

Mapping the Syrian diaspora in Germany

*Contributions to peace, reconstruction and potentials for
collaboration with German Development Cooperation*

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Nora Jasmin Ragab

Laura Rahmeier

Prof. Dr. Melissa Siegel

Maastricht Graduate School of Governance (MGSoG)



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List of abbreviations

BMZ	Bundesministerium für internationale Zusammenarbeit
CIM	Centrum für internationale Migration und Entwicklung
CMI	The Center for Mediterranean Integration
DEMAC	Diaspora Emergency Action and Cooperation
DSÄ	Deutsch-Syrische Ärzte für humanitäre Hilfe
DSV	Deutsch-Syrische Verein zur Förderung der Freiheiten und Menschenrechte
ECHO	EU's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department
FDSG	Freie Deutsch-Syrische Gesellschaft
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PME	Programme Migration for Development
SWN	Syrian Women's Network
UKSSD	Unabhängiges Komitee für Sozialentwicklung und selbstorganisierte Demokratie
UOSSM	Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations
USSA	Union der Syrischen Studenten und Akademiker

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1. Introduction

During the past six years, the Syrian conflict escalated into one of the most dramatic humanitarian and security crises in the world, causing over 190,000 deaths, displacing almost 11 million people, leaving 13.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and deepened sectarian violence across the region (European Commission, 2016; United Nations News Service, 2014). With increasing intensification, internationalisation and spill-over of the conflict within the region, its cessation seems unlikely in the near future. At the same time, there is a considerable lack in literature on Syrian diaspora groups, particularly regarding the nature and dynamics of their engagement with Syria, the impacts of that engagement on the current conflict, and the potential role such engagement could play in future development and reconstruction of the country. Existing studies do note, however, that the Syrian Uprising encouraged not just a revolutionary movement inside Syria but also externally, within the diaspora. According to Di Bartolomeo, Jaulin and Perrin (2012) Syrian diaspora groups play an important role in oppositional political movements. Beyond political involvement, they also engage in civil society groups, mainly humanitarian and human rights organisations, both in Europe and in the neighbouring countries (Hallisso, 2014; Qayyum, 2011; Svoboda & Pantuliano, 2015).

Diasporas are increasingly recognised as important players in the international political arena (Vertovec, 2005). Yet, there is a growing debate on the nature and impact of diaspora engagement when it comes to conflict-settings. While some argue that diaspora groups might exacerbate the dynamics of conflicts through their involvement, there is an increasing recognition of the potential constructive role of diaspora groups due to their contributions to peace, stability and development. On the one hand diasporas can evolve as a critical actors in reconciliation efforts and conflict-resolution as they might represent the very parties initially involved in the conflict (Brinkerhoff, 2011). Next to fostering cooperation between conflicted groups, they can also play an important role in raising awareness and international support for the solution of conflict (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). Upon the resolution of the conflict, the diaspora is recognised for the important contributions it can make to post-conflict reconstruction efforts based on their personal ties to their place of origin. Diasporas are known to support the economic development of their home countries through remittances and other financial contributions (Nielsen & Riddle, 2010), such as in the cases of Somalia or Afghanistan. Social remittances, in the form of human capital through return, or the transmission of knowledge, skills and values, are vital tools for successful reconstruction. International organisations have especially made use of diaspora experts in their reconstruction efforts of Iraq (J. Brinkerhoff & Taddesse, 2008)

On the other hand, Diasporas can introduce new tensions to the conflict. Brinkerhoff (2011) argues that the conflict might invoke a new nationalism or ethnicisation within the diaspora that is especially problematic as the place of reference for the diaspora might not directly correspond with

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the place conflict. A resulting political fragmentation of the diaspora runs the risk of being imported to the place of origin (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). Upon post-conflict return, diaspora actors might constitute new political or economic elites, leading to a fragmentation of newly formed societies, as occurred in Iraq (Chesterman, Ignatieff, & Thakur, 2005; Koser, 2007). Moreover, diaspora contributions during the conflict, such as economic remittances, are difficult to control in informal channels and can potentially be misused for political mobilisation or conflict activities, such as in the case of Kosovo (F. B. Adamson, 2005).

Based on a request of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, this study examines the characteristics of the Syrian diaspora in Germany, the level and structures of their organisations, their political leanings and affiliations, and their existing and potential engagement in conflict resolution and reconstruction. Moreover, potential for cooperation between diaspora organisations and the German Development Cooperation will be identified. The aims of the study are to: 1) gain insight into the profile of the Syrian (organised and non-organised) diaspora in Germany, 2) to map and document Syrian diaspora organisations, associations and initiatives based in Germany as well as their development potential, and 3) to develop recommendations regarding a context-specific and conflict-sensitive strategy for approaching the organised diaspora. Accordingly, the study focusses on the following research questions elaborated in Table 1.

Table 1: Set of Research questions

Topic	Research questions
Characteristics of the Syrian diaspora	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How is the diaspora comprised (i.e., what is the demographic profile of individuals considered part of the Syrian diaspora)? - How has that diaspora been created (through, for instance, home- and/or host-country factors)?
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the networks, organisations, umbrella associations, professional associations etc. of the Syrian diaspora in Germany, and how are they/will they pursue involvement with their home country? - What forms of cooperation as well as potential lines of division exist among different groups within the Syrian diaspora?
Transnational practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What forms of engagement with Syria do different types of diaspora organizations pursue? - What factors influence the type of initiatives different organizations pursue (e.g., differences between first – and second-generation diaspora members, between those who migrated before or during the conflict)?
Potentials for cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the needs and goals of the Syrian diaspora? - What are the objectives of the German Development Cooperation in this context?

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- | | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- How can these goals be connected for constructive involvement and cooperation? |
|--|--|

This study contributes to a broader understanding of the diaspora and peace literature, by showing how the initial peaceful movement in Syria inspired many Syrians abroad to take action to shape their home country's future. Similar to the narratives of the revolution, diaspora organisations frame their action based on notions of freedom, democracy and human rights. Within a process of dynamic social formation that has recently started and is constantly evolving, new structures and networks are emerging within the Syrian diaspora and some organisations become established, while others dissolve. Diaspora engagement cannot only be observed among the more established Syrian population, but also among those, who more recently migrated to Germany. Many of those young activists have accumulated knowledge and experiences in working with international or local civil society organisations in Syria or in the neighbouring countries. Influenced by historical and recent migration patterns, which continue to be characterised by rather medium to high-skilled migration especially in comparison to other migrant groups, many members of the Syrian diaspora are equipped with valuable skills, for contributing to peace, development and reconstruction. Their involvement ranges from providing humanitarian aid to those suffering from the conflict, and development initiatives that foster self-reliance, to supporting integration of the new arrivals in Germany as well as reconciliation efforts targeting the wider diaspora community. Hence, one can observe that transnational practices of the Syrian diaspora are not just contributing to development within the origin country context, but also promoting development in the destination country Germany. The lasting commitment of many members of the Syrian diaspora represents a great potential for collaboration with German development cooperation. Measures that tackle the key challenges of diaspora engagement, such as the promotion of capacity development and networking can thus enable the Syrian diaspora to reach its full potential.

2. Concept of diasporas

The term diaspora has become a catch word in public, academic and media debates and is used to describe diverse forms of social actors ranging from immigrant populations, displaced communities, and ethnic minorities to transnational social formations (Brubaker, 2005). In line with newer conceptualisations within the diaspora literature, this study understands diasporas as multi-layered, heterogeneous, and dynamic social formations, resulting from an active process of transnational mobilisation, hence moving beyond essentialist conceptions of identity, culture and belonging (F. Adamson, 2008; Baser & Swain, 2010; Sökefeld, 2006). Importantly, as Lyons and Mandaville (2010) argue, not every migrant who feels connected to the homeland and shares a common identity with others should be considered as part of a diaspora, but only those who are "mobilized to engage in homeland political process" (p.126). This study focusses on the organised Syrian diaspora, thus, on Syrian diasporic entrepreneurs, their organisational framework, transnational links and practices. As

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collective action of diaspora groups often tend to be a result of transnational mobilisation activities by a small elite, whose legitimacy might even be contested (F. Adamson, 2008; Portes, Escobar, & Radford, 2007), the findings should not be considered as representative for the Syrian immigrant population as a whole. Rather, the study seeks to contribute to an understanding of the contributions of Syrian diaspora organisations to peace, development and reconstruction and to highlight potential avenues for cooperating with the German development cooperation.

Diaspora engagement is highly specific to individual diaspora communities and their interests, aspirations, institutions, and sources of identities. At the same time, members of diasporas may face different social, economic and political circumstances and conditions in the destination country that, along with different trajectories of displacement and contextual aspects in the country of origin, shape identities, political orientations and their capacity of engagement (Al-Ali, Black, & Koser, 2001). Both the individuals' capabilities and their aspirations to get involved influence the way and form of diaspora engagement. Moreover, the dimension and nature of diaspora involvement depends on the size, composition and distribution of diaspora groups (Al-Ali et al., 2001; Shain & Barth, 2003). Chapter 4 of this report, therefore, presents an overview of Syrian migration patterns and history from a global perspective and provides an insight into the characteristics of the Syrian immigrant population in Germany.

Both formal and informal organisations and networks promote engagement, channel collective action and provide an important basis for mobilising practices of diaspora groups (Sökefeld, 2006). The ability of diaspora organisations to generate and maintain a common identity and to create functioning structures and networks, influence the dimension and nature of diaspora involvement in transnational social fields (Shain & Barth, 2003). Diaspora organisations can range from associations and clubs based on ethnicity or religion to aid and welfare organisations as well as community-based and other civil society organisations (Van Hear, 2014). Chapter 5, is devoted to the analysis of the organisational framework, transnational links and practices and the broader development of the Syrian diaspora in Germany.

Finally, diaspora groups do not act in a political vacuum; rather their actions are encouraged, constrained or shaped by the transnational opportunities, hence, contextual factors in both the country of origin and destination. Chapter 6, thus, contributes to an understanding on how diaspora- and country-specific factors converge to influence forms of engagement in order to assess diaspora potentials for reconstruction and development.

3. Methodology

This research was carried out in the form of an exploratory mapping study, which employed a mix of methods for data collection and analysis. As a first step, a literature review on diaspora

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engagement in conflict-settings and their contribution to development and reconciliation has been conducted. Secondary data and statistics have been reviewed and included in order to provide an overview of the demographic and socio-economic composition of the Syrian immigrant population in Germany. Data on the structures of the Syrian diaspora in Germany, as well as on their existing and potential contributions to development, reconstruction and reconciliation has been collected in the form of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with members of the diaspora and individuals active in diaspora organisations. This study, hence, focuses on diaspora organisations as units of analysis since these constitute pools of aggregated interests and represent important points of collective action and engagement. Bush (2008) defines diaspora organisations as “complex, formal, informal or semi-formal organizations that articulate and pursue goals that are asserted to be representative of the interests and aspirations of ‘the diaspora’ as a whole” (p.195).

One important caveat of this study is that one should not treat diasporas as an extension of the nation-state model, implicating that there exists conformity between territory, culture and identity. In particular, since the post-war era, economic, political and cultural boundaries are shaped and changed constantly, resulting in new claims of membership, belonging and identity (Soysal, 2000). Identities are hybrid, fluid and multi-layered and, hence, boundaries of diaspora groups are constantly drawn and redrawn (Mavroudi, 2007). The Middle East is the birthplace and spiritual centre of diverse religions and home to numerous ethnic groups, scattered across various countries. As a result, the Syrian society is characterised by a rich diversity in terms of ethnicity and religion, which is also reflected in the diaspora. In addition, this also means that imagined communities of diasporas are not necessarily limited to national borders, but can span over different countries of origin, like in the case of the Kurdish or Aramaic/Assyrian diasporas, resulting in competing territorial claims of contested homelands.

The focus of this study lies on diaspora organisations that target explicitly Syria or the Syrian community in Germany. Hence, Kurdish organisations that pursue the objective of an independent Kurdish state, as well as cultural associations that were founded for the purpose of preserving the Aramaic cultural heritage, representing the interests of the Aramaic Christians in Germany, were excluded from this study. This does not mean that these objectives and claims are not legitimate or relevant, but are rather perceived as claims of the Kurdish or Aramean/Assyrian diaspora, respectively. However, Kurdish and Aramaic organisations have been included, when they were identified (or identified themselves) as part of the Syrian diaspora.

To gain an overview of the organisational landscape, a mapping of Syrian diaspora organisations in Germany was conducted, using different channels for gathering the information. As a first step, a search was conducted in the Common Register Portal of the German federal states, which maintains a database of all registered associations in Germany. Using different keywords such as “Syria”, “Syrian” “Syrians”, 100 organisations have been identified. Eight of these organisations

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were excluded from the mapping, because these were run by non-Syrians. For 48 of the organisations no phone number, email address, website or Facebook page could be identified and no information about their activities could be generated through desk research. In the case of 29 organisations, however, postal addresses were available, so that these have been contacted and informed of the study via a letter and paper-based survey. Despite these efforts, only 1 response was received from the paper-based surveys. Additionally, a significant proportion (12 of 29) of these letters was returned as 'not known at this address'. After the identification of key contacts through the initial mapping, snowball sampling and extended desk research were conducted resulting in 15 further contacts within the Syrian community. The findings presented in this study relate to the 60 organisations, for which contact information (phone, email or a web presence) and comprehensive information on their activities were available.

Given this focus on organisations, data was collected from groups of individuals who display some degree of organisation and continuity and engage in activities or specific forms of involvement in the development of the country of origin or in Germany. Additional insights have been generated through interviews with other relevant stakeholders, as well as through information obtained from social media pages and websites of the organisations.

In total, 17 interviews with 19 members of the Syrian diaspora, as well as one stakeholder interview have been conducted in between October and December 2016. The respondents had diverse reasons for migration, ranging from work and education, to asylum. The duration of stay in Germany at the time of the interview ranged from two years to 41 years covering various phases of Syrian immigration to Germany. Moreover, the sample also includes respondents that were born in Germany and can be considered as second generation migrants. All but one respondent were either studying or had a university degree. Moreover, with 16 respondents being male, the sample method unfortunately did not allow for a demographic spread of the sample in terms of social class/educational background and a gender balance (see Table 2). The characteristics of the sample might be partly explained by Syrian migration patterns to Germany, which tend to be characterised by the more high- and medium-skilled, male-dominated immigration ([See chapter, 4.2.2.](#)).

