND POLICY CONTEXT

Sweden has been among the major European destination countries for Syrian immigrants, hosting 20,758 individuals born in Syria in 2010, with females (49%) representing almost half of the Syrian-born population in Sweden. After Germany, Sweden has become a major destination for forcibly displaced Syrians, hosting a total 149,418 Syrian-born individuals in 2016, with men now making up a larger share (59%) of the Syrian immigrant population. The share of young people under the age of 35 tends to be with 63 percent slightly smaller when compared to the other destination countries selected in this study (Statistics Sweden, 2017). Moreover, a study by Konle-Seidl and Bolits (2016) on labour market integration of refugees in Europe indicates, based on data retrieved from Statistics Sweden, that more than 40 percent of Syrians residing in Sweden in 2014 had at least upper secondary education, compared to only 20 percent of those from Afghanistan and 10 percent from Eritrea.

In response to the increasing numbers of Syrians migrating to Europe, Sweden initially introduced a policy granting asylum seekers from Syria permanent residency, as well as residency for their families. However, due to the sharply increasing numbers of asylum seekers in autumn 2015, the government abandoned its liberal policies by introducing border controls and temporary residence permits for those seeking protection in Sweden (Bucken-Knapp, 2017). The overall responsibility for migration and asylum policy lies with the Ministry of Justice. In turn, each government agency in Sweden is responsible for integration issues in its own field. Migrationsverket (The Migration Board), a government agency of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is responsible for a permit, asylum, and citizenship issues together with international cooperation regarding these matters. Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting (The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions) works to ensure successful integration and that municipalities and counties have the preconditions to implement state-assigned measures related to asylum- and refugee reception.

The government-funded Cooperation Group for Ethnical Associations in Sweden (SIOS) is a cooperative body for ethnic minority organisations. The main aim is to increase democracy and civic engagement as well as strengthen identity, language and multiculturalism in society. Funding for civic activities is accessible

to immigrants and native Swedes alike. Generally, Sweden is very supportive of associations and anyone can start one and apply for grants if basic conditions are met. Moreover, this support extends to different diaspora organisations (MIPEX, 2015).

The government agency Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) reports to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Migration and development have been a recognized issue in Sweden since 2002 when the government worked out its Policy for Global Development. Since 2008, migration has been included among the six most crucial global challenges for Sweden. In contrast to many other countries, Sweden's approach to migration and development is holistic, cross-sectoral and focused on the circular nature of migration (ICMPD & ECDMP, 2013).

#### 4.4.2. SUBJECTIVE VIEW ON THE SYRIAN DIASPORA

The origin of the Syrians in Sweden goes back to the mid-1970s. Most of them belong to Assyrians/Syriacs communities who came to Sweden between mid-1970s and 1980s. Although some migrated because of the civil war in Lebanon, others came due to poverty and marginalisation in Syria, looking for better opportunities in Sweden. After the Swedish government had facilitated the travel for immigrant workers to Sweden, the numbers of Assyrians/Syriacs (from different countries) increased significantly (estimated now to be 50,000). Thus, most of the Assyrians/Syriacs who are living in Sweden today are from diverse origin countries including Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, Iran and Syria. Although there is a group of Assyrian/Syriacs who identify themselves as Syrians and are active in Syrian associations, the majority of Assyrian/Syriacs in Sweden identify themselves more with the Assyrian/Syriac diaspora:

**“First and foremost, I identify myself with the Assyrian diaspora, but after the war, I have also started to identify myself with the Syrian diaspora, as I am a Syrian citizen after all. I represent both now”.**

Furthermore, there is a distinction within the Assyrian/Syriac community, with cultural cleavages being present among Assyriskya (Assyrians) and Syrianska (Syriacs). Built upon perceived historic, religious, linguistic and traditional differences, the distinction between the two communities is also reflected in the civil society landscape in Sweden.

Another component of the Syrian immigrant population, but with less presence is the Kurdish group of Syrian origin, who migrated to Sweden due to the general repression and the lack of recognition of their rights in Syria. Thus, in addition to a small number of Syrians, who migrated individually for better chances of education in Sweden, one can identify the following four communities within the Syrian immigrant population before 2011: Assyrians, Syriacs, Kurds and Syrians from diverse backgrounds.

Regarding the conflict in Syria, the political polarisation increased the divisions among and within these communities. After 2011, political polarisation occurred leading to fragmentation of the Syrian diaspora along political lines. While some groups supported the regime, considering it as a protector of the minorities in Syria and a guarantee to stability, others joined the opposition in fighting regime repression and other perceived dictatorial practices. Hence, it seems that the religious and ethnic tensions, which were already existing within the Syrian diaspora in Sweden before 2011, became even more manifested after the outbreak of the crisis in Syria adding to the political polarization.

With the influx of Syrian refugees in 2011/2012, the number of Syrians in Sweden increased significantly. While at the beginning some people fled Syria due to the political persecution or the obligatory military service for men, many Syrians left at a later stage because of the instability and insecurity in Syria or the neighbouring countries. Some came to Sweden or other European countries after spending years or months in displacement in the neighbouring countries of Syria. This group of Syrians come from diverse backgrounds (regional, ethnic, religious, educational level and political view). However, like with the old generation of diaspora, similar ethnic and political lines of division can be observed.

Remarkably, some of the associations are aware of the diverse obstacles, such as the lack of trust and political and ethnic divisions and try to address these through pursuing more inclusive projects and the promotion of dialogue:

**“The word (Syrian) does not gather all Syrians in Sweden unfortunately, and this what we are trying all the time to work on, to focus more on a collective identity that gathers us all” (SE6, personal interview, Stockholm, June 2017).**

#### **4.4.3. ASPIRATIONS AND MOTIVATIONS**

Regarding the aspirations and motivations of the Syrian diaspora in Sweden, it is important to distinguish between the old and new generation of the Syrian immigrant population. With respect to the first group, respondents argue that the majority is well integrated into Swedish society. A lot of them are active or part of the associations that were founded after the mid-1970s to gather and support the Syrian community. In addition to preserving the identity of the group and its culture, the associations aim at supporting the integration of Syrians in Sweden.

After the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011, these organisations increasingly engaged in the Syrian context. While some have collected donations for humanitarian associations, others have strived to start development-orientated projects in Syria. In addition, political initiatives started to be more active to support the Syrian uprising, like the Swedish branch of Assyriska Demokratiska Organisationen (ADO).

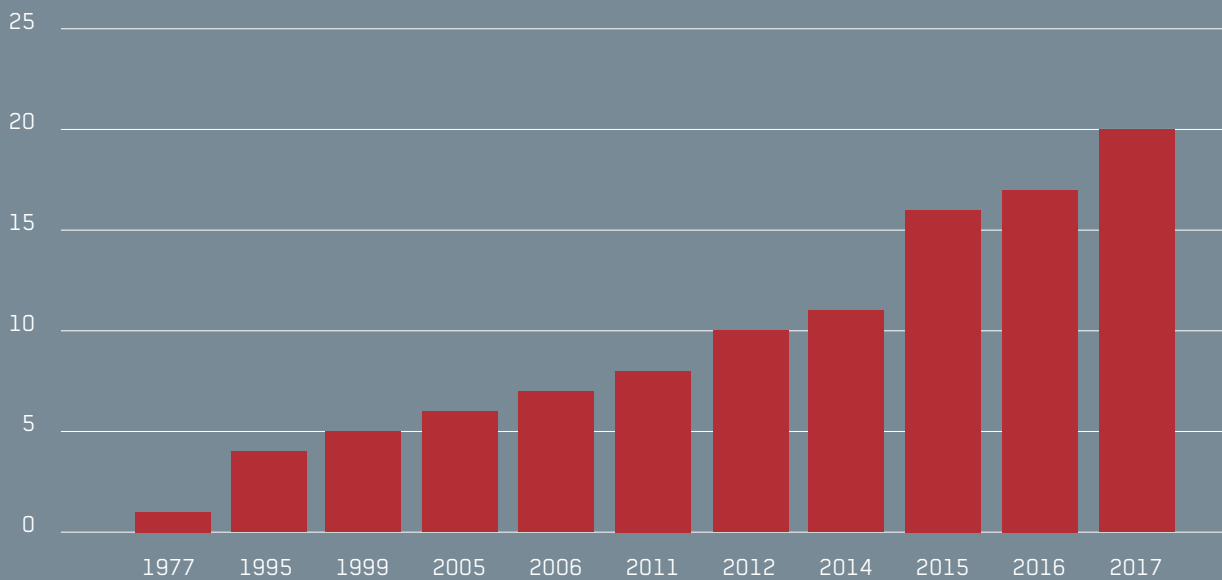
Asking about the return issue and their role in the peace and reconstruction process, most of the respondents demonstrated that the old generation of immigrants would not return, especially after spending decades in Sweden. Some bear a strong identification with both Sweden and Syria, hence being embedded in multiple country systems at once. However, many respondents perceive that the Syrian diaspora in Sweden can play a crucial role in supporting the reconstruction process in the long-term if they would have the capacity and means to do so.

On the other hand, most of the Syrian newcomers are still busy with the two-year integration program. However, according to some respondents, unlike the old generation of Syrian immigrants, the newcomers tend to be more educated and motivated to learn the Swedish language and to start working or designing their own initiatives as soon as the more basic needs have been met. Some of them have already founded associations or are in the process of establishing one. In addition to providing a space for social gathering and mutual support, the focus of these associations lies in promoting integration related to the needs and demands of the Syrians in Sweden.

The question of return is often discussed among those who more recently arrived in Sweden. However, while some predicate the decision to return to the safety situation and rule of law in Syria, others relate it to the political solution to the conflict in Syria. Yet, many emphasise that it will be unlikely that a significant number of Syrians will return, given the feeling of stability and security (physically and socially) that the people have enjoyed in Sweden. Furthermore, all agree that if for the next two or three years the situation in Syria remains devastated and insecure, most of the Syrians are not going to return to Syria, especially those who have started to establish their lives in Sweden. Syria will be for them only a place to visit from time to time and spend the holidays, like what the old generation of Syrian immigrants did before 2011.

Significantly, while at the beginning of the conflict several associations (old and new ones) were more politically active, many of them have started to focus more on fostering the integration process of those who newly arrived in Sweden, responding to the demands of the Syrians in Sweden and impacted by status quo in Syria. This was also reflected in the round table in Stockholm, when participants could discuss the integration issue and its challenges, more than the voluntary repatriation to Syria as possible durable solutions for the Syrian refugees:

**FIGURE 8: STOCK OF SYRIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN SWEDEN, 1977-2017**



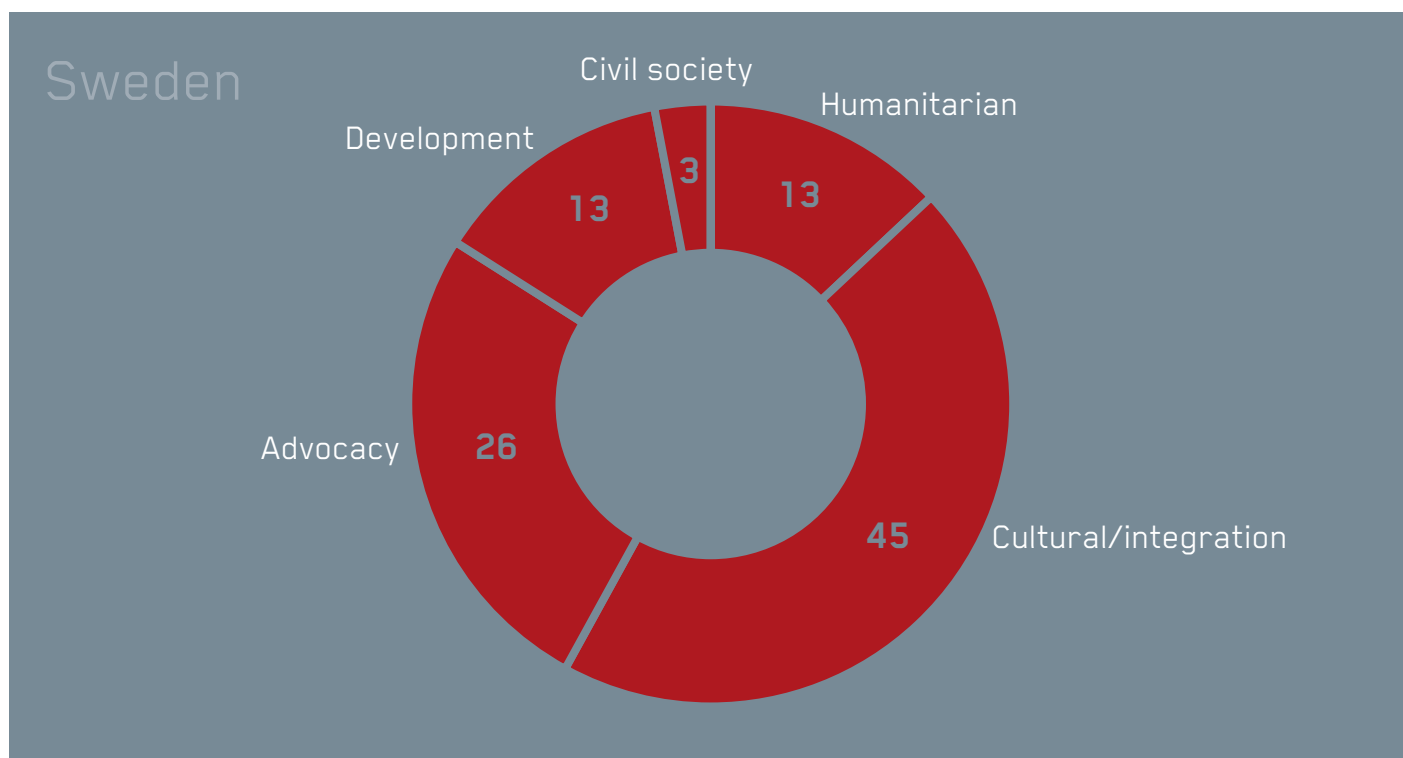
**“The topic of voluntary return is very sensitive and we even cannot communicate this, as some Syrian refugees are still arriving in Sweden” (participant of the roundtable in Stockholm).**

Next to safety and political freedoms, the economic situation was seen as influencing the decision of potential return, as basic living conditions and economic perspective were seen as crucial for the reintegration process.

Regarding the integration of Syrian newcomers into the host society, learning the Swedish language has been identified as the main challenge, but at the same time being the backing factor that would help Syrian refugees throughout the integration process. In addition, within the roundtable discussions it has been emphasised that the concept of integration should not be perceived as an assimilative process, in which newcomers are expected to forget their identity. Rather, the diversity of the new Syrian diaspora should be recognized as an added value to the Swedish society as they can provide different solutions, perspectives and opportunities to Sweden. Hence, integration must be fundamentally understood in the frame of inclusiveness and as a two-way process meaning that it is as much about the way in which destination countries receive the migrants as much as what migrants do to adapt to a new setting. However, the highly negative media coverage of the Syrian conflict and displacement crisis, rather contributes to the production of stereotypes, in which Syrian refugees are either portrayed as passive victims in need of social assistance or as fundamentalist and potential terrorist, posing a threat to national security.

Challenges related to labour market integration were seen in the temporary nature of residence permits. Often, newcomers have to make concessions and accept the worst job opportunities and conditions in order to get permanent residence permit. Moreover, the certificate recognition in the field of medicine, engineering, and law among others, is a very lengthy process and seen as highly frustrating for newcomers who want to commence their careers in Sweden. Further participants identified a gap in the quality of the education systems of Sweden and Syria. This hampers the integration process, while trying to find good job opportunities or enrol in Swedish schools and universities.

**FIGURE 9: FIELDS OF ENGAGEMENT OF SYRIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN SWEDEN (CATEGORIES EXPLAINED ON PAGE 69)**



#### 4.4.4. ORGANISATIONAL LANDSCAPE

Through the mapping exercise 20 active Syrian associations and initiatives were documented in Sweden, starting from 1977. Only three of them are not registered. Since around 65 percent of the organisations were established after 2011, the Syrian conflict seemed to motivated Syrians in Sweden to engage in collective action of the diaspora.

As figure 9 shows, integration and culture is the primary field of action of Syrian diaspora organisations in Sweden, often aimed at strengthening relations and community ties, but also to support Syrian newcomers in their integration process. Fourteen out of twenty organisations are active in this field of engagement. Advocacy work, to raise awareness about the Syrian revolution, but also to shed light on the challenges Syrian newcomers are facing in Sweden, is an important component of engagement (26%), with eight organisations being active in this field. Engaging in development (13%) and humanitarian aid (13%) appears not to be a strong focus of the Syrian diaspora in Sweden, since only four organisations promote measures in this field. Only one organisation engages in the field of civil society, by fostering civic engagement and active citizenship of Syrian youth in their host communities.

As illustrated above, there are many associations that include members from the Syrian population in Sweden. However, most of these associations and their members do not identify themselves with the Syrian diaspora in the first place, but rather as members of their ethnic groups (Assyrian, Syriac or Kurdish), which is also reflected in the objectives, names and logos of the associations. For instance, looking at the objectives and programs of the Assyrian/Syriac associations in Sweden, most of them do not have projects that target the Syrians only. Rather their projects and activities are open for Assyrians/Syriacs from all nationalities in Sweden. Only some of the Assyrian/Syriac associations that work in the humanitarian/developmental field have specific programs to support the Assyrians/Syriacs in Syria, like Assyrier Utan Gränser and Assyriska Hjälpfonden i Sverige. There are also some politically active groups, like the Swedish branch of Assyriska Demokratiska Organisationen (ADO), an active Assyrian political party in Syria. From the 31 Assyrian/Syriacs associations which we documented in Sweden, only 3 of them have direct humanitarian or political activities in respect with Syria or Syria Diaspora. Like the Assyrians/Syriacs, the Syrian Kurds have also established their own associations, like Rådet för Syriska Kurder i Sverige that aims

at fostering integration of the Syrian Kurds in the Swedish society, as well as increasing the understanding and awareness of the Kurdish issue in Syria. After 2011, the association was more engaged in advocacy, lobbying and raising awareness about the Kurdish question in Syria.

A significant umbrella organization that has gathered the pre-conflict Syrian diaspora since 1977 is Syriska Riksförbundet i Sverige. The organisation focuses more on promoting a collective Syrian identity and attempts to include all Syrians, regardless of religion or ethnicity. The primary objectives are to foster integration, democracy, gender equality and consensus in Swedish society.

Regarding the cooperation between the Syrian associations, there has been only the Syriska Riksförbundet i Sverige as a Syrian umbrella organization before 2011. Since then, the political polarisation and mistrust among and within the associations has increased. Also, a clear division is visible between the older and the more recently established organisations, as many newcomers perceive that the older generation supports the Syrian regime. Therefore, they have preferred to establish their own associations and cooperate more with Swedish civil society. Recently, some associations are working now on enhancing their network and cooperation with other Syrian associations, attempting to establish a federation.

With regard to the organisation capacity, many rely on voluntary work to run their activities, while some were able to employ paid staff. In general, many organisations reported to receive small-scale funding from the commune. At the same time, it was reported that there is no funding available for projects or activities realised in the Syrian context.

Having a look at social media (only Facebook where the Syrians are active), one can find several Facebook pages with similar names that are related to the Syrian immigration population in Sweden. Most of them provide information for refugees about different issues related to integration and offer a virtual platform for Syrians to communicate with each other and exchange information. Some of them are a closed group and have more than 23,000 members. The polarisation is also obvious here. While some pages support the Syrian uprising, others support the Syrian regime. However, it is important to mention that their impact is limited to sharing and exchanging information. Many of the members do not even live in Sweden or they are members of many groups at the same time.

#### **4.4.5. ACTIVITIES AND PRACTICES**

Most of the old associations have engaged in activities related to culture and integration. Many of these associations are social and cultural clubs, where the community can keep in touch with its culture, habits and traditions and be able to preserve its identity. They target all family members, and their activities are somehow similar to each other, such as mother-language courses for children, summer camps for children, sport and culture activities, as well as special social activities for women and men. Unlike the old organization, a few new organizations, like the Young Republic, follow a more inclusive integration approach and use interactive and alternative methods. Through organising workshops and seminars for refugees (from all nationalities) they aim to promote civic engagement and foster the democratic participation of refugees in the Swedish society.

Since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011, some of these association, like Syriska Riksförbundet i Sverige, have been engaged in more formalised projects to support the Syrian refugees directly in the integration process or to support some humanitarian/developmental projects in Syria. Other typical activities of the diaspora were collecting donations and sending them to Syria. These activities were mostly organised by the Assyrian humanitarian associations, Assyrier Utan Gränser and Assyriska Hjälpfonden i Sverige. Both associations are now working with local partners in Syria to provide humanitarian assistance and relief aid for the Assyrians there.

After the outbreak of the Syrian conflict, a new kind of Syrian organisations was established mainly by pre-conflict Syrian migrants who did not belong to the community mentioned above. The goals were driven by political or humanitarian motivations, like Föreningen Syrien Sverige, which was founded to support the

Syrian uprising, and Svensk Syriska Centre, which aims at supporting the Syrians inside and outside Syria, as well as enhancing the relationships between the Syrian and Swedish people.

Furthermore, there are the new associations that were founded mostly by the new Syrian newcomers. Next to a few organisations that advocate for solidarity with Syrian uprising, most of the associations focus on integration, culture, education and promoting civic engagement among those who have newly arrived, like Hand in Hand in Malmö. Since it is easy to establish an association in Sweden, many initiatives have been formally registered. However, in reality, not all organisations are active to the same extent. Some initiatives are more personally motivated and do not have a clear public goal, while others pursue clear visions and inclusive approaches concerning membership. For instance, the Young Republic aims at empowering young Syrians to foster their democratic participation, civic engagement and social inclusion in their host communities.

Next to this, other humanitarian and cultural activities are implemented by Syrian individuals in cooperation with Swedish associations to support the Syrian refugees in Sweden and in the neighbouring countries of Syria, like the Re:Orient's project "Orientens Stjärna" that works with Syrian musicians on cultural/developmental projects, targeting the Syrian displaced population.

On the political level, the newly established associations are still active in organising protests and events on Syria to raise awareness and mobilise the Swedish society and government to support the Syrian uprising. Besides, some organise charity events and collect donations to finance humanitarian organisations in Syria.

#### **4.4.6. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

While the old associations are well-established and tend to face no barriers in receiving public funds, their greatest challenge is to find and attract new members who could continue the work and take up responsibility. While it is perceived that the pre-conflict immigrants have little interest in engaging with such kinds of associations, Syrian newcomers have a clear trust problem with these organisations. Despite the political polarisation that is clearly visible among the associations, for many newcomers, the old Syrian associations are considered as supporters or sympathisers of the Assad regime. Apart from the divisions along political lines, the homogenous ethnic and closed character of most of these associations has not encouraged many newcomers to approach these organisations. Indeed, the political polarisation regarding the conflict in Syria has significantly affected the work within the associations and made some lose a significant proportion of its members. For some, it is now harder to gather Syrians as they did prior to 2011.

Alternatively, most of the recently established initiatives are still in the founding phase, and, hence, are confronted with other kinds of difficulties. While it is easy to found an association in Sweden, it remains difficult to keep it working while maintain funding and support. Some clarified how their feeling towards getting financial resources depends mostly on contacts, as well as having a good profile and reference. "People with migration background have less chance to get fund. Here, there is a kind of racism".

Another challenge all associations, the old and new, face alike, is the difficulty in activating and mobilising the broader Syrian society in Sweden. While some relate it to the challenging situation for Syrians in the new country as well as the loss of hope and motivation after seven years of war, others add the absence of a culture of civic engagement and volunteering among the Syrians. One can also add the enormous difference in the religious and political views among the Syrians as well as the personal issues that one can find in every society.

Despite all these challenges and divisions between and within the Syrian diasporic associations, it is important to mention that several associations have high capacity and sustained experience in the civil society work in Sweden. This could be supportive for the newly established associations as well as the refugees if a mutual basis for work and cooperation is promoted. Remarkably, some of the associations are aware of the diverse obstacles, such as the lack of trust and political and ethnic divisions and try to address these through pursuing more inclusive projects and the promotion of dialogue. In addition, several



associations and initiatives strive and would like to broaden their scope of activities, some concerning integration in Sweden and others regarding the reconstruction process in Syria.

#### **4.4.7. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Although the Syrian immigration population in Sweden is well established, it is difficult to consider them a unified and homogenous group. Due to the long-standing ethnic/national divisions, during the last four decades, many Syrians have built their own communities organised along ethnic, religious or political lines, representing not just Syrians but also members of other origins. Only few associations have attempted to be inclusive and promote the Syrian identity as a collective one for all Syrians regardless of their backgrounds. With the increasing number of Syrian refugees, the number of people of Syrian origin in Sweden has increased significantly. Similar ethnic and political lines of division are reflected among them, although this group of Syrians came from diverse backgrounds.

The ethnic division and political polarisation tend to also be reproduced on the organisational level. One can see that each community has its own associations and umbrella organisation. Similarly, the newcomers who support the Syrian uprising have founded their respective associations, as many believe that the old Syrian associations are supporters or sympathisers of the Assad regime.

Indeed, the engagement of the Syrian diaspora regarding the promotion of integration in Sweden or with Syria is relatively rare when compared to its number and how well-established some of the associations are. Here, several reasons have played a role, such as the (perceived) exclusiveness of the communities of the pre-conflict Syrian immigrants, the social and cultural nature of most old associations, as well as the political polarisation resulting from conflict dynamics in Syria. These have greatly affected the work among and within most of the old and new associations alike. After seven years of conflict, most of the practices and activities of the Syrian diaspora have, to a large extent, only assumed a cultural and social character.

Nevertheless, some associations would like to broaden their scope of activities not just in Sweden, but also in the Syrian context. Here, there is immense potential for developing the Syrian diaspora, if a mutual basis for work and cooperation is promoted. Some respondents express the desire to tackle the fragmentation within the Syrian diaspora, through projects that foster an inclusive approach and dialogue. Therefore, a platform that connects the diverse actors within the Syrian diaspora could be a first step towards rebuilding trust among the associations and support communication and cooperation in the long term.

## **4.5. DENMARK**

### **4.5.1. MIGRATION AND POLICY CONTEXT**

With 3,707 Syrian immigrants and their descendants living in Denmark in 2010, the pre-conflict Syrian immigrant population was relatively small. As of January 1, 2017, 37,880 immigrants and their descendants of Syrian origin (excluding asylum seekers) were residing in Denmark, out of which 34,699 were non-Danish nationals. Females made up 43 percent of Syrian immigrants and their descendants. As in the other destination countries, young people under the age of 35 years made up the largest share, representing almost 76 percent of the Syrian immigrant population (Statistics Denmark, 2017a). In addition, the stock of Syrian asylum seekers as of January 1, 2017, was estimated at 168, with Syria ranking first among the countries of origin of asylum applicants in that year (Statistics Denmark, 2017b). A recent study by Schultz-Nielsen and Rose Skaksen (2017) on working-age immigrant's level of education revealed that the average educational level of Syrian immigrants is significantly lower than that of immigrants from other countries of origin such as Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon and Pakistan. According to the findings of the study, the majority of Syrian immigrants (66%) in Denmark had primary education level, whereas only three percent have an educational attainment equivalent to the long-cycle qualifications (Master's degree). Given that the average duration of a stay was with four years relatively short when compared to other origin countries, Syrian immigrants might not yet have the possibility to benefit from educational opportunities

in Denmark. Denmark has been highly criticised for its restrictive response to the increasing numbers of migrants seeking protection in Europe, in particular regarding restrictions placed on family reunification, the shortening of residence permits and the rules on confiscation of migrants' valuables (Kvist, 2016).

The Danish Ministry of Immigration, Integration and Housing was established under the newly elected government in November 2016. The Ministry is responsible for the immigration management, including asylum, humanitarian residence permits and family reunification, as well as for the integration of refugees and immigrants into the labour market and the education system and other integration related issues (Immigration and Integration Ministry, 2016). To better represent the interests and experiences of ethnic minorities in Denmark, the Council for Ethnic Minorities (Rådet for Etniske Minoriteter, REM) (2016) was established in 1994 and redesigned in 2014. It advises the Ministry of Immigration and Integration on issues concerning immigrants, refugees and integration. Furthermore, it focusses on democratic participation and active citizenship among ethnic minorities, among others. In 2012, the New Dialogue, Citizenship and Ethnic Equality Fund (Dialog, medborgerskab og etnisk ligebehandling) was established, which offers project-based funding with the aim to increase immigrant participation in politics, elections, organisations and leisure activities and to combat ethnic discrimination. Next to municipalities, integration councils, voluntary organisations and associations can also apply for financial resources under this scheme (Immigration and Integration Ministry, 2015).

DANIDA, an area of activity under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is responsible for the planning, implementation and monitoring of Denmark's development cooperation. Denmark's new strategy for development cooperation and humanitarian action recognises migration and development as one of the four priorities of Danish development assistance. Within this priority, particular attention is given to the strengthening of migration response through improved migration management and the prevention of irregular migration to Europe. Further, activities will focus on dialogue with partner countries regarding readmission and return of rejected asylum-seekers and irregular migrants in Denmark and the strengthening of local structures to promote the sustainable reintegration of returnees. Third, the aim is to contribute to countering the root causes of migration, through measurements including the promotion of economic growth and decent employment and the reduction of poverty, as well as the promotion of gender equality, education and the building of stable and just societies (DANIDA, 2017). While the strategy paper does not explicitly mention the potentials of diaspora for development of the origin country, diaspora organisations are financially supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through the Diaspora Programme implemented by DRC. The programme aims at promoting constructive diaspora engagement through, among other things, the provision of project funding and capacity building (DRC, 2017). Further diaspora organisations can access financial resources through the general funding stream for NGOs active in development cooperation. The Civil Society in Development administrates the funds provided the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, high bureaucratic burdens and restrictions make it difficult for smaller and less professionalised diaspora organisations to access funding under this scheme (Danstrøm, Kleist, & Sørensen, 2015).

#### **4.5.2. SUBJECTIVE VIEW ON THE SYRIAN DIASPORA**

The origin of the Syrians immigrant population in Denmark goes back to the 1980s as a result of the Muslim Brotherhood insurgency in 1976-1982, which ended with the Hama massacre and the persecution of Muslim Brotherhood's members, as well as other oppositional political activists to the Syrian regime at that time. Another group that has had a similar presence in Denmark are Syrian-Kurds, who migrated due to general repression and the lack of recognition of their rights in Syria, looking for a better life in Europe. In addition to these two main groups, a few number of Syrians migrated to Denmark in search of better education and economic perspective. According to some respondents, most of the Syrians were integrated either in the Danish society or other immigrant communities, which made their presence as a collective group unnoticeable before 2011.

With the influx of Syrian refugees in 2011/2012, the number of Syrians in Denmark increased significantly as in many other destination countries. While at the beginning some people fled Syria due to the political

persecution or the obligatory military service for men, many left later as a result of the insecurity and instability in Syria or the neighbouring country. Some came to Denmark or other European countries after spending years or months in a neighbouring country of Syria. This group came from different Syrian areas and had diverse ethnic, religious, educational and political backgrounds.

Due to the strict refugee allocation policy in Denmark, the Syrians are now spread all over Denmark, and in every city or town, small communities of Syrians can be found (between 150 to 350 Syrians, as estimated by respondents). However, most of these communities do not include Syrians from all regions or backgrounds. Rather Syrians tend to organise mainly along ethnic lines (Arabic/Kurdish). For instance, in some big cities, there are one or two collectives for Syrian Arabs and the same for Syrian Kurds. Another line of division within the groups themselves is the polarisation over political issues related to the conflict in Syria.

**“Unfortunately, the Syrians came here and brought with them their problems and divisions which they had in Syria” (DK7, Skype interview, June 2017).**

Indeed, the same (political, ethnic or religious) tensions which escalated and keep the conflict lasting in Syria can be noticed within the Syrian immigration population in Denmark. This division and polarisation are reflected not just in the names but also in the exclusiveness of activities of the associations. Only a few small groups of Syrians and well-established associations seek to be inclusive and promote the Syrian identity as a collective one for all Syrians, regardless of ethnicity, religion or political view.

#### **4.5.3. ASPIRATIONS AND MOTIVATIONS**

While in the beginning, Syrian newcomers in Denmark were motivated and wanted to realise several projects (economic as well as social ones), the challenging circumstances and the unwelcoming policy of the new Danish government demotivated many Syrians to integrate or to become active in the new society. After the new strict laws and regulations related to refugees in Denmark, most Syrians are now busy with the obligatory two-year integration program, i.e. learning the language and attending a job training (praktik). Besides, after the reduction of the financial assistance, many of them are occupied with securing their own basic needs, leading some to even start working illegally. According to some respondents, due to this situation, few families returned to any of the neighbouring countries of Syria. Others considered return as a potential option given the challenges they encountered in the destination context.

Indeed, due to this new situation in Denmark as well as the feeling of longing for Syria, the question of return is often discussed among Syrians in Denmark. However, while some predicate the decision to return to the safety situation in Syria, others relate it to the political solution to the Syrian conflict. Nevertheless, all agree, that if for the next two or three years the situation in Syria remains politically unstable and insecure, most of the Syrians in Denmark are not going to return to Syria, especially those who have children and seek to establish their lives in Denmark.

Moreover, the devastating situation in Syria bears significant impact on the perceptions towards engagement in the peace and reconstruction process. Several respondents emphasised a feeling of disappointment, depression and loss of hope among Syrians in Denmark, especially after seven years of losses and no solution to the conflict in sight. For that reason, “it is not easy to activate and convince the Syrians that they could play a role now” (DK1, Skype interview, June 2017).

These perceptions are also reflected in the objectives of the Syrian associations in Denmark. At the beginning of the conflict, the motivations and goals of the first established (between 2011 and 2013) Syrian diasporic associations were more political or humanitarian in nature and related to the conflict in Syria. However, the more recently established organisations and initiatives have focused more on fostering the integration process of those who newly arrived in Denmark to satisfy their needs in the new society. This shift in motivation was also clear in the round table in Copenhagen, when all participants preferred to focus

on discussing ‘integration in Denmark’ and its challenges, more than ‘voluntary repatriation to Syria’ as possible durable solutions for the Syrian refugees:

**“We would like to return, but it is impossible now, so it is better to focus on the integration issue” (participant of the roundtable in Copenhagen).**

Nevertheless, it was mentioned that it might be good to start thinking about developing strategies and solutions to create better circumstances in Syria that could help the Syrians who are still there to stay or to return (if they would like), especially for those in the neighbouring countries of Syria. Now, only a few associations strive and aim to play a role in the reconstruction process. However, precise means and concrete strategies are still missing.

Regarding the challenges faced in the integration process, learning the Danish language was seen as a major obstacle for Syrian newcomers. While some difficulties are related to the failure in the language integration program, some are related to the lack of opportunity to practice the language and have enough contacts with the Danish society. Moreover, the roundtable discussions identified a misuse of human resources of refugees by the Danish government, since refugees are often used as cheap labor, posing a challenge to finding suitable job opportunities. Besides, there are difficulties in having access to the job market due to the lack of network as well as the cultural differences between Syria and Denmark in this respect.

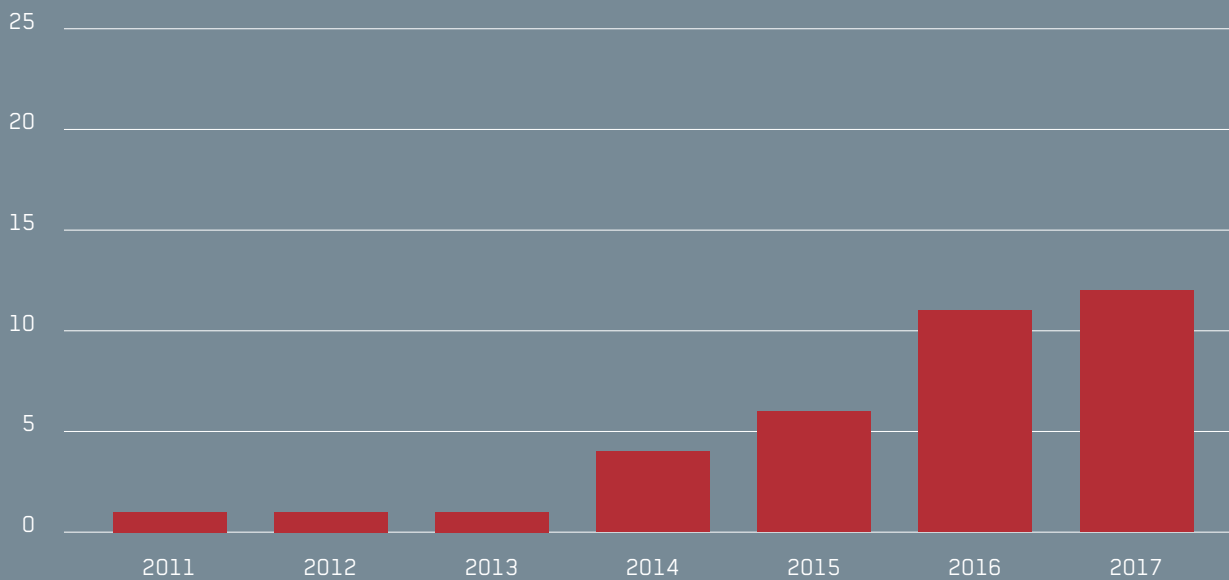
Integration is further hampered by feelings of instability and being unwelcomed. This results from the “wrong” distribution of refugees in Denmark without taking into consideration their experiences and skills. Newcomers are often distributed randomly, leading to send some of them to regions where they cannot find a job in their domains. Besides, the quality of temporary accommodation and the extended period of sharing the accommodation with other people, especially in the camps results in emotional and psychological distress. Another issue which has an enormous impact on the willingness and ability to integrate is the short residency permission (especially the one-year residency) and not having the right to family reunification. The insecurity of residency on the one hand limits the willingness to invest in building a new life in an unstable environment, while on the other it also negatively affects the feeling of belonging to the new society. Furthermore, the recent strict law and regulations against the refugees by the new Danish government increased the feeling of being unwelcomed in Denmark. In its integration program, the Danish government does not take the psychological situation of refugees into consideration, like trauma issues and family unification as well as the psychological impact of staying in the refugee camps for a long period.

In general, it is perceived that there is still much room for improvement of the Danish integration policy, which should move beyond the sole focus of economic integration, towards a multidimensional understanding, where inclusion relates different spheres of life ranging from structural factors such as one’s legal status and its associated rights, to more social factors that may contribute to overall well-being and functioning within society:

**“The government understands under integration only language and finding job. But there are other things that are important for integration like, culture of volunteering, culture of respect and accepting the others, history of the country. These things should be included in the integration process” (DK2, personal interview, Copenhagen, June 2017)**

\* It is unclear whether the initiative/association active is or not. There is no information about it in the internet. The initiators are also not reachable.

**FIGURE 10: STOCK OF SYRIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN DENMARK, 2011-2017**



#### 4.5.4. ORGANISATIONAL LANDSCAPE

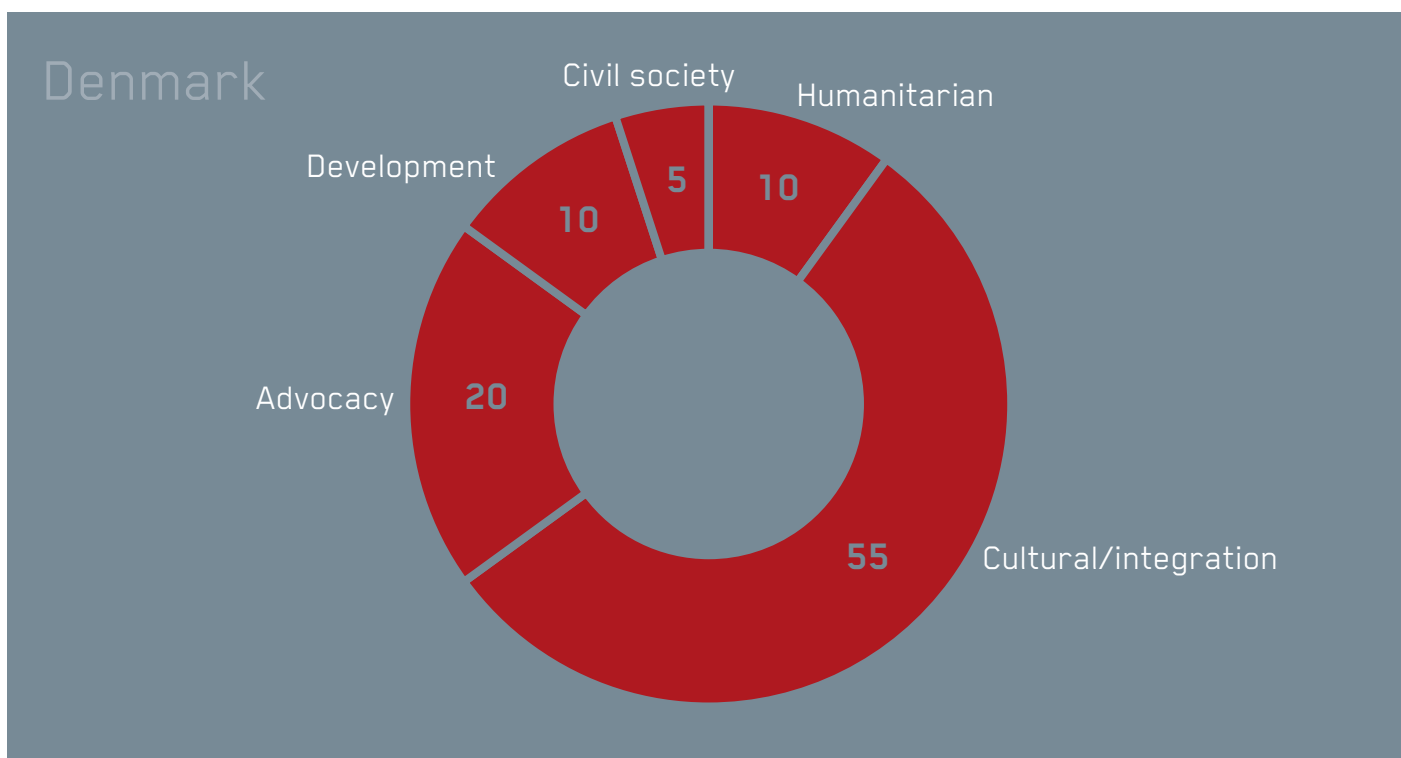
Through the mapping exercise, 12 Syrian associations and initiatives have been identified in Denmark. All of them were founded after 2011 and 11 of them are officially registered. One can add here that many Syrian groups that are active virtually using social media, mainly Facebook, yet their influence is still limited to the virtual space.

Since founding an association is relatively easy in Denmark, many of the Syrian newcomers have established their own associations, sometimes with the support of the older generation of Syrian migrants or Danes. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that some organisations seem to exist only on paper. Over the course of the conflict, many organisations dissolved and became inactive, sometimes due to internal conflicts or frustration over the continuing deterioration of the situation in Syria.

With regard to the fields of engagement (figure 11), one can observe that with 55 per cent of total engagement, culture and integration represents a strong focus of Syrian diaspora organisations in Denmark. In addition, four organisations have an advocacy component, by raising awareness on the situation of Syrian refugees and advocating for their rights in Denmark. Moreover, one advocacy group aims to raise awareness about the conflict and complexities in Syria. It seems that the Syrian diaspora in Denmark focus much more on the host country context, as only two organisations could be identified that work in humanitarian aid and implement development-oriented projects in Syria, making up ten per cent of engagement each.

Remarkably, at the beginning of the conflict, the first established Syrian diasporic associations had more political or humanitarian objectives, and their areas of involvement were mainly related to the conflict in Syria. These associations were predominantly established by the pre-conflict Syrian immigrants. Their main activities were advocacy, lobbying and raising awareness about the conflict and the situation in Syria more in general. The political polarisation was significantly apparent here. On the one hand, Dansk Syrisk Initiativ\* aimed at creating and strengthening solidarity and sympathy for the Syrian cause as well as organising humanitarian projects for Syria. On the other hand, Dansk Syrisk Forening i Danmark has aimed at

**FIGURE 11: FIELDS OF ENGAGEMENT OF SYRIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN DENMARK (CATEGORIES EXPLAINED ON PAGE 69)**



supporting the Syrian people and Assad’s ongoing reforms as well as raising awareness about the conflict and its complexity by providing alternative information to mainstream media in Denmark.

Between 2014 and 2017, the established associations and initiatives were focusing more on culture, integration and education, targeting Syrians residing in Denmark. They were founded mostly by Syrian newcomers, to address their needs in the new country. Some initiatives receive support from the Danish governmental institutions or civil society organisations. An example to be mentioned here is the project of Anaobaba.tv (Me and Daddy TV), which assists refugees (men, women and children) in the process of family reunification. While the project was initiated for Syrians, it now targets also refugees from other nationalities.

Other associations seek to strengthen the relationship among Syrians or Syrian Kurds in a particular location and create a space for social encounters. These social and cultural clubs enable the cultivation of Syrian (some only Kurdish) culture and traditions to preserve their identity. Beside this, they attempt to build bridges with the Danish society to promote intercultural dialogue and foster relations with the governmental institutions (the communes) to communicate the problems of the refugees and promote their integration. Examples of such kinds of associations are: Dansk-Syrisk Kulturforening i Holte, Dansk Syrisk Venskabsforening i Syddjurs, Den syriske forening i Silkeborg, Ascent Association and Foreningen af Kurdere fra Syrien i Herning. Significantly, most associations are working on the local level, impacted by the demographic distribution of Syrian refugees as well as the political structure of Denmark. Only a few associations, like Buhar Kurdish Kulturforening i Danmark, aim at targeting Syrians in the whole country and working on the national level.

One exception that can be noticed here is Det Syriske Kulturinstitut i Danmark, which was founded by the same members who were active in the Danish Institute in Damascus. After the institute was closed in Syria in 2011, the association was reopened in Copenhagen in 2016 with a new name and mixed team of Danes and Syrians. Their goal is to support refugees in integration and education as well as building bridges between the Syrian and Danish society. Unlike the other associations that are still working mainly on a voluntary basis, the institute is well established and cooperates with several Danish organisations as well as with the communes in different cities in Denmark.

Since most of the Syrian organisations have been established more recently, there are no significant networks or umbrella associations among the Syrian diaspora in Denmark yet. Rather, cooperation among different initiatives is mostly limited to the community of the city or other partners from the Danish civil society organisations. Some of the associations are members within a Danish local umbrella association. Nevertheless, following from the roundtable that was organized by the Danish Refugee Council, a second meeting was held to gather the same associations for discussing potential cooperation and networking platform.

Having a look at social media, one can find dozens of Facebook pages that are related to the Syrian immigration population. They provide information for refugees about different issues related to integration and offer a virtual platform for Syrians to be able to communicate with each other and exchange information. Some of these pages target specific groups like doctors. However, it is important to mention that their influence tends to be limited to sharing and exchanging information. Many of their members do not live in Denmark, but rather they have liked the page to know more about Denmark.

\* Some Danish humanitarian organizations were suspected of supporting terrorist groups in Syria. Read here more information:

[www.cphpost.dk/news/danish-humanitarian-aid-may-be-supporting-terrorists.html](http://www.cphpost.dk/news/danish-humanitarian-aid-may-be-supporting-terrorists.html)

[www.cphpost.dk/news/two-danish-charities-fundraising-illegally-for-causes-in-syria-and-palestine.html](http://www.cphpost.dk/news/two-danish-charities-fundraising-illegally-for-causes-in-syria-and-palestine.html)

#### 4.5.5. ACTIVITIES AND PRACTICES

As mentioned before, most of the active Syrian associations are focusing mainly on fostering and supporting the integration process of the Syrians in the new society as well as creating spaces to strengthen the relationship among Syrians living in a specific city or region. Hence, the diaspora is seeking to reduce the gap between the enormous needs of the Syrian newcomers and the lacking support by the Danish government:

**“We do not have any activities related to Syria, and this is not a question for us now, because most of the members are still depending on the social assistance. Besides, we do not have the time to do more activities and because the refugees in Denmark have enough problems. Because of the politics of the government in Denmark, the refugees are busy with their own problems” (DK3, Skype interview, June 2017).**

Most of these associations target all family members, and their activities overlap, like offering mother-language courses for children, celebrating cultural and religious festivals, and organising different social activities for men, women and/or children. In addition to the invitations for celebrating together the cultural and religious festivals, events are organised to promote knowledge and understanding of Syrian culture, targeting the host society for building bridges. Furthermore, some initiatives, like the Dansk-Syrisk Kulturforening i Holte, advocate for the rights of refugees and raise awareness on the situation of Syrians displaced on the local level. The association is part of a broader network of organisations active in this field. In the group, they discuss the current issues regarding refugees and coordinate their communication with the commune of the city. Other initiatives that were initially designed by and for Syrians, but are open now to refugees regardless of the nationality, implement projects that foster the integration and orientation of refugees in their new environment. An example here is a project by Den Nye Havn supported by the commune, which offers consultation and guided city tours to refugees and has mentoring programme, through which refugees are assisted in their integration process.

Concerning engagement within the Syrian context, many organisations that have been established in the beginnings of the Syrian crisis were more political in nature. Their main aim was to mobilise the Danish society and government for their cause (regime or uprising), through the organisation of protests, demonstrations and information events. Dansk Syrisk Forening i Danmark was active in speaking about the situation in Syria in the Danish media. Moreover, the association has also helped and supported some Danish journalists and TV correspondents to travel to Syria and cover the situation from there. With the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria, some associations have started to gather donations and organise charity events to support organisations that work in Syria or the neighbouring countries. However, only a small share of associations is active in this field, as most of the organisations established



in Denmark, were founded by refugees. Many feared that due to an insecure legal status being involved in the Syrian context may cause problems with Danish authorities\*. Furthermore, some associations have started cultural, developmental projects in cooperation with partners in Syria, like the project of Det Syriske Kulturinstitut i Danmark - This is my Story.

#### **4.5.6. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Next to the financial constraints, several respondents feel that the greatest challenge for the Syrian diasporic associations in Denmark is the Syrians themselves. While the organisations and initiatives obtain good support and in some cases funds from the Danish government or Danish NGOs, it remains challenging for them to activate and mobilise the Syrians for collective action. Many Syrians living in Denmark now were not socially or politically active in Syria and many still have little interest in the public issues in Denmark. Furthermore, respondents perceive a lack of experience with civic and political engagement among Syrians, as the civil society has long been oppressed in the Syrian context. In other words, a culture of civic engagement and volunteering is weak or missing among the Syrians, which limits the potential for creating a broad basis for social change. While this culture started to change in response to the general social and political transformations, many organisations still see a significant challenge to activate the broader Syrian public in Denmark for their cause.

Another challenge is related to the difficult socio-economic situation that many Syrian refugees face in Denmark. Due to the recent reduction in the financial assistance offered to refugees, most Syrians are struggling with securing their basic needs. The lack of security not just limits the freedom and space for civic and political engagement, as Syrians tend to be preoccupied on how to ensure their livelihood, but also constrains the capacity to become actively involved.

One more challenge to be added here is the potential fragmentation within the Syrian diaspora in Denmark. In general, it is emphasised that Syrians do not comprise a homogeneous group, with strong voice and legitimacy. Next to ethnic division and political polarisation among the Syrians in Denmark, the recent creation of the Syrian immigrant population, which is geographically scattered across the country, is seen as major hurdles for community building within the Syrian diaspora.

However, despite these challenges, one should not forget that the Syrian diaspora associations are relatively new and they have achieved a lot in a brief period, although almost all of them work on a voluntary basis. Similarly, several organisations strive and would like to broaden their scope of activities, both within the Danish and the Syrian context.

#### **4.5.7. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The Syrian immigration population in Denmark is relatively new and small and, due to the strict distribution policy, dispersed across the country. Furthermore, due to long-standing ethnic division (Arabic/Kurdish) and political polarisation concerning the Syrian conflict, Syrians in Denmark do not represent a unified, homogenous group, but rather reflect the general conflict dynamics of the Syrian crisis. These divisions can also be noticed among and within the organised Syrian diaspora. Only a few small groups of organisations attempt to be inclusive and reinforce the Syrian identity as a collective one for all Syrians, regardless of ethnicity, religion or political view.

Having a look at the organisational landscape, it is clear that the Syrian associations in Denmark are still in the phase of finding, organising and establishing themselves. Concerning their aspirations and motivation, the first established Syrian diasporic associations in 2011/2012, have more political or humanitarian objectives and their areas of involvement were related to the conflict in Syria, like advocacy and raising awareness as well as relief aid. On the other hand, the more recently established associations, mostly by the newcomers, focus more on culture and integration issues, depending on the needs and demands of Syrians in Denmark. However, most of these associations have a homogenous group (mainly Arabic Syrian or Kurdish Syrian), without having Danish members. This raises the question whether this kind of

association will help and foster the integration process in the long term or not? Only a few associations have an inclusive approach in this respect.

Despite many challenges, some related to the Syrians themselves and some related to the difficult situation in Denmark, the Syrian diasporic associations have made substantial efforts in a short period, although most of them work on a voluntary basis. Several organisations express the desire for more professionalisation and institutionalisation in order to broaden their scope of activities and to respond more effectively to the various aspects of the Syrian crisis, both in the context of Denmark and Syria. Here lies immense potential for developing the Syrian diaspora, if the associations get the needed funding and support, like capacity building programs and network and cooperation platform.

## 4.6. SWITZERLAND

### 4.6.1. MIGRATION AND POLICY CONTEXT

While the Syrian migrant population before the conflict was very small, with 2,510 Syrian nationals residing in Switzerland in 2010, the country experienced a relatively sharp increase of Syrian immigrants over the past years, with numbers reaching 14,876 Syrian nationals in 2015. Given that 58 percent of Syrian nationals in 2015 were male and 42 percent female, Syrian migration patterns to Switzerland seem slightly less male-dominated when compared to the other selected destination countries. With a total number of 11,059, a large proportion of Syrian nationals (73%) were under the age of 35 years, therefore indicating that, similar to other European destinations, young people make up a large share of the Syrian immigrant population. Moreover, a high proportion, almost 72 percent, were holding a permanent residence permit (Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2016) .

In response to the Syrian crisis, Switzerland has eased the visa policy for individuals directly affected by the conflict and introduced a sustainable resettlement program in 2015, targeting particularly vulnerable persons. Under this scheme, 994 individuals have been administered by the end of May 2017 and distributed to various cantons according to a pre-established distribution key. Besides these humanitarian visas and the emergency reception efforts, the country has also set up a family reunification scheme for nuclear families whose member is already living in Switzerland. Since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in March 2011, 15,306 persons from Syria have applied for asylum in Switzerland. In the period between March 2011, and April 2017, 4,098 Syrian nationals have been granted asylum, and 7,770 have received provisional protection (Staatssekretariat für Migration SEM, 2017).

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) under the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) is Switzerland's international cooperation agency. SDC provided humanitarian aid in Syria as well as in the neighbouring countries through its development and maintenance of a funding envelop covering various field, from education to technical support, protection, WASH, monetary transfer assistance and construction. The Swiss government recognized the central role of migration for sustainable development and identified migration as one of the nine priority themes of Swiss development assistance. Implemented by SDC, the "Global Programme Migration and Development (GPMD)" aims at harnessing the potential of migration for development, by pursuing the following five fields of action 1) International dialogue, 2) Acceptable working conditions, 3) Contributions of the diaspora, 4) Integrating migration in development planning, 5) Swiss migration policy. Within the contributions of the diaspora field of action, SDC promotes capacity development, provides funding and establishes projects in cooperation with selected diaspora organisations (SDC, 2017).

#### 4.6.2. SUBJECTIVE VIEW ON THE SYRIAN DIASPORA

Syria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, and this mosaic is reflected in the many religions and ethnicities making up this diaspora. Altogether, Syrians in Switzerland mirror, to some extent, the situation in Syria, and their heterogeneity has become even more pronounced after 2011, politically, economically, ethnically, among other factors. In general, one can distinguish between two groups, namely those who migrated before the outbreak of the conflict, and those who were more recently forcibly displaced during the crisis. The former left Syria for political factors, economic reasons, or better educational opportunities. As outlined in the previous section, the pre-conflict Syrian population in Switzerland was relatively small and, according to the interviewees, did not maintain strong ties among each other. Although with varied success, attempts have been made in the past to create cultural associations to strengthen the community and relationship among Syrians in Switzerland.

Pre-conflict weak links between diaspora members surfaced in 2011 when Syrians came together in search of a political solution to the conflict. Moreover, when the humanitarian situation in Syria became more severe in 2012, several gatherings across Switzerland were organised to coordinate relief efforts by the diaspora to support those most affected by the conflict in Syria or within the displaced population in the neighbouring countries. According to one respondent who was present in several meetings, the conflict had led to a politicisation of humanitarian aid and polarisation among the Syrian community more in general, where different political opinions and conflicting interest can be considered as the main dividing factors. As with the other countries captured in the study, the large political and aspirational diversity that lacked a unifying political movement manifested itself in various lines of conflict, leading to a fragmented Syrian community in Switzerland:

**“Every little community sticks by each other. Like the ones, who support Bashar Al-Assad, they stick to themselves. Others who support the opposition parties are also divided into two different categories, those who support the Islamists and those who support the Free Syrian army” (CH2, phone interview, August 2017).**

At the same time, the Swiss host country context may similarly provide a secure and free space for reflections and renegotiation of boundaries that have been created, as Syrians do not directly experience the negative impacts of the conflict. In addition, the dramatic nature of the humanitarian crisis may also encourage rapprochement among different conflict parties in the diaspora, creating room to work together towards common goals.

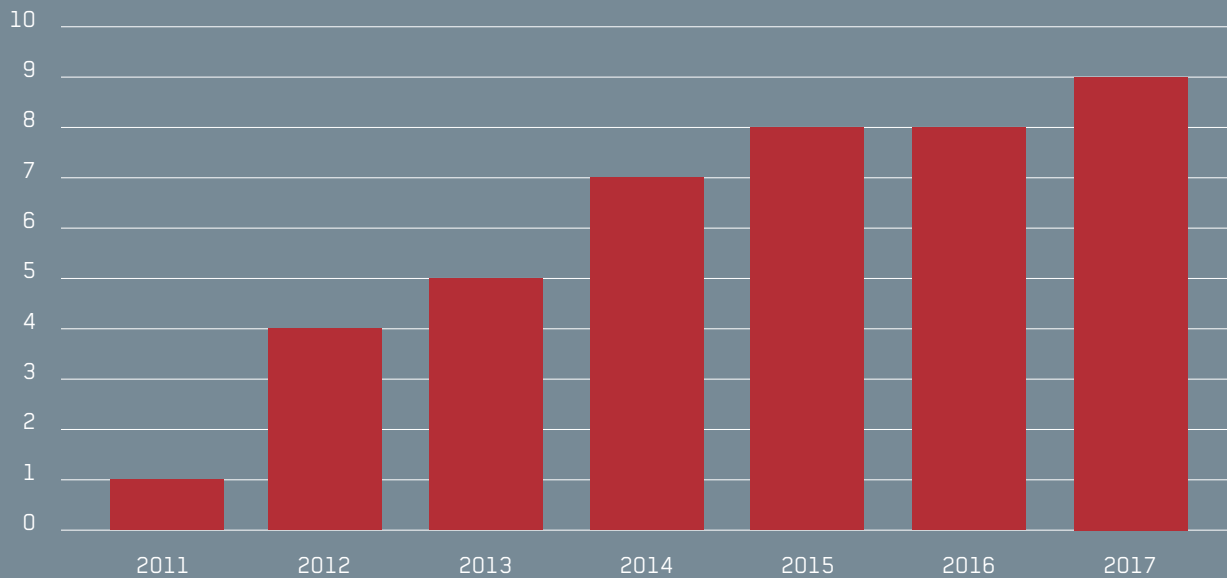
#### 4.6.3. ASPIRATIONS AND MOTIVATIONS

While the conflict seems to be a major driving factor for diasporic action in Switzerland, it seems that supporting the political movement that emerged is less of a focus. According to one respondent, who has been involved in raising awareness on the political aspects of the conflict, the escalation of the crisis with deepened sectarian violence in line with polarisation within the diaspora led to a shift in focus towards more humanitarian assistance:

**“We started with some young guys who were making manifestations and going on demonstrations in the street asking for a little more openness, for some solutions, for freedom [...] And now, we do not suffer from one dictatorship. Right now, we suffer from many dictatorships within the regime side and the opposition side. We suffer from Islamist groups, we suffer from ISIS” (CH2, phone interview, August 2017).**

Due to the strong focus of Syrian diaspora organisations in providing relief aid, the alleviation of the suffering of the Syrian people both in Syria and in the neighbouring countries seems to be among the

FIGURE 12: STOCK OF SYRIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN SWITZERLAND, 2011-2017



major motivations. Respondents highlight that their engagement is driven by humanity and a feeling of responsibility to assist Syrians who suffer the consequences of the conflict:

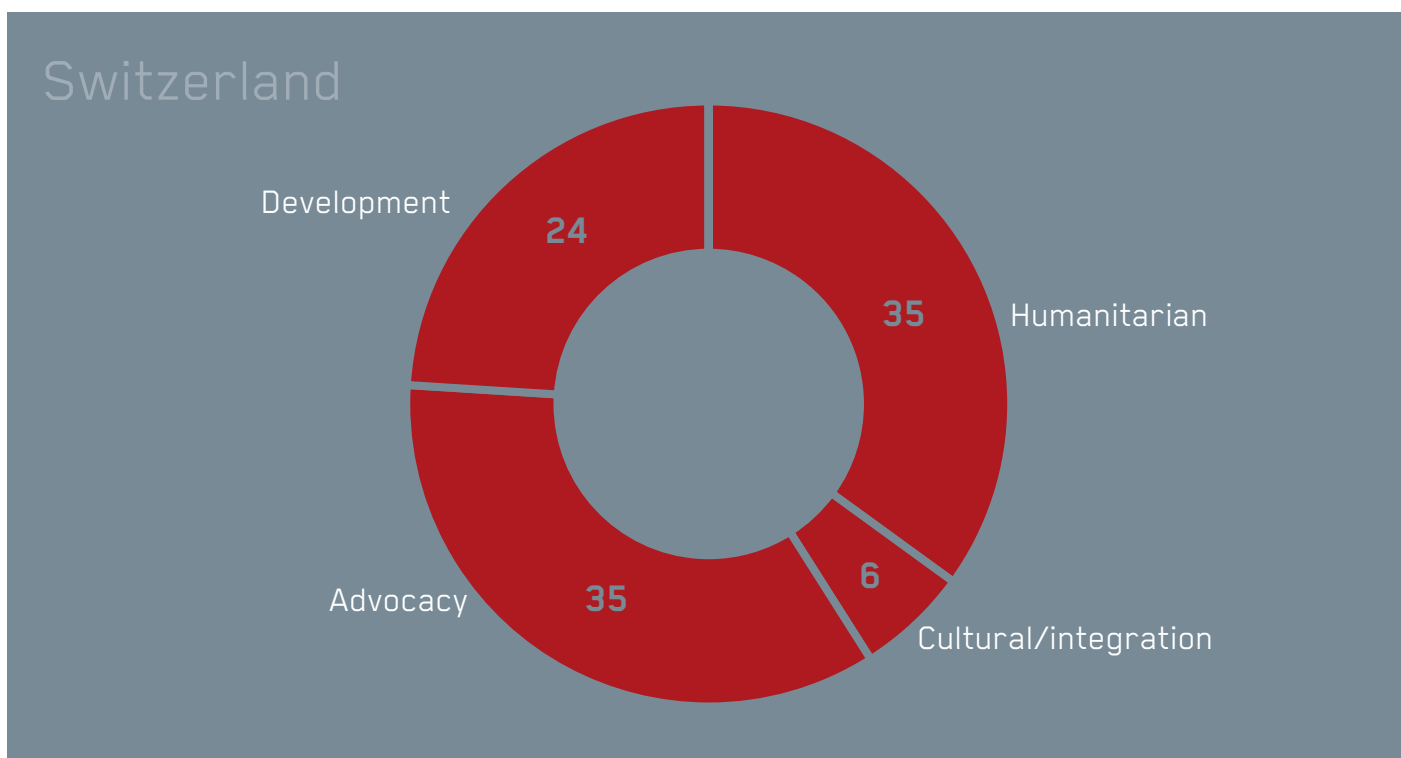
**“For me, it certainly also plays a role that I am of Syrian origin. And I have a certain responsibility to help the people there [...], because I have such a luxurious and high standard of living here” (CH3, phone interview, July 2017).**

When it comes to aspiration regarding return and integration, respondents perceive that newcomers that have been coming to Switzerland since 2011 still have hope of going back to Syria, but there is an increasing feeling of hopelessness given the latest developments in the country. Moreover, the growing negative perception regarding the possibility of return leads some Syrians to understand that they may benefit from putting greater efforts into local integration.

**“Newcomers clearly still hope to go back to Syria. Unfortunately given the last developments [...] they are losing hope. They have a darker perception of the return possibility and start to understand, maybe, that they should put efforts into definitive integration here [...] The more this effort is oriented towards an integration that helps for returning, the better it is. People don’t go back home with empty hands but with some sort of baggage, an experience, or anything to give to the country” (CH1, personal interview, Geneva, June 2017).**

Hence, it is seen as of utmost importance that Syrians have an opportunity to build skills during their stay in Switzerland, in order to better support post-war efforts in Syria. In this regard, oriented integration helps towards a smoother return; it enhances the capacity for human development in both the origin and destination countries and for the people themselves. In Switzerland, some room for cooperation has been identified and it includes, without being limited to, providing assistance to refugees in need of psychosocial

**FIGURE 13: FIELDS OF ENGAGEMENT OF SYRIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN SWITZERLAND (CATEGORIES EXPLAINED ON PAGE 69)**



help and an educational project supporting efforts towards trainings interested Syrians in humanitarian management.

#### 4.6.4. ORGANISATIONAL LANDSCAPE

With nine organisations being identified through the mapping exercise, Switzerland hosts the smallest share of Syrian civil society organisations when compared to the other selected countries. As Figure 14 indicates, the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011 can be considered as a transformative event, triggering diaspora mobilisation in Switzerland, since no established organisation has been identified prior to 2011. While the crisis did lead to the emergence of several organisations over the past years, the organised Syrian diaspora in Switzerland can still be considered rather small. As newly arrived Syrians make up by far the largest share of Syrian immigrants in Switzerland (see section 4.1.1.), they may still lack the capacity, such as language skills, as well as financial, personal, and political security to become collectively engaged.

Looking at the fields of engagement (Figure 15) one can observe that 35 percent of the engagement takes place in the humanitarian sector in Syria or the neighbouring countries, with six out of nine Syrian diaspora organisations in Switzerland being active in this field. In addition, four associations started to implement more-long term orientated programs by engaging in development projects (24%), ranging from the establishment and maintenance of schools or medical centres to employment promotion to provide livelihood opportunities for displaced Syrians in the neighbouring countries. Advocacy continues to play a significant role in Syrian diaspora mobilisation, representing 35 percent of total engagement and six out of nine Syrian diaspora organisations implementing activities in this field. However, these activities tend to be rather an add-on than a sole focus of organisation and often aim at raising awareness on the humanitarian crisis prevailing in Syria and the neighbouring countries. Interestingly, only one organisation has been identified as being active in culture/integration (6%) sphere. The association was established in 2017, aiming at providing a platform for the Syrian diaspora in Switzerland.

Most associations kept a relatively small scope of work and interviews, indicating that they are often poorly institutionalized. Two of the three organisations interviewed still mainly rely on donations and work

is predominantly executed on a voluntary basis. While respondents perceive that they receive strong support from Swiss society, there seems to be decreasing willingness to donate to the Syrian crisis, given the protracted nature of the conflict and a decline in media coverage. This poses a substantial threat to the sustainability of diaspora involvement and limits the potential to contribute to the reconstruction process of the origin country. One notable exception is the organisation UOSSM (Union of First Aid and Medical Care Organisations), a transnational network, which was founded in January 2012 in France and has moved its headquarter to Geneva in 2017. UOSSM has become one of the most important actors in the humanitarian system in Syria. The NGO's main focus is oriented towards medical care but has progressively evolved over the years through widening the scope of activities (e.g. training on photography and journalism, integration workshops and language courses, educational projects, etc.) and partners (UN, OCHA, WHO, Save the Children, etc.). According to all respondents, their organisations are characterized by great heterogeneity of members, with people of different ages, gender and origins being active in the implementation of activities. Next to persons of Syrian origin, all organisations stated that they have other members of the host society involved in their organisation, who strongly support their efforts. Except from UOSSM, which in addition to around 600 volunteers (out of which around 30 are in Switzerland) employs 1600 persons, organisations tend to have a relatively small size of membership, with efforts of the organisation being realised by a handful of people.

With regard to networks and other means of cooperation, no umbrella organisation of the Syrian diaspora could be identified in Switzerland. Despite efforts that have been made to coordinate relief work of the diverse Syrian diaspora groups in 2013, it appears that organisations do not interact and cooperate strongly with each other. The fragmented nature of the Syrian diaspora in Switzerland, the politicisation of relief efforts as well as strong mistrust towards other Syrian initiatives, were mentioned as the major reasons for the failure and limited scope of cooperation.

#### **4.6.5. ACTIVITIES AND PRACTICES**

As illustrated above, due to the prevailing humanitarian crisis, providing assistance to those suffering from the consequences of the conflict in Syria or the neighbouring countries continues to be the major focus of Syrian diaspora organisations in Switzerland. Slowly, these organisations are moving beyond the delivery of short-term aid, by providing funds for schools, medical centres and livelihood opportunities.

UOSSM organises medical support in Syria with the assistance of its nearly 1,600 staff members, and has operational mobile clinics, special intervention units, carries out surgeries regularly through Skype, offers psychiatric care and psychosocial support, and delivers continuously accelerated trainings for a wide variety of health workers and also managers. The organisation has a research team whose main task is to update/compile live statistics and subsequently analyse them. These activities became the strategic focus of the organisation as a consequence of the absence of formal entities to provide direct, on-the-field medical care in Syria. Such work is rendered possible thanks to an active and strong network within and around Syria with local knowledge and field experience available from and for Syrians, which is the key to success. Where other organisations had to withdraw, UOSSM was able to adapt to security concerns and pursue its interventions in areas controlled by multiple rebel groups including the Islamic State (ISIS).

In addition to UOSSM, small scale initiatives such as Association Amis du Peuple Syrien (Association Friends of the Syrian people), SyriAid and Association Help Syria have emerged since 2012 to provide humanitarian assistance to persons in need in Syria or in neighbouring countries. Aid includes the sending of medicine and medical equipment, as well as food and non-food items. However, conflict dynamics, high logistical costs as well as bureaucratic hurdles in the neighbouring countries make aid delivery more and more costly and difficult to realize for organisations with lower capacity in particular. Therefore, some organisations moved away from directly delivering aid on their own towards providing funding for aid projects, often with a more long-term focus on health and education.

For instance, the organisation Syrian Refugee Crisis aims at promoting the well-being of displaced children in Jordan. Given that therapeutic care has been identified by the founders as a major need within the

displaced population, which until now is not sufficiently addressed within the Syrian humanitarian system, the provision of psycho-social health emerged as a major focus of the organization. In 2014, Syrian Refugee Crisis became the main sponsor for the Happiness Again Malki Center (HAMC) in Amman, Jordan. The center provides therapeutic care to 160 girls and boys aged between six and twelve through various therapy programs ranging from art and music therapy, to open play groups and individual support by the psychological management of the center. In addition, the organization seeks to establish an international network of experts in the field of traumatization to promote professional knowledge transfer and the exchange of experience in the field of trauma therapy for refugee children.

In the majority of cases, the funding for aid and projects in Syria is generated through advocacy work and fundraising campaigns, but also through the organisation of social and cultural events as well as the publishing arts and media work. The aim is not just to collect funds for the work in Syria or the neighbouring countries, but also to raise awareness on the humanitarian crisis prevailing in Syria and the neighbouring countries among the Swiss public. Through awareness raising activities, organisations aim to inform about the root causes of displacement and to dismantle the term refugee, giving it a human face and story. Only one organisation has been identified that has a sole focus on advocacy work. Wake up Geneva was established in 2014 in response to the perceived indifference of public opinion and the incapacity of governments to solve the Syrian crisis. The aim of the movement is to raise public awareness and to mobilize solidarity to defend the right of the Syrians to live free from all forms of violence, oppression, with respect for their dignity and fundamental rights.

Supporting the integration of Syrian newcomers, however, seems not to be the focus of Syrian diaspora organisations in Switzerland. While the needs of this population are acknowledged by the respondents, they feel that the Swiss government and civil society provide enough support for their integrational process. So far only one organisation could be identified that focuses on culture/integration. Initiated in 2017, the organisation Narenj - Swiss Syrian Diaspora established a community website to strengthen the ties and networks among Syrians in Switzerland. The website is also dedicated to non-Syrians, with the objective to inform the broader Swiss public about the history and culture of Syria, by also questioning the image of Syria, created by the mainstream media.

#### **4.6.6. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Though small in size, the Syrian diaspora in Switzerland shows strong commitment towards eliminating the suffering of the Syrian people, mainly in Syria and the neighbouring country. Many times, these associations serve as bridge builders between inside Syria and outer possibilities, by identifying essential needs of the Syrian population and mobilising support from Swiss institutions and society. At the same time, Syrian organisations face challenges that limit them to reach their full potential.

With the last years' evolution of the conflict, it is widely believed among respondents in Switzerland that the fate of their country is out of their hands given the multiple foreign interventions. Their vision towards a pacified Syria is thus that an international will is needed so that relevant stakeholders would sort out a number of geostrategic interests that became central to the conflict. The protracted nature of the conflict, including its international dimension, decreases the hope of people in that their action could lead to change in the near future:

**“Everybody is tired of what’s going on in Syria, and everybody has relatives in Syria of whom one has to take care of, and the situation is really bad. A lot of people feel the same as me. They have lost hope they don’t know what to do” (CH3, phone interview, August 2017).**

At the same time, the complex conflict setting, with several regional battlefronts, great numbers of armed actors affiliated to different fractions and with complex and fluid relationships, pose challenges to the realisation of diaspora activities in Syria. As a result of huge scale violence, organisations suffered great



losses in local staff and volunteers, due to arrests, killings and forced displacement. While negotiations with actors, including military forces and non-state armed groups are essential to secure and sustain humanitarian access, respondents feel that these tend to risk the humanitarian principles of independence, neutrality and impartiality, leading to politicisation of their humanitarian action:

**“When you do humanitarian work, it’s very difficult to maintain total 100% humanitarian action without getting in touch political view or religious view” (CH3, phone interview, August 2017)**

Finally, the lack in financial capacity is perceived as a major challenge among the smaller, less institutionalised organisations. In general, respondents highly acknowledge the support they received from the Swiss society in form of denotation and voluntary assistance. Yet, due to the protracted nature of the conflict alongside declining media coverage, many organisations perceive that the heavy reliance on donations and voluntary work will not be sustainable for the future. At the same time, ensuring stability of the projects is seen as crucial, as local partners tend to heavily depend on the diaspora’s financial contributions:

**“Stability is already central. Because we are the main sponsor of the centre and are therefore always under pressure that to generate enough money, so that the work can go on” (CH2, phone interview, July 2017)**

#### **4.6.7. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Syria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, and this mosaic is reflected in the many religions and ethnicities making up this diaspora. Altogether, Syrians in Switzerland mirror, to some extent, the situation in Syria, and their heterogeneity has become even more pronounced after 2011, politically, economically, ethnically, among other factors.

While the conflict propelled Syrians to become collectively engaged in the Syrian cause, Switzerland hosts the smallest share of Syrian civil society organisations, when compared to the other countries captured in this study. As newly arrived Syrians make up by far the largest share of Syrian immigrants in Switzerland, they may still lack the capacity, such as language skills, as well as financial, personal, and political security to become collectively engaged. Moreover, Syrian organisations in Switzerland tend to focus their engagement on the Syrian context, with measures ranging from the delivery of aid to financing of schools, medical centres and livelihood opportunities. Engaging in promoting integration appears to be less important, as it is generally perceived that the Swiss government and civil society provide enough support for Syrian newcomers in Switzerland.

While efforts have been made in the last years to strengthen relationships, networks and cooperation among diaspora groups, politicisation, polarisation and mistrust are major stumbling blocks for developing joint efforts towards reconstruction. Yet, bringing together a divided organisational landscape and giving greater attention to long-term initiatives, while incorporating Syrian nationals to peace-promoting and reconstruction projects, would undoubtedly lead to positive future developments of the origin country.



## **5. CONCLUSION: A COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT OF SYRIAN DIASPORA MOBILISATION**

### **5.1. SYRIAN IMMIGRANT POPULATION**

All in all, the official statistics across the six destination countries portray Germany and Sweden as hosting far larger numbers of Syrian-born immigrants, and refugees in particular. Moreover, confirming prior reports, it appears that the largest number of Syrians in each country case is predominately male and of working age, even though the absolute number of females and minors has risen in parallel with the overall trend. Concerning some of the main reasons for migrating, the number of asylum claims by Syrian-born nationals has increased sharply in each country over the last five years, and family reunification likewise remains one of the leading reasons a Syrian is ultimately granted official residency. While these official statistics help to provide a general overview of the Syrian-born population, there are inherent limitations that need to be recognised. First, data availability by each of the country statistical offices vary, and in particular in the case of the UK and France disaggregated information by key demographics is not made public. In all cases, there appears to be little to no information on socio-economic characteristics including education levels, prior or current economic activity or the like. In the case of first-time Syrian asylum seekers in Germany (2015) and Sweden (2016), data indicates that these groups tend to have an above average level of education when compared to other origin countries. In contrast, the majority of Syrian refugees in Denmark had only a primary education level.

### **5.2. PROCESS AND DEVELOPMENTS OF SYRIAN DIASPORA MOBILISATION**

Altogether, Syrians in Europe mirror to some extent the situation in Syria, and their heterogeneity has become even more pronounced after 2011, politically, economically, ethnically, among other factors. In all countries, pre-conflict Syrian diaspora mobilisation was mainly limited to the socio-cultural sphere and tended to avoid political dimensions. Also, some Syrians with a minority background tended to connect themselves to wider ethno-religious communities of Kurdish and Assyrian collectivities, whose members originate from diverse backgrounds including Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon and Iran. The government repression, which not only prevented political mobilisation, but also led to a lack of cohesion and solidarity among Syrians in Europe, has been identified as a major stumbling block for collective action based on a Syrian national identity.

The Syrian uprising in 2011, can be perceived as a transformative event, which politicised Syrians abroad and sparked collective action based on a national identity, mainly of those who position themselves oppositional to the Assad regime. As a result, the majority of Syrian diaspora organisations in Europe that were founded in 2011 and onwards emerged in response to the social and political transformations happening in Syria. Besides, the escalation of the conflict and increasing numbers of Syrians seeking protection in Europe lead to further mobilisation efforts of the diaspora, who try to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people both at home and abroad.

While the revolution itself can be perceived as a unifying factor, the conflict escalation, with rising ethnicisation and radicalisation on the ground in Syria also affect the patterns of diaspora mobilisation in Europe. In all the countries represented in this study, it is clearly visible that the same (political, ethnic or religious) tensions that escalated and perpetuate the conflict, are reproduced in the Syrian diaspora in Europe. These fragmentations, conflict dynamics and divisions within the Syrian diaspora are perceived as major obstacles for diaspora mobilisation and for the resolution of the Syrian conflict in general. Increasingly some initiatives across the countries covered in this study are trying to tackle the social, cultural and political division within the Syrian diaspora, aiming to build a strong, resilient and inclusive Syrian society at home and abroad. Moreover, Syrian diaspora groups in host countries like Germany, the UK, France and more recently Denmark, are now seeking forms of cooperation through the creation of umbrella organisations to bundle resources and respond more efficiently to the various aspects of the crisis. In the latter case of Denmark, the roundtable organised within this project served as a first opportunity for encounters of Syrian diaspora groups in Denmark that motivated participants to strengthen their ties, networks and collaboration in the future.

Hence, it was shown that Syrian diaspora mobilisation is a highly dynamic process, which tends to reflect to some extent the developments on the ground in Syria. At the same time, it was shown throughout the study that host countries can provide a safe and neutral space for rapprochement, reflection and dialogue among the diverse range of Syrian diaspora actors, highlighting the potential role of diasporas as agents of change and peace.

### 5.3. ASPIRATIONS AND MOTIVATIONS

The aspirations and motivations of the Syrian diaspora elaborated in this study show that there is a strong desire and commitment to contribute to peace and reconstruction of the country. It was revealed that the real potential of the Syrian diaspora could only be achieved through finding a political solution to the violent conflict. For many, but not necessarily all, a peaceful Syria will be difficult to achieve under the ruling Assad government. At the same time, many respondents feel that it will be a long path to peace and stability in Syria, which requires not just an end to the violent conflict and a political transformation, but also much more complex economic, cultural and social changes.

In general, the findings indicate that there is a strong desire to return to Syria, especially among those who more recently migrated to Europe. At this stage of the conflict, with high levels of instability and insecurity, the absence of essential freedoms and human rights, and a lack of infrastructure for a decent life, large-scale return and sustainable reintegration is not perceived as a viable option in the near future. Therefore, integration opportunities and a welcoming culture for those seeking protection in Europe should be promoted. Interviewees pointed towards access to language courses, education and the labour market as key factors in that regard, which would also contribute to an overall human capacity building amongst Syrians in Europe; an important measure to ensure that Syrians are equipped to rebuild their country once the conflict has ended, either through return or through transnational involvement. What also should not be overlooked are the benefits that the current migration can yield for hosting societies if integration efforts are successful. Hence, integration must be fundamentally understood in the frame of inclusiveness and as a two-way process meaning that it is as much about the way in which destination countries receive the migrants as much as what migrants do to adapt to a new setting. Moreover, integration policies should move beyond the aspects of language and economic integration, towards a multidimensional understanding, where inclusion relates different spheres of life ranging from structural factors such as one's legal status and its associated rights, to more social factors that may contribute to overall well-being and functioning within society.

## 5.4. ORGANISATIONAL LANDSCAPE

With 63 organisations being identified, Germany represents the country with the largest organised Syrian diaspora, followed by France (27), the United Kingdom (25), Sweden (20) and Denmark (12). Switzerland hosts the smallest amount of the organised Syrian diaspora, and only nine organisations were mapped in this destination. The Syrian diaspora in Europe is strongly committed to addressing the various aspects of the Syrian crisis, by being engaged both in the Syrian and destination country contexts. Given the highly dynamic nature of the Syrian conflict and the recent emergence of the Syrian diaspora, a clear-cut categorisation of the organisations is difficult to undertake.

Concerning the organisational capacity, the landscape of Syrian diaspora organisations in the six selected destination countries is characterised by great diversity. The majority of organisations started at the “kitchen table”, and have since tried to professionalise and institutionalise their efforts. Interestingly, some organisations in the UK and to a lesser extent in Germany and France successfully mastered the path towards professionalisation, emerging now as key players within the Syrian humanitarian system. Next to the general culture of charity and giving in the UK, a firm commitment from the founders, who at an early stage started to work full-time for the organisation, has been identified as the primary success factors.

Regarding cooperation, Syrian diaspora groups in host countries like Germany, the UK, France and more recently Denmark, are now seeking forms of cooperation through the creation of umbrella organisations. Through this, the diaspora seeks to bundle resources and respond more efficiently to the various aspects of the crisis, since for many at this stage of the conflict, peace can only be achieved through finding ways of collaboration and respect. Beside this, other networks have evolved, revolving around specific professions or fields of engagement, being often transnational in nature and involving members that are scattered across the world. For instance, UOSSM (Union of First Aid and Medical Care Organisations) has become one of the most important actors in the humanitarian system in Syria. Founded in 2012 in France, the organisation has managed to create a transnational network, with member organisations being based in different European countries, the US and Canada. As another example, the recently established network We exist! is an advocacy alliance of over 25 Syrian civil society organisations that aims to provide a platform for strengthened engagement of Syrian civil society in humanitarian efforts as well as long-term work promoting human rights, dignity, justice, accountability, peace and reconstruction.

## 5.5. PRACTICES

Looking at the fields of engagement (figure 14), one can observe that culture and integration represents a major focus of Syrian diaspora organisations. Many members of the Syrian diaspora see the need to promote the integration of Syrian newcomers in Europe, to prevent a loss of skills, and further frustration and disillusion. Human capital development of displaced Syrians, through the promotion of education, professional training and labour market integration, can help to build a firm basis of skills, that can be applied to the reconstruction of Syria once the violent conflict has come to an end, either through return or transnational practices of the diaspora. In particular, organisations in Sweden and Denmark tend to focus on activities related to the host country than to origin country, by mainly being engaged in promoting integration and strengthening the social and cultural ties among Syrians living abroad. In contrast, organisations in Switzerland mainly focus on the Syrian context, by providing humanitarian aid or advocating for a political solution to the conflict. While promoting integration also plays a role in the context of Germany, the UK and France, Syrian diaspora organisations there are equally involved in the Syrian context. Through their engagement in Syria and the neighbouring countries, Syrian diaspora organisations not only alleviate the suffering of those most affected by the conflict through the provision of humanitarian aid but also contribute to the creation of local structures in more development-orientated projects in health, education, infrastructure and gender equality. These structures can provide important conditions for future return and reintegration of the displaced population.

Institutional framework and funding mechanisms: Both in Denmark and Sweden respondents highlighted that they receive (small-scale) funding for their activities related to integration and culture, whereas in particular in the Swedish case it was mentioned that founding seems not available for activities related to the Syrian context. In contrast, respondents in Germany and the UK, mentioned that founding is difficult to access for their integrational projects, while the German Development Cooperation has offered targeted founding and trainings for humanitarian and development-orientated projects. Hence, the institutional framework and funding mechanisms in the host country not only influence the capacity to contribute to peace and development in the country of origin, but also tend shape the focus and the activities of diaspora organisation.

Asylum and integration policies: In particular, in the case of highly restrictive asylum and integration policies in Denmark, the diaspora is seeking to reduce the gap between the enormous needs of the Syrian newcomers and what they perceive as the lacking support from the Danish government. Conversely, supporting the integration of Syrian newcomers seems not to be the focus of Syrian diaspora organisations in Switzerland. While the needs of this population are acknowledged by the respondents, they perceive that the Swiss government and civil society provide enough support for their integrational process.

History and composition of the immigrant population: In terms of size, both Denmark and Switzerland, which hosted the smallest share of the Syrian pre-conflict immigrant population, are characterised as having the smallest organized diasporas, when compared to other selected destination countries. Syrian immigrants in these countries, may still lack the capacity, such as language skills, as well as financial, personal, and political security to become collectively engaged, while Syrians in the other destinations may be well established and equipped to organise.

However, it should be emphasised that there are complex and dynamic interactions and processes between different factors at various levels, calling for a deeper analysis of patterns, dimensions, linkages and mechanisms of collective action of diaspora groups and their diverse roles in conflicts.

## 5.6. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Over the past years, the Syrian diaspora groups across Europe showed strong commitment in alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people, in building a strong basis for social change and political transformation, and in addressing the needs of Syrian newcomers in the host countries. As transnational social agents, Syrian diaspora groups play an important role in matching resources across spaces and of growing the network of institutions and individuals who work in (post-) conflict environments. Given their intimate knowledge of the country, access to diverse social networks, and higher risk thresholds, Syrian diaspora groups are able to work in areas that the international community is either unable or unwilling to. In the host country, Syrian diaspora organisations serve as a trusted point of contact for newcomers and facilitate their first orientation in the new “home”. Through their access and context-specific knowledge about structures in the host country, organisations are able to support the inclusion of newcomers in the labor market, education and society. Further, Syrian organisations contribute to the inclusion of newcomers, by raising awareness, lobbying and advocacy for human rights and against marginalization and discrimination of refugees. Moreover, many of the organisations have a strong desire for professionalisation, yet they also face many challenges that stop them from reaching their full potential.

While political opportunities varied across the countries, one of the major challenges frequently identified in the different destinations was the lack of capacity, in particular among organisations which were more recently established. Most associations have very limited access to public funding and are relying on small budgets originating, for most of them, from fundraising events and private donations. With too few donors, not enough funds, and quite irregular money flows, there is an increasing difficulty to broaden the scope of activities and to implement long-term action plans. A lack of strategic planning due to funding insecurity was also visible in the case of well-established, professionalised and institutionalised organisations, which



have sufficient resources for direct activities, but tend to lack structural core funding, given the project-based nature of many funding schemes.

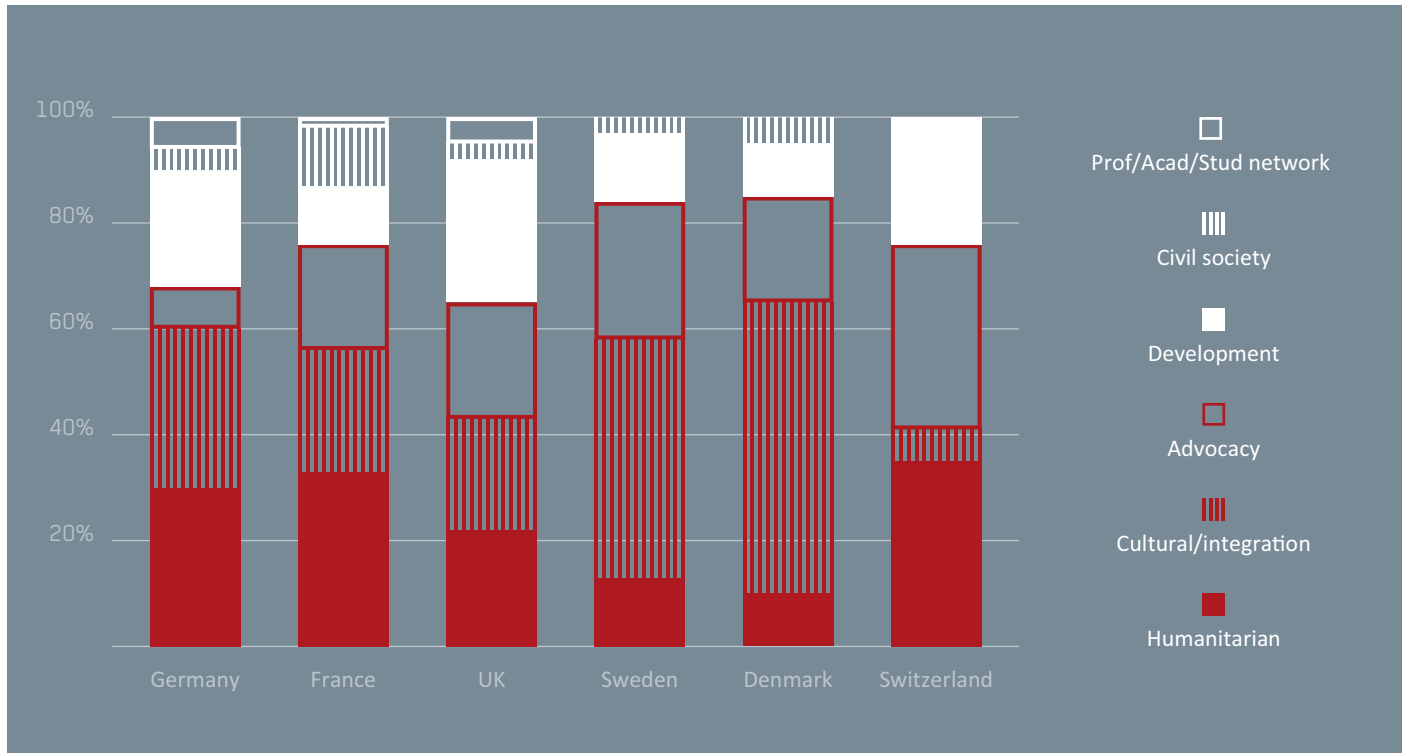
In addition to financial resources, some organisations see a great challenge in the loss of human capital. The fact that the Syrian conflict progresses with no end in sight causes despair, frustration and hopelessness, demotivating many Syrians to take action as it is perceived that the fate of their country is out of the hands of Syrians themselves. The difficulty in mobilising Syrians for collective action is further exacerbated by the general mistrust and fragmentation that continues to characterise relations among Syrians abroad. The lack of a culture of civil society and volunteering and of an experience with democracy in Syria is also seen as a major obstacle, as this prevents necessary open discussion among the Syrian civil society and a constructive approach to dealing with diversity. The different conflict narratives, aspirations, divergent interest and other potential lines of division within the Syrian diaspora should, however, not be considered as purely destructive but also as an integral part of social change and transformation. Despite the entrenched divides, many members of the Syrian diaspora emphasise the importance of establishing a culture of forgiveness and reconciliation, through the promotion of dialogue within communities across political, social and cultural divisions. Here, European host countries can provide a safe and neutral space for renegotiation of communal boundaries.

In the context of Syria, the complex conflict setting, with several regional battlefronts, and great numbers of armed actors affiliated to different fractions and with complex and fluid relationships, pose challenges to the realisation of diaspora activities in Syria. As a result of huge scale violence, organisations suffered great losses in local staff and volunteers, due to arrests, killings and forced displacement. While negotiations with actors, including military forces and non-state armed groups are essential to secure and sustain humanitarian access, respondents feel that these tend to risk the humanitarian principles of independence, neutrality and impartiality, leading to unintended politicisation of their humanitarian action

Moreover, the political and public discourse which almost exclusively focusses on security threats and terrorism is perceived as a major challenge to mobilise support by the broader public. On the one hand, this constrains the potential to raise donations within the host society, limiting the financial capacity of many organisations. In addition, one organisation stated that banks refused to open an account, due to counter-terrorism regulations and “de-risking” measures. This poses not just a practical challenge on the involvement, but also has unintended yet severe consequences for the people inside Syria, who highly depend on the financial contributions of the diaspora.



FIGURE 14: FIELDS OF ENGAGEMENT PER COUNTRY



**ADVOCACY**

Raising awareness, support the Syrian uprising through non-violent action, raising awareness on the situation of Syrian refugees in host country, promotion of human rights.

**CIVIL SOCIETY**

Promote civic engagement in Syria and in host countries, promote capacity of Syrian civil society actors through networking, human resources development and other forms of capacity building programs.

**CULTURAL/INTEGRATION**

Promoting and cultivating (Syrian) identity, encourage cultural exchanges and deepen the relations between host country and Syria, services to refugees in form of education, legal advice, and language courses, community building through cultural events.

**DEVELOPMENT**

Long-term efforts to improve quality of life in economic, political and social sectors, e.g. projects promoting education, development and maintenance of the medical sector, livelihood support (micro-finance).

**HUMANITARIAN**

Short-term relief to prevent death, e.g. food and non-food items, health care, cash-transfers.

**PROFESSIONAL/ACADEMIC/STUDENT NETWORKS**

Pooling expertise of Syrians abroad in a specific field, promote cooperation between Syrian professionals and other professionals in host country or Syria, organisation of workshops, seminars and conferences.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1. RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO ENGAGE WITH AND SUPPORT THE SYRIAN DIASPORA

Overall, the study has shown that the Syrian diaspora groups in the six destination countries selected for this study show strong willingness and potential to address the various aspects of the Syrian crisis and to contribute to peace, reconstruction and development of the country of origin and the integration of displaced Syrians in the host countries. At the same time, several challenges have been highlighted throughout this study, which prevent the Syrian diaspora from achieving its full potential. In order to promote constructive engagement of the Syrian diaspora in Europe and fruitful cooperation with the MENA Durable Solutions Platform, Danish Refugee Council and other relevant stakeholders, the following recommendations have been identified regarding how to engage with and support the Syrian diaspora.

#### 1) A CONFLICT SENSITIVE APPROACH TO DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT

As shown throughout the study, there exist different and sometimes competing interests, aspirations and divergent opinions related to the settlement of the conflict among Syrians abroad, which tend to reflect the societal divisions and conflict lines on the ground in Syria. Hence, in the context of fragile- and conflict-affected states, and given the potential ambiguity of diaspora engagement in such settings, development cooperation needs to be aware of how to best engage with a diverse range of actors. On the one hand, including individuals of different (ethnic, political, religious) backgrounds in programs targeting the diaspora helps to gather different perceptions, experiences, and aspirations and provides a space for potentially marginalised sections of the diaspora to express their voice and foster their actions. On the other hand, underlying conflict lines might hamper effective and constructive program implementation and may in the worst case contribute to further entrenchment of societal divisions among diaspora groups. To best harness these diasporas' potential and to limit the risk of doing harm, actors should make a conscious decision to opt for either a selective or an inclusive approach when engaging with diaspora groups, and be aware of each approach's limitation(s). Choosing an inclusive approach, engagement should allow time and space for trust and confidence building, and not only be results-driven. Hence, long-term efforts by international organisation/NGOs and governments, who want to involve the Syrian diaspora, are needed to build a trustful and lasting relationship. Projects, in which different groups and members of the Syrian diaspora are involved, need to create a space for reflecting on strategies and joint future actions (rather than reactions), to generate sustainable impacts.

#### 2) STRENGTHEN EFFORTS OF THE SYRIAN DIASPORA THROUGH THE PROMOTION OF NETWORKS WITHIN EACH DESTINATION COUNTRY AND IN THE TRANSNATIONAL SPHERE

As fragmentation and several lines of conflicts within the diaspora have been identified as major obstacles for diaspora mobilisation, there is a clear need to promote networking, cooperation and dialogue among Syrian diaspora groups in different destinations and across Europe. Promoting networks within the diaspora would yield several benefits since these can promote peer-to-peer learning, facilitate dialogue between the various organisations and strengthens the advocacy efforts through the formation of a collective voice. Given DRC's experience in working with diaspora groups from conflict-affected countries, the organisation could act as a focal point for setting up a platform, which connects the different diaspora organisations and initiatives across Europe. Building a lasting and trustful relationship and using a conflict

sensitive approach are important aspects of ensuring the sustainability of networks and cooperation. In addition, the implementation of workshops that deal with fragmentation within the diaspora by promoting reconciliation efforts within the community are recommended. For this, facilitators should be formally trained in conflict resolution and mediation.

### **3) INCLUDE SYRIAN DIASPORA IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES**

Moreover, there is a clear need to include Syrian diaspora groups in political negotiations and peace talks, as the perceived lack of political influence was identified as a demotivating factor for Syrians to shape their home country's future. For more than six years, members of the Syrian diaspora have advocated for democracy, freedom and human rights. The vibrant Syrian civil society that emerged in Europe since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict can make valuable contributions to a peaceful transition in the country. At the same time, increasing mistrust among the Syrian diaspora towards the international community can be observed, as the diaspora feels that their voice is being neglected in the international discourse.

### **4) PROVIDE TARGETED FUNDING STREAMS FOR DIASPORA ORGANISATIONS**

Many organisations expressed the lack of financial resources as a major challenge for their engagement. Hence, funding-schemes targeting small diaspora organisations should be promoted in each host country. Moreover, including elements of inter-organisation collaboration as a requirement in the funding-scheme could encourage cooperation either among Syrian diaspora organisations, or with other civil society actors in the host country. This would foster mutual learning among diaspora organisations as well as the inclusion of Syrian diaspora organisations into the host civil society. Several government and civil society initiatives have been identified across the selected countries, which could be expanded to target Syrian diaspora organisations in the different host countries or Europe-wide.

### **5) SUPPORT DIASPORA ORGANISATIONS' CAPACITY TO DEVELOP AND MANAGE PROJECTS, FUNDRAISE AND COLLABORATE WITH EACH OTHER**

Next to availability of targeted financial resources, many diaspora organisations would benefit from training in fundraising (including a focus on institutional funding mechanisms), project management, strategic planning and legal issues related to registering and organising the life of an association. Moreover, efforts should be made to promote the development of negotiation, communication and mediation skills to encourage a working environment among different diaspora organisations and initiatives in which diversity and differences are approached constructively. Here a selective approach for capacity workshops seems best suited, in which participants are chosen based on the needs identified. More professionalised and experienced diaspora organisations could be involved as facilitators to promote peer-to-peer learning.

### **6) SUPPORT ADVOCACY EFFORTS OF THE SYRIAN DIASPORA**

A lack of advocacy power was identified as a major weakness, as it limits the political influence of the Syrian diaspora across Europe. DRC could foster networks between diaspora groups and other relevant stakeholders in the host countries and internationally, to spread the voice and demands of Syrian diaspora groups on various platforms. The Durable Solutions Platform and DRC could support and promote lobbying and advocacy efforts of the Syrian diaspora, through facilitating networks and contacts with the international community and developing advocacy papers presenting diaspora recommendations on key topics (local integration, voluntary return, conflict resolution, etc.). Herein, DRC and other stakeholders could collaborate with already existing diaspora networks, such as We exist!.

## 6.2. RECOMMENDATIONS SPECIFIC TO DURABLE SOLUTIONS TO SYRIAN DISPLACEMENT

Next to providing a general overview of mobilisation patterns of the Syrian diaspora in the six selected destination countries, the study aimed at examining the perceptions of the Syrian diaspora on the main challenges Syrians are facing in finding long-term solutions to their displacement. With regard to this the following recommendations have been identified:

### 1) PROMOTE EFFORTS BY THE SYRIAN DIASPORA TO STRENGTHEN LOCAL STRUCTURES

The current debate on return, that often at least implicitly carries a notion of obligation, needs to be transformed into a rights-based discourse. Many Syrians expressed a strong desire to return and to contribute to the rebuilding of the country. Yet at this stage of the conflict, with high levels of instability and insecurity, absence of essential freedoms and human rights, and a lack of infrastructure for a decent life, sustainable return cannot be realised in the near future. At the same time, many diaspora organisations already contribute to the strengthening of local structures, by being engaged in projects, that foster various fields of development such as education, health, gender equality, civil society and livelihood opportunities among others. Offering financial support to those diaspora organisations would be one way to contribute to ensuring a sustainable future, voluntary return and integration of the displaced population.

### 2) SUPPORT HUMAN CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

As Syrians in Europe need to be prepared to rebuild their country once the conflict has ended, integration and human capacity building are important measures in order to ensure that Syrians are equipped with the necessary skills to do so. Human capacity development should not only take into account the needs of the host countries, but also be based on a sophisticated analysis of the skills required in the Syrian context. This would facilitate the economic reintegration upon return, and increase the potential for transnational engagement.

### 3) PROMOTE A CHANGE OF THE DISCOURSE ON INTEGRATION

While supporting Syrians towards constructive engagement in their country of origin today and after a potential future return is essential, the right to remain, integration opportunities and a welcoming culture for those seeking protection in Europe should also be promoted. The European discourse and approach to integration is often perceived and understood as assimilation by many Syrians, posing a threat to their culture and identity. Therefore, encouraging a more inclusive discourse of integration and civic engagement, as well as including constructive dialog about the aspects of culture and identity in the integration process are important measures towards preventing segregation or radicalization of Syrian refugees on the long-term. DRC could foster networks between Syrian diaspora groups and other relevant stakeholders in the host countries and internationally to support advocacy of the Syrian diaspora. Moreover, by collaborating with Syrian organisations active in integration, DSP and DRC can support the efforts of the Syrian diaspora to contribute to integration, civic engagement and human capacity development.

### 4) PROVIDING TARGET SUPPORT FOR NEWCOMERS

Many integration programs in the selected European host countries are often limited to aspects related to system integration, like language training and job market inclusion. Within the integration process, refugees are often treated the same way as immigrants who decided voluntarily to leave their countries and prepared to integrate, not taking into consideration their psychological situation. Here, more psychological support programs for refugees and trauma-sensitive approaches are necessary for successful integration.

## **5) INVOLVING THE SYRIAN DIASPORA IN THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF INTEGRATION POLICIES**

Many Syrian diaspora organisations across Europe serve as a first contact points for newcomers, helping them to settle in the host society. Given their own migration or flight experience, members of Syrian diaspora organisations tend to have both intercultural and linguistic competences, and are, hence, more aware of the diverse needs and challenges faced by Syrian newcomers. In addition to context-specific knowledge of the host country, these skills help to build a bridge between the needs of Syrian newcomers and support structures offered by the respective governments and civil society actors. Involving the Syrian diaspora directly in integration measurements will therefore enable more targeted and effective support. For example, providing training for Syrian community leaders in legal aid related to family reunification forms, the asylum process, as well as education and work-related issues, could ensure that newcomers are informed about their rights and duties.









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## APPENDIX A

Code	Gender	Main organisational focus	Reason for migration	Year of arrival in HC	Place Date
CH-1	Male	Humanitarian, development	Political asylum	1979	Geneva June 2017
CH-2	Male	Development (education)	Education	2010	Phone July 2017
CH-3	Male	Humanitarian	Education	2010	Phone August 2017
D-1	Male	Development (Education)	Education	2003	Phone Oct. 2016
D-2a	Male	Civil society, Political	Education	2001	Dusseldorf Nov. 2016
D-2b	Female	Civil society, Political	-	Born in Germany	Dusseldorf Nov. 2016
D-3	Male	Humanitarian aid, Development	-	Born in Germany	Skype Nov. 2016
D-4	Female	Key informant interview	-	-	Berlin Nov. 2016
D-5	Male	Political representative	-	Born in Germany	Berlin Nov. 2016
D-6a	Male	Civil society	Political asylum	2011	Berlin Nov. 2016
D-6b	Male	Civil society	Political asylum	2015	Berlin Nov. 2016
D-7	Female	Development (Women empowerment), Civil society Political	Political asylum	2013	Berlin Nov. 2016
D-8	Male	Humanitarian aid/Integration	Education	2000	Berlin Nov. 2016
D-9	Male	Development (Education), Humanitarian aid	Education	1987	Berlin Nov. 2016
D-10	Male	Civil society, Political	Education	2011	Berlin Nov. 2016
D-11	Male	Civil society/Integration/ Political	Education	1990	Phone Nov. 2016
D-12	Male	Development	Personal & Work	2012	Leipzig Nov. 2016
D-13	Male	Integration/Cultural	Better & secure life	1994	Löhne Nov. 2016
D-14	Male	Humanitarian aid/ Integration/ Development	Education	1991	Darmstadt Nov. 2016
D-15	Male	Integration/Cultural	Security	1978	Frankfurt Nov. 2016
D-16	Male	Humanitarian aid	Work	1976	Phone Nov. 2016
D-17	Male	Humanitarian aid	Education	1975	Phone Dec. 2016

Code	Gender	Main organisational focus	Reason for migration	Year of arrival in HC	Place Date
D-18	Male	Civil society/political	Political asylum & Personal	2013	Phone Dec. 2016
DK-1	Male	Culture/Integration	Political asylum	2015	Skype June 2017,
DK-2	Male	Culture/Integration	Political asylum	2015	Copenhagen June 2017
DK-3	Male	Culture/Integration	Political asylum	2014	Skype June 2017
DK-4	Male	Culture/Integration	Political asylum	2013	Skype June 2017
DK-5	Female	Culture/Integration	Family	2001/2002	Copenhagen June 2017
DK-6	Male	Advocay/Media	Family & Education	1987/1988	Copenhagen June 2017
DK-7	Male	Culture/Integration	Political asylum	2014	Skype June 2017
FR-1	Female	Advocacy/Civil Society	Political asylum	1984	Paris May 2017
FR-2	Female	Humanitarian/Cultural, Integration	Education	2000	Paris May 2017
FR-3	Male	Development, Humanitarian, Advocacy, Cultural/Integration, Civic Society	Education	2012	Paris May 2017
FR-4	Female	Cultural/Integration	Education	1987	Paris May 2017
FR-5	Female	Advocacy, Cultural/integration, Humanitarian	-	Born in France	Paris May 2017
FR-6	Female	Humanitarian	Personal	2009	Paris May 2017
FR-7	Female	Advocacy, Cultural/Integration, Development, Humanitarian	-	Born in France	Paris June 17
FR-8	Female	Advocacy, Cultural/Integration	Education	1981	Paris June 2017
FR-9	Female	Civil society, Development, Humanitarian, Advocacy	-	Born in France	Skype June 2017
FR-10	Male	Advocacy, Humanitarian, Cultural/Integration	Education	1976	Strasbourg June 2017
FR-11	Male	Advocacy, Cultural/Integration, Humanitarian	Political asylum	1998	Lyon June 2017
FR-12	Male	Civil society, humanitarian aid	Education	1971	Toulouse June 2017
FR-13	Male	Professional network (Medical)	Education	1978	Paris June 2017
SE-1	Female	Culture/intgeration	Conflict	1980	Phone May 2017
SE-2	Male	Culture/intgeration	Education	1977	Phone May 2017
SE-3	Male	Individual - Social worker	Security & Family	2015	Skype June 2017

Code	Gender	Main organisational focus	Reason for migration	Year of arrival in HC	Place Date
SE-4	Female	Individual - Project Developer- Civil Society	Political asylum	2013	Stockholm June 2017
SE-5	Male	Individual - Social worker	Political asylum	2012	Stockholm June 2017
SE-6	Male	Individual - freelance musician - culture	Education	1999	Stockholm June 2017
SE-7	Male	Syrian politician (opposition)	Political asylum	1995	Stockholm June 2017
SE-8	Female	Culture/intgeration	Conflict	1976	Stockholm June 2017
SE-9	Female	Advocay/Lobbying/ Raising awarness	Political asylum	1991	Stockholm June 2017
SE-10	Male	Civil Society, Advocacy	Political asylum	2014	Stockholm June 2017
SE-11	Male	Culture/intgeration	Work	1988	Stockholm June 2017
SE-12	Female	Culture/intgeration	Conflict	2014	Malmö June 2017
UK-1	Male	Humanitarian		Born in the UK	Skype April 2017
UK-2	Male	Integration, humanitarian	Education	2014	Skype April 2017
UK-3	Male	integration	Education	1988	Phone April 2017
UK-4	Male	individually engaged	Education	2010	Skype April 2017
UK-5	Male	individually engaged	Education	2003	Skype April 2017
UK-6	Male	Integration	Conflict	2015	Cardiff June 17
UK-7	Male	Cultural	family	1980	London August 2017
UK-8	Male	Humanitarian, integration	Work	2015	Manchester August 2017
UK-9	Male	Humanitarian	Education	2009	Skype September 2017
UK-10	Female	Development	Education	2015	Phone September 2017
UK-11	Female	Development	Education	2014	Phone September 2017





# APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

QUESTIONNAIRE IDENTIFICATION	
x.1 Questionnaire Number	
x.2 Date	
x.4 Location interview	
x.6 Organisation name	
x.7 Organisation contact person	
x.8 Contact person phone number	
x.9 Contact person email address	
x.10 Organisation mailing address	
x.11 Consent to share contact details with DRC?	Yes / No

## Interviewer introduction

Thank you very much for speaking with me. I am a researcher from Maastricht University/United Nations University-MERIT in the Netherlands. We recently got commissioned by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) to conduct a mapping study on the Syrian diaspora in Denmark, Germany, France, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The aim of the study is to provide a capacity assessment of, amongst other attributes, the strength, purpose and aims/objectives of Syrian diaspora organisations in order to identify areas of potential collaboration. Specifically, the mapping and study will be used by DRC to engage with relevant groups of Syrians (associations and individual) across Europe for consultations on future solutions scenarios for Syrian refugees, as well as to enable DRC's Diaspora Programme to develop activities specifically targeting the Syrian diaspora looking towards the reconstruction and development of Syria. One of this study's goals is to have a roster of diaspora and migrant organisations that can be used to foster participation in homeland development initiatives. Do I have your permission to share your contact details with DRC? Do I have the permission to record the interview? The audio file will be shared only within the research team.

## A. Introductory question

First, I would like to start with a more personal question

- 1) Can you tell me a bit more about your migration experience?
  - a) How was your life before you left Syria?
  - b) What year did you migrate to [Country of residence]?
  - c) What were the reasons for your migration?

## B. Syrian Diaspora

Now, I would like to ask you some questions on the Syrian diaspora.

- 1) Can you tell me some details about the Syrian diaspora [Country of residence]?

- a) Is it homogeneous or heterogeneous (in terms of socio-economic factors, ethnicity, political aspirations and religion)?
- b) Are there strong ties/networks within the Syrian diaspora in Host Country, and in other countries? [What is the role of ethnicity and religion, if any?]
- c) What is the relationship to Syria? Are there strong connections? What is the relationship to the state?
- d) How do you perceive the “evolution” of the Syrian Diaspora since you’ve lived in [Country of residence]?

### **C. Integration and Return**

- 1) In your opinion and experiences, what are the motivations and perceptions of Syrians in Germany with regard to integration?
- 2) What do you consider integration? And do you think this is important?
- 3) Do you personally feel integrated? Why/Why not?
- 4) In your opinion and experiences, how are the perceptions and intentions of Syrians living in Germany towards returning to Syria? Do people see return as a viable option? Do people want to return?
- 5) What would motivate you personally to return? Or what do you think motivates people to return to Syria?
- 6) What could be potential policies for assisting people in the return? Where do you see the role of the Syrian diaspora in facilitating return?

### **D. Basic Organisational Information**

Now, I would like to ask some basic information about your organisation—about how it started, why it started, and its registration status.

- 1) What motivated you to become engaged?
- 2) In what year was this organisation established? [Potential follow-up/prompts: Have you been with the organisation for much of/not much of its history? Have you seen it change much in the time you’ve been here?]
- 3) Why was the organisation established, and why at that time?
- 4) What would you say is the goal or the “core mission” of the organisation? Has it changed over time?
- 5) What kind of organisation do you consider [name of organisation]? For instance, would you consider it a humanitarian organisation, political organisation, a professional network, a religious organisation, etc.?
- 6) Is your organisation registered?
- 7) What is the size of your organisation’s membership (excluding staff)? Does this include both active and inactive members? (What is the size of both groups?)
- 8) Do you have paid staff? Or is it run on voluntary basis?
- 9) Is the size of your membership consistent, or does it fluctuate?

10) What is the composition of your membership? What is the distribution in terms of:

- a) Gender
- b) Age
- c) Generation (e.g., first, second, etc.)
- d) Ethnic group
- e) Other characteristic [Education or skill level]
- f) Also more recently migrated members?

11) How is your organisation financed?

12) Is the organisation part of any larger network of organisations, like an umbrella organisation for all Syrian diaspora organisations, or a transnational migrant platform, or something similar? Why or why not?

### **E. Current Organisation Activities in Conflict**

Now, let's talk about what your organisation does, about what kinds of activities or events your organisation organises or takes part in. I'm also interested in your view on the conflict.

1) In your opinion, how would a peaceful Syria look like and how could peace be achieved?

- a) How do you perceive the role of the Syrian diaspora?

2) What kind of activities and projects does your organisation implement both Syrian and in [Country of residence]? (Please, describe all activities in detail)

3) Have these core activities changed over time?

4) Where do these activities take place? For instance, are some activities run exclusively from Country of destination while others take place in Syria or in the refugee camps?

5) Why have these activities become the focus of your organisation? What inspired these activities?

6) Aside from these "core activities", what other sorts of actions or events does your organisation take part in? [Alternate formulation: In a typical year, what activities will your organisation have carried out?]

7) Does your organisation raise collective remittances? [Prompt: if yes, how is the money transferred to Syria/refugee camps, challenges?]

### **F. Cooperation**

1) Do you cooperate with other Syrian diaspora organisations from [Country of residence] or other countries of residence? Why or why not? If yes: Could you give me the names of the organisations?

2) How does your organisation interact with stakeholders in Syria/neighbouring countries?

- a) What kind of Stakeholders are these?
- b) Does your organisation support any specific group in Syria?

3) Does the government in [Country of residence] have programs in place to facilitate cooperation with stakeholders in Syria/neighbouring countries?

4) Do you see potentials for cooperation with Danish Refugee Council and their durable solution platform?

a) If yes, through which means/forms?

### **G. Main Challenges and future Plans**

Finally, I would like to talk about the future of your organisation—about what is on your agenda for the coming months and years.

1) After this six years of conflict, what is the key driver that motivates you to continue your engagement? What would you like to see the organisation achieve in the future? [For instance, what are its short/medium/long-term goals?]

2) What are its key challenges/obstacles now and in the future?

Is there any other important information, you think I should know?

# CONTACT

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