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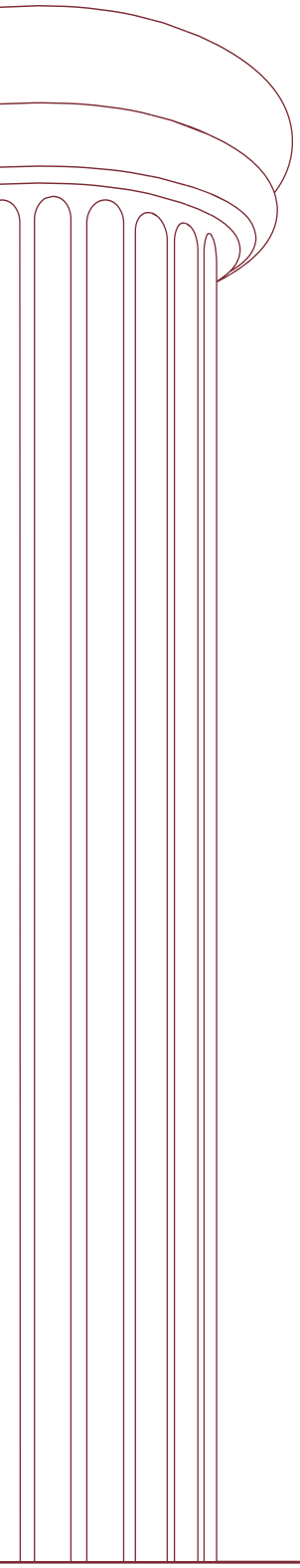

Linda Mattes

Syrian Civil Society Organisations in Lebanon

Assessment and Analysis of Existing Organisations and the Conditions under which they Operate

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1. Introduction[1]

1.1 Relevance

> "We are resilient people. We still believe in human dignity and in a better future for ourselves and others. We have a cause, and it is a just cause. I think that the Syrian revolution liberated us from an inferiority complex we had toward the other people of the world. We don't wait for others to solve our problems now, or to define for us what is just and what is fair. We are struggling for our emancipation, without illusions."[2]
>
> (Yassin al-Haj Saleh, 3 April 2017)

The Syrian cause is a just one, indeed. The totalitarian Syrian regime and its security apparatus, which have over decades been enforcing emergency laws, banning public meetings and restricting free speech, put any Syrian who might be considered critical of the government at the risk of arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and torture and death in detention.[3] Any attempt at political or civic activism has been a dangerous and courageous endeavour, as is evident from the crackdown on movements like the Damascus Spring, which evolved after Bashar al-Assad assumed Syria's presidency in 2000.[4] Furthermore, the subsequent demands for political reforms – the peaceful protests emerging in 2011 also known as the Syrian Revolution – were brutally repressed to an extent that the country has been torn by war ever since.[5] What evolved is the largest displacement crisis since World War II.[6] Hence the Syrian cause came to mean the protection and support of its (displaced) people and their basic rights.[7] Syrians[8] are mainly hosted by their neighbouring countries, while Lebanon is a particularly

[1] Acknowledgements to Zeina, Lorna, Ameenah & for transnational solidarity. Sincere thanks to the interviewees for taking their time and sharing their expertise. Thanks for all the valuable advice of the team of FES, Hozan, Caro and more. And to Beirut, for her hospitality with a distinct Syrian flavour.

[2] Yassin al-Haj Saleh, as cited in: Hussain/ Hisham (2016). Yassin al-Haj Saleh is a prominent Syrian intellectual and dissident who had been jailed for 16 years as a student activist in Hafez al-Assad's time, and whose activism in the current uprising eventually exiled him to Turkey. cf. ibid.

[3] Cf. Amnesty International (2017); Cambanis (2007); Human Rights Watch (2015).

[4] The Damascus Spring was a movement in which discussion forums, initiated by public political figures, demanded political reforms. They emerged when Bashar al-Assad promised reforms, after he assumed the presidency following his father's death. The Damascus Spring introduced the term "civil society" (mujtama' madani) to Syria. Only after a few months, its leaders were arrested and discussion forums were banned. This had the effect that Syrian society from then on understood "civil society" as opposed to the regime, and at the same time the regime enforced additional repressive measures, even on protests such as against the US-American invasion in Iraq. cf. Khalaf/ Ramadan/ Stolleis (2014), pp. 7-8; Pollard (2014), p. 63.

[5] Various warring parties commit war crimes in Syria, with al-Assad's government and his allies being one of the deadliest forces; besieging cities, targeting medical facilities and aid convoys, and using chemical weapons. cf. Goldman (2017).

[6] Cf. Reybet-Degat (2016), p. 62.

[7] Therefore, when this paper refers to the Syrian cause, it means these two dimensions; the struggle against a totalitarian regime, and the demands to protect and provide for its population in all of the Syrian diaspora.

[8] The term "Syrians" in this paper refers to everyone who identifies as Syrian or a "hyphenated" identity, such as Syrian-Palestinian, or who does not identify as Syrian but is a Syrian citizen residing or having resided in Syria and is or was therefore subjected to the same circumstances of a repressive state and a brutal war. When referring to the "Syrian Community," this paper mostly means the population of Syrians in Lebanon in direct relation to the civil society which represents it, if not specified otherwise as the "larger Syrian community," which refers the diaspora.

interesting case, because both countries have a history of migration and occupation.[9] Lebanon – a fragile state where one out of four people is a refugee – struggles with the impact of the increase in population.[10] Its already scarce resources are further strained, having to provide for both Syrians and Lebanese, and the refugees' presence exacerbates the domestic political situation.[11] When looking to the international community for assistance, Syrians are stalled while regional and international political players negotiate over their heads. Although their situation in Lebanon is a trying one – perhaps particularly because of that – the country witnesses the evolution of a new Syrian civil society: By means of civil society organisations (CSOs), which can include loose community groups as much as professional non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Syrians can take a stand for their own interests in public life.[12] As al-Haj Saleh proclaims, Syrians are struggling for their emancipation, and organising themselves in Lebanese exile might present an opportunity for them to achieve it.

1.2 Research Interest and Current State of Research

As the large-scale displacement of Syrians persists since 2011, plenty of research has been done on Syrians in Lebanon. However, much of this is grey literature, especially by civil society, think tanks and agencies of the United Nations (UN). Reports conducted by the UN or international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) mostly view Syrians solely as refugees, analysing their vulnerabilities and needs. Other research has been done on the effects of the Syrian presence on the Lebanese economy, labour market and fragile state. The evolution of a growing Syrian civil society did not go unnoticed, but mappings and directories do not focus on the Lebanese context.[13] One extensive mapping by Citizens for Syria e.V. focuses on the Syrian civil society inside the country and its neighbouring countries, but its results are hard to break down on the Lebanese context only.[14] Only newspaper articles and one Master's thesis could be found on Syrian civil society organisations in Lebanon specifically. The thesis by Welander mostly focuses on the role these CSOs will play in a future Syria.[15] However, both Welander and Citizens for Syria e.V. provide valuable quantitative data and identify challenges posed to Syrian CSOs. Welander and sources like Mansour and Harling, Simon and Berthier have discussed how the international community and its donor regime fail local civil society

[9] Syria hosted Lebanese refugees after the Lebanese Civil War broke out in 1975, and Syrian troops entered the country as part of a peacekeeping mission. The troops ended up staying in Lebanon for 25 years, even after the war ended in 1990, continuously being in control of the Lebanese government. cf. The New York Times (2005).
[10] Cf. Girard (2016), p. 11; Reybet-Degat (2016), p. 62.
[11] Cf. ibid.
[12] This definition was adapted by the official definition of civil society by the World Bank: Civil society refers "to the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) therefore refer to a wide of array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations." cf. The World Bank (2013).
[13] Cf. Citizens for Syria. e.V. (2015); Hamzet Wasel (2017).
[14] Cf. Citizens for Syria e.V. (2015).
[15] Cf. Welander (2015).

actors.[16] Therefore this research aims to focus on the resilience of Syrian CSOs in Lebanon by bringing out their strategies in overcoming these challenges. Furthermore, no recent literature could be found on the effects of the 2015 large-scale migration to Europe on Syrian CSOs in Lebanon, so another focus of this research is to analyse how they experience migration. Hence, this paper considers all the aforementioned research as a background, and aims to contribute something new by considering Syrians in Lebanon as agents of their own cause:

The purpose of this paper is to analyse Syrian civil society organisations with regards to the conditions under which they operate and the identities, shapes, human resources, and strategies they adopt in the face of these circumstances.

1.3 Structure of the Paper

The first part of this paper gives a theoretical background of reasons for nonprofit organisations (NPOs) to emerge and of the roles they take.[17] To explain the emergence of Syrian civil society organisations in Lebanon, this chapter details the failures of the Lebanese market and state, of the international community and the non-profit sector in the Syrian-Lebanese context. By identifying the needs of Syrians in Lebanon that remain unmet, it suggests which roles their civil society organisations might take. The paper then goes on to define what qualifies as a Syrian civil society organisation in Lebanon and verifies which of the suggested roles are actually assumed by Syrian CSOs in Lebanon through giving a basic quantitative overview and typology of the sector.

The main body of the paper begins with chapter 4; thoroughly examining the political, legal, economic, and societal context in which these Syrian CSOs operate. Chapter 5 then goes on to discuss how the nine organisations interviewed for this research operate under the aforementioned circumstances, which identities and shapes they assume and of which human resources they are constituted. The analysis puts special attention on the many original strategies identified throughout the interviews, which the CSOs use to overcome challenges they are presented with, and on the capacities they build among Syrians in Lebanese exile. After discussing the interviewees' visions for the future of their organisations, concluding remarks will summarise the main findings, reflect on the research, and suggest potential scenarios of Syrian civil society in Lebanon.

[16] Cf. ibid; Mansour (2017); Harling/ Simon/ Berthier (2017).
[17] The terms nonprofit organisation and non-governmental organisation will be used interchangeably in this paper, unless pointed out differently.

2. Methodology

The theoretical background of this paper is based on core third sector theories which are then applied to the Syrian-Lebanese context, derived from literature review. This review relies on grey literature such as newspaper articles and civil society reports, as it references current events and developments. Subsequently, a quantitative overview and typology of Syrian CSOs in Lebanon has been drafted by consulting different civil society sources. These non-academic publications, such as directories and mappings, use different parameters and diverge severely in their findings, as the very new Syrian civil society is subject to constant development. In spite of its very limited validity, this quantitative data was included to give a basic idea of the size and scope of the sector and identify certain tendencies.

The main body of the paper is based on the conduct and analysis of nine qualitative interviews. The interviews have all been conducted with representatives and former employees of Syrian CSOs operating in Lebanon in October and November of 2017 in Beirut, Lebanon. The nine interviewed organisations were chosen based on field research in Beirut within the Syrian CSOs' network, with the aim to cover a range of fields of activity, geographical scopes, legal forms and degrees of formality. Former employees were included as they still present valuable input on the sector and can elaborate especially on the factors of migration and turnover. As the context is a very sensitive one, and in order to allow confidential information to be shared, the anonymity of the interviewees and their organisations has been preserved.

The interviews were explorative, open-ended and semi-structured. Guiding questions were established on the basis of desk-based research of the Lebanese and international context in which (Syrian) CSOs manoeuvre. The interviews aimed to identify which of these context factors are most decisive to the CSOs, which were then thoroughly examined in chapter 4 by means of a literature review. The interviews intended to better understand the variety of identities and shapes assumed by Syrian CSOs under these conditions. Interviewees were given the chance to elaborate extensively on the topics most significant to them, while an emphasis was put on the CSOs' human resources in the Syrian-Lebanese context of displacement and migration. The research does not mean to be representative of the whole sector due to the limited sample size, but rather to identify trends.

3. Emergence and Extent of Syrian Civil Society in Lebanon

3.1 Responsibilities for Syrian Needs in Lebanon

3.1.1 Failures of the Lebanese Market and State

The theories of market and state failure imply that NPOs emerge as service providers in order to fill gaps which are left by market as well as state.[18] In Lebanon, services like shelter, health and education are largely privatised.[19] This means that market mechanisms would ensure their distribution. However, the Lebanese market entails exclusive agencies and de-facto oligopolies while it lacks a strong judicial system law to regulate competition and cartel agreements.[20] Additionally, markets can fail when consumers mistrust offers from private suppliers as there is an information asymmetry about the quality of services.[21] This applies especially to consumers in precarious situations, such as refugees, who are in danger of being exploited for profit maximisation. As Lebanon has been struggling with increasing living costs since before 2011, this is aggravated by the additional demand of Syrians with very limited means. Prices of low-income housing, food, medicine, water and fuel have been increasing constantly, while Syrians face poor service quality and harassment.[22] To meet their basic needs, many deplete their savings and contract debts to such an extent that by the end of 2015the percentage of Syrian households living below the poverty line had reached 70%.[23] In this vulnerable position, families might turn towards negative coping mechanisms, taking children out of school for child labour and marriage.[24]

In the face of this limited economic power, entering the labour market to improve their living conditions presents a convincing step for many Syrians in Lebanon. However, the Lebanese government heavily restricts Syrians' access to the labour market to prevent labour competition and not least because having a job can encourage refugees to stay even after their need for protection from conflict has ended.[25] Such restraint causes Syrians to work unskilled jobs in the informal sector, where they earn significantly less than the national minimum wage even though they tend to work more hours per week than Lebanese.[26] Keeping Syrians from providing for themselves means that the Lebanese government needs to secure their access to

[18] Cf. Salamon (1987), p. 35.
[19] 70 percent of Lebanese children attend private schools and over 86 percent of hospital beds are privately owned. cf. Culbertson/ Oliker/ Baruch/ Blum (2016), p. 35.
[20] Cf. Raman (2016), p. 14.
[21] Cf. Salamon (1987), p. 36.
[22] Cf. International Labour Organization Regional Office for the Arab States (2014), p. 39; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees/ United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2014), pp. 7-8.
[23] Cf. Errighi/ Griesse (2016), p. 20; Girard (2016), p. 11; Raman (2016), p. 11.
[24] Cf. Chatty (2016), p. 58; Reybet-Degat (2016), p. 62.
[25] Cf. Frangieh (2016), p. 40.
[26] 50 hours per week for Syrian male workers against the 48 hours average for Lebanese. The average monthly income for Syrian refugee workers was at LBP 418,000, the national minimum wage at LBP 675,000. cf. Errighi/ Griesse (2016), p. 20; Raman (2016), pp. 10-11.

affordable basic goods and services another way. However, Lebanon has one of the world's highest national debt ratios.[27] The country's already limited resources such as water and sewage facilities or education and healthcare services have been further strained by the refugees' demand.[28] Failure of the Lebanese state to provide services to meet the increased demand is what the original state failure theory by Weisbrod specifies as a quantitative shortage. The needs are identified but cannot be met due to insufficient means.[29] To meet these pressing demands, the Lebanese government needs to request funding from the international community.[30]

Beyond a shortage in provision of services and goods, the Lebanese state lacks an effective legal framework for asylum, not least as it has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention.[31] It adopts minimal and inconsistent protection measures; suspending deportations, yet tolerating temporary stay only on the condition of resettlement.[32] Through this form of tolerance, Syrian refugees are kept in a precarious state: More than half of them cannot renew their residence permits, which are issued only on a short-term basis and unsystematically, and the threat of arrest and deportation is upheld.[33] Exclusionary and dehumanising policies create an anti-Syrian climate and keep refugees from integrating into host communities.[34] Such strategies are used as a deterrent against potential refugees and an incentive for the international community to advance resettlement.[35] In a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), Lebanon has shifted the responsibility to protect refugees to the United Nations.[36] Through this alternative protection regime the Lebanese state assumes basic responsibilities on the condition of passing the long-term responsibility to the international community. [37] Meanwhile, Lebanon does not sufficiently protect refugees and their rights and struggles to both provide for them and to prevent the market from exploiting them both as consumers and as cheap labour.

3.1.2 Failures of the International Community of States

War-torn Syria and the concomitant large-scale displacement of Syrians call for transnational assistance. The UN is the supranational body which, on behalf of the international community, helps "parties in conflict make peace; […] and creating the conditions to allow peace to hold

[27] Lebanon's debt is the world's third highest in terms of debt-to-GDP ratio. cf. Barrington (2017).
[28] Cf. International Labour Organization Regional Office for the Arab States (2014), p. 39.
[29] Cf. Weisbrod (1977), as cited in: Badelt/ Pennerstorfer (2013), p. 109.
[30] $2.48 billion in the 2016 Lebanon Crisis Response Plan. cf. Girard (2016), p. 11.
[31] Cf. Frangieh (2016), p. 37.
[32] UNHCR has stopped registering Syrian refugees in May 2015 as Lebanon prohibited them to do so. cf. Frangieh (2016), pp. 38-39, 42.
[33] Cf. Frangieh (2016), pp. 39-40; Girard (2016), p. 12.
[34] Cf. Chatty (2016), p. 58.
[35] Cf. Frangieh (2016), p. 39.
[36] Cf. ibid. pp. 37-38.
[37] Cf. Frangieh (2016), p. 43.

and flourish."[38] However, the ineffective UN Security Council and failed diplomatic attempts to end or even defuse the war leave Syrians disillusioned and without trust in the international community's protection.[39] On top of that, the UN has lost credibility of its impartiality in the Syrian cause, as UN agencies in Syria were reported to employ and award procurement contracts to regime affiliates in 2016.[40] Another of the UN's purposes is to coordinate "humanitarian relief operations […] in areas beyond the relief capacity of national authorities alone."[41] As such, UNHCR in the above mentioned MoU accepts the obligation to resettle Syrians, whereas implementing this relies on the willingness of the individual states which fail to provide enough visa and family reunification opportunities.[42] Instead, UNHCR's focus is on providing humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees in the main three hosting countries Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan, not least to keep them within the region.[43] However, the billions of US dollars of financial aid provided by the international community still remain insufficient and unstable.[44] As an example, when in 2015 a deficit in funding severely reduced the output of food e-vouchers, many Syrians in Lebanon were left impoverished to a degree that made them lose faith and leave the region as a last resort.[45]

Hence, the international community avoids putting real efforts into political solutions on national and international levels and instead takes the easier and cheaper route by viewing the Syrian crisis solely through a humanitarian lens.[46] As refugees, with or without status, Syrians do not have voting power neither in Lebanon nor on an international level. Their limited political power and exclusion from decision-making give both Lebanon and donor states little reason to consider their input when determining how to respond to their needs. While the international community does assume responsibility in the face of the shortcomings of the Lebanese state, it is mostly responding to socio-economic needs as established in the MoU.[47] This constitutes a qualitative state failure on their side, which is specified as an unmet heterogeneity in demand.[48] It does not cover the full range of Syrian refugees' needs, such as demands for protection and a political solution, and leaves out certain demographic groups by focusing on the most vulnerable and other groups that match its own agenda.[49] Additionally, its humanitarian system

[38] UN (2017)
[39] Cf. Reybet-Degat (2016), p. 62.
[40] Cf. Mansour (2017), p. 14.
[41] UN (2017)
[42] Cf. Girard (2016), p. 12; Frangieh (2016), p. 39; Reybet-Degat p. 64.
[43] Cf. Chatty (2016), p. 57.
[44] Cf. Girard (2016), p. 11.
[45] Cf. Reybet-Degat (2016), p. 63.
[46] Cf. Mansour (2017), pp. 9, 14.
[47] Cf. Frangieh (2016), p. 40.
[48] Cf. James (1987), as cited in: Badelt/ Pennerstorfer (2013), p. 109.
[49] Davis argues that the term vulnerability is gendered, primarily considering groups such as female-headed households while for instance the fact that many Syrian non-combatant men are fleeing forced conscription does not influence donor policies. cf. Davis (2016), pp. 49, 54.

has been criticised for being too complex and centralised.[50] Therefore the UN's response is fragmentary and calls for a more thorough implementation.

Market and state failure can give rise to NPOs to fill gaps, but they can just as well be the preferred choice to supply goods or services, as is argued by Salamon's theory of Third-Party Government: States can avert their failure through partnerships with NPOs, providing funds to them to have goods and services delivered.[51] Indeed, for several decades the international donor community has increasingly preferred subcontracting to NPOs during humanitarian crises.[52] Salamon suggests that priorities in spending resources are ideally determined by a democratic political process while the actual implementation is done by a less bureaucratic entity in the field. In theory, service provision can become more efficient through competition over public funds while the partnerships involve blended roles and shared responsibilities that can cause problems of accountability and control.[53] Indeed, the UN-led humanitarian system's very own personnel has criticised it as a competition over limited resources of international governmental and non-governmental players with different agendas that leads to power struggles, a lack of coordination and inefficiencies.[54] It leaves quantitative shortages, owed to limited resources of donor countries and qualitative shortages due to donors' limited perspectives and own political interests. Both gaps are responded to by even more NPOs without UN mandates. How this vast landscape of nonprofit actors in Lebanon – subsidiaries and substitutes of the international community – still fails Syrians there will be analysed hereafter.

3.1.3 Failures of the Nonprofit Sector

The Three-Failures Theory suggests that the nonprofit sector is not the ultimate solution to market and government failure. It introduces the idea of voluntary failure, which has been specified by Salamon as philanthropic insufficiency, particularism, paternalism and amateurism. Philanthropic insufficiency addresses the limitation of resources which an NPO can generate by itself, resulting in inadequate, unreliable and fragmentary provision of resources. Philanthropic particularism means the failure to target the segments of a community which are not adequately represented in the NPO or not favoured by those in control of resources. This can result in selective responses to needs and also in inefficient duplication of services and waste of resources. Philanthropic paternalism implies that NPOs might respond to community needs in a patronising way; upholding the concept of charity and creating dependency. It also describes the decrease of democratic legitimation of third sector organisations, as a growing need for professionalism moves decision-making power from the community of volunteers and

[50] Cf. Mansour (2017), p. 10.
[51] Cf. Salamon (1987), p. 38.
[52] Cf. Makoba (2002).
[53] Cf. Salamon (1987), p. 38.
[54] Cf. Mansour (2017), pp. 8, 16.

members to those in control of resources.[55] All of these aspects of non-profit failure are well-established points of criticism of NPOs working with Syrians in Lebanon: Funds are insufficient and lead to rivalry among NPOs, which implement overlapping short-term programmes instead of creating synergies.[56] Surfing the donors' agenda, programmes leave segments of the Syrian community uncared for, as described before, and might be abruptly halted when that agenda changes.[57] A lack of Syrian voices in the international aid and development system contributes to a reliance on Western perspectives, which confirm the paternalistic concerns of the service providers instead of the beneficiaries.[58]

Lastly, philanthropic amateurism describes the dilettantism that is attributed to NPOs as they are associated with unprofessional volunteerism and meagre financial power to acquire qualified staff.[59] This last point is not the case with the overly professionalised international NPOs, which are criticised by Syrians in Lebanon as being detached from the actual programme implementation and are perceived to be wasteful and corrupt.[60] Local Lebanese NPOs are supposedly closer to the field, yet Lebanon's third sector has been operating in the international humanitarian system for decades and is inclined to reproduce the same shortcomings.[61] Some Syrians consider Lebanese NPOs' commitment to the Syrian cause as mainly economically opportunistic; surfing the donors' agenda to create workplaces for Lebanese.[62] Whether these perceptions are true or not, they show Syrians' distrust in international and Lebanese NPOs. All of their failures, in addition to the failures of the Lebanese market and state and of the international community, give Syrians reason to respond themselves to their own community's needs, to want their whole community democratically represented in the organisations, and to depend on themselves for reliable resources. To conclude the analysis of why Syrian CSOs emerged in Lebanon, the last chapter of the theoretical background will look into the roles they might assume under these circumstances.

3.1.4 Potential Roles for Syrian Civil Society Organisations in Lebanon

The theoretical framework consulted in this chapter is commonly used to analyse NPOs as service providers. Thus many of the aforementioned failures of the Lebanese market and state, the international community and nonprofit sector suggest that a Syrian civil society in Lebanon primarily emerges in response to the unmet socio-economic needs of Syrian refugees there. However, Walcher suggests that this allocative function of NPOs has to be complemented by a socially and politically integrative function: NPOs can stabilise civil society, activate it socially

[55] Cf. Salamon (1987), pp. 39-41.
[56] Cf. Mansour (2017), p. 17.
[57] Cf. ibid.
[58] Cf. Chatty (2016), p. 57.
[59] Cf. Salamon (1987), p. 42.
[60] Cf. Topham Smallwood (2014), p. 22.
[61] Cf. Beyond Reform & Development/ Transtec (2015), p. 120.
[62] Cf. Interviewee A.

and politically, facilitate participation in public discourse and defend its interests through advocacy and political lobbying.[63] Strachwitz also extends the roles of associations that the European Commission lists and ends up with six more roles that CSOs assume beyond service provision: advocacy, watchdog, intermediary, self-help, community building and political deliberation.[64] Indeed, this chapter also established other necessities of Syrians displaced to Lebanon: They need protection and security in their hosting country and a peaceful solution in Syria in order to return home – cause for advocacy on national, regional and international levels. Being at the mercy of political players and an international humanitarian aid regime could give occasion to establish watchdog initiatives monitoring them. A growing number of Syrian CSOs can be a reason to establish intermediary organisations such as umbrella groups to network and coordinate, or grant-making institutions to create their own source of funding.

Naturally, organisations can take on more than one role and some could be considered meta-roles of organisations fulfilling other purposes. For instance, self-help might be inherent to grassroots initiatives originating from within a community to respond to its own needs. A CSO can be community-building because it brings people together for even the most mundane leisure activity, as Strachwitz argues.[65] Such new collectives, regardless how informal, can create a feeling of belonging and ownership where geographical communities do not and prompt citizens to interact, collaborate and communicate, thus developing social capital.[66] This is especially relevant in the context of displacement, where original communities have been disrupted and reassembled, people need support systems, and tensions with host communities are prevalent. Strachwitz also argues that any casual CSO can be a centre of political activity and civic spirit.[67] In Syria, civil society has indeed been understood as a political opposition to the government and dominant military.[68] Since this type of political activism is heavily restricted inside the country, exile could be a chance for Syrian organisations to pursue it and publicly take a stand in the politically charged Syrian context. Hence, Syrian CSOs have reason to fill several potential roles: After the primary state failure of the Syrian Arab Republic denying them peace, security and human rights and putting them in the perilous position to have to seek refuge in other countries, they experience a lack of protection and support there, too. The following chapter will give an overview of which Syrian CSOs actually emerged in Lebanon and which roles they assume, after establishing their definition.

[63] Cf. Walcher (1997), pp. 24-25.
[64] Cf. Strachwitz (2014), p. 22.
[65] Cf. Strachwitz (2014), p. 23.
[66] Cf. ibid.
[67] Cf. ibid.
[68] Cf. Khalaf/ Ramadan/ Stolleis (2014), p. 7.

3.2 Scope of Syrian Civil Society Organisations in Lebanon

3.2.1 Definition of Syrian Civil Society Organisations in Lebanon

To determine which organisations evolved from the above-described circumstances, Syrian CSOs in Lebanon need to be defined more closely for the purpose of this research. As most of them emerged in uncertain and insecure circumstances – inside a country torn by war or a country of asylum – their legal status and varying degrees of formality will be of secondary importance to their nature. Hence, in this research the term CSO will describe any type of nonprofit and non-governmental association, from informal community initiatives to professional NPOs. The "Syrianness" of these organisations can be discerned in different aspects. As will be established later, registration, management and employment are delicate aspects for Syrians in Lebanon and will therefore in this research not be relevant in defining their organisations. Instead, an organisation will be considered part of Syrian civil society, for one, when it works on the Syrian cause, as defined before, and entails targeting mainly Syrian beneficiaries. Further, it will only be considered Syrian if it also originated from the larger Syrian community, in that its founder(s) and most human resources – including volunteers – are from within Syria and its diaspora, which entails "hyphenated" identities like Syrian-Lebanese. Lastly, it needs to be specified which organisations are considered to be located in Lebanon, which will be any Syrian CSO that has its administration and/or its operational activities inside the country. This includes organisations which originated elsewhere but respond to the needs in Lebanon, and organisations which respond to needs inside Syria but manage their activities from Lebanon, for the reason that both types are subject to the specific conditions of the Lebanese context to a certain extent. Hence, for the purpose of this research a Syrian civil society organisation in Lebanon shall be defined as any distinctly Syrian – meaning in purpose, beneficiaries and human resources – non-governmental and nonprofit association that operates in Lebanon either on a management or on a project level.

3.2.2 Quantitative Overview and Typology

To give an overview of Syrian CSOs in Lebanon, three registers were consulted: one mapping of Syrian civil society by the Syrian CSO Citizens for Syria e.V., one online directory of institutions working in and for Syria called Rawabet, and one Master's thesis by Welander on Syrian CSOs in Lebanon specifically.[69] They all collected their data in 2015 and 2016 but approached the mapping differently, not necessarily academic, and applied varying parameters of what

[69] Citizens for Syria e.V. is based in Berlin and has done periodical mappings through on-site field research in Syria and its neighbouring countries. Hamzet Wasel, a Syrian CSO, offers the Rawabet online directory of institutions working in and for Syria and the Syrian CSOs in Lebanon could be identified when choosing the parameters "Lebanon" and "National Civil Society Organization". Welander has written their Master's thesis on Syrian civil society in Lebanon and identified organisations by doing field research. cf. Citizens for Syria e.V. (2015); Hamzet Wasel (2017); Welander (2015).

constitutes a Syrian CSO in Lebanon. After crossing out overlapping findings of these three, 72 Syrian CSOs in Lebanon could be identified.[70] However, due to unreliability of data and the unsteadiness of the context these constitute no definite overview, but give an approximate idea of the extent of the Syrian CSO landscape in Lebanon. As only the mapping by Citizens for Syria e.V. categorises all its findings, a basic typology has been conducted for this research on the basis of the 39 organisations which that mapping identified in Lebanon.[71] Judging by the findings of the other mappings, this quantitative analysis is limited because it shows only a fragment of Syrian CSOs in Lebanon. However, it allows a basic overview to give an idea of the fields of the sector and its size in relation to Syrian civil society in total.

Out of the total 802 Syrian CSOs identified by Citizens for Syria e.V. only 4.9% are in Lebanese exile.[72] Only half of these have their headquarters there (46%), the others are branches of Syrian CSOs originated elsewhere.[73] This suggests that a comparatively small share of Syrian CSOs is in Lebanon, of which some are there solely to direct their activities inside Syria.[74] With regards to fields of work, the mapping categorised organisations based on the International Classification for Non-Profit Organizations which they expanded to fit the Syrian context. For this research, the activities ascribed to the mapping's 39 identified organisations[75] were re-evaluated to examine which roles Syrian CSOs in Lebanon actually assume, in response to the needs that have been established in the previous chapter, and categorised in the afore-mentioned seven roles:

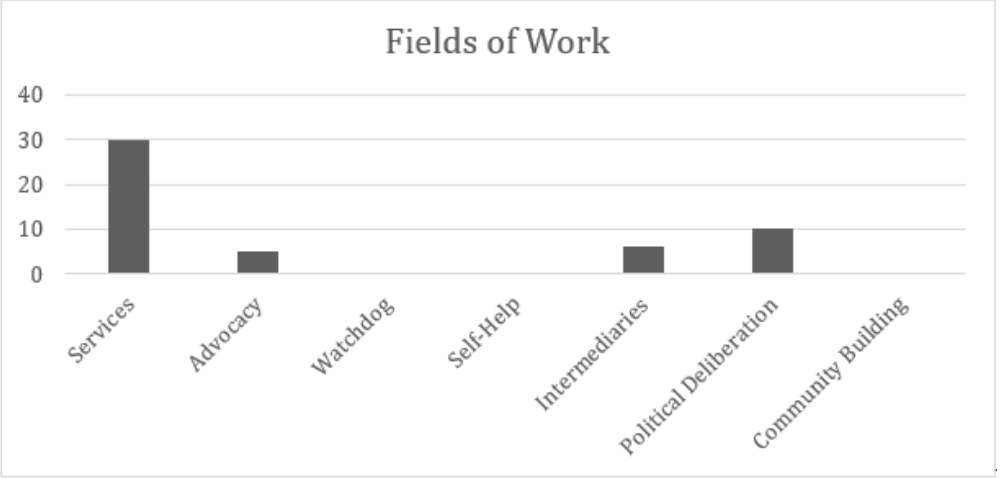

Figure 1: Fields of Work of Syrian Civil Society Organisations in Lebanon in absolute numbers. Own categorisation and illustration based on Citizens for Syria e.V. (2017a).

[70] Cf. Appendix 1, pp. 42-43.
[71] Cf. Appendix 2, pp. 44-45.
[72] Comparing between Syria's neighbouring countries, Turkey has more than three times as many Syrian CSOs as Lebanon, but Jordan has less than a quarter of the ones in Lebanon. cf. Citizens for Syria e.V. (2015), pp. 25, 31.
[73] Cf. Citizens for Syria e.V. (2017a).
[74] Cf. ibid.
[75] Cf. Appendix 2, pp. 44-45.

Figure 1 shows the absolute majority of organisations providing services (76.9%), which include mostly education, housing, social and health services – responses to mainly socio-economic needs ranging from emergency relief to developmental approaches. The second-largest domain is the rather ambiguous political deliberation (25.6%).[76] This label was chosen to comprise organisations' activities like research and political education on issues of civil and human rights, gender, law, democracy, transitional justice and peace-building.[77] While such activities have been restricted inside the country first by the Syrian regime and further by the armed conflict, proportions of politically active organisations in Lebanon are not clearly higher compared to those active inside Syria.[78] Still, only a minority of Syrian CSOs in Lebanon (12.8%) defends Syrian interests through advocacy and also does this as only a secondary field. Organisations classified as intermediary (15.4%) do networking and coordination among the Syrian CSOs, while one of them is grant-making. No organisations can specifically be counted as community-building, as the mapping did not give information on services like community centres, but qualitative analysis will later on challenge this finding. Based on the organisations' listed activities, none could be specifically identified as watchdogs or self-help organisations, but some might fill these meta-roles. Several organisations cover more than one field, but only two offer both services and advocacy or political activities.[79] This basic, albeit limited overview suggests that Syrian civil society in Lebanon mainly responds to socio-economic needs of displaced Syrians in Lebanon and in Syria. A larger share also engages in political activities inside the community – possibly responding to the restraint of such opportunities inside Syria and the infringement of Syrians' basic rights in Lebanon – but noticeably little importance is placed on advocacy or the watchdog role. To get a better understanding of why Syrian CSOs in Lebanon assume which roles, and in preparation for the analysis of the identities, shapes and strategies they assume, the next chapter will examine the circumstances under which they operate in the Lebanese-international context.

[76] Cf. Figure 1, p. 13.
[77] Workshops concerning political education and discussion are not counted as services provided, but as political deliberation to put an emphasis on their political nature.
[78] Territories inside Syria vary in how restrictive their environment is depending on whether they are controlled by the regime, the opposition, Kurdish Forces, or ISIS. Hence, Lebanon is not per se a more enabling environment for political activities than Syria, but surely when compared to certain areas inside Syria. cf. Citizens for Syria e.V. (2015), pp. 26-31.
[79] Cf. Citizens for Syria e.V. (2017a).

4. Circumstances of Syrian Civil Society Organisations in Lebanon

4.1 Political Context

In a field of national and transnational interest, various dimensions of politics influence the CSOs working on the Syrian context in Lebanon. The Lebanese government's power sharing agreement aims to guarantee certain stability by representing all ethnic and religious groups of the country's population.[80] However, this is susceptible to imbalance as the Lebanese political elite is divided in their stance on Syria, to the extent that Hezbollah, a political party in the Lebanese parliament, is involved in the war in Syria as an ally to the Syrian regime's army.[81] This further politicises the Syrian presence in Lebanon and contributes to the aggravation of the national security situation:[82] There are reports of Lebanon's General Security Office, historically affiliated with the Syrian regime, arbitrarily arresting Syrian refugees and especially Syrians opposed to al-Assad's regime still feel observed by its security apparatus even in Lebanon.[83] To avoid further polarisation, the Lebanese state needs Syrian life in Lebanon to be apolitical. While freedom of speech and assembly are guaranteed, the latter has recently been suspended when pro-Syrian (and their counter-) demonstrations have been banned for fear of violent clashes.[84] In order to marginalise the Syrian presence, the Lebanese state shifted from its "open door" guideline to a more hostile stance, calling the Syrian presence an "existential threat".[85] With this type of rhetoric and the tolerance of discriminatory policies,[86] it manifests its vision to be nothing more than a transitory country for Syrians.

This is especially critical in light of the international community's agenda of keeping Syrians mainly in their neighbouring countries.[87] In order to present fast progress to their constituencies, international donor countries often choose the easier and cheaper route of funding relief programmes rather than investing time and effort in political action, as mentioned earlier.[88] A mostly symptom-oriented humanitarian response stalls Syrians, makes them dependent and inhibits their self-reliance.[89] This approach does little to empower Syrians and to get them out of this passivity. Instead, the international community's response is shaped by its member

[80] Cf. Dionigi (2016), p. 12.
[81] Cf. ibid. pp.12, 17-18.
[82] Cf. Cherri/ Arcos González/ Castro Delgado (2016), p. 169.
[83] Cf. Mansour (2017), p. 6; Interviewee I.
[84] The demonstrations originated from the death and alleged torture of four Syrian refugees by Lebanese army soldiers, following suicide attacks during an army raid in a Syrian refugee camp. The protest ban seems to be politically motivated, as protests regarding other issues were tolerated. cf. Wood (2017); Porter/ Chehayeb (2017).
[85] President Michel Suleiman, in March 2014, shifted from defining the situation as an "existential crisis" to "existential threat" to Lebanon. cf. Dionigi (2016), pp. 17, 20.
[86] In over 40 municipalities illegal night curfews and vigilantism keep Syrians from going out at night or mixing with Lebanese. cf. Chatty (2016), p. 58.
[87] Cf. Harling/ Simon/ Berthier (2017).
[88] Cf. Mansour (2017), p. 8.
[89] Cf. Frangieh (2016), p. 42; Harling/ Simon/ Berthier (2017); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees/ United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2014), p. 6.

states' various mandates and competing geopolitical agendas.[90] Thus concepts like "countering violent extremism" or "stabilization" appear on the agenda but remain little more than buzzwords for western actors.[91] Programmes are designed on the basis of paternalistic assumptions of realities on the ground, and lobbying for these international priorities to change takes a huge amount of effort and time. Even though this donor regime is itself politicised, it demands neutrality of its partner organisations in the field.[92] Political sensibilities of donors as well as the Lebanese state and the impartiality they dictate fail to support any communities and projects which are politically active or affiliated. They demand that these organisations distance themselves and their work from events in Syria and also from the spirit of the Syrian uprising.[93] Again, Syrians are kept in deadlock of what they are able to do in Lebanon.

4.2 Legal Context

The neutrality demanded by national and international politics is reflected in the legal framework for CSOs in Lebanon. While the process of registration is fairly simple, it can be subject to arbitrary duration and scrutiny to get the approval and receive the registration number, which is needed to open a bank account. This vagueness contributes to the widespread perception that registering a CSO is time-consuming and work-intensive.[94] The Lebanese Associations Law does not cover certain controversial activities or topics, so approving these organisations is left to the discretion of the Ministry of Interior.[95] This, coupled with the random leniency that Lebanese authorities display when enforcing the law, illustrates the Lebanese state's spectrum from ambiguity to corruption.[96] However, the most obstructive aspect of Lebanese legislation for Syrian CSOs might be that Syrians are not allowed to found and register organisations of their own. Additionally, in line with the general legislation to promote Lebanese employment, any local or international CSO on Lebanese territory must be staffed by 90% Lebanese employees and only up to 10% foreigners – among which Syrians are counted.[97] In addition, employment of Syrians is restricted as they are not issued work permits except for when they get a Lebanese sponsor – an option that is closed to many Syrians who are not well acquainted with a Lebanese national willing to vouch for them.[98] This leaves Syrians in Lebanon with very limited lawful means not only to ownership of CSOs, but even to contribute as an employee.

[90] Cf. Mansour (2017), p. 8.
[91] Cf. Harling/ Simon/ Berthier (2017).
[92] Cf. Mansour (2017), p. 8.
[93] Cf. Harling/ Simon/ Berthier (2017); Mansour (2017), p. 14.
[94] Cf. Beyond Reform & Development/ Transtec (2015), pp. 68-69, 72.
[95] Cf. ibid. p. 68.
[96] Cf. Frangieh (2016), p. 40.
[97] Cf. Mansour (2017), p. 15.
[98] The Lebanese Sponsorship Programme enables Syrians to maintain residency and work legally under certain conditions if they have a Lebanese national sponsoring them, which means vouching for them. However, some Lebanese turn sponsoring Syrian refugees into a business and demand huge amounts of money in return. cf. Human Rights Watch (2017).

The legal grey area of any Syrian CSO that is not (yet) registered can present difficulties maneuvering in the international system. These range from simple hindrances like the lack of a bank account for funding payments to mistrust and a lack of credibility.[99] International countries' respective antiterrorism legislation demand extra scrutiny when engaging or funding Syrian CSOs or projects; subjecting them to special examinations.[100] In order not to violate Lebanese policies and donor countries' formal requirements, potential international partners are reluctant to engage with (informal) Syrian initiatives. Instead, they are easily excluded, rather than finding a form of collaboration that allows them to play a more active role beyond volunteering and to cooperate at eye-level.[101] The possibility of registration and international partnerships is also what prompts many Syrian CSOs from within the country to move their administration to Lebanon, as seen in the quantitative overview in chapter 3. However, Lebanese legislation still keeps Syrians and thus their CSOs in a legal grey area, reinforcing that Lebanon will be nothing more than a temporary home to them. International donors and NPOs, on the other hand, do not advocate Lebanese authorities to ease these laws, nor do they take on the challenge of supporting Syrian initiatives.[102] Instead, they impose their own set of regulations, which obstruct newly emerging organisations even more.

4.3 Economic Context

With its own complex political agenda and the formal restrictions it imposes, as elaborated in the last two sub-chapters, the international donor regime is one of the most influential factors for organisations working in the Syrian context. Syrian CSOs have options to generate income such as private donations or corporate patrons, yet this is a very limited field. The majority of them depend on competing for limited funds from UN bodies and international NPOs, which rely on donor countries themselves. As mentioned before, this is a heavily one-sided relationship: Foreign agendas are dictated top-down, with little possibility for local CSOs to influence them; potential feedback would have to go up the complete chain of funding, through intermediary organisations to reach the large donor body.[103] Hence, surfing donor agendas by shaping programmes accordingly increases an 20rganization's chances of securing funding.[104] However, funding cycles are often short-term and only for individual projects, making it hard for organisations to plan any long-term programme without having to worry about running out of funds.[105] Additionally, few donors are willing to provide grants for overhead costs, impeding many organisations from being able to guarantee steady employment.[106] After all, there are at

[99] Cf. Mansour (2017), p. 15.
[100] However, reports have shown that this threat is overstated and unsubstantiated allegations are made easily. cf. ibid. pp. 2, 14-16.
[101] Cf. ibid. pp. 15-16.
[102] Cf. ibid. p. 16.
[103] Cf. Harling/ Simon/ Berthier (2017).
[104] Cf. ibid.
[105] Cf. Beyond Reform & Development/ Transtec (2015), p. 120.
[106] Cf. Harling/ Simon/ Berthier (2017).

least some donor bodies willing to invest in and support 21rganization21i capacities and human resources with capacity building programmes and 21rganization21i trainings. However, these are also often drafted through donors' lenses instead of being based on an actual needs assessment – and moreover they tend to overlook the capacities which are already there and are worth being developed further.[107]

Naturally, the Syrian CSOs which evolved only in recent years are challenged by the overly bureaucratic and hierarchical international system that they are forced to compete in. In return for funds, donor bodies demand financial accountability by imposing regulatory standards such as monitoring, evaluation and reporting.[108] Smaller and rather informal initiatives have an especially hard time meeting these requirements. By imposing these demands, the donor regime can discipline CSOs to concentrate more on technicalities and bureaucracy, rather than on actual project implementation, which inevitably increases their spending on administration.[109] In addition, both reporting formalities and complex funding proposal standards are rarely published in the Arabic language.[110] Hence these requirements pose immense challenges for CSOs with limited knowledge of English and scarce human resources. The 21rganization21ized nonprofit landscape in Lebanon poses a competitive environment for qualified and experienced human resources and often it is salaries that determine which ones are available to an 21rganization.[111] Indeed, the nonprofit sector has become one of the most profitable and preferred employment sectors in Lebanon because international NPOs or UN bodies can afford to pay their staff big salaries. Therefore it is funding that largely determines not only a Syrian CSO's capacity to work sustainably and implement continuous programmes, but also the human resources it can engage and keep. After considering the national and international dependencies that Syrian CSOs in Lebanon are subjected to, the rest of this chapter will examine the society that constitutes them, as employees, volunteers, or beneficiaries.

4.4 Socio-Economic, Socio-Demographic and Socio-Cultural Context

The socio-economic standard of living of Syrians in Lebanon is a crucial factor for a dignified life. Livelihoods are at stake in spite of humanitarian programmes, and many Syrians turn towards the (informal) labour market to support their families in Lebanon and back in Syria. Economic needs dictate their lives to an extent that 31% of households decrease expenditures for education, with some taking their children out of school or even sending them to work.[112]

[107] Cf. Beyond Reform & Development/ Transtec (2015), p. 86.
[108] Cf. Harling/ Simon/ Berthier (2017).
[109] Cf. ibid.
[110] Cf. ibid.
[111] Cf. Beyond Reform & Development/ Transtec (2015), p. 120.
[112] However, rates of 6-14-year-old children enrolled in school in 2017 rose to 70% compared to 52% in 2016 – yet many children are over-aged for their grade. cf. United Nationals Children's Fund/ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees/ United Nations World Food Programme (2017), p. 79.

Further, enrolment of 15-to-24-year-olds in vocational trainings is extremely low, leaving them with mostly low-skilled employment opportunities.[113] Additionally, the competitive Lebanese labour market often forces Syrians to accept lower salaries and exploitative conditions such as little workplace safety and no job security.[114] While around half of Syrian men in Lebanon are working, albeit irregularly, only 7.6% of Syrian women are part of the workforce.[115] Higher education presents a competitive advantage on the labour market, yet it is a costly investment in Lebanon, unaffordable for many. However, Syrians, Lebanese and internationals with academic degrees still struggle to find employment in Lebanon's highly competitive labour market.[116] Thus Syrians in Lebanon in their socio-economically tough situation often have to decide how to spend their time and efforts on the basis of financial considerations. If they volunteer, the prospect of a small remuneration presented by INGOs can be a decisive factor. All that constitutes a loss of volunteer potential, an unutilised potential of untrained Syrians and a brain drain of qualified ones, in favour of well-financed employers and opportunities abroad – to the detriment of Syrian CSOs, which are less financially powerful employers.

The highest geographical concentration of registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon is in Baalbek-Hermel, Bekaa and Akkar, which are the border regions with Syria that also have the highest percentage of informal settlements.[117] These tend to be overcrowded and in need of repair but are often organised in informal governance structures, which need to be considered when providing infrastructure and services.[118] While these settlements in the countryside are often a last-resort option in the face of saturated rental and labour markets, some newcomers choose them deliberately to stay close to social connections.[119] Indeed, shelter and employment are often arranged through extended families.[120] Similarly, whole neighborhoods in cities like Beirut turned into de facto Syrian settlements.[121] Still, the latest UN Vulnerability Assessment shows that safety and respect for human rights are reasons for around a quarter of Syrians in Lebanon to consider moving to a third country, while almost two thirds would return to Syria if safety and security improved there.[122] Furthermore, the prospect of accessible

[113] Cf. ibid. p. 35.
[114] Cf. Errighi/ Griesse (2016), p. 20.
[115] 29% of women cite cultural reasons when asked why they are not working. Around a fifth of households are headed by females, who tend to be less educated, and of which half do not have a working member. Hence, gendered socio-economic vulnerability among Syrians in Lebanon is an important issue, but will not be discussed further here to not go beyond the scope of this research. cf. United Nationals Children's Fund et al (2017). pp. 9-11, 65, 68-69.
[116] Cf. Dionigi (2016), pp. 31-32.
[117] Cf. ibid. pp. 22-23.
[118] Cf. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees/ United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2014), pp. 8-9.
[119] Cf. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees/ United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2014), p. 37.
[120] Cf. ibid, p. 33; Dionigi (2016), p. 8; United Nationals Children's Fund et al (2017), p. 54.
[121] Lebanese residents in general approve of both rural and urban settlements, as numbers of single males decreased with this structural development and so did incidences of street violence. cf. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees/ United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2014), pp. 8, 54.
[122] Other reasons are better education opportunities in third countries and the high cost of living in Lebanon. cf. United Nationals Children's Fund et al (2017), p. 17.

education abroad is one of the reasons why Syrians emigrate from Lebanon.[123] Nonetheless, only 2% of surveyed households had a member either moving back to Syria or to a third country.[124] Many Syrians are indeed staying in Lebanon in spite of the hardship and the Lebanese state's efforts to remain only a country of transit. This is partly owed to the fact that options for resettlement to a third country are very limited, but even more so as many want to stay as close to Syria as possible, waiting to return home once conditions there improve.[125]

By staying in Lebanon, not only do financial and legal issues keep them worried, but the biggest source of insecurity for more than half of displaced Syrians in Lebanon is the neighbours and host communities.[126] Surveyed Syrians feel that the competition for jobs is the biggest factor creating community tensions.[127] Naturally, tensions are rising when a demographic group has to share their already scarce resources with a growing number of newcomers – especially since poorer Lebanese are not eligible for aid services that Syrians are provided with.[128] The presence of Syrians in Lebanon is increasingly associated with criminality and this climate further exacerbates the segregation between both demographic groups and restrains Syrians' daily lives, who often experience harassment and restricted freedom of movement.[129] Still, 87% of surveyed Syrians consider relations with host communities neutral to positive.[130] Indeed, both countries have historical ties due to pre-war Syrian work migration and Syrian hospitality for Lebanese refugees during the 2006 Lebanon-Israel war.[131] Over the years, these relations evolved into tight social networks of extended families of both nationalities.[132] Some Syrians (12%) do consider cultural differences a reason for community tensions, whereas others say they appreciate the shared language and culture.[133] In conclusion, while certain cultural proximity and social security nets alleviate being displaced to Lebanon for Syrians, many demographic and socio-economic factors have the potential to aggravate the lives of both Syrians and Lebanese and thus also aggravate their relations. Hence, Lebanese society with difficulties of its own might also only present a transitory place of refuge, but both countries have a history of migration and solidarity and concomitant social and cultural ties, which might prove to be an asset.

[123] Cf. Errighi/ Griesse (2016), p. 23.
[124] Cf. ibid. p. 17.
[125] Cf. United Nationals Children's Fund/ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees/ United Nations World Food Programme (2016), p. 16.
[126] Cf. United Nationals Children's Fund et al (2017), p. 15.
[127] Cf. ibid. p. 16.
[128] For example, secondary healthcare is provided to Syrians through the UN humanitarian response plan and which is only accessible to Lebanese through their own private capacity and not as a public service. cf. Dionigi (2016), p. 29.
[129] Cf. Chatty (2016), p. 58.
[130] However, there are sharp regional differences, with up to half of Syrians in the northeast considering relations positive, while in the south only 18% do so. cf. United Nationals Children's Fund et al (2017), p. 16.
[131] Cf. Dionigi (2016), p. 19.
[132] Cf. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees/ United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2014), p. 54.
[133] Cf. United Nationals Children's Fund et al (2016), p. 16.

5. Shapes and Strategies of Syrian Civil Society Organisations in Lebanon

5.1 Identity

5.1.1 Syrian, Lebanese and the Diaspora

There is no one clear identity of Syrian civil society organisations in Lebanon, which is illustrated by the variety among the nine organisations that have been interviewed for this research. All of them identify themselves as Syrian or, in one case, Syrian-Lebanese, referring to their main beneficiaries and the nationalities of their founders and majority of staff. Their founders are Syrians (or Syrian-Lebanese), some of whom are refugees to Lebanon who arrived in the last seven years, while others left Syria before the current crisis to live in Europe or North America.[134] This variety reflects the involvement of the wider Syrian diaspora in Syrian CSOs in Lebanon as suggested in chapter 3. Many interviewees of organisations working on refugee support report that their origins lie in an instantaneous response to the evolving displacement crisis, the desire and even sense of duty to help – of the Syrian founders in Lebanon as much as in Europe.[135] All of the interviewed organisations were founded in 2011 and 2012, except for one in 2014, which suggests that events in Syria must have given rise to the non-relief CSOs as well. The founder of a CSO doing education on peace-building and human rights confirms this, saying that the Syrian revolution inspired their own and other Syrian CSOs, as it revived the idea of a Syrian civil society.[136]

Official terms have little power over the interviewed organisations' identity and ownership: All of them are registered in Lebanon or a third country and some are managed by Lebanese managers, but only to comply with Lebanese law. In the latter cases, the organisations made sure to appoint a director who has the same vision as the Syrian founders.[137] Lebanon as a location constitutes something different for many of the interviewed organisations. Several of them merely run projects in Lebanon but have their headquarters abroad, some have other branches and activities in Europe or Turkey.[138] Two interviewed organisations, which work inside Syria, are based in Lebanon for reasons of feasibility of programmes and availability to donors. One of them was founded in Syria and just recently moved to Lebanon for security reasons. Its programmes still target Syrians from within the country who are participating by crossing the border – successfully in most cases.[139] Several interviewees do not have a specific reason as to why they operate in Lebanon and not another neighbouring country, and

[134] Cf. Interviewee H; Interviewee F; Interviewee B; Interviewee C; Interviewee E.
[135] Cf. Interviewee D; Interviewee E; Interviewee H; Interviewee G.
[136] Revived, because the last emergence of Syrian civil society activism, the Damascus Spring, saw the persecution and detention of its activists that forced many to stop their activism and go into hiding. cf. Interviewee F.
[137] Cf. Interviewee C; Interviewee H.
[138] Cf. Interviewee E; Interviewee B.
[139] Cf. Interviewee I.

some consider it a relatively enabling environment.[140] These results confirm the tendencies that are displayed in the quantitative overview in chapter 3. Syrian civil society organisations in Lebanon are closely connected to the ones inside Syria, in other countries of exile and the wider diaspora. For the majority, Lebanon is not part of their identity but merely a location to work in and from as it is hosting Syrians and bordering Syria. Instead, a clear Syrian identity, which might not always be extraverted, is shaped on the basis of the organisations' main beneficiaries, founders and staff members.

5.1.2 Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organisations

While all of the interviewed organisations are registered as an NGO, many of them 25rganizat the fact that they cannot just be a movement or an initiative.[141] One considers it a painful process for a group of activists to adjust their 25rganization to an NGO[142] template which comes with strict regulations.[143] In particular, to be eligible for partnerships and essential funding from international donors they have to fit into the international system.[144] For some interviewees this system is the reason they call their organisations NGOs, others adopt it from their legal title.[145] When asked whether they identified as a CSO, some of the Syrian interviewees negate – for the aforementioned politicised concept of civil society in Syria.[146] Still, two interviewees specifically call their organisations a CSO regardless of their legal framework, to dissociate them from NGOs in Syria, which mostly operate under the regime umbrella and from NGOs in Lebanon, which one interviewee calls fake.[147] However, two interviewees refer to their organisations as INGOs as they also have programmes abroad.[148] The majority of organisations refer to themselves as local, even if they are registered abroad.[149] One interviewee elaborates on this local identity, saying that their 25rganization grew from grassroots as a volunteer movement and continues to be that, regardless of their rate of growth.[150] All interviewed organisations report growth over time, such as in budget and number of employees, but their local identity is also 25rganizati by other interviewees: Many of them were established at a community level, even among the ones with exiled European founders, and continue to highly value these grassroot origins. Hence, most organisations can be 25rganizati under the term civil

[140] Cf. Interviewee B; Interviewee F.
[141] Lebanese law allows nonprofit associations to be registered only as an "NGO". cf. Interviewee E; Interviewee D; Interviewee G.
[142] The terms NGO and INGO are used in this paragraph as they were used by interviewees and as they denote a certain association they have with large, bureaucratic (international) NPOs.
[143] Cf. Interviewee E.
[144] Cf. ibid.
[145] Cf. Interviewee C.
[146] Cf. Interviewee A.
[147] Cf. Interviewee B; Interviewee I
[148] Cf. Interviewee E; Interviewee B
[149] Cf. Interviewee I; Interviewee D.
[150] Cf. Interviewee D.

society 26rganization, regardless of their legal status, as the majority of them identify more with their rather informal grassroots community than with the international NGO landscape.

5.2 Formality

5.2.1 Governance

Many of the Syrian CSOs in Lebanon started as movements and initiatives and reached varying degrees of formality and professionalism with time. This is exemplified by their different types of internal governance. Several interviewees identify a trend of Syrian CSOs emulating highly managerial NGOs.[151] They recognise an overemphasis on tight management and formal structures and processes, which might be in place due to both the influence of Lebanon's INGO landscape as well as to fulfil donors' requirements.[152] Several interviewees describe the aforementioned cycle of establishing new administrative structures to qualify for funding, but then having to use the additional funds to finance the administration.[153] However, others decide against this: One interviewee explains that their organisation deliberately does not want to grow beyond its own scope but instead builds structures and processes slowly and carefully.[154] Another argues that, operating in such insecure environment, smaller organisations can manage unforeseen obstacles and lean periods in funding more easily.[155] Deciding against complex administrative structures is not an option to all Syrian CSOs: Several of them are just a Lebanese branch with their headquarters outside the country, as seen in chapter 3. One interviewee working with such an organisation considers it detrimental to their work in Lebanon. They find that the physical distance leads to lack of communication, understanding and leadership on the side of management.[156] However, the same detachment is described with some of the organisations that have offices in Beirut and do field work in camps. Two interviewees consider this a hierarchy that perpetuates inequality, in that the benefits of Syrians from within the local community are reaped as field workers or volunteers, while others in management positions decide which projects are important enough to be funded.[157]

Indeed, many interviewees report increased tensions between people in the field and in headquarters due to issues like status and salaries. While one interviewee emphasises that it is a convenient practice to blame the administration even for issues that might be beyond their control,[158] many of the CSOs have strategies to unite the various interests: Two interviewed organisations try to harmonise the different perspectives by having a board of volunteers as a

[151] Cf. Interviewee A; Interviewee B.
[152] Such overemphasis on rather hierarchical administration and rigid structures and processes is an organisational trend sometimes referred to as managerialism.
[153] Cf. Interviewee H; Interviewee B; Interviewee E.
[154] Cf. Interviewee E.
[155] Cf. Interviewee G.
[156] Cf. Interviewee E.
[157] Cf. Interviewee B; Interviewee A.
[158] Cf. Interviewee B.

counterpart to the executive director. One of these organisations finds it necessary also because the director is Lebanese and this method not only increases transparency and trust, but also gives Syrians involved with an organisation greater ownership of it.[159] On the contrary, one of the two interviewees expresses that paid staff would ensure a higher efficiency of decision-making.[160] Another organisation, which operates centres, plans for a more decentralised administration up to self-governance of these centres.[161] All organisations emphasise flat hierarchies and that decision-making is a democratic process. Many of them use majority votes and one organisation's administration even requires unanimous decisions of the core team.[162] Several of the organisations working in camps and centres have volunteers or field workers represented in important meetings, as they are considered the ones able to report whether an organisation's mission and vision are actually implemented on the ground.[163] In conclusion, governance is a concept constantly evolving with these Syrian CSOs, especially as many of them rely on volunteers and continuously master the concomitant challenges such as participation and power struggles. One interviewee emphasises that Syrians do not have a long experience with democracy but that these organisations are their chance to implement it.[164] However, the description of flat hierarchies and shared decision-making by all interviewees might have been overly positive and rather disregarding of the problems and efforts that come along with it.

5.2.2 Communication

A large aspect of bridging the aforementioned gaps between headquarters and work on the ground is communication. Many interviewees, in light of the importance assigned to flat hierarchies, emphasise that their organisation sets great value upon open communication and invites people working in the field to the table, taking concerns seriously and having regular team building meetings.[165] While this sort of transparency is important especially to those CSOs aiming to integrate their grassroots members, one interviewee argued for separation: Their organisation chooses to not communicate straining administrative aspects to field staff, whose daily work is emotionally and mentally exhausting enough. Instead, they provide them with psychosocial support.[166] With regards to communication channels, convenient messenger apps like WhatsApp are used regularly on the ground or between field workers and headquarters. Hence, many of the CSOs choose to communicate selectively and informally, not out of neglect but to adapt to the specific context they work in. When coordinating with headquarters

[159] Cf. ibid.; Interviewee C.
[160] Cf. Interviewee B.
[161] Cf. Interviewee E.
[162] Cf. Interviewee I.
[163] Cf. Interviewee D.
[164] Cf. Interviewee G.
[165] Cf. Interviewee D; Interviewee H.
[166] Cf. Interviewee E.

abroad, organisations have video calls (which were called tedious) or meetings, which happen rarely and only between superiors.[167] Communication with donors is via email and has to be in English, while internal communication in all but one organisation is completely in Arabic.

This one CSO uses English in the office, but needs translations in meetings and emails as four of their core team members do not speak English.[168] Apparently the internationalised system in which they manoeuvre looms larger in their administrative practice than the Arabic-speaking country they operate in. Of the two organisations' directors who do not speak any English, one considers it not a problem and frequently arranges for translators in meetings with international actors.[169] In contrast, the other calls it a real challenge and does not consider translation an adequate solution but rather calls for the international system to open up to communication in Arabic.[170] Both communication and governance show Syrian CSOs torn between their local, informal and grassroots origins and the international system that they depend on, which would need convergence from both sides. While some signs of managerialism can be detected, many decide against unrewarding administrative growth and make an effort to involve their base in decision-making and to communicate in a supportive and informal way.

5.3 Human Resources

5.3.1 Employees

A crucial resource of Syrian civil society organisations in Lebanon are the people working with them, who will therefore be examined more closely.[171] Looking at the gender quota of the staff of the interviewed organisations, there is a disparity between the field and the office. In the field, especially in more conservative areas, female employees are rather rare, except for women's organisations'.[172] This reflects women's reluctance to work for cultural reasons described in chapter 4. On the contrary, among managerial employees several organisations identify a trend of increasing numbers of women, while two organisations' 10% quotas challenge that.[173] This shows that there is still progress to be made with regards to gender equality. Looking at nationalities, the one interviewed 28rganization identifying as Syrian-Lebanese has around 50% of employees from both nationalities, while all others have a share of 60% to 100% Syrian employees.[174] These clear majorities substantiate the Syrian identity and ownership that all organisations describe. Naturally, Syrian-Lebanese tensions are an issue in

[167] Cf. ibid.; Interviewee B.
[168] Cf. Interviewee D.
[169] Cf. Interviewee F.
[170] Cf. Interviewee H.
[171] All people working for a payment exceeding an expense allowance will be considered employees if not detailed further.
[172] Cf. Interviewee A; Interviewee E.
[173] Cf. Interviewee A; Interviewee F; Interviewee H.
[174] The rest of the self-identifying Syrian CSOs' staff is mostly Lebanese except for two organisations who also employ one or two internationals.

several of the interviewed organisations, as they reflect the society they are based in. They are increased if the CSO's manager is Lebanese, causing Syrian employees to question their status, authority and legitimacy.[175] Some Syrian CSOs do not call it a requirement for a potential employee to be Syrian, while others insist on it: In the face of Syrians' socio-economic difficulties, they want to provide them with a regular salary that gives them minimum security and a perspective in Lebanon.[176] Organisations operating in camps and centres aim to employ only Syrians from within those communities due to their proximity to the field and concomitant specific expertise of infrastructure and inhabitants there, as described in chapter 4.[177]

However, if all-Syrian employment is only enforced in the field, an inequality will be reproduced, which keeps Syrians in the lower-paid field work: Because they have fewer options for employment, they have to accept jobs with less benefits. However, finding qualified and experienced Syrian employees for managerial positions is described as very difficult. That is not to say that Syrians in Lebanon are less qualified per se: One interviewee deconstructs this idea by explaining that many people did attend university in Syria, but were taken out of school by the conflict and thus lack the degrees.[178] Therefore they experience difficulties both continuing their education – in addition to financial obstacles – and entering the professional NPO sector, and are thus denied the opportunities to gain relevant experience. The ones that do have degrees and/or experience constitute valuable human resources, who many Syrian CSOs lose to other employers which can offer better salaries, mostly INGOs. Some interviewees consider their own lack of funding for continuous and well-paid salaries the reason they see qualified staff leave.[179] Additionally, many of the CSOs struggle with employees leaving them to pursue their education, most of them abroad.[180] Especially scholarship options for higher education present an opportunity that few would want to miss, and which therefore constitutes a brain drain particularly of already educated Syrians in Lebanon.

Migration abroad is a crucial aspect for employment of qualified Syrians. The large-scale migration in 2015 cost several organisations a big share of their staff, to an extent that one 29rganization lost all team members but one and could not continue its activities until a new team was gathered in 2016.[181] Yet this is not an issue of the past, as one 29rganization's representative reports that 5 out of their 12 team members left Lebanon in 2017.[182] These unambiguous accounts contradict the tiny share of Syrians leaving Lebanon shown by the survey described in chapter 4, and suggest that the sector of educated and trained Syrians might have

[175] Cf. Interviewee H; Interviewee C.
[176] Cf. Interviewee C; Interviewee G.
[177] Cf. Interviewee D; Interviewee B; Interviewee A; Interviewee H.
[178] This is especially true for Syrian men who left the country before finishing university to avoid the mandatory military service. cf. Interviewee E.
[179] Cf. Interviewee H.; Interviewee G.
[180] Cf. Interviewee D; Interviewee A.
[181] Cf. Interviewee A.
[182] Cf. Interviewee I.

more desires and opportunities to leave. Another 30rganization, which had several staff members go to Europe, says that they are still being supported by them remotely.[183] Hence, this migration might further incorporate Syrian CSOs in the larger diaspora, yet it is a constant threat to the CSOs operating in Lebanon. Negative effects of this brain drain and concomitant turn over are vast and go beyond the exacerbated competition among organisations for qualified personnel: Responsibilities are not taken care of and skills and knowledge are lost. Often, such a void negatively impacts the rest of the team who are left trying to cover for the absentees. Such situations are not rare and one interviewee reports that this type of emergency situation went on to such an extent that the 30rganization lost track of their grants.[184]

Strenuous working conditions are another reason why employees have left the interviewed organisations – being overworked due to unlimited overtime and a lot of pressure, but also the psychologically overwhelming nature of many organisations' daily affairs.[185] On the other hand, several organisations report that their staff could not be kept from working overtime due to their non-receding motivation and sense of obligation to work for the Syrian cause.[186] One interviewee even calls these excessive efforts an addiction, another considers this sense of duty the reason why the majority of their staff has not left the country yet.[187] In conclusion, the interviewed organisations' staff with their significant motivation constitutes an important and reliable resource. Tensions between Syrian and Lebanese as well as between field and office staff exist, but are not as trying as stretched capacities and mental and emotional strain. Many organisations recruit Syrian field workers from the community that they work in, but have to compete for qualified and experienced managerial staff. Hence, the majority of the interviewed organisations aim to remunerate their human resources – especially the Syrians. While this is the ideal, all but one of the interviewed organisations still rely on unpaid volunteers, an important resource that will be examined hereafter.

5.3.2 Volunteers

Around half of the interviewed CSOs which rely on unpaid volunteers do so due to a lack of funding, whereas the other half values Syrian volunteers as their connection to the community. Syrians from within the community are not only intrinsically motivated to help, but one interviewee describes volunteering on a community level as an activity that can endow meaning and make Syrian volunteers feel better in a psychologically difficult situation.[188] Many interviewees also describe Syrian volunteers as reliable, but others emphasise their limitations: Due to the socio-economically challenging circumstances in Lebanon, only few Syrians can

[183] Cf. Interviewee F.
[184] Cf. Interviewee D.
[185] Cf. ibid.; Interviewee B; Interviewee A.
[186] Cf. Interviewee D.
[187] Cf. Interviewee A; Interviewee F.
[188] Cf. Interviewee B.

afford to invest their time in charitable activities rather than a paid job. When relying on students, organisations have a hard time finding available persons during semester times.[189] Some volunteers demand payment, referring to UN agencies' practice of remunerating them.[190] Interviewees also report that there is a high circulation of volunteers due to the fact that people start volunteering in hopes of being hired as paid staff but then drop out again after realising that this will not happen. To avoid that, several interviewed organisations are transparent about their organisations' financial situation from the start and pay travel or food allowances if they can afford it.[191] Nevertheless, several organisations hire their volunteers once they have the financial capacities and thereby strengthen their connection to the community. Others emphasise that their organisations have created solid networks of Syrians whom they call friends of the organisation, and that these can be relied upon for volunteering as much as for crowd-funding.[192]

Some of the interviewed organisations consider it increasingly hard to find volunteers: With regards to Lebanese, several organisations report that they worked with many Lebanese volunteers in the early days of the Syrian displacement to Lebanon but that their number decreased more and more when the emergency situation became normality.[193] This shows that the close cultural ties and solidarity described in chapter 4 are indeed an asset, but of limited sustainability. However, several interviewees comment on the continuous interest of international volunteers to work on the Syrian cause: Some CSOs deploy them in projects such as English classes, leisure time activities with children or services by medical professionals.[194] Others utilise international students' and graduates' expertise by engaging them in administrative work.[195] All organisations which have been working with international volunteers consider them and the expertise and contacts they bring along as assets, but they are also aware of their limitations and thus engage them only in specifically chosen projects: A lack of cultural and social understanding can lead to misconduct that can do a lot of harm, especially in vulnerable refugee communities, and thus all the interviewed Syrian CSOs prefer in this context to work with local volunteers, preferably from within the Syrian community. All interviewed organisations report having more employees than volunteers and at least two organisations prefer to not have any volunteers at all.[196] This is not an argument against civic engagement, but rather in favour of remunerating Syrians for their valuable work as they are in a socio-economically vulnerable situation. Hence, volunteering is a way for Syrian CSOs to further integrate into the communities they work with, if they did not already originate from them, and to utilise

[189] Cf. ibid.
[190] Cf. Interviewee H.
[191] Cf. Interviewee H; Interviewee F.
[192] Cf. Interviewee D.
[193] Cf. Interviewee G; Interviewee B.
[194] Cf. Interviewee G; Interviewee H; Interviewee B; Interviewee D.
[195] Cf. Interviewee D; Interviewee C.
[196] Cf. Interviewee I; Interviewee E.

solidarity and strengthen it. In order to determine the interviewed organisations' resilience, the subsequent chapter of the analysis highlights the many strategies they adopted to meet the challenges they are presented with, which were established in chapter 4.

5.4 Strategies of Resilience

5.4.1 Political Pressure

Any distinctly Syrian activity is subject to Lebanese and international politics. To avoid deterring stakeholders, several of the interviewed CSOs try to contain certain aspects of their "Syrianness." Several of the interviewed organisations also target beneficiaries other than Syrians.[197] While some might have humanitarian reasons, others seem to try to avert Lebanese politics' hostile stance on any 32rganization Syrian activity. One CSO removed the word "Syrian" from their name when registering in Lebanon, to facilitate the process and for fear of appearing on the radar of security agencies.[198] Furthermore, none of the interviewed organisations take a political stance publicly – some for neutrality as a humanitarian principle, others because they would risk 32rganization.[199] The interviewee from an 32rganization implementing empowerment and knowledge programmes on civic rights says that they are not working on political issues and calls it a coincidence that all members support the Syrian revolution.[200] Neither of the two interviewed CSOs, which offer political education and peace-building goes beyond project level to do larger-scale campaigning. All of this indicates that such work is being done in Lebanon specifically to reach Syrian citizens there and inside Syria to build capacities that are not easily built in an illiberal and war-torn country. With regards to political agendas dictating their work, only two of the interviewed CSOs lobby decision-makers in an effort to shape their funding agendas and to raise awareness of the Syrian cause in general.[201] This quota corresponds with the small number of Syrian CSOs doing advocacy in Lebanon identified in chapter 3. It suggests that Syrian CSOs in Lebanon have little capacity for doing advocacy, expect limited chances of success, and that organisations wanting to advocate the Syrian cause might choose a different, more enabling and less politically charged location than Lebanon, as their work does not require field work with displaced people or close proximity to Syria.

[197] Cf. Interviewee D; Interviewee G; Interviewee I.
[198] Cf. Interviewee I.
[199] Cf. ibid.; Interviewee G.
[200] Cf. Interviewee I.
[201] These two organisations also only do advocacy as a secondary field. One of them has a campaigning and advocacy manager and the other organisation's director acts as an ambassador. cf. Interviewee D; Interviewee E.

5.4.2 Lebanese Legislation

As has been described, the legal framework for CSOs in Lebanon is obstructive for Syrians, as founders and as employees. Initially, several of the interviewed organisations reported that they did not see the need for registering as they expected their activities to be necessary only temporarily. As it got clearer that the situation was not going to be defused, but aggravated, all of them decided to register in some form or another in order to avoid illegality and to enable partnerships with donors.[202] To do that, the interviewed CSOs chose two ways: Some decided to take the trouble to register in Lebanon as some sort of safety net that provides them with basic 33uthorization in the eyes of the state, while others decided to register abroad, and some of them did both. Several organisations registering abroad did so to obtain certain formality but avoid Lebanese legislation and hence expect to be less of a subject to Lebanese authorities' scrutiny.[203] Registering in Lebanon, all but one interviewee had to comply with the restrictive policies established after 2014 that require Lebanese board members and a Lebanese director.[204] To bypass this, founders asked Lebanese friends to fill these positions pro forma to facilitate the process.[205] In spite of the Lebanese authorities' many restrictions on CSOs, they are rather ambiguous in their control. Several interviewees explain, in similar words, that the malfunctioning Lebanese state makes it easier to circumvent the law than to comply with it, as authorities are not monitoring them. Thus many organisations avoid drawing the authorities' attention to their activities by, among other things, not bothering to officially employ Syrians through sponsorship programmes.[206] Instead, they forgo employment contracts with their Syrian staff by framing their contribution as external such as that of a consultant, as volunteer engagement with an "expense allowance" or as a one time cash-for-work activity – while still aiming at their continuous employment. Ergo, all interviewed Syrian CSOs entered the Lebanese or an international legal framework to then make use of the latitude in a malfunctioning Lebanese state.

5.4.3 Donors' Demands

Large parts of the NGO sector working on the Syrian cause depend financially on funding from the international community's donor regime. As described before, this makes these NGOs subject to international agendas and gives them the choice to either surf donor agendas by shaping their programmes according to them or to try lobbying them. As has been mentioned before, only two of the interviewed organisations do this type of advocacy.[207] Most others still try to conceptualise projects based on a needs assessment and then find suitable grants.

[202] Cf. Interviewee H.
[203] Cf. Interviewee B.
[204] Cf. Interviewee F.
[205] Cf. Interviewee I; Interviewee H; Interviewee G.
[206] Cf. Interviewee B.
[207] Cf. Interviewee D; Interviewee E.

However, they face limitations with regards to duration and continuity.[208] Employment is heavily affected by project-based funding, as very few donors cover overhead costs. One 34rganization's strategy is to cover certain percentages of their management salaries in each funding proposal.[209] Other organisations attempt to defy international donors' monopolistic power by broadening their funding portfolio, relying also on private donors: individuals, corporations or crowd-funding.[210] This provides them with greater sustainability in the face of changing political agendas. However, only one 34rganization manages to rely solely on private donations from the Syrian exile community and reportedly enjoys long-term and stable funding.[211] Additionally, several CSOs report having established projects independent of funding. However, none of these are generating revenues themselves like a social business would, but are rather small-scale projects relying on volunteer or pro bono engagement.[212] Hence, several organisations developed strategies to gain independence from international donors, but they all face finite resources and do not really consider more self-sufficient projects.

5.4.4 Turnover and Migration

The fourth main challenge posed to Syrian CSOs in Lebanon that has been identified in this research is the large-scale migration of (potential) employees and concomitant staff turnover. In order to limit the damage of managerial staff leaving their organisations, many interviewees turn to elaborate mechanisms: One interviewee reports that their organisation aims at proper documentation and archiving in case an employee leaves or responsibilities are redistributed.[213] Many of the interviewed organisations' managerial teams are small and often a department consists of only one person, who takes their knowledge with them when they leave. Hence two of the interviewed organisations over time developed a system of manuals with guidelines, written policies and best practice templates for certain tasks and processes to conserve the modus operandi of individual departments.[214] This type of knowledge management is crucial to preserve important content and facilitate onboarding. One interviewed executive director has established a system which they call shadow management: Their organisation takes on extra volunteers who are trained by following the paid staff around and thus get to know the organisation, the procedures and tasks, so that the organisation has backups to resort to in case an employee leaves.[215] Regarding qualification in general, several organisations report using the opportunities to send their staff to external trainings or capacity building seminars offered by donors or their partners. However, these interviewees said that few of

[208] Cf. Interviewee G.
[209] Cf. Interviewee D.
[210] Cf. ibid.; Interviewee G; Interviewee C.
[211] Cf. Interviewee B.
[212] Cf. ibid.; Interviewee D; Interviewee C.
[213] Cf. Interviewee D.
[214] Cf. ibid.; Interviewee H.
[215] Cf. Interviewee H.

these opportunities are offered and the ones that are might not be relevant to their work.[216] Hence, as an answer to the shortage of qualified Syrian employees, many of the interviewed organisations turn to training them themselves in order to transform inexperienced novices into valuable human resources.

The majority of the interviewed organisations have a training approach that resembles an apprenticeship, in which they take on inexperienced Syrian staff and coach them while working with them. “Trainees” are explained how to execute tasks until they can do them themselves, which one interviewee describes as effortful and time-consuming, but effective.[217] Another organisation integrates them into several different departments for them to acquire a whole set of skills and as much practical experience as possible.[218] One interviewee also considers this training approach rewarding and adds that it creates a relation among the organisation’s staff members and gives the new members the feeling that the organisation cares for them and gives them something in return.[219] The interviewed organisations which offer political and civic education programmes qualify their new teaching staff members by sending them to their own trainings as participants.[220] One interviewee emphasises that it is an important organisational strategy to rather nurture and expand the skills of people who show great potential instead of employing people who already have qualifications.[221] Several emphasise that these efforts are worthwhile in spite of their experience and continuous threat of the newly qualified human resources leaving the organisation, due to lack of funding or personal motives. On the contrary, all interviewees even utter their sympathy and understanding for especially younger Syrians’ migration and one executive director emphasises their organisation’s practice of providing them with recommendation letters to increase their chances of finding employment elsewhere.[222] Hence, in spite of migration being a detrimental factor for Syrian CSOs in Lebanon, they still find great potential in the human resources available to them and actively work on training Syrians in Lebanon themselves. The importance of the capacities which these organisations are building thereby will be examined subsequently.

5.4.5 Civil Society Capacity Building

Especially in the face of a quasi non-existing Syrian civil society before 2011 and the national and international restrictions which they experience in Lebanon, the interviewed Syrian CSOs show remarkable efforts to give something back to the members of this new civil society.

[216] Cf. ibid.; Interviewee E.
[217] Cf. Interviewee C.
[218] Cf. Interviewee H.
[219] Cf. Interviewee E.
[220] Cf. Interviewee I; Interviewee F.
[221] Cf. Interviewee E.
[222] Cf. Interviewee H.

Several interviewed CSOs consider the capacity building of their employees as well as volunteers an investment in the Syrian community.[223] Many also emphasise that this investment and the skills conveyed through the organisations' work go beyond professional life: The majority of the interviewed organisations state that they also educate their staff with regards to human rights, democracy, or gender awareness.[224] Two interviewees report that they feel a lack of teamwork among Syrians in general and presume that working in such organisations can help develop these skills.[225] Indeed, one interviewee tells that their 36rganization is actively investing in collaboration through team building measures and works to strengthen the sense of community through team outings and reflection and psychosocial support meetings.[226] Integrating the various hierarchical levels in an 36rganization might also bear the chance to bring various Syrian communities and social classes closer together.

Indeed, interviewees imply that the Syrian CSOs in Lebanon are inducing a certain sense of belonging. One interviewee explains that they create communities of Syrians who share the same mentality and beliefs, albeit establishing bonds within organisations and not among them. He considers NGO politics, the lack of networking and coordination and their competition with each other factors that drive these communities apart.[227] One interviewee concludes that while many of the beneficiaries as well as the employees of CSOs in Lebanon only see the country as a place of temporary stay, their time there presents a unique chance to work with such organisations, to participate in trainings and empower themselves.[228] This type of capacity building is an opportunity specifically for Syrians in exile, as the same activities would be heavily restricted inside Syria – albeit some territories more than others. In conclusion, Syrian civil society organisations in Lebanon bring forth a group of Syrians with distinct expertise in the nonprofit sector and foster a new form of democratic culture and civic values inside their institution and closer environment. However, time will tell whether these organisations will unite to become one Syrian civil society, and which role it might play in the future.

5.5 Potential Future Scopes

When asked about the future of their CSOs, none of the interviewees see their commitment coming to an end with an end to the war in Syria. In the face of both a Lebanese and an international political shift towards reconstruction and refugees' return to Syria, all of them consider working in Syria, either adding activities inside the country or even moving the whole organisation there. However, many underline that such a move would be subject to certain

[223] Cf. Interviewee D.
[224] Cf. ibid.; Interviewee E.
[225] Cf. Interviewee A; Interviewee B.
[226] Cf. Interviewee D.
[227] Cf. Interviewee B.
[228] Cf. Interviewee I.

political factors, such as the freedom to conduct their activities without surveillance and restrictions.[229] Another interviewee emphasises that a move to Syria is ineligible for organisations with an overtly political stand against the current Syrian regime if it were still in power in a post-war Syria, not least because they would not be able to get permission to work.[230] Others also express their intent to continue their work in Lebanon as they expect ongoing need for support there – one organisation has a ten-year plan for their work in Lebanon.[231] However, another interviewee emphasises that any type of long-term strategy is impossible to draft as the situation is insecure and dependent on international actors and relations.[232] Still, another interviewee calls moving the organisation to Syria one day a sustainable vision for their CSO and considers it a continuous motivation for all employees.[233]

One interviewee presumes a rather pessimistic future of current Syrian civil society in Lebanon; saying that its work there can give a certain sense of purpose for the time being, but that these organisations do not build something relevant for a future back in Syria. The interviewee considers the country to be torn by war into differently controlled and thus influenced areas that are unable to develop one civil society, albeit acknowledging the organisations' shared beliefs and ideals as an asset.[234] These are brought up by many interviewees and unify all interviewed organisations in their common vision of a democratic Syria. One interviewee also mentions the fact that the purpose of relief and development-related organisations should be to make themselves redundant and that they can therefore imagine moving their focus of activity to other relevant fields later.[235] Hence, Syrian civil society organisations consider themselves relevant to the reconstruction of their country, no matter their current mission. Very few of the interviewed organisations have a concrete plan for the future but are rather undetermined with regards to geographical and thematic fields of work. Still, many anticipate their future to be inside Syria or the Syrian-Lebanese context rather than other countries of exile. Hence, it is their shared vision of a Syria based on democratic and civic values that unites them and might prove to be sustainable beyond exile, as time goes on.

[229] Cf. Interviewee G.
[230] Cf. Interviewee B.
[231] Cf. Interviewee D; Interviewee H.
[232] Cf. Interviewee E.
[233] Cf. Interviewee C.
[234] Cf. Interviewee B.
[235] Cf. Interviewee D.

6. Concluding Remarks

6.1 Summary of Core Findings

Syrians are a resilient people indeed, judging by their time in Lebanese exile. After their own state failed them, they depend on their host country and the international community. Both of these, and their partner NGOs, fail to live up to their responsibilities and leave Syrians in Lebanon to some extent unprotected and uncared for. Syrians' unmet needs make a strong case for them to self-organise in order to provide for themselves, and, indeed, a large share of the examined Syrian CSOs in Lebanon respond to their community's socio-economic needs. Furthermore, Syrian CSOs in Lebanon also engage in socio-political activities and education, which reflect the political dimension of the Syrian cause beyond support for the displaced. However, noticeably few of them engage in advocacy – potentially due to the politically charged environment in Lebanon – which might leave them subject to others' agendas. The examined CSOs are also compelled to withhold their Syrian identity and political stances for the sake of functioning in the Lebanese and international context. When faced with restrictive Lebanese regulations, they rely on the state's malfunction and act on their mission in spite of its conflicting nature by, for instance, employing Syrians anyway. In contrast, the international donor system is more difficult to circumvent: A dependency on funding impacts some Syrian CSOs to such an extent that they need to fulfil formal structural and procedural requirements, in some cases even shape their programmes according to (contradictory) donor agendas – and still depend on only limited and often conditional support.

Contrary to monetary resources, Syrian CSOs in Lebanon can draw on reliable human resources. Most of their founders, employees and volunteers are from within the wider Syrian community. Being located in Lebanon is less of a factor of identity, than of necessity: Syrians cornered inside their country can be accessed via Lebanon, Syrians in Lebanon are in need as well, and many of them simply have nowhere else to go. Nevertheless, Lebanese citizens (and internationals) have been engaged with Syrian CSOs when they needed a helping hand. Still, these organisations' principal and inexhaustible resource is Syrians, as they can rely on their motivation, loyalty, sense of duty and endurance. However, socio-economic concerns and the prospect of better opportunities abroad limit the group of Syrians in Lebanon available for financially weak Syrian CSOs to the rather inexperienced and untrained. The majority of the interviewed organisations still commit to Syrians in Lebanon not only as beneficiaries, but also as staff. That way they provide a perspective to a socio-economically vulnerable population and create something more: They train their human resources while working with them and thereby build not only professional abilities, but also capabilities for teamwork and democratic decision-making, and awareness of civic and human rights, gender equality and more. In doing so, the capacities that they create are not limited to Lebanese exile, but can be

transferred into a larger Syrian civil society (and other fields therein). But the fact that they created them there, under such challenging conditions in a place that keeps reminding them that it is only transitory, demonstrates their strength.

In Lebanese exile, Syrian civil society organisations can evade their own restrictive regime to a certain extent, yet they still have to resist many other forms of repression. While being able to operate relatively free, their potential is not properly supported and sponsored. Instead of actually influencing the national and international politics that shape Syrians' daily lives as much as the future of their country, CSOs are kept busy struggling with organisational politics and a dependency on donor's demands and paternalistic positions. Thereby a chance is foregone to empower Syrian agents in Lebanon and foster their engagement in a local civil society instead of seeing them migrate back and forth. In spite of this, the organisations rely on a powerful resource: Crucial work is being done on the ground by the many unpaid or underpaid Syrians. Embedded in dire socio-economic conditions in Lebanon, Syrians' volunteer engagement might be more of a mere necessity of cheap labour than an opportunity to build bridging social capital, especially as religious and ethnic segmentation might be reproduced in the displacement of whole communities. Strenuous working conditions might also inhibit the formation of democratic organisational cultures and structures. Therefore, much of the organisations' assumed functions with regards to political deliberation and the formation of social cohesion has yet to be further investigated. However, what many of the interviewees in this research confirmed was that this surge of Syrian civil society in Lebanese exile coincided with a socio-political awakening, originated in the peaceful 2011 protests. This development includes Syrians taking a political stance and voicing it, demanding the attention of a global public to have their needs taken care of and their concerns taken seriously, educating and getting educated, holding their and other governments accountable, creating their own public sphere and actively planning the future of their country, and fostering democracy in exile if they are deprived of it in their own state.

6.2 Reflection of the Research

This research made clear that there is no one typical Syrian civil society 39rganization in Lebanon by showing the pluralism in the sector. The data collected does not allow for a comparative quantitative analysis but rather depicts variety and different trends. However, such analysis, based on a more detailed mapping, could give valuable insight into group-specific characteristics: It could detect differences between service providing organisations and politically engaged ones, or between the ones with headquarters in Lebanon and the ones with only projects there, with regards to criteria such as governance, funding, or human resources. Yet, such data collection and evaluation would have gone beyond the scope of this research. It neither allowed for field observations to get a second account of the interviewed organisations'

operations and therefore relies on the interviewees' objectivity and accuracy. Furthermore, it is based on a lot of grey literature, which implicates certain unreliability, as it depends on current developments of a rapidly changing context. Two of the interviews were conducted in Arabic with English translation, which might present a source of error, and the same is true for the other interviewees who spoke in a language that is not their mother tongue. Lastly, this research was conducted by someone from outside the Syrian context. Theoretical concepts consulted have a Western perspective and field research was shaped through a European lens, resulting in certain aspects possibly not being disclosed to the author of this paper.

6.3 Outlook

Time will tell whether the Syrian civil society organisations which emerged in Lebanese exile will contribute to a larger Syrian civil society. Thus far, migration has proven to be a rather detrimental factor for them, but it might also present an opportunity to interweave the various exiled communities with each other. This research also identifies a lack of intermediary or umbrella organisations, and a need for community-building and networking among the organisations. Therefore an even broader, transnational Syrian civil society might either pose a threat of dispersal, or the chance to build alliances throughout the diaspora. Such initiatives are being established, for instance the We Exist! advocacy alliance, but the whole field deserves special attention.[236] Another aspect of migration is return: Some of the human resources who left Lebanon might come back soon, perhaps well-educated, and possibly enhance the CSO sector. Others return to Syria, for which political agendas and deceptive rhetoric are pushing.[237] However, these might not return to a life with less needs, but rather to a situation in which they are even less accessible to civil society activities of any kind.

Indeed, in spite of its vast restrictions on Syrian CSOs, Lebanon is still a more enabling environment than Syria. Nevertheless, this research shows that many Syrian CSOs in Lebanese exile share the vision of moving (or returning) there one day. NPOs providing relief work to have eventually made themselves redundant, so they could then potentially be active in other relevant fields. In fact, this research indicates that Syrian CSOs in Lebanon are united beyond their current mission by the democratic and civic values they have been promoting. However, whether these organisations will actually be able to establish themselves in Syria will depend on security concerns and political conditions, not only for the politically active or affiliated CSOs. Hence, to create a sustainable environment for civil society to thrive, Syrians will not only need an end to the war, but political efforts to guarantee human rights, justice and accountability. The quotation from Yassin al-Haj Saleh in this paper's introduction continues as

[236] Cf. Citizens for Syria e.V. (2017b).
[237] Syrians returning do so mostly after being internally displaced, but for each of them three more were newly displaced due to continuous violence. Furthermore, it is not always clear whether those returning (from outside the country) do so voluntarily. cf. Ratcliffe (2018).

follows: “We are hopeful that more people will join us in this struggle. It is not just about Syria any longer. It is about the world.”[238] Clearly, whether the world stands with Syria will also be decisive for the future of its civil society.

[238] Yassin al-Haj Saleh, as cited in: Hussain/ Hisham (2016).

Appendix

Appendix 1. List of 72 Syrian Civil Society Organisations in Lebanon

Name of Organisation	Identified in the register of
Abni	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Ahl Network	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Al Caravan	Rawabet
Alan Revolutionary movement	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Alpha	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Alpha & Bet/ Alphabet for Alternative Education	Citizens for Syria e.V., Welander
Alshar3	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Ataa Relief	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Basmeh & Zeitooneh	Citizens for Syria e.V., Rawabet, Welander
Bdna Caporeh	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Bidayat	Citizens for Syria e.V., Rawabet
C.A.A	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Centre for Civil Society and Democracy Syria	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Centre for Syrian Freedoms	Welander
Consultancy Commission for Syrian Refugees	Rawabet
Cord	Welander
Damma Hug	Rawabet
Dawlaty	Citizens for Syria e.V., Rawabet
De yalla	Welander
Decostamine Initiative	Rawabet, Welander
Dirasat	Welander
Dubarah	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Ettijahat-Independent Culture (اتجاهات . ثقافة مستقلة)	Rawabet
Farik Beirut	Welander
Floka Freedom	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Future View	Welander
Generation Freedom	Welander
Ghiras Al Amal / Grass of Hope	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Girath al-Nahda	Welander
Hamzet Wasel	Rawabet
Ibda'at for Charity and Relief (إبداعات للخير والإغاثة)	Rawabet
Inab	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Jusoor – Syrians Forward Together	Citizens for Syria e.V., Rawabet, Welander
Kayany Foundation	Welander
Khayr Charity Foundation	Welander
Lamsat Ward	Citizens for Syria e.V., Rawabet, Welander
Mobaderoon	Citizens for Syria e.V., Welander

Mulham Volunteering Team	Citizens for Syria e.V., Welander
Multi Aid Programs (MAPS)	Rawabet
Najda Now – Syria	Citizens for Syria e.V., Rawabet Welander
Nuon Organization for Peace-Building (منظمة نون لبناء السلام)	Rawabet, Welander
Olive Branch Organization	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Palestinian-Syrian Bond	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Rahma Relief foundation	Citizens for Syria e.V.
RSM	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Rûşêr Network	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Sawa for Development and Aid	Citizens for Syria e.V., Rawabet, Welander
SDCCS	Welander
SEMA	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Shafak Syria Organization	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Sharq for Citizen Development	Rawabet
Sonbola	Citizens for Syria e.V., Rawabet, Welander
Spark of March	Welander
SYAN	Welander
Syrian Anamel	Welander
Syrian Business Club	Welander
Syrian Center for Policy Research	Citizens for Syria e.V., Rawabet
Syrian Civil Coalition	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Syrian Eyes (عيون سورية)	Citizens for Syria e.V., Rawabet, Welander
Syrian League for Citizenship	Rawabet, Welander
Syrian Medical Relief Office (المكتب الإغاثي الطبي السوري)	Rawabet
Syrian National Media	Welander
Syrian Relief Network	Rawabet
The Butterfly Effect	Citizens for Syria e.V.
The Nawaya Network	Rawabet
UOSSM	Citizens for Syria e.V.
USYCSO	Citizens for Syria e.V.
Watan	Citizens for Syria e.V., Welander
Women Now for Development	Citizens for Syria e.V., Welander
Yasmine Syria	Welander
Youth League of Saadnoye	Welander
Union of Relief and Development Associations (اتحاد الجمعيات الإغاثيّة)	Rawabet

Cf. Citizens for Syria e.V. (2017a); Hamzet Wasel (2017); Welander (2015).

Appendix 2. List of 39 Categorised Syrian CSOs in Lebanon

Name	Domain of Work	Second Domain of Work	Presence in Lebanon	Headquarters abroad in
Abni	Political Organisation	Civic & Advocacy Organisation	Headquarters	
Ahl Network	Education & Research	Development & Housing	Headquarters	
Alan Revolutionary Movement	Political Organisation		Branch	Aleppo
Alpha	Emergency & Relief	Development & Housing	Headquarters	
Alpha & Bet	Education & Research	Child Welfare & Services, Day Care	Headquarters	
Alshar3	Media & Communication	Development & Housing	Branch	France
Ataa Relief	Emergency & Relief	Development & Housing	Branch	Turkey
Basmeh & Zeitooneh	Emergency & Relief	Education & Research	Headquarters	
Bdna Caporeh	Social Services	Education & Research	Headquarters	
Bidayyat	Civil Association	Grantmaking Foundation	Headquarters	
C.A.A	Emergency & Relief	Development & Housing	Branch	Damascus
CCSDS	Civil Association	Adult/Continuing Education	Branch	Turkey
Dawlty Project	Civil Association	Advocacy Organisation	Headquarters	
Dubarah	Education & Research		Branch	Qatar
Floka Freedom	Emergency & Relief	Health	Branch	Al Ladhiqiyah
Ghiras Al Amal/ Grass of Hope	Education & Research	Child Welfare & Services, Day Care	Branch	Rif Dimashq
Inab	Civil Association		Headquarters	
Jusoor	Education & Research	Development & Housing	Headquarters	
Lamsat Ward	Development & Housing	Civil Rights Association	Headquarters	
Mobaderoon	Development & Housing	Education & Research	Branch	Damascus
Mulham Volunteering Team	Emergency & Relief	Education & Research	Branch	Jordan
Najdeh Now	Emergency & Relief		Headquarters	

Olive Branch Organization	Education & Research	Emergency & Relief	Branch	Dar'a
Palestinian-Syrian Bond	Human Rights	Rule of Law	Headquarters	
Rahma Relief foundation	Emergency & Relief	Development & Housing	Branch	Al Ladhiqiyah
RSM	Civil Association	Human Rights	Headquarters	
Rûşêr Network	Development & Housing		Branch	Aleppo
Sawa for Development & Aid	Education & Research	Emergency & Relief	Headquarters	
SEMA	Emergency & Relief	Adult/Continuing Education	Branch	Turkey
Shafak Syria Organization	Emergency & Relief	Health	Branch	Turkey
Sonbola	Education & Research	Child Welfare & Services, Day Care	Headquarters	
Syrian Civil Coalition	Development & Housing	Networking & Cooperation	Branch	Turkey
Syrian Eyes	Emergency & Relief	Food Security & Livelihood	Headquarters	
The Butterfly Effect	Social Services	Education & Research	Headquarters	
The Syrian Center for Policy Research	Research	Social Sciences & Policy Studies	Headquarters	
UOSSM	Health	Field Hospitals	Branch	Turkey
USYCSO	Development & Housing	Education & Research	Branch	Turkey
Watan	Civil Association	Education & Research	Branch	Turkey
Women Now for Development	Development & Housing	Women Protection	Branch	Turkey

Cf. Citizens for Syria e.V. (2017a).

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List of Interviews

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Interviewee B. “Interview with Former Volunteer and Programme Manager at Organisation B.” Personal interview. 1:12 hr. Beirut, Lebanon. 17 October 2017.

Interviewee C. “Interview with Executive Director at Organisation C.” Personal interview. 0:29 hr. Beirut, Lebanon. 31 October 2017.

Interviewee D. “Interview with Grants Manager at Organisation D.” Personal interview. 0:36 hr. Beirut, Lebanon. 3 November 2017.

Interviewee E. “Interview with Communications and Advocacy Manager at Organisation E.” Personal interview. 0:47 hr. Beirut, Lebanon. 10 November 2017.

Interviewee F. “Interview with Founder and Executive Director at Organisation F.” Personal interview. 0:35 hr. Beirut, Lebanon. 12 November 2017.

Interviewee G. “Interview with Founder and Executive Director at Organisation G.” Personal interview. 0:59 hr. Beirut, Lebanon. 15 November 2017.

Interviewee H. “Interview with Founder and Executive Director at Organisation H.” Personal interview. 0:58 hr. Beirut, Lebanon. 20 November 2017.

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List of Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPO	Nonprofit Organisation
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	The United Nations Refugee Agency

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