Table 2: Characteristics of Interview Respondents

Code	Gender	Main organisational focus	Reason for migration	Year of arrival in Germany	Date & place
IN1	Male	Development (Education)	Education	2003	Oct. 2016, Phone
IN2a	Male	Civil society, Political	Education	2001	Nov. 2016, Dusseldorf
IN2b	Female	Civil society, Political	-	Born in Germany	Nov. 2016, Dusseldorf
IN3	Male	Humanitarian aid, Development	-	Born in Germany	Nov. 2016, Skype

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IN4	Female	Key informant interview	-	-	Nov. 2016, Berlin
IN5	Male	Political representative	-	Born in Germany	Nov. 2016, Berlin
IN6a	Male	Civil society	Political asylum	2011	Nov. 2016, Berlin
IN6b	Male	Civil society	Political asylum	2015	Nov. 2016, Berlin
IN7	Female	Development (Women empowerment), Civil society Political	Political asylum	2013	Nov. 2016, Berlin
IN8	Male	Humanitarian aid/Integration	Education	2000	Nov. 2016, Berlin
IN9	Male	Development (Education), Humanitarian aid	Education	1987	Nov. 2016, Berlin
IN10	Male	Civil society, Political	Education	2011	Nov. 2016, Berlin
IN11	Male	Civil society/Integration/Political	Education	1990	Nov. 2016, Phone
IN12	Male	Development	Personal reasons & work	2012	Nov. 2016, Leipzig
IN13	Male	Integration/Cultural	Better & secure life	1994	Nov. 2016, Löhne
IN14	Male	Humanitarian aid/Integration/Development	Education	1991	Nov. 2016, Darmstadt
IN15	Male	Integration/Cultural	Protection	1978	Nov. 2016, Frankfurt
IN16	Male	Humanitarian aid	Work	1976	Nov. 2016, Phone
IN17	Male	Humanitarian aid	Education	1975	Nov. 2016, Phone
IN18	Male	Civil society/political	Political asylum & personal reasons	2013	Dec. 2016, Hannover

The interviews were semi-structured based on an interview guide (see Appendix B) that was divided into five main sections:

- 1) Migration history: As an introductory question, respondents were asked to talk about their migration history, about their lives before leaving Syria, their reasons for migration, their decision to migrate to Germany as well as their relationship to Syria more in general.
- 2) Subjective view on the Syrian diaspora: This section aimed at generating an overview of the Syrian diaspora in Germany (both organised and unorganised) with regard to the composition in terms of socio-economic factors, ethnicity, political aspirations and religion, their networks and potential lines of conflict and fragmentation.
- 3) Basic organisational information: This topic included questions about the engagement, focusing on the motivation, the structure, and the goals of the organisations as well as their sources of funding.
- 4) Current organisation activities: Questions in this section of the interview dealt with peacebuilding and potential contributions regarding the reconstruction process. They sought to explore the perceptions of peace and to maintain an overview of the activities carried out in Syria, the neighbouring countries and Germany.

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- 5) Cooperation: This section aims at understanding the forms of cooperation and networks that exist among diaspora organisations, as well as with regard to other actors, such as policy makers, NGOs and INGOs, both in the context of Germany and Syria. Moreover, questions seek to identify potentials for cooperation with German development cooperation.
- 6) Main challenges and future plans: This final section aimed at exploring the specific activities planned in the (near) future and further aspirations in particular with regard to the reconstruction process. Another focus was to uncover potential challenges and barriers the organisations face in their engagement.

In general, the sequence of the questions was applied in a flexible manner, allowing for fluid discussions and adjustments with regard to the individual situation during each interview. Based on the permission of the interview partner, all except one interview have been recorded. In order to ensure an in-depth analysis of the data, all interviews have been transcribed and thematically analysed using an inductive coding scheme to identify both common and unique narratives of diasporic experiences.

In addition to the interviews with diaspora organisations, informal and unstructured interviews with GIZ staff members were conducted, in order to get an overview of the work of GIZ with regard to the Syrian context and in the field of migration and development more in general. The information obtained in these interviews serves as background knowledge for the authors and is directly reflected in [section 6.2](#) on development and diaspora engagement policies in Germany.

4. Syrian diaspora: migration patterns and history

Given that the dimension and nature of diaspora involvement depends on the size, composition and distribution of diaspora groups, as well as on individual capabilities and aspirations, it is essential to understand the broader migration patterns as well as the social, economic and political circumstances and conditions Syrian migrants encounter in the destination country. This section provides a short overview of emigration trends from Syria more generally, before turning to a description of the characteristics of the Syrian immigrant population in Germany.

4.1. Syrian emigration profile

Syria has a long emigration history, which is characterised by several waves of emigration. Historically, high population growth, socio-political events and economic factors such as low economic growth and high rates of unemployment were the main push factors for migration, while nowadays the violent conflict is causing mass displacement, both internally and internationally. In general, one can observe four waves of emigration leading to an emigration profile that differs in terms of destination countries, the type of movement and the period of emigration.

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- The first wave of emigration was observed in the mid nineteenth-century, in which poor living conditions and obligatory military service enforced by the Ottoman Empire led to migration flows mainly to the US, South America, Europe, and Australia (Mehchy & Doko, 2011).
- The second wave of emigration from mid 1950s onwards was characterised by emigration of the Syrian elite such as entrepreneurs, capitalists and professionals, escaping the rigid regulations implemented by the socialist regime. In combination with the flourishing economies and employment opportunities in the receiving countries, these factors caused migration flows mainly to Lebanon, the Gulf countries, Europe and to a lesser extent to the US (Di Bartolomeo et al., 2012; Mehchy & Doko, 2011).
- The third wave from the mid-1970s onwards was distinguished by labour migration to the Gulf States due to the expansion of the oil-based economy and the resulting economic opportunities. After governments of the Gulf States implemented policies limiting the number of Arab workers in 1980s, emigration rates to these countries declined. Moreover, the end of the civil war in Lebanon (1975-1989) created labour shortages that further encouraged migration especially of lower skilled workers until 2005. In this year, the assassination of the then Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri led to political instability between Lebanon and Syria (Mehchy, Mahadi Doko 2010; Di Bartolomeo et al. 2012). Beside emigration to Arab countries, smaller flows of asylum seekers migrating to Europe formed a part of this emigration period (ICMPD & IOM, 2010).
- In recent time the fourth wave of emigration has been occurring. The violent crisis is causing massive refugee outflows as well as internal displacement. It is estimated that the conflict displaced almost 11 million people, with the majority (6.1 million) of individuals being internally displaced (UNHCR, 2016a). Moreover, the number of refugees and asylum seekers reached more than 4.8 million in 2016. Of these, the great majority moved to neighbouring countries, with Turkey (2.765 million), Lebanon (1.017 million) and Jordan (655,400) hosting the major part of Syrian refugees in the region (UNHCR, 2016b). Only twelve per cent of the Syrian refugees were residing in European countries in 2015, most of them in Germany and Sweden (De Bel-Air, 2016).

Given that the Syrian government does not publish any statistical information on their emigrant population, no exact numbers on the Syrian emigrant population can be provided from an origin country perspective. According to a Syrian migration profile published by the Migration Policy Centre (De Bel-Air, 2016), the total stock of Syrian nationals residing abroad based on receiving country statistics was estimated at around 7.3 million as of November 2015, of whom 5.6 had left Syria since the outbreak of the conflict in 2011. Table 3 provides an overview of the top destination countries of Syrian emigrants and refugees as of November 2015. The neighbouring countries Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and to a lesser extent Iraq and Egypt were hosting the majority of Syrian

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refugees (76%) and of all Syrians abroad (68%) by November 2015. Other important destination countries were the Gulf States, with Saudi Arabia hosting around 920,000 Syrian nationals. In Europe, Germany and Sweden have become major destinations for Syrian emigrants in 2015.

Table 3: Top 10 Destination Countries for Syrian Emigrants, c. November 2015¹

Country	Stock number	% of total stock
Turkey	2,188,067	29.9
Jordan	1,265,514	17.3
Lebanon	1,119,766	15.3
Saudi Arabia	920,000	12.6
Iraq	244,765	3.3
United Arab Emirates	242,000	3.3
Germany*	201,765	2.8
Kuwait	155,000	2.1
Egypt	132,241	1.8
Sweden*	116,057	1.6

* The data is composed of the number of Syrian migrants who have immigrated to destination countries prior to 2011 based on OECD statistics and the number of first-time asylum applicants from Syria between January 2011 and October 2015 according to Eurostat.

Source: De Bel-Air, 2016

Unfortunately, limited data is available on demographic and socio economic characteristics of the Syrian emigrant population. OECD estimates indicate that Syrian immigrants in OECD countries had an intermediate skill level, with 34.1 per cent being low and 34.5 per cent highly educated in 2011. When it comes to the distribution of employment of the Syrian immigrant population in OECD countries, however, 43.1 per cent were employed in highly skilled jobs, and slightly less than half (48.9%) in medium skilled occupations, whereas only 8.1 per cent worked in low-skilled occupation in 2011. Among the OECD countries, France, the United Kingdom and Canada, had the highest share of highly skilled Syrian immigrants, with more than 50 per cent of the Syrian immigrants being highly educated, whereas in Germany the rate of highly skilled was estimated at 22.4 per cent (OECD, 2015). In contrast, emigration to non-OECD countries tend to be characterized by low skilled

¹ The statistics aggregate Syrian migrants who have migrated to destination countries before 2011 with the number of Syrian refugees between 2011 and November 2015. Data is based on various sources and definitions of migrant and refugee differ.

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migration, with older estimates (excluding Gulf States and Lebanon) from 2001 indicating that with 51.4 per cent slightly more than a half of Syrian immigrants had a low level of education, while only 14.4 per cent were highly-skilled (OECD, 2001). Similarly, Syrian emigration to Lebanon was mainly characterised by male dominated, lower skilled, circular migration patterns (Balanche, 2007).

4.2. Characteristics of Syrian immigrant population in Germany

This section provides an overview of the Syrian immigrant population in Germany. The German Federal Statistical Office collects annual data on the immigrant population residing in Germany, where information is available on gender, age, average length of stay, and residence status for each nationality. The data only captures the immigrant population that does not have German citizenship, and does not provide separate information for Syrian nationals on educational level, labour market performance, or other socio-economic key statistics. Instead, a microcensus conducted every year informs on the educational status and income situation of the population with a migration background. However, these statistics underrepresent very recently arrived Syrian asylum applicants, while its data is overall skewed towards the migrant population that arrived after 2011. Recently, the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees published a study on demographic and socio-economic characteristics of first-time asylum applicants in Germany in 2015, which maintains disaggregated data for Syrian asylum seekers (Rich, 2016). Yet, given that findings are based on administrative statistics, for which the information was provided voluntarily, the results have to be interpreted with caution. Beside these limitations and the fact that estimates are based on flow data for the year 2015, this study does give a brief overview of the qualification structure of Syrians, who more recently arrived in Germany.

4.2.1. Size and geographical distribution

Germany has become Europe's largest receiving country for Syrian migrants, hosting in total 366,556² individuals with Syrian citizenship in December 2015 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2016a), up from 118,196 in December 2014. This number neither captures Syrians who hold German citizenship nor does it include those who arrived in 2016 and thus had not been registered in the central register for foreigners by 31st December 2015³. The central register for foreigners does however include persons that have legally entered the asylum process, irrespective of whether they have been granted recognition yet. Still, one can assume that the total number of people with a

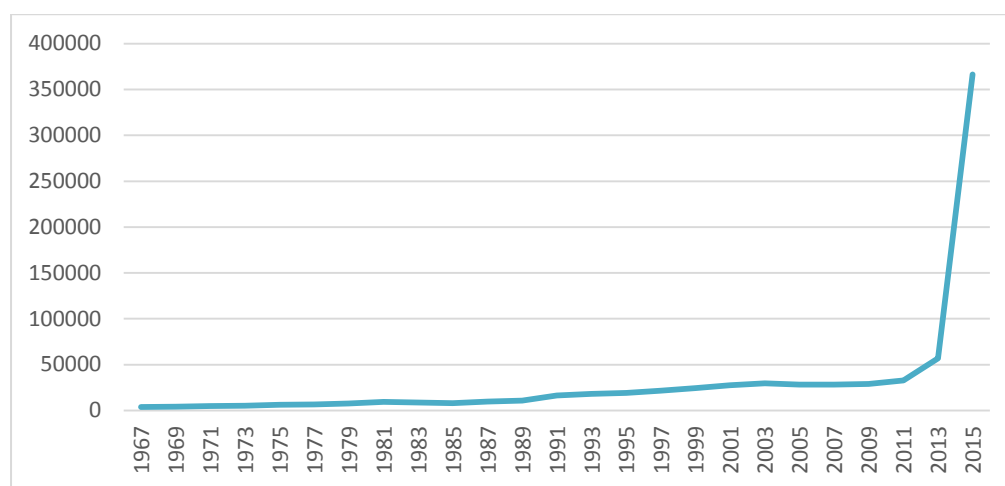
² This number significantly differs from data given in table 2, as numbers in table 2 for Germany do not include asylum seekers who have not yet filed an application, but only registered asylum applicants.

³ Eurostat (2016) data indicates that between January 2011 and November 2016 461,040 Syrians have filed a first-time application for asylum in Germany. In addition to the Syrian citizens who migrated to Germany (30,133; Statistisches Bundesamt, (2016d) prior to 2011, this results in an estimation of 491,173 Syrian citizens residing in Germany by November 2016.

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Syrian migration background in Germany is much higher. Microcensus data asking for a person's migration background indicates that in 2015 172,000 people of Syrian origin resided in Germany, of which 143,000 had an own migration experience. In addition to persons with a Syrian citizenship, migration background includes those persons with a German citizenship whose parents have migrated to Germany from Syria or who themselves migrated and have taken up German citizenship (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2016b). Looking at the historical data, one can observe that the numbers of Syrian nationals sharply increased since 2012, given the massive displacement caused by the Syrian conflict (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Syrian citizens in Germany 1967-2015



Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2016a

Table 4 provides an overview of the residence status of Syrian citizens residing in Germany in 2015. As the table indicates, the vast majority of Syrian citizens had a limited residence permit. Almost one third of the Syrian citizens received temporary protection based on humanitarian grounds, whereas around 85,000 were granted a residence permit based on their admission to the asylum procedure. Another significant proportion, almost one third, was still residing in Germany without a legal status (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2016a). This category includes registered asylum seekers who have not yet filed an application for asylum or who have not yet been granted a preliminary residence permit on grounds of seeking asylum (Aufenthaltsgestattung) (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2016c).

Table 4: Residence Status of Syrian Citizens in Germany, December 2015

	Male	Female	Total
Old Immigration Act (AuslG 1990)	284	182	466
Fixed time	117	75	192
Without time limitation	167	107	274
New Immigration Act (AufenthG 2004)	100,899	60,378	161,277

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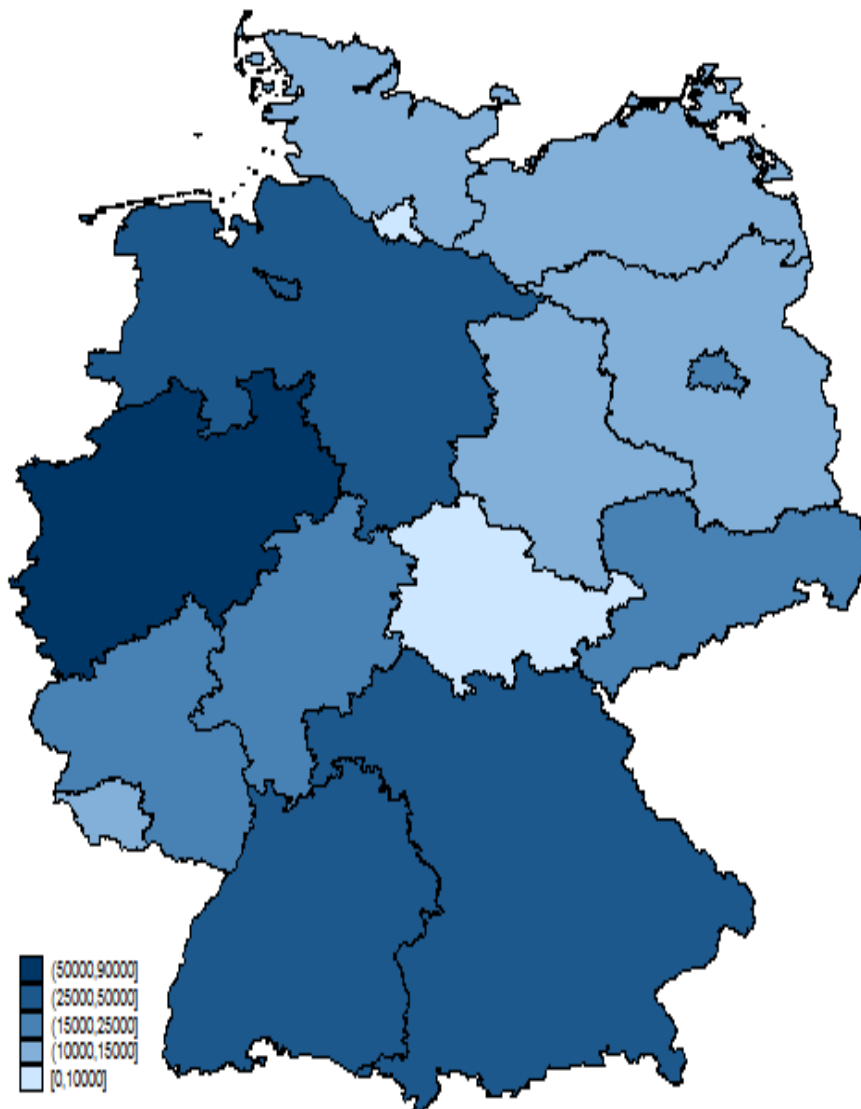
	Limited Residence Permits (befristete Aufenthaltserlaubnis)	86,734	52,582	139,316
	Education	2,861	640	3,501
	Work	1,166	141	1,307
	Humanitarian grounds	74,239	38,057	112,296
	Family reasons	8,178	13,531	21,709
	Other	290	213	503
	Permanent Settlement Permit (unbefristete Niederlassungserlaubnis)	5,613	3,797	9,410
	Other	8,552	3,999	12,551
	No need for residence permit, Stateless Persons	4	3	7
	Application for residence permit / legal status ('Aufenthaltstitel')	8,548	3,996	12,544
	EU Mobility	238	121	359
	Exceptional Leave to Remain (,Duldung')	7,893	2,191	10,084
	Temporary residence permit ('Aufenthaltsgestattung')	62,827	22,488	85,315
	Without Status ('ohne Aufenthaltstitel, Duldung oder Gestattung')	75,187	33,868	109,055
	Total	247,328	119,228	366,556

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2016a

Looking at the geographical distribution, one can observe that with 84,261 Syrian nationals, North Rhine-Westphalia hosts the highest share of Syrian citizens residing in Germany in December 2015, followed by Lower Saxony (41,324), Bavaria (40,111) and Baden-Wuerttemberg (38,624) (Figure 2). Given that a significant proportion of Syrian nationals arrived in Germany after the outbreak of the crisis as asylum seekers, the distribution might be highly influenced by the "Königstein Key", which regulates the initial distribution of asylum-seekers among the Federal States (Bundesländer) based on tax revenues and population numbers. The key determines in which Federal State a prospective asylum seeker has to apply for asylum upon arrival in Germany.

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Figure 2: Geographical distribution of Syrian citizens in Germany, December 2015



Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2016a

4.2.2. Demographic and socio-economic characteristics

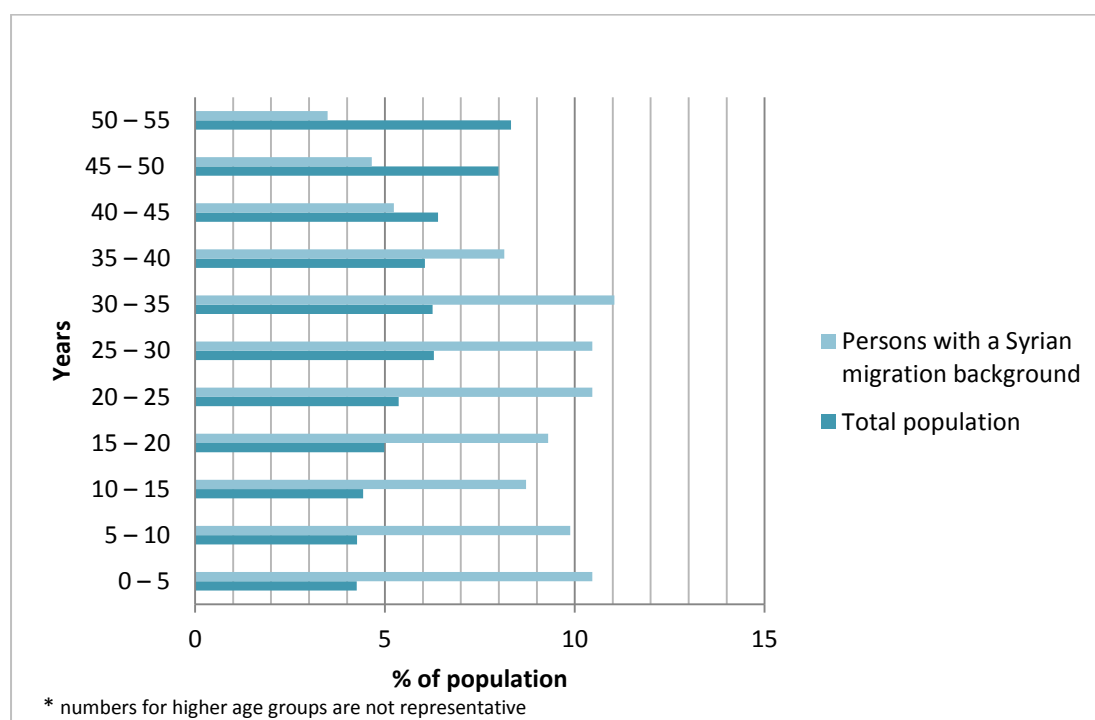
The Federal Statistical Office annually provides data on the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the population residing in Germany with a migration background (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2016b). The latest data gathered stems from the year 2015. Due to the high influx of Syrian nationals as asylum seekers during this year, the data is likely to underrepresent very recently arrived Syrians. While the census technically includes official communal accommodation of asylum applicants, their location in often provisional infrastructures leads to their omission in the sampling for the census (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2016c). However, given the high proportion of Syrians who have arrived since 2011 in comparison to the number of pre-2011 Syrian migrants, the

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data is overall likely to disproportionately reflect the characteristics of the new refugee population. As the microcensus data does not inform on the legal status of the surveyed population, a comparison between the two migrant groups is impossible.⁴ In addition, the microcensus does not account for second-generation migrants of German citizenship where only one parent migrated from Syria. Still, it can add to a more comprehensive picture of the Syrian immigrant population, by including those members who have obtained German citizenship through naturalisation or birth in Germany.

Compared to the total population residing in Germany, the Syrian diaspora exhibits a very young population profile. The average age of persons with Syrian migration background lies at 26.8 years, in contrast to a mean of 44.7 years for the total population. With 61.6 per cent being males who have an average age of 27.2 years, young men account for a high proportion of Syrian nationals in Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2016a).

Figure 3: Age groups of the Syrian population in Germany, 2015



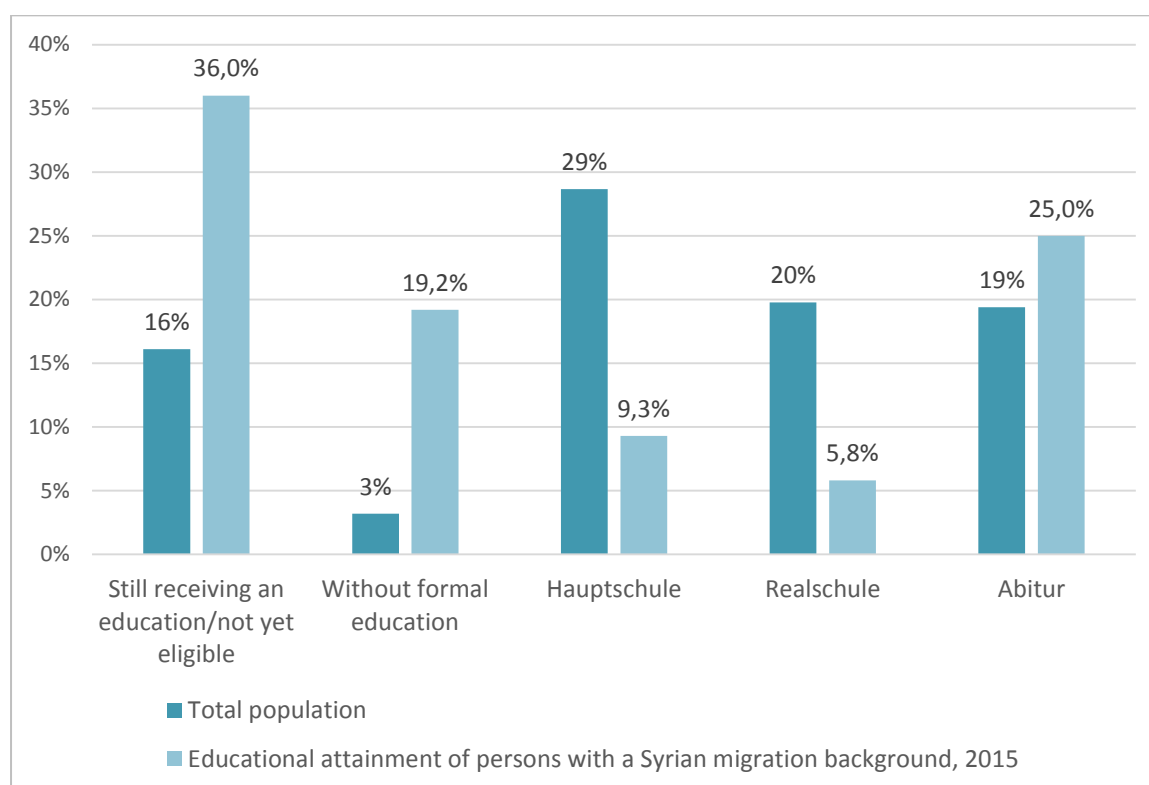
Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2016b

⁴ The 2015 microcensus is the first one to include Syria in its disaggregation by nationality. Thus, it is not possible to refer to data on pre-2011 Syrian migrants separately.

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The education profile of the Syrian immigrant population appears very polarised (figure 4). Due to the relative youth of the population, a much higher proportion of persons with a Syrian migration background is still receiving education or is not yet required to attend school (36.0%). While the proportion of Syrians without any formal education lies at 19.2% in comparison to 3.0% of the total population, the percentage of Syrians with Abitur (25.0%) exceeds that of the total population (19.0%) (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2016b).

Figure 4: Secondary school qualifications of persons with a Syrian migration background, 2015

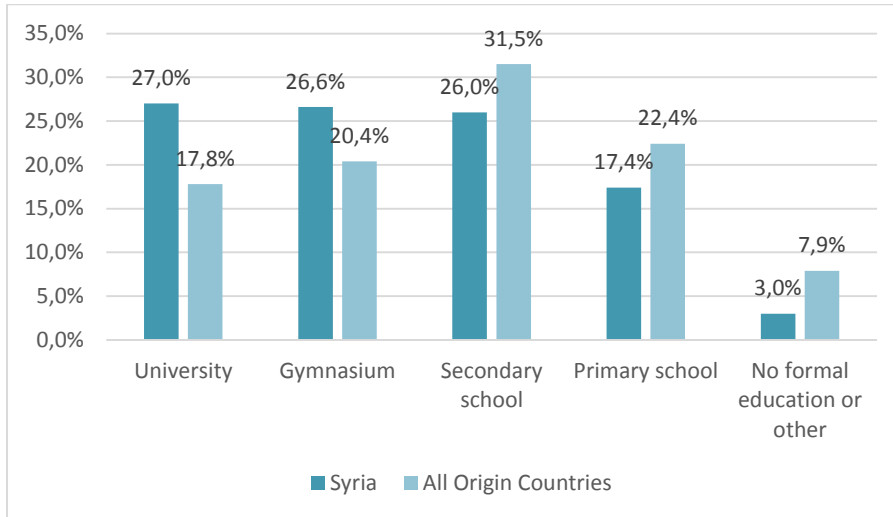


Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2016b

Among Syrian asylum first-time applicants specifically, the results show proportionately good schooling in 2015. As figure 5 indicates, they had higher levels of university or secondary education and a lower level of no formal education, when compared to the overall sample. Moreover, the study found that about a quarter has worked in technical, medical, engineering, teaching and administrative professions (Rich, 2016).

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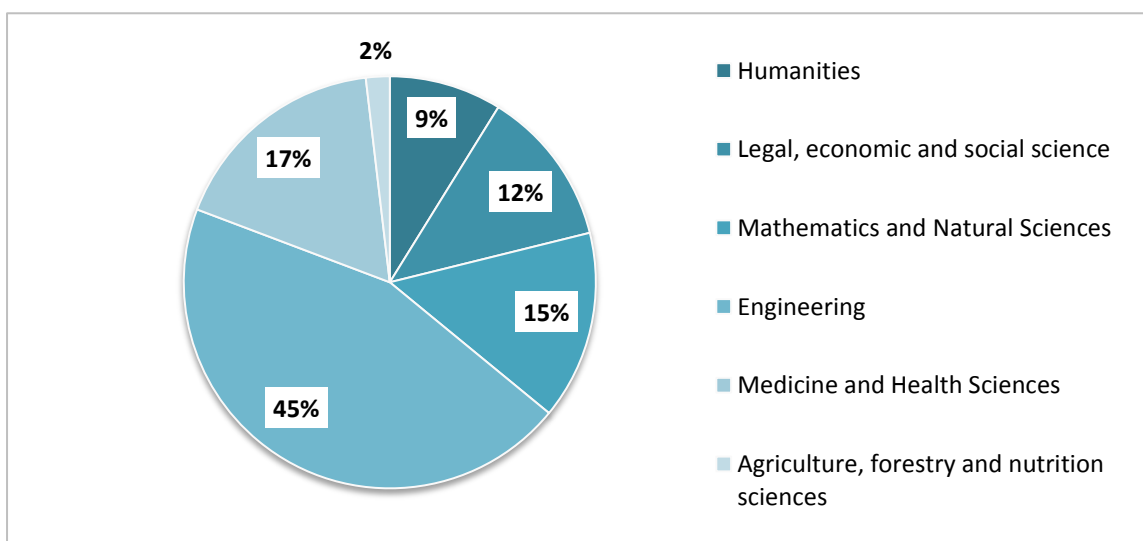
Figure 5: Highest educational institution attended by Syrian adult first-time asylum applicants compared to all first-time asylum applicants, 2015



Source: Rich, 2016

Regarding tertiary education, in winter semester 2015/2016, 3,803 Syrian citizens were registered at an institute of higher education in Germany. Of these, 3,158 were enrolled at a university, while 645 studied at a university of applied sciences (Fachhochschule) (BMBF, 2016). As figure 6 shows, the majority of students are enrolled in the field of engineering, followed by medicine and health sciences and mathematics and natural sciences. These three fields have also historically been major fields of studies of Syrian students in Germany.

Figure 6: Fields of Study of Syrian Students in Germany, 2015/2016



Source: BMBF, 2016

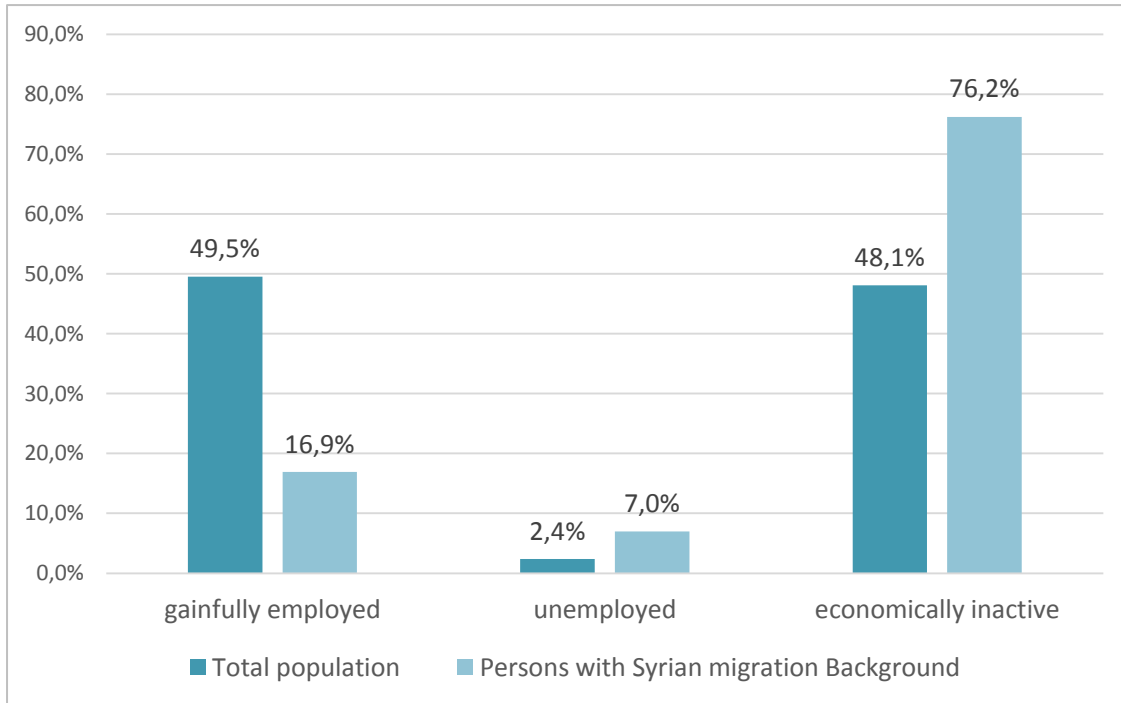
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While the educational qualifications of Syrian refugees are relatively high, especially in comparison to other refugee groups (Rich, 2016), the differences in educational systems and the conflict-affected context can result in difficulties for the recognition of qualifications and the labour market integration of Syrian refugees. The Syrian education system does not provide for a clear distinction between secondary schooling and professional vocational training, which complicates the direct comparison of qualifications for the German labour market (bq portal, 2016). Based on information provided by the Central Office for Foreign Education (Zentralstelle für ausländisches Bildungswesen, ZAB), Syrian higher education qualifications, however, are relatively well recognised in Germany (von Radetzky & Stoewe, 2016). The disruption of education since the outbreak of the civil war has resulted in incomplete qualifications and discontinued education paths as well as missing documents proving enrolment or qualification (von Radetzky & Stoewe, 2016; Aumüller, 2016). A 2015 study conducted among various refugee groups in reception centres of Lower Saxony, for instance, showed that only one quarter of refugees could provide documents proving their enrolment, or educational or professional qualifications (Aumüller, 2016).

The demographic characteristics result in an economic situation for the Syrian immigrant population that is very different from that of the general population. The population group with a Syrian migration background displays a higher proportion of economically inactive people and fewer gainfully employed. This can be attributed to the fact that persons under the age of 15 and people still gaining an education make up a considerable part of Syrian immigrants in Germany. In addition, Syrians that are still in the asylum procedure and have not yet acquired the right to work are likely to be among the group considered economically inactive. The unemployment rate of the Syrian group lies at 7%, 4.6% higher than that of the total population.

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Figure 7: Labour force categorisation, 2015



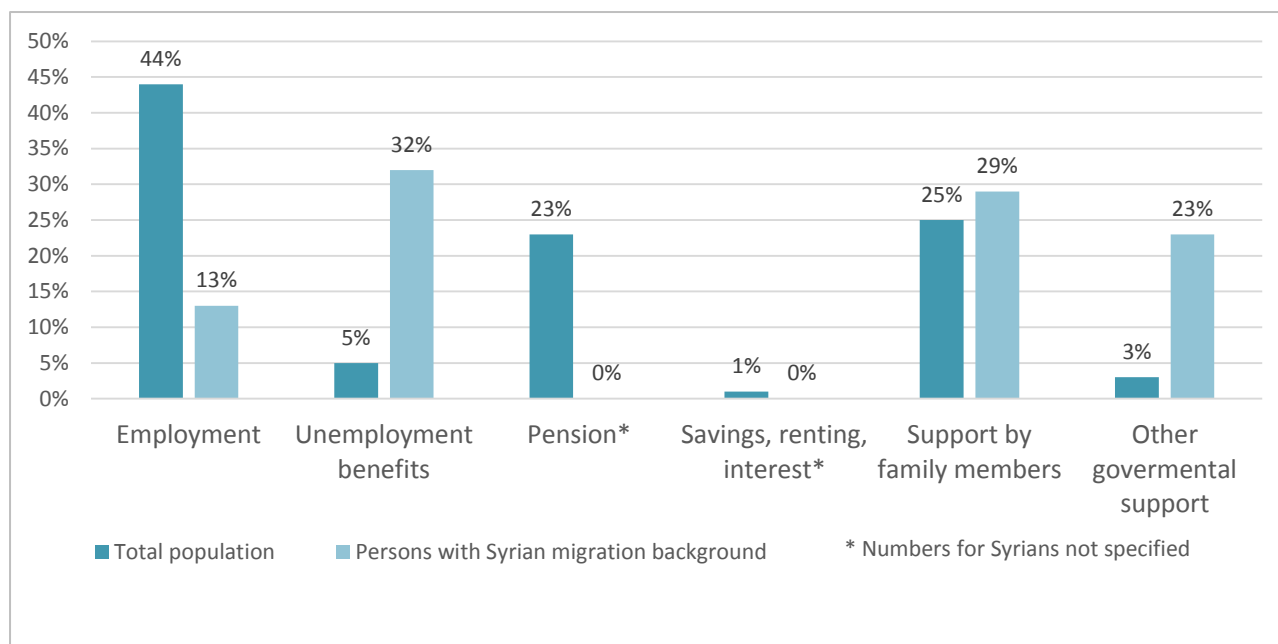
Note: Gainfully employed is the English equivalent of 'erwerbstätig', unemployed refers to the German term 'erwerbslos', and economic inactive describes the German category of 'Nichterwerbspersonen'.

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2016b

As the proportion of gainfully employed persons among the population with a Syrian migration background is considerably low, their income source profile naturally differs from that of the general population. Only 13% indicate wage from employment as the main source of income. Instead, more than half (55%) source their main income from unemployment benefits and other governmental support, a figure that lies only at 8% for the total population residing in Germany.

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Figure 8: Income categories, 2015



Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2016b

Syrian households on average comprise more household members; however, the number of gainfully employed persons earning a wage to support the household is much lower. One household member in a general German household supports two household members, which corresponds to a ratio of one to five for a household of a person with a Syrian migration background. This results in an average net income per Syrian household member that is only half of that of the household member of an average German household (see Table 5).

Table 5: Household characteristics and income situation, 2015

	Total population	Persons with Syrian migration background
Household characteristics		
Average number of household members	2.0	2.77
Average number of gainfully employed persons per household	1.0	0.53
Household income		
Average net income per household (€)	2,630	1,622
Average net income per household member (€)	1,433	705

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2016b

With regard to the ethnic and religious affiliations, information is only available on Syrian asylum seekers. Arabs (66.6%) represent the numerically largest groups of Syrian asylum seekers in 2015, followed by Kurds (24.9%), unknown ethnicity (6.9%), other (1.2%) and Arameans (0.4%). With

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regard to religious affiliation, the majority are Muslims (86%), whereas Christians account for 4 per cent and Yezidis for 2 per cent (BAMF, 2016).

As stated previously, it is a great challenge to provide a sound overview of the Syrian immigrant population in Germany. One of the main limitations is certainly the fact that the most up-to-date data is based on citizenship, excluding a significant part of the population with a Syrian migration background, while data with a more inclusive definition underrepresents the characteristics of more recently arrived Syrian migrants. Moreover, the different data sources, each providing different information on different categories of Syrian immigrants such as Syrian citizens, asylum seekers, and students, presents a challenge for a detailed comparison within the Syrian immigrant population. In the case of socio-economic characteristics of Syrian asylum seekers, results are based on flow data of the year 2015, which tells little about the overall composition of Syrian asylum seekers in Germany. Yet, the available statistics hint to rather medium- to highly-skilled immigration patterns, which are also reflected in the subjective view on the Syrian diaspora outlined in the following chapter.

5. Syrian diaspora organizations and their engagement in development

Until now, there is a considerable lack in literature on Syrian diaspora groups, particularly regarding the nature and dynamics of their engagement with Syria. Studies that exist on Syrian diaspora mobilisation before the conflict dealt mainly with identity construction and forms of nationalism of the Syrian diaspora in North and Latin America in the pre-World War II era (Gualtieri, 2009; Schumann, 2004). Yet, the escalation of the conflict and the large-scale displacement of Syrians, have led to an increasing interest in studying the Syrian diaspora. Research so far mainly focussed on the role of media work of Syrian diaspora activists, that link the voices of protesters inside the country to the outside world (Al-Ghazzi, 2014; Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2013; Pantti & Boklage, 2014; Wall & Zahed, 2015). Limited research deals with political mobilisation or involvement in reconciliation and development (Baeza & Pinto, 2016; Moss, 2016; Qayyum, 2011; Ulutas, 2011). This chapter provides an overview of the emergence and developments of the Syrian diaspora, of its organisational landscape as well as of the nature and dynamics of their transnational practices with respect to Syria and Germany.

5.1. Subjective view on the Syrian diaspora in Germany and its developments

The Syrian diaspora in Germany is characterised by heterogeneity in terms of religion, ethnicity and political aspirations, reflecting the rich diversity of the Syrian society. Moreover, the time and reasons for migration influenced its composition. In general, one can distinguish between two migration patterns. First, since the 1980s, Syrians have migrated to Germany for the purpose of studying, often in the fields of medicine and engineering. Second, two waves of forced migration can be observed. The first occurred in the earlier 1980s, when political unrests in the city of Hama

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forced many involved in the oppositional movement to seek political asylum abroad. Some respondents stated that Syrians of the 80s generation, regardless of the reasons for migration, established communities with strong internal ties, cultivating Syrian traditions and customs in Germany. The violent conflict that has ravaged the country since 2011 engendered the second wave of forced displacement, in which Germany has become the major destination country of Syrian refugees in Europe. In general, it is perceived that the Syrian community is still in the making, and that, given the large number, this recent migration will lead to the establishment of a new community, once those who recently arrived have settled in Germany.

Until the Syrian emergence of the initial peaceful movement in 2011, the engagement of the Syrian diaspora was limited to the social and cultural sphere. Syrian-German friendship associations existed, which aimed to serve community interests. Their goal was to support and strengthen the relationships between the Syrians living in Germany, promote their integration and to strengthen the ties with the country of origin. Officially, these organisations distanced themselves from political or religious goals, but were seen by many of the respondents as an extension of the Syrian state, which tried to politically control those living abroad via these organisations. Besides these organisations, communities emerged along ethnic lines, such as Syrian Kurdish or Aramaic organisations that aimed at preserving their cultural heritage and identity and to promote awareness on minority and human rights.

Many authors have argued that critical social and political events, such as revolutionary struggles, conflicts or natural disasters, can shape and influence diaspora consciousness and mobilise members to take action (Hammond et al., 2011; Hess & Korf, 2014; Khayati, 2012; Maria Koinova, 2011b; Skrbis, 2007). Similarly, transnational mobilisation of the Syrian diaspora emerged greatly in response to the revolution, rather than causing the political change happening in the country of origin. The peaceful struggle for social, cultural and political change that took to the streets in Syria to challenge Assad's government in March 2011, inspired many Syrians living in Germany to take action to shape their home country's future. Seeing people demonstrating and risking their lives on the street in Syria, led many Syrians in the diaspora to lose their fear of political repercussions and to feel obliged to support the movement from the safe harbour of Europe. Initially, initiatives were politically motivated, created to raise awareness among the German society, to establish contacts with German politicians to influence decision making on the Syrian case and to lobby for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Many respondents emphasise that both the involvement of the diaspora, as well as the peaceful movement in Syria were not ethnically or religiously coloured, but framed their actions based on notions of freedom, democracy and human rights. With the escalation of the conflict along with growing sectarian violence, the different conflict actors in Syria have increasingly drawn on political mobilisation of religious and ethnic identities. There is a fear among many respondents that this might engender a process of othering based on religious and ethnic boundary creation and maintenance, also within the diaspora. Yet, Syrian diaspora organisations continue to

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pursue nonviolent, non-sectarian and liberal goals through their mobilisation and in the vast majority of cases imagine a cohesive, tolerant, multi-religious Syrian society for the future. Hence, there seems to be no real division based on ethnicity and religion, within the organised diaspora. The major source of stratification, however, lies in the political sphere, since the revolution did not unify the diaspora as a whole, but rather created fragmentation along political lines, namely those opposing and those favouring the ruling Assad government. The latter group however, remains less visible in Germany and also less organised in the public.

Although the organised diaspora seems united on common ground, there exist different ideas, strategies and divergent solutions to the conflict. The fragmentation along political lines in the Syrian diaspora and within and between diaspora initiatives, prevented necessary open discussion among civil society and a constructive approach in dealing with diversity. A major reason for that was seen in the lack of experience with democracy and civic engagement in the Syrian context. As the following quote indicates, through their engagement members of the diaspora are learning to not just accept, but also value the differences within the diaspora community:

“We have not learned to deal with differences. We have grown up in Syria, where one had to have a certain canon and one could not have a different opinion. And now it is just that people can express their opinion, that people can have their own thoughts and it was at the beginning difficult to deal with each other. But we have learned to do so” (IN_1b).

Moreover, due to the recent influx of Syrian refugees, lines of division are also emerging based on generational and social hierarchies, influenced by both the distinct migration experiences, as well as the respective age structure of these groups. Within the Syrian refugee population, initiatives and organisations emerged supporting the integration in Germany or contributing to humanitarian aid, development and reconstruction in Syria. Many of their members are young activists, who have been involved in the non-violent and civil society movement in Syria, and accumulated knowledge and experiences through their work with local and international organisations. As the following quote indicates, members of the new migrant generation feel that the older generations have a different view on the conflict and on the situation in Syria that might not reflect the actual reality on the ground:

“So the purpose of the organisations is to develop the current generation, because we disagree with the 80 generation. You know, they only do politics. [...] And they don’t actually understand the current generation. So, the current generation, I believe we understand each other, we are on one level [.....]. The current world, it is an intelligent and smart world, democracy, values, liberties, you cannot shut people up and you cannot play the father, you look at your son or daughter as an individual” (IN_12).

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Unlike generations of Syrians that migrated in the 70s and 80s, the younger generation perceives a different kind of ownership of the conflict, given that they have been actively involved in the democratic and human rights movement and have experienced recent transitions in Syria. Rather than a 'mere' overthrow of Assad's regime, they see a need for more complex social change that breaks down the traditional patriarchal structures, which continue to exist within the Syrian society, both at home and abroad.

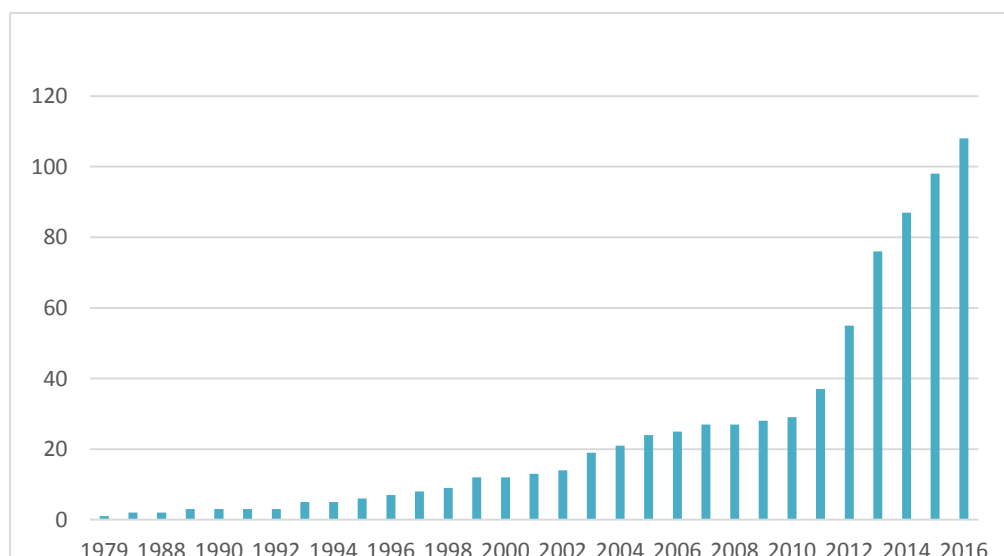
While the revolution in 2011 did inspire a national identification among the Syrian diaspora, this identity lacks a common denominator. Within the Syrian diaspora different conflict narratives, aspirations and divergent solutions to the crisis exist that are shaped not just by cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds, but also by different trajectories of displacement, gender, social class, generation and lived experiences. Yet, fragmentation and conflicts as such should be understood not only as violent and hostile, but as integral part of social change and transformation. Rather than seeing fragmentation within the Syrian diaspora as a challenge, there seems a need to understand diversity as an opportunity, that, if constructively approached through dialogue, can promote social transformation and development both in Syria and Germany.

5.2. Organisational landscape

The involvement of diasporas is highly dynamic and context specific. On the one hand, one can observe that crucial events, such as the emergence of the initial peaceful movement, the violent escalation of the conflict, as well as the more recent displacement to Germany activated members of the Syrian diaspora to take action and to contribute to a peaceful society, both in Syria and Germany. On the other hand, organisations dissolved and became inactive, sometimes due to internal conflicts or frustration over the continuing deterioration of the situation in Syria. As Figure 6 indicates, the number of Syrian organisations in Germany has increased significantly since 2011, whereby the emergence of the peaceful movement and the violent escalation of the conflict can be seen as important transformative events, triggering diaspora mobilisation.

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Figure 9: Number of Syrian organisations established in Germany, 1979 -2016



Source: Field work data

Given the highly dynamic nature of the Syrian conflict and the recent emergence of the Syrian diaspora a clear-cut categorisation of the organisations is difficult to undertake. Many organisations responded to an urgent need, be it to originally support the non-violent movement, to alleviate suffering through humanitarian aid as the conflict escalated, or to support those who recently arrived in Germany. The complex nature of the conflict that plays out in Syria, its neighbouring countries and in destination countries such as Germany seems like a multi-layered crisis, in which members of the Syrian diaspora try to address as many aspects as possible, becoming engaged in various conflict fields at once. Rather than providing a typology of organisations, the following categorisation presents an overview of the main fields of engagement that have been identified during the mapping of the 60 Syrian diaspora organisations for which comprehensive information was available. It has to be emphasised that almost 60 per cent of the diaspora organisations do not have a single focus, but stretch their scope and activities across various categories mentioned below.

Table 6: Fields of Engagement of Syrian Diaspora Organisation

Fields of engagement		Proportion of total organisations (%)	Proportion of total engagement (%)
Humanitarian assistance	34	56.6	33.0
Integration	22	36.6	21.4
Development	21	35.0	20.4
Civil society sector	17	28.3	16.5
Cultural	9	15.0	8.7

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Source: Fieldwork data

Given the high levels of violence, death and destruction, 33 per cent of the engagement takes place in the **humanitarian sector** in Syria or in the neighbouring countries, with more than half of the Syrian diaspora organisations (57%) being active in this field. Relief aid ranges from clothes, baby milk, and medicine to medical equipment like ambulances and medical devices. Around 38 per cent of the organisations active in this field have the provision of humanitarian aid as their sole organisational focus, whereas the rest combines it with other activities, such as development projects or the promotion of integration.

More than one third of the organisations (37%) implements initiatives aiming at promoting **integration** of Syrian refugees into the German society, representing 21 per cent of total engagement. Support in the integrational process of Syrian refugees ranges from the provision of advisory service and legal advice, to the promotion of professional integration. Other activities aim at fostering intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding among refugees and the local population, but also at addressing social injustice, stereotypes and discrimination in the context of the current displacement crisis. Organisations conducting activities in this field tend to combine their activities with engagement in other sectors, as only 6.6 per cent are exclusively active in the integration sector.

After almost six years of conflict, 35 per cent of the organisations perceive the need for more sustainable efforts by engaging in **development** activities (21% of total engagement), in order to alleviate peoples' dependency in favour of a more self-determined life. The main target groups in this field are women and children, who are given the opportunity for education and professional training, often with a focus on liberal values, such as gender equality, justice and democracy. Other initiatives promote the maintenance and development of the medical sector in Syria. Activities in the development field are conducted as more of an add-on, but rarely as a sole focus. Half occur together with humanitarian aid, followed by civil society and integration activities.

Moreover, 17 per cent of the engagement aims at promoting **civil society development**, with more than 28 per cent of the organisations being active in this field. This field of engagement captures various activities that promote a strengthening of civil society in Germany, Syria and within the wider diaspora. First, some initiatives tackle the more underlying causes of the crisis such as identity and conflict narratives, to promote a process of peacebuilding and reconciliation often already among diaspora members and within the wider immigrant population. Secondly, organisations implement activities that promote capacity development of Syrian civil society actors, in order to establish a basis for social and political transformation. And finally, many organisations aim at promoting democratic change in Syria, based on principles of rule of law, freedom and equality. Frequently, protests and demonstrations as well as dialogue and information events are organised

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to show solidarity with the nonviolent movement in Syria, to raise awareness on the Syrian cause and to lobby for a political solution to the conflict.

With 15 per cent, only a small proportion of the organisations captured in the mapping are active in the *cultural* spheres with the goal of promoting community building within the Syrian diaspora, by providing a space for the expression of identities and the cultivation of heritage, traditions, customs and culture of the origin country.

The presented categorisation does not, however, imply clear-cut boundaries between the different fields of engagement, but in fact its distinctions are better characterised as complex, interconnected and overlapping. In protracted conflict-situations such as the Syrian one, traditional distinctions between humanitarian assistance and development efforts become increasingly blurred, as their objectives, standards and principles converge (Harmer & Macrae, 2004). This is also reflected in the diaspora response, since many organisations move beyond the mere provision of relief aid towards more development orientated efforts. Moreover, most of the organisations were initially established to support the revolutionary movement and to promote democratic change in Syria. Many of them continue to organise protests and demonstrations in order to raise awareness on the Syrian crisis and to call for international solidarity for the Syrian cause, often as a reaction to the lack of a political resolution of the conflict. The political engagement of Syrian diaspora organisations, however, might call into question their adherence to the principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence, in particular of those being engaged in humanitarian aid. The level of politicisation is commonly a key concern for policy makers when cooperating with diasporas in conflict settings, since a potential lack in compliance with the humanitarian principles can undermine the fundamental foundations for peacebuilding, development cooperation, and humanitarian action (Horst, 2013). Yet, given the continuous violations of human rights and freedoms, the frequent crimes against peace and humanity as well as the disengagement of the international community in finding a political solution to the Syrian conflict, the demand for neutrality of diaspora organisations might become difficult to justify. At the same time, many respondents emphasise that members of the diaspora might not be neutral in their political views, but do their best to act impartial when it comes to aid delivery, where support is provided to those most in need without discrimination. Moreover, this must be discussed also within the broader debate on politicisation of humanitarian aid, which influences the “conventional actors” and diaspora groups alike, as the undermining of neutrality of humanitarian aid organisations has been documented in crises such as Afghanistan (Atmar, 2001), the Former Yugoslavia (Cunliffe & Pugh, 1997) and Somalia (Menkhaus, 2010).

5.2.1. Membership

Given the complex nature of the Syrian conflict, in many cases a small size of active membership is preferred, as this allows for more flexible and fast decision making processes and means less

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bureaucratic work. As many respondents stated, it is more about the quality of members' engagement than the quantity of members. In general, one can observe that the vast part of the continuous work is actually realised by a small proportion of very active individuals. However, many respondents state that they are able to mobilise hundreds of people, when bigger events such as fund raising campaigns or demonstration and protest are planned.

Looking at the composition of membership, the majority of organisations foster inclusive membership policies and promote involvement of Syrians with diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. Moreover, as many of the names indicate, the aim is not just to involve Syrians but also promote engagement of people from Germany. Regarding demographic composition one can observe two trends. On the one hand, organisations were established by the older generation with clear hierarchical structures, with the board often being composed of male members from the older generation. However, the organisations emphasise that younger people and women also form an important part of membership. On the other hand, organisations were established by the younger generation, many of them having more recently migrated to Germany. These are composed of young activists, who have accumulated knowledge and experience in working with international or local civil society organisations in Syria or in the neighbouring countries. Members of these organisations prefer loose and non-hierarchical structures, in which decision-making is realised in a decentralised way and based on a more direct democratic nature.

Regarding the skills levels, one can observe that the vast majority of organisations have members who are either studying or have an academic background. This shows that many of the diaspora organisations are equipped with important skills and resources, in diverse fields ranging from medicine, psychology, engineering and law, to economic, social and political sciences. Organisations that can draw heavily upon the professional backgrounds of their members, for instance doctors being able to acquire medical equipment, logistics officers dealing with transportation of humanitarian goods, or lawyers being able to deal with bureaucracy and the conventions of German law have an easier trajectory in the broadening of their scope of activities and in their professionalisation. While organisations benefit from these personal resources in their work, the demanding jobs some members occupy can make engagement that spans over years more strenuous.

5.2.2. Capacities

There exists a strong desire in many organisations to professionalise their engagement, in order to realise their full potential. Yet, a lack of capacity is clearly visible and articulated by many organisations. The vast majority still depends on membership fees and donations to fund their activities and projects. Given the protracted nature of the conflict with no end in sight, many respondents are reaching the limits of their personal resources, which, along with a declining willingness of the German society to donate for the Syrian cause, poses a great challenge for the

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survival of many organisations. In the majority of cases, work continues to be done on a voluntary basis. However, a few organisations have been able to transition to employing paid personnel with expertise in writing funding proposals and accounting on a full-time or part-time basis, a step that is regarded as an important factor for the on-going success of an organisation.

So far, only a small share of the organisations was able to access public funds from government or international organisations. Here, one can observe two important success factors. First, organisations that were able to forge cooperation with more established German or international organisations had greater access to funding opportunities and highly benefitted from the long-term experience of their partners, when implementing projects. For instance, already by the end of 2012 the German-Syrian Association (Deutsch-Syrischer Verein, DSV) started cooperating with Islamic Relief, and was thereby able to access funding from the German Federal Foreign Office. DSV has now become the Syrian organisation with the greatest capacity in Germany, employing seven people in their German office. Secondly, organisations such as UKSSD and Citizens for Syria that have a field office in Turkey benefitted from the proximity to the international donor community. The friendly funding environment in Turkey, where smaller NGOs receive training, have access to more flexible project funds and contacts to international NGOs, promoted capacity development and allowed those organisations to professionalise their actions.

5.2.3. Cooperation and diaspora networks

As elaborated earlier, the Syrian diaspora is characterised by heterogeneity, not just with regard to their capacity and fields of engagement, but also when it comes to the different interests, aspirations and strategies for conflict resolution. Cooperation between different Syrian diaspora groups was marked by both good and bad experiences. In 2011, a very diverse landscape of diaspora organisations emerged, marked by the different political identities of the Syrian population, which were also reflected in the diaspora. Even though the organised diaspora seemed united on a common ground, namely being in opposition to the Assad regime, there exist different conflict narratives, solutions to the conflict and visions and aspirations for a peaceful Syria. As conflict goes on, cooperation emerges between initiatives to bundle resources and become more effective, since for many respondents at this stage of the conflict, peace can only be achieved through finding ways of collaboration and respect. Among the organisations active in humanitarian aid, the creation and work of the umbrella organisation was perceived as a very important step, which helped to coordinate the work and promoted dialogue among the members, as the following quote indicates:

“Even this was a task, these diaspora meetings in Berlin, as Syrian representatives from different backgrounds; more Islamic, other regions [...] to come together, get some discussions. Why are we judging each other on geographical backgrounds? It was to come close to each other. And this has happened with humanitarian organizations” (IN_12).

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Founded in 2014, the aim of the *Federation of German-Syrian aid organisations (Verband Deutsch-Syrischer Hilfsvereine, often referred to as the Dachverband)* is to connect, unite and represent Syrian organisations in Germany that promote humanitarian assistance in Syria and in the neighbouring countries. The establishment of the Dachverband was initiated by different diaspora organisations and was further facilitated by Berghof Foundation, which received funds from the German Federal Foreign Office to support the founding process. For the success and working of the Dachverband it is important that it acts strictly as a neutral coordination and capacity building mechanism in order to “unify” the (politically) divided landscape of diaspora organisations. The federation represents 13 full and 6 associate member organisations, which are active in the field of humanitarian aid. Activities include the promotion of communication, coordination and cooperation between the member organisations, the bundling of capacities through trainings and workshops, as well as the promotion of network opportunities with other German organisations and policy makers. So far, this umbrella organisation is the biggest body pooling the resources of Syrian diaspora organisations in Germany. Yet, based on the results of the mapping study commissioned by the Ministry of Interior, the creation of a network for Syrian organisations and initiatives focussing on integration is planned for the near future.

Beside this, other networks have evolved, revolving around specific professions or specific aims, such as the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment, often being transnational in nature and involving members that are scattered across the world. For instance, the association *German-Syrian doctors for Humanitarian Aid (Deutsch-Syrische Ärzte für humanitäre Hilfe, DSÄ)* was founded in August 2013 in order to bundle the expertise of doctors with a Syrian background in Germany, to leverage their respective contributions and technical knowledge. The association is part of the *Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations (UOSSM)*, a transnational network, which was founded in January 2012 in France and has become one of the most important actors in the humanitarian system in Syria. UOSSM is a coalition of humanitarian, non-governmental, and medical diaspora organisations from the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, and Turkey. Their main aim is to mobilise and pool resources of the member organisations and to coordinate their actions in weekly skype meetings, in order to increase the effectiveness of the humanitarian response and to provide independent and impartial relief and medical care to victims of war in Syria.

The *Syrian women’s network (SWN)* is a network of individuals and independent non-governmental democratic organisations working on issues of gender equality. It has around 30 member organisations and more than 100 individual activists. While originally, the largest share of members was comprised of organisations and activists that were based in Syria, the on-going crisis forced many partners in the network to leave the country. Yet, many continue their engagement from Germany and other destination countries. SWN implements projects in Syria, to challenge traditional norms and gender stereotypes and to promote political participation of Syrian women.

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On international level, members of SWN are part of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board, which was initiated by de Mistura, the UN special envoy for the Syrian crisis, to enable civil society participation in the Geneva peace talks. The main aim is to lobby for a commitment to gender-sensitive peacebuilding and reconstruction as well as for enshrining the rights of women in Syria's future constitution.

5.3. Transnational practices

This section provides an overview of the diverse contributions of the Syrian diaspora in both the destination country and origin country context, as well as within the wider diaspora community. As Bercovitch (2007) argues, the nature of diaspora involvement highly differs throughout the conflict cycle, with different contributions and interventions being made in each state of the conflict. Similarly, one can observe shifting aims and activities of Syrian diaspora organisation since 2011. As the last chapter indicated, the emergence of the peaceful movement in Syria can be seen as a transformative event that triggered diaspora mobilisation. At this stage, many initiatives formed with the aim of supporting the movement from abroad and were, hence, political in nature. The primary goal of mobilisation was to raise awareness among the German society and to establish contacts with German politicians to influence decision making on the Syrian case and to lobby for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. As the conflict escalated many saw the need to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people, both in Syria and in the neighbouring countries and providing humanitarian aid became the main objective of many initiatives. The sharply increasing numbers of Syrian refugees since 2014 called for action to support those newly arriving in Germany in their integration process. More recently, many organisations focussing on Syria perceived the need to move beyond pure humanitarian aid, by implementing more sustainable development-orientated projects. The following sections will highlight the diverse contributions in the different spheres more in detail.

5.3.1. Contributions and activities in the origin country

With the escalation of the conflict, many Syrians abroad saw the need to formalise their involvement and to support the victims of the crisis in Syria and in the neighbouring countries. At this stage of the conflict, members of Syrian diaspora organised campaigns and collected donations to provide *humanitarian aid* to those suffering from the consequences of the conflict. Relief aid ranged from clothes, baby milk, medicine and medical equipment to ambulances and medical devices. Other initiatives provided financial support for widows and orphans in order to ensure their livelihood. While humanitarian aid continues to be a major focus of many initiatives, it is becoming increasingly difficult to deliver the aid to Syria. The closing of borders, as well as bureaucratic procedures in the neighbouring countries were frequently mentioned as major obstacles for a continued involvement.

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In addition to the provision of medicine and medical supplies, organisations like DSV, DSÄ, FDSG and UOSSOM, have financed the construction and maintenance of hospitals, including the funding of medical staff and electricity. Another contribution can be found in the training, development, and support of human capital and medical practitioners to foster ***maintenance and development of the Syrian health sector***. Professional training is provided in training centres in Turkey or directly in Syria. Next to human resources development, these initiatives create new perspectives for people in Syria, hence, countering extremism and addressing the root causes of forced displacement. Beside this, new media resources (e.g. WhatsApp, SKYPE) enable knowledge transfer on a regular basis, through which doctors in Syria consult with Syrian doctors abroad, discuss diagnosis or even receive assistance in surgeries.

The conflict in Syria is increasingly affecting not just the physical health but also emotional and social wellbeing of the Syrian population, both in the country and among those being forcibly displaced. ***Psychosocial support*** is seen as crucial to help the victims of the conflict to cope with the traumas of war, loss and displacement. In collaboration with local NGOs, DSV implemented a project financed by GIZ's "Programme Migration for Development" (Programm Migration für Entwicklung, PME), in which social workers from three community centres and ten schools in Aleppo are being trained in psychosocial care for women and children. One member of the Syrian diaspora with a background in psychology frequently travels to Turkey to provide supervision to psychosocial personnel, who work in refugee camps, widow's or orphan's centres, helping them to develop their professional skills. Another association, Homs League Abroad, established five widow's and orphan's centres in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan, which provide education, health care as well as social and psychological rehabilitation. They do not just place emphasis on ensuring that the basic needs of refugees are met, but also on more sustainable efforts, that lead women out of dependence towards a more self-determined life.

Syrian refugees residing in the neighbouring countries face difficult socio-economic conditions, often being particularly vulnerable due to scarce livelihood resources and limited access to public services such as health care and education. Many organisations, therefore, implemented projects aiming at enhancing access of Syrian refugees to ***employment opportunities and livelihoods support***. For instance, the German-Syrian Forum (Deutsch- Syrisches Forum) implemented a project in Gaziantep, Turkey, in which Syrian refugee women receive sewing training to enable them to become self-reliant and to live independently from aid. A future project aims at providing micro finance to female refugee entrepreneurs in Turkey, in order to equip them with the resources necessary to realise their own business projects and ideas. The widow's and orphan's centres established by Homs League offer professional training in tailoring, health care and hairdressing. More than 700 orphans and widows have been supported so far, with women now being equipped with skills to earn their own livelihood. As part of the Archaeological Heritage Network, the association Friends of the Old Town Aleppo (Freunde der Altstadt Aleppo), is involved in the project

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“Die Stunde Null”, which was jointly initiated by GIZ and the Department of Culture and Communication of the Federal Foreign Office in 2015. The aim of the project is to develop a concept for the rehabilitation of cultural heritage in Syria. One major component is the training and development of Syrian architects, technicians, craftspersons and urban planners in the neighbouring countries, not just to create employment opportunities and perspectives for Syrian refugees, but also to provide them with valuable skills for the reconstruction process.

After more than five years of conflict, there is an increasing risk of an entire generation of children being deprived of their basic right to education. Yet, children will be the ones to lead the country towards a peaceful future. Therefore, many diaspora organisations, such as Barada Syrienhilfe, Human Help Community and The Free Association of Syrian Expats, see the need in ***promoting education*** of children, through the establishment and financing of schools and educational centres both in Syria and in the neighbouring countries. Beside traditional subjects, such as languages and natural sciences, organisations put emphasis on strengthening the awareness for and education on human rights, women's rights and principles of democracy and freedom. Moreover, Homs League Abroad is promoting the inclusion of Syrian refugees in higher education. In cooperation with six universities in Turkey, they provided scholarships to 60 university-qualified students in diverse fields of study to promote their skills development and to build a strong knowledge base for the reconstruction process.

While women played a leading role in the peaceful movement, the escalation of the conflict exacerbates gender-based violence, placing women often at the margins of society. Many members of the Syrian diaspora emphasise the importance of ***promoting gender equality and women's empowerment*** in order to achieve sustainable peace in Syria. The Syrian Women's Network implements projects that enable women to play a leading role in Syria's social and political transformation, by promoting political participation of women in Local Administrative Councils and by enhancing their role in other decision-making processes. Another initiative broadcasts the daily struggles of Syrian women to counter inherited notions of gender roles and stereotypes. Through radio, it aims to make the society aware of the important role of women and their challenges to tackle gendered hierarchies within the Syrian context. As mentioned earlier, being involved in the Syrian Women's Advisory Board, SWN lobbies for a commitment to gender-sensitive peacebuilding and reconstruction on international level as well as for enshrining the rights of women in Syria's future constitution.

The Independent Committee on Social Development and Self-Organized Democracy (Unabhängiges Komitee für Sozialentwicklung und selbstorganisierte Demokratie, UKSSD) was established in 2012 in Syria to promote a peaceful and democratic transition of the country through the support of ***peace building, violence prevention and social and political awareness***. The organisation works in four cities in northern Syria and implements activities in various sectors such as education, child

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protection and youth development, women protection and empowerment, as well as humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons. The main aim of the organisation is to counter divisions within the Syrian society through the promotion of co-existence and tolerance among all Syrian community members and groups.

5.3.2. Contributions and activities within the Diaspora community

The increasing intensification and ethnicisation of the conflict, in which power is more and more mobilised along ethnic and religious lines, is perceived as a major challenge for achieving sustainable peace in Syria. The conflict in Syria engendered social divisions, which are not just reflected in the society in Syria, but also in the Syrian population abroad. Some initiatives tackle the need to ***promote a process of peacebuilding, dialogue and reconciliation among members of the diaspora in Germany***, laying the groundwork for a successful future reconstruction process. For instance, Alkawakibi organises monthly dialogue forums and panel discussions, in which topics such as democratic transitions in the Arab world, cohabitation of Muslims and Christians, or islamophobia have been discussed, with the broader aim to promote democratic education and the dissemination of respect for human rights. Moreover, the organisation created a Whatsapp group, which has around 170 members with diverse backgrounds, like atheists, Christians, Muslims, Alawites and Kurds to encourage dialogue on a more regular basis.

The project „Young leaders for Syria“, jointly implemented by Citizens Diplomats for Syria, Friedenskreis Syrien and The European Foundation for Democracy, aims at building capacity for political and social transformation in Syria. The project targets young Syrians with diverse backgrounds, who came to Germany since 2011. In a range of workshops, participants discuss topics such as identities, sectarianism, conflict narratives and conflict resolution. The main aim of this project is to develop capacities for a democratic and inclusive development basis within the young Syrian population in Germany. In addition, the objective is to promote participation and integration into the local community through civil education and professional/capacity building.

In Hannover, a member of the Syrian women's network organises meetings for Syrian refugees with different backgrounds, creating a place of encounter for people to meet and exchange experiences and ideas. While initially, the aim was to bring Syrian refugees together on a social basis, they now also discuss more sensitive political issues. Being in Germany far away from the conflict may also enable more critical reflection of the conflict narratives, promote a free space for exchange and enable Syrians to overcome religious and ethnic divides.

The organisation Citizens for Syria aims at ***empowering Syrian civil society actors, by promoting capacity building and networking***. Recently, within a project financed by the German Ministry of Interior, the organisation conducted a study on mapping the capacity of Syrian diaspora organisations in Germany in order to better understand and address the challenges and constraints

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that Syrian organisations face in their engagement. One result of the mapping project will be the creation of a network that unites the different Syrian organisations active in the field of integration in Germany, to facilitate knowledge sharing and cooperation. Moreover, the organisation established a global network platform for civil society organisations, initiatives and activists (www.citizensforsyria.org), to promote the development of independent civil society in Syria.

Only a small proportion of the initiatives captured in the mapping aim at ***promoting community building within the Syrian diaspora***, by providing a space for the expression of identities and the cultivation of heritage, traditions, customs and culture of the origin country. The Association of Solidarity with Syrian Kurds in Frankfurt (Solidaritätsverein Syrischer Kurden in Frankfurt am Main) focusses on the promotion of integration of Syrian Kurds in Frankfurt. On a regular basis, cultural events, family gatherings and meetings are organised to support and strengthen the relationships between newly arrived refugees from Syria and the region. The German-Syrian Christian Association (Deutsch-Syrisch-Christlicher Verein) aims at fostering integration, supporting Syrian refugees in Germany and promoting German and Aramaic language acquisition. Among other things, the association organises leisure activities, family gatherings and meetings to provide a space for exchange among the Syrian community in Löhne.

An initial mapping of Syrian groups on Facebook, however, indicates that much more of such initiatives are taking place on an informal level. Several Facebook groups have been established to connect the Syrians Germany-wide or in specific locations. Beside practical information on, for example, the asylum procedure, housing and the life in Germany more in general, these groups have the objective to promote connections and exchange between Syrians and to promote and deepen the relations between Syrians and Germany. Over time, these initiatives might result in more institutionalised actions.

5.3.3. Contributions and activities in the destination country

“It is not easy to plant a grown tree into a strange place without support” (IN_8).

Integration and participation in Germany influence the ability of Syrians to contribute in Syria. For the majority of respondents the potentials of the Syrian diaspora to contribute to peace, reconstruction and development can only be promoted through successful integration in Germany. Only if people can generate knowledge and experiences and build up their capacity, they are able to promote social, economic and political transitions in Syria, upon return or from Germany. That is why many of the organisations engage to promote and facilitate the process of integration of those newly arriving in Germany.

Given the increasing number of Syrian refugees, many initiatives started to offer ***advisory service for those newly arrived in Germany***. Activities range from assistance with government agencies and

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doctors' visits, organisation of information events on asylum procedures, and provision of legal advice to psycho-social support. Moreover, some organisations offer German language and orientation courses, as language plays an important part in the process of integration.

Next to the support for refugees in their daily life, some initiatives focus also on the *professional integration of Syrian refugees into the labour market*. For instance, the organisation Alkawakibi advises around 450 Syrian doctors with a refugee background on questions regarding approbation and the recognition of diplomas. In their mentoring programme, doctors volunteer to provide support for Syrian doctors in building their career in Germany. Due to the success of this initiative, they are now expanding the focus of the project to promote professional integration of Syrian refugees who have a background in engineering. Moreover, the project "Young leaders for Syria" mentioned above, promotes contacts and networking between young Syrians and German companies and organisations to promote integration into the private and civil society sector and foster mutual learning on both sides. The Union of Syrian Students and Academics (Union der Syrischen Studenten und Akademiker, USSA) advises Syrian students on questions regarding their studies and recognition of diplomas and established an extended network of professionals, students and academics with a Syrian background, to exchange their knowledge and experiences.

Many respondents see integration as a two-way process meaning that it is as much about the way in which destination countries receive migrants and refugees as much as what migrants and refugees contribute to a new setting. Cultural events, that *promote dialogue between locals and refugees*, as well as information events that foster an understanding about the root causes of forced displacement in the context of Syria are frequently organised. One important aim is also to change the perceptions of integration and to show that those who newly arrived in Germany are also bringing important resources with them and can successfully contribute to the German society. For instance, the project "Youth against extremism" implemented by UKSSD (Independent Committee for Social Development and Self-Organized Democracy) in Leipzig, aims to bring together German and Syrian youth to foster intercultural dialogue and to counter the emergence of extremism. On the one hand, activities such as music workshops, cooking and language exchange create a space for encounter and promote mutual learning among the groups. On the other hand, workshops and seminars are organised, in which participants critically discuss topics such as identity, extremism and challenges of integration. The overarching goal is to increase the youth's awareness of extremism and to develop common strategies that counter its emergence. Another example is the initiative ABWAB (www.abwab.eu), a cultural, social, political, independent website and newspaper that addresses the needs and concerns of Syrian, Iraqi and other Arabic-speaking refugees and newcomers in Europe through the provision of information on European laws, norms and legal codes as well as on the rights of refugees more in general. Moreover, the goal is to promote effective understanding between European communities and refugees, by providing a platform for dialogue and exchange.

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6. Policy influence on Syrian diaspora activities

Contextual aspects of the destination country—including policies and legal regimes of political opportunity structures— play a role in shaping forms of diaspora engagement. Likewise, factors in the country of origin, such as long distance policies targeting the diaspora or conflict dynamics, can influence if and how diaspora communities engage in the development of the country of origin. Thus, understanding how diaspora- and country-specific factors converge to influence forms of engagement is essential when assessing diaspora potentials for reconstruction and development.

6.1. Syrian policies toward the diaspora

Given the highly complex and dynamic nature of the Syrian conflict, with several regional battlefronts in the country and a great number of armed actors affiliated with different fractions and with complex and fluid relationships (Uppsala University, 2015), a comprehensive analysis of its causes, actors and dynamics lies way beyond the scope of this report. The focus therefore lies on two different actors, who are relevant in understanding Syrian policies towards the diaspora, mirroring the political fragmentation within the conflict and the contested legitimacy in the geopolitical arena. On the one hand, the *Assad government*, which has ruled the country since the 1970s, still controls areas in the country and is accepted by part of the population and by countries like Russia and Iran as a legitimate Syrian representative and sovereign entity. On the other hand, the *National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces* was formed in November 2012 in Doha, Qatar, to unify main opposition groups and to establish an interim government. The Coalitions Headquarter is based in Cairo and is comprised of a 114-member Parliamentary Assembly, with members representing major oppositional groups and individuals such as the Supreme Military Council representing the Free Syrian Army, Syrian National Council, Local Coordination Committees of Syria, and the Local Administrative Councils of Syria. The National Coalition is recognised as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people by 120 states and institutions including Germany, the United States, the European Union, the Arab League, and the Gulf Cooperation (Syrian National Coalition, 2016).

Until now, the relationship between the Assad government and the Syrian diaspora community has been marked by tensions, not at last because in the past many of the Syrian elite, escaping the rigid regulations implemented by the socialist regime, found exile abroad. Although states are not able to exercise their full sovereignty abroad, countries of origin can introduce long-distance instruments and policies to monitor and exert control over their emigrant population. In the case of Syria, state-run institutions of the Assad government abroad were involved in surveillance and intelligence measures to repress diaspora political activism and to prevent the emergence of a political opposition from outside. Members of the Syrian diaspora were detained and interrogated when they visited Syria or their family in Syria was threatened (Qayyum, 2011). As a result, until the uprisings in 2011, the engagement of the Syrian diaspora was limited to the social and cultural

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sphere. As mentioned earlier, the Syrian diaspora organisations that existed before the conflict, were by many perceived as a long arm of the Assad government, which tried to politically control those living abroad via these organisations. While in 2013, at least formally, attempts have been made to engage with the diaspora and to promote national dialogue to bring an end to the crisis (MPC Team, 2013), representatives of the diaspora continue to be reluctant towards policies of the Assad government.

The National coalition hosts a field office in Berlin and tries to engage in regular exchange with diaspora organisations, political activists, women networks and military officers. Yet, no formal policy exists that guides a diaspora engagement strategy. While cooperation due to similarities in political leanings might be a desirable goal in the future, lacking financial and human resources as well as the dramatic situation in Syria given the failed political process are potential reasons for a lack in involvement with the diaspora (Interview with a representative of the national coalition in Germany). Due to the failed political process and general mistrust towards Syrian political institutions, many members of the diaspora distance themselves from the Coalition and see no real avenues for cooperation with political actors from the country of origin.

6.2. Development and diaspora engagement policies in Germany

Diplomatic relations between Syria and Germany were established in June 1952, only to be suspended between 1965 and 1974 due to the German recognition of the state of Israel (Auswärtiges Amt, 2011). While Syrian-German development cooperation has a long tradition reaching back to the times of decolonisation (Trentin, 2008), it was intensified between 2001 and 2011, with Syria becoming an official partner country for German development cooperation in 2002. Central focus of German-Syrian development cooperation was the water sector, but activities also tackled economic reform, tertiary education, urban development and renewable energy (Auswärtiges Amt, 2011)

Owing to the Syrian crisis that began in 2011, Germany suspended all development cooperation with Syria in May 2011, in line with EU decisions. At the end of April 2011, all German experts had left Syria. Instead, the *Federal Foreign Office* and the *Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development* (BMZ) intensified their work in Syria's neighbouring countries. The Federal Foreign Office is therein responsible for humanitarian aid, while BMZ provides structure-giving transitional aid, focusing on supporting host communities and refugees, food security and the rebuilding of social and economic infrastructures. During the crisis, Germany has emerged as the third largest donor, pledging to invest €2.3 billion until 2018 (BMZ, 2016a).

The Federal Foreign Office is the German institution responsible for the coordination of humanitarian aid. Since the beginning of the crisis, humanitarian aid in Syria's neighbouring countries has become an essential component of Germany's emergency relief measures in order to

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ensure the survival of refugees and internally displaced persons. The Federal Foreign Offices thus finances sector- and country-overarching aid projects of the UN, the Red Cross and various German NGOs.

As a response to on-going and long-lasting crises around the world, and especially to the Syrian one, the BMZ has established three special initiatives in 2014 to complement the Federal Foreign Offices emergency relief measures. These initiatives serve to stabilise the situation in affected regions and sustainably improve living conditions (BMZ, 2016b). Initiatives comprise the following topics:

- Tackling the root causes of displacement, reintegrating refugees: With this initiative, the BMZ seeks to tackle the structural causes of internal and international displacement and to empower refugees through the recovery of infrastructure and capacity building; as well as to strengthen host communities.
- Stability and development in the MENA region: This initiative aims to support the political and economic stabilisation of the region by fostering peace, and democracy and providing employment and training opportunities.
- ONE WORLD – No Hunger: With the third initiative, BMZ aims to eradicate hunger and foster food security, through providing equal access to food sources, protecting natural resources and generating employment opportunities for secure income.

Next to these initiatives, the BMZ provides financial means to German NGOs, which implement projects in Germany and developing countries. Funding for NGOs is divided regionally in Germany. The *Schmitz Stiftungen* obtain funding from the BMZ and support West-German NGOs in projects which they intend to carry out with partner organisations in developing countries (Schmitz Stiftung, 2016). *Stiftung Nord-Süd-Brücken* on the other hand supports East-German NGOs in projects to be implemented in developing countries or in Germany with the financial means supplied by the BMZ (Stiftung Nord-Süd-Brücken, 2016). BMZ's partner for the management of funding provided to German NGOs is *Bengo: Engagement Global*. Bengo acts as the advisory body for German NGOs regarding the securing of BMZ funding for projects and the implementation of projects in developing countries (Bengo, 2016). Syrian diaspora organisations can apply to Bengo or foundations associated with the BMZ to obtain BMZ funding and seek support in the application process as well as the execution of their projects abroad.

As a federally owned enterprise, the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ) supports the German Government in achieving its objectives in the field of international cooperation for sustainable development. While GIZ had to suspend all its activities in Syria in 2011, it still carries out projects under BMZ special initiatives in Syria's neighbouring countries. The *Centre for International Migration and Development* (CIM), a joint operation of GIZ and the *German Federal Employment Agency*, implements the BMZ commissioned programme 'Migration for

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Development' (PME), which operates in five fields of action with activities in some of Syria's neighbouring countries:

- Knowledge transfer by returning experts: This field of action supports migrants in their permanent return to their home countries. PME provides help with regard to job placement, networking and financial aid.
- Diaspora cooperation: With this programme, PME seeks to support Diaspora organisations in their development work through financial aid, and advising in project management and application for funding, networking and support in the planning and execution of concrete projects. In addition, this programme addresses the temporary return of experts who wish to engage in and contribute to the development of their home countries.
- Migrants as Entrepreneurs ('Business Ideas for Development'): The project seeks to support migrants returning to their country of origin to build a business through capacity building, individual coaching and networking.
- Migration Advice: This field of activity aims to support migrants in their migration decisions.
- Migration Policy Advice: The last component supports partner countries in the development of sound migration policies.

In addition, GIZ directly targets the Syrian diaspora in Germany through the project "Qualification Initiative for Syrian Civil Society, Women and Community Representatives" established in 2015. Within this programme, GIZ together with the Dachverband has produced a manual for German-Syrian organisations engaged in humanitarian aid in Syria and neighbouring countries (Verband Deutsch-Syrischer Hilfsvereine e.V., 2016). Moreover, they support the Syrian diaspora in the development of ideas, proposal and application writing through capacity building workshops.

Furthermore, GIZ cooperates with various development partners and the Syrian diaspora to support reconstruction efforts in Syria. A diaspora project developed by the World Bank Group, The Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI), International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and diaspora actors, for instance, aims at fostering sustainable investment, long-lasting diaspora engagement and business opportunities in Syria as well as in refugee host countries. A conference is planned for early 2017, hosted by GIZ on behalf of BMZ which serves as a platform to bring together development actors and the Syrian diaspora and to develop concrete ideas for action.

Next to state actors, the *Berghof Foundation*, an NGO working for sustainable peace through the transformation of conflict, seeks to strengthen the Syrian diaspora in Germany. The foundation provides capacity-building opportunities for Syrian political and civil society actors in order to include them in the political dialogue and support them in their work for the transformation of Syrian society. Next to activities within the programme group Middle East & North Africa, they

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established a Liaison Office Syria in Berlin in June 2013 as a forum for Syrian civil society actors. Commissioned by the EU's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO), the Berghof Foundation together with the UK-based diaspora association Afford and the Danish Refugee Council implemented the *Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination* (DEMAC) project in 2016. The project targets Syrian diaspora actors in Germany, Somali diaspora actors in Denmark and Sierra Leonean diaspora actors in the UK, as well as representatives of "conventional" aid organisations. The main objective was to "improve diaspora emergency response capacities and to facilitate the coordination with the 'conventional' international humanitarian system" (DEMAC, 2016).

7. Key challenges and avenues for cooperation

7.1. Key challenges

Over the past years, the Syrian diaspora showed strong commitment in alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people, in building a strong basis for social change and political transformation and in promoting a democratic vision for the country of origin, in which all Syrians regardless of their backgrounds can live in dignity and freedom. Many of the organisations have a strong desire for professionalisation, yet they also face many challenges that stop them from reaching their full potential.

The devastating situation in Syria, with high levels of violence and destruction, due to frequent attacks on civilians and infrastructure, is seen as the greatest challenges for diaspora involvement. After almost six years of conflict, war crimes and crimes against humanity, many Syrians feel abandoned by the international community in their efforts to fight for a peaceful solution of the conflict:

"I believe that strongly, that there is no peace without justice. And justice, it needs accountability. And I think that was the mistake, the big fault, that the international community did, when it just closed the eyes" (IN_7).

The fact that the Syrian conflict progresses with no end in sight causes despair, frustration and hopelessness, but also limits the sustainability of diaspora contributions. The repeated targeting of schools and hospitals by airstrikes, destroyed some of the infrastructure that was built by diaspora organisations and injured or even killed medical staff, patients, teachers and children:

"We had a hospital in Aleppo, which already at the end of April was directly attacked and badly damaged and went completely out of service" (IN_14).

The fluid and complex nature of the conflict makes countrywide coverage impossible to realise, leading to unintended selectivity in the aid delivery. Besides the urgent humanitarian needs in territories controlled by the so called Islamic State or other besieged areas, local partner

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organisations were forced to stop their engagement or continue to operate at limited capacity underground. While over the years organisations established trustful relationships with reliable partners, many of them left the country, were detained or killed in attacks. For instance, at the beginning of the conflict, around 80 per cent of the member organisations and activists of the Syrian women's network was active in Syria, while now the majority of members are based abroad and spread all over the world. Moreover, due to the killing and suffering of the Syrian people, respondents perceive a challenge in realising more long-term peace and development orientated initiatives:

"With this situation, the women rights they just got at the end, it's no priority, when the people in general are dying. So? What mean women rights now, to talk about women rights, and we are going to lose Syria in general. Syria, it is destroyed" (IN_7).

Hence, while there is a huge potential of the diaspora to contribute to peace, reconstruction and development, sustainable contributions can only be realised upon a resolution of the immediate conflict, supported by efforts from the international community.

The second major challenge perceived by all respondents is the lack of capacity due to limited infrastructure and scarce human and financial resources. The majority of organisations lack necessary working equipment, such as office space and supplies, to efficiently plan and implement their activities. Moreover, as the following quote indicates, work continues to be predominantly done on a voluntary basis next to regular employment and family obligations:

"We have also a special case, it is not only about a year of political crisis. But it is now five, six years and perhaps will go on for still three or four years. Therefore, I think, I must also live, also work and make money and so on. And it is difficult to just do everything on voluntary basis" (IN_10).

Many organisations express a lack of human resources with respect to administrative skills, such as proposal writing and accounting, but also regarding more strategic management skills and leadership. A main reason for that is perceived in the fact, that the majority of organisations still heavily rely on donations and membership fees to finance their involvement. These financial constraints limit the potential to invest in needed infrastructure and human resources, which in turn would further facilitate access to public funding and professionalisation. Moreover, respondents perceive a lack of information on funding opportunities, as well as high bureaucratic burdens associated with fund applications and management as major barriers for capacity building and professionalisation. Some organisations also experienced discrimination in the funding procedure of government funds. Even though, diaspora and local organisations implement the vast majority of humanitarian aid due to their context-specific knowledge, extensive networks and access to

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otherwise inaccessible areas, they at the same time often only receive a small proportion of the funds as implementing partners:

“INGO receive the money, then they take half of it, and they give third of it. And then we have to use this small part, half of it, you know, maybe even quarter, to pay our staff and to pay all risks and also to pay for the activities (IN_11).”

Discrimination in funding procedures, where often more established German or international organisations were favoured, was not just perceived in the case of organisations providing aid in Syria, but also among organisations that focus on the integration of refugees in Germany. Even for organisations with greater capacity, the project based nature of funding leads to constant insecurity, regarding the predictability and continuation of engagement in the future. Many organisations aim to establish sustainable projects but erratic funding situations deter them from larger commitments.

Counter-terrorism regulations present another challenge, based on which some banks in Germany refused to transfer money to local partners in Turkey or Lebanon. While there is a clear need for such regulations given the security context of the Syrian crisis, these have unintended but often serious consequences for the people inside Syria, who highly depend on the financial contributions of the diaspora. Moreover, respondents frequently mentioned the unpredictable closing of borders, as well as bureaucratic procedures in the neighbouring countries as major obstacles for a continued involvement in Syria.

7.2. Avenues for cooperation

Many respondents perceive that the German government can and should play an important role in the reconstruction process of Syria, not least because of its strong commitment in the reception of Syrian refugees. There is a strong willingness among the Syrian diaspora organisations to cooperate with the German development cooperation and to build a trustful relationship to realise joint efforts for the development and reconstruction of the country. Matching both the needs of the diaspora and the objectives of German Development Cooperation, several forms of potential cooperation can be identified.

Approaching the diaspora

The Syrian diaspora is characterised by heterogeneity, not just with regard to their capacity and fields of engagement, but also when it comes to the different interests, aspirations and strategies for conflict resolution. Umbrella organisations, such as the German-Syrian Dachverband, are important points of contact that facilitate communication and cooperation with diaspora groups, yet, these rarely unify diaspora communities as a whole. In approaching the Syrian diaspora, GIZ and other policy makers should, therefore, make use of the various diaspora networks in order to reach the diverse range of Syrian diaspora organisation in Germany. In spite of strong similarities in

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the perceived challenges, organisations established by those, who more recently arrived in Germany might face more bureaucratic barriers with regard to legal issues of registration, hiring and accounting, not at last because of a potential lack in German language skills. Hence, involvement of this group so far might be more informal in nature, since skills are required to register organisations and to apply for public funding. GIZ could promote institutionalisation of these initiatives, by providing technical support in their founding process.

Strengthening capacity of the organised diaspora and active individuals

As the lack of capacity presents a major challenge for diaspora organisations, implementing programs and workshops that promote capacity building and professionalisation would enhance their effectiveness as peace-builders and agents of development.

Enhancing organisational capacities through workshops, in which diaspora organisations are trained in the process of fundraising, proposal writing, and accounting. These workshops not only promote professionalisation, but have also the potential to encourage cooperation between the different diaspora organisations. Evaluations of similar capacity-building initiatives have shown that a flexible and clearly objective-based approach of these programmes complemented by feedback-loops between implementing agency and participants is necessary to maximise the potential gain for diaspora organisations. In addition, different diaspora actors should be targeted through varying options of activities, depending on their needs and future objectives. Activity fields could include skill development in project management, alliance building or empowerment exercises (De Bruyn & Huyse, 2008). Diaspora organisations already working in the field of capacity building, such as Citizen for Syria, Citizen Diplomats for Syria or NAHDA Group could be involved in the implementation of these workshop, not just to make use of their expertise but also to encourage peer-to-peer learning among the different organisations. Workshops could either be organised for different Syrian organisations in Germany, or like in the DEMAC project, jointly with diaspora organisations from other conflict-affected countries. This enables the creation of networks beyond the own country contexts and promotes knowledge sharing as well as mutual learning among diaspora groups. Studies have shown that other diaspora groups experience similar challenges as the Syrian diaspora, each with their own specific experiences of circumventing them (Bonfiglio, McGregor, & Siegel, 2015; Marchand, Langley, & Siegel, 2015; Ragab, McGregor, & Siegel, 2013; Warnecke & Schmitz-Pranghe, 2011). As different diaspora groups find themselves at different stages of their trajectories, having recently been established, facing conflict, or engaging in post-conflict development, diaspora organisations could learn from each other. To generate sustainable impact, these workshops should not just be organised as a one-time event, but rather in the form of a series to enable the creation of lasting networks and relationships.

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Enhancing individual capacities through the support of organisations that focus on the integration of Syrian refugees in Germany, as these promote human capacity development of Syrians in Germany, who can make valuable contributions to the reconstruction process upon return. Joint projects with diaspora initiatives that promote professional integration, human capacity building and creation of networks could be initiated, to link integration with potential reconstruction efforts of the German development cooperation. In scenario building workshops, members of the Syrian diaspora could discuss and reflect on possible developments in post-conflict Syria, and how equitable and sustainable efforts could be promoted through the involvement of the diaspora and the German development cooperation.

Promoting professionalisation and cooperation

Having access to UN institutions, international nongovernmental organisations, or policy makers facilitates the access to funding, promotes knowledge exchange and fosters capacity development and hence ultimately the professionalisation of diaspora organisations. Moreover, due to their context-specific knowledge and access to diverse social networks, diaspora organisations can be valuable partners in the design and implementation of development projects in Syria or the region.

Promoting networks between the diaspora and international actors of development cooperation and humanitarian aid as well as with professional networks, NGOs and other potential partners in Germany through the organisation of network events, workshops, or conferences, as this can enhance cooperation and facilitate access to funding opportunities. An on-going involvement of diaspora actors could help to institutionalise diaspora participation in policy processes, address a possible fragmentation and ensure a continuity in diaspora engagement (Ong'ayo, 2014). Again, programmes that focus on knowledge sharing, cooperation and networking on a long-term basis help to create lasting contacts and potential collaborations and are therefore more effective than one-time events. Events could be organised around specific themes, such as humanitarian aid, education or women empowerment to foster shared competence building of different organisations with similar needs. An important output of these network events could be an online database composed of qualified professionals, diaspora organizations, and opportunities for cooperation with external actors, to encourage knowledge transfer, the exchange of experiences and collaboration beyond the scope of the events.

Promoting networks within the diaspora, through workshops with members of different Syrian diaspora organisation would yield large benefits, since these can promote peer-to-peer learning, strengthening dialogue and the relationship between different organisations. Diaspora contributions are most likely and productive if social capital is bonded through diaspora organisations. However, these should not work to inhibit cross-identity group coordination (Wescott & Brinkerhoff, 2006). As already shown, earlier projects with this component enabled the

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diaspora to overcome disagreements and internal conflicts and fostered cooperation and dialogue among the groups. An inclusive approach, with participation of diaspora groups with diverse backgrounds and interests can encourage dialogue between the different fractions, which is an important step towards societal reconciliation and a peaceful solution of the conflict within the diaspora. Goal orientated workshops that create a de-politicized spaces for discussion can be facilitated by organisations, such as Friedenskreis Syrien and Citizens Diplomats for Syria, which have competences and experiences in dealing with diverse conflict narratives and in promoting a constructive conflict culture.

Involving diaspora organisation in project design and implementation, to make use of the expertise they comprise with respect to the Syrian context, up-to-date information, cultural aspects and networks within the country. Different members of the Syrian diaspora that are willing to collaborate and contribute with their own expertise, experiences and resources can be involved in the design and implementation phases of GIZ projects in the region. Various studies have referred to the potential mutual benefits that arise from such a cooperation and by regarding diaspora organisations as actors in development (Bonfiglio et al., 2015; Candan, 2013; Marchand et al., 2015; Ragab et al., 2013). Regarding this, different degrees of participation are possible, ranging from providing basic information to more complex consultations or joint realisation of projects based on equal cooperation between both actors. Brinkerhoff (2011) notes that generally development outcomes improve as diaspora organisations operate less autonomously and more in cooperation with donors and governments while professionalising their work. Government agencies can make explicit use of the comparative advantages diaspora organisations offer. However, there is a danger in instrumentalising diaspora organisations for national development objectives. Any partnerships have to respect organisations' identities found in their missions and values, as those are what motivates engagement. Respect for organisational identity leads organisations to realise their own added-values, promotes a self-awareness fostering ownership of projects and supports a commitment to partnerships (J. M. Brinkerhoff, 2011a). It is thus important to foster the identification of missions and values within diaspora organisations in order to strengthen possible partnerships with German development cooperation

Recommendations for programme components of PME

Despite the on-going conflict, several avenues for cooperation within the PME programme components can be identified, now and for the future:

Knowledge transfer by returning experts: At this stage of the conflict, for many respondents return to Syria is not a realistic option, yet might be a desirable opportunity in the future. In general, there is a need to approach return migration and its potential benefits in a context-sensitive manner. Proclamations of the positive impacts of return migration rest on several assumptions, which need

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to be cautiously evaluated within the Syrian context. These assumptions include the self-selected character of migration, the possibility for migrants to accumulate valuable skills and values in host societies, a successful mediation between origin and destination, and the maintenance of strong links with home communities that foster conflict resolution (van Houte, 2014). Whether return migrants will be able to transfer acquired skills and knowledge into their home contexts largely depends on the institutional mechanisms they encounter and that are created for them now. Therefore, it is important that the development of capacities and skills for knowledge sharing already starts in Germany and that institutional arrangements are in place which allow for knowledge accumulation. Due to their extensive networks, diaspora organisations could be involved in a mapping of skills within the Syrian immigrant population, based on which the creation of different professional networks could be promoted and potentials for this component be evaluated. Although people are not willing to go back permanently at this point, there is an opportunity to implement shorter-term return programs upon the resolution of the immediate conflict.

Cooperation with Diaspora Organisations: Many organisations stated high interest in applying for funding and in benefitting from capacity development and support in project planning. To ensure sustainability of the projects, the funding streams should allow for the financing of administrative staff that has the expertise to deal with the bureaucracy implied by public funding. Moreover, respondents expressed the desire for more long-term funds, which enable the creation of necessary structures for professionalisation and to decrease uncertainty. As all organisations work with local partners in Syria, the support of diaspora projects not just alleviates the suffering of the victims of the conflict, but also promotes structures that foster sustainable return and potentials for reconstruction in the future.

Temporary return of Diaspora experts: Many respondents express the desire to return to Syria on a temporary basis once the violent conflict has come to an end, to contribute to the reconstruction process with their expertise, knowledge and skills. Promoting temporary return to the neighbouring countries could already be promoted through the programme to encourage knowledge sharing, and capacity building of local partners.

Migrants as Entrepreneurs: Once the conflict in Syria has ceased, the project can promote economic development in Syria, by aiding returning refugees in the (re)building of enterprises. As many of the organisations already perceive the need for more sustainable efforts that lead people out of dependence towards a more self-determined life, programmes could be developed to promote entrepreneurship in Syria or in the neighbouring countries. Members of the diaspora could receive training from GIZ and mentor entrepreneurs in the region, to help them realise their business ideas. GIZ regional offices in the neighbouring countries could provide their expertise on potential sectors and types of businesses, but also on how to mitigate the potential risks that Syrian entrepreneurship promotion involves for host communities (e.g. labour market competition for

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locals). As profession matters for diaspora engagement (Brinkerhoff, 2006), targeted sectors should also reflect diaspora labour and educational characteristics. This enforces the need for a mapping of diaspora professions and the willingness to engage in business development in Syria post-conflict.

General recommendations

Promoting visibility and appreciation: For more than five years, the Syrian diaspora has shown strong commitment in promoting a peaceful solution for the conflict. Despite these efforts, the public, political and media attention continues to focus on the violent aspects of the conflict and pessimistic views on migration. Public recognition and appreciation of the contributions of the Syrian diaspora, are important measures to value the potentials of the Syrian diaspora, and to increase public attention on their work. This can generate more support by the German public and help in motivating the Syrian diaspora in their efforts (Ong'ayo, 2014). This could be realised through the organisation of public events and conferences, as well as through press releases and other forms of media representations.

Support and acknowledge various forms of engagement: While there is a clear potential of many diaspora initiatives to contribute directly to development and reconstructions, others tackle more intangible and long-term developmental effects. The rebuilding of Syria will only be lasting and sustainable if the on-going violent conflict can be solved, internationally but also within the Syrian society itself. Action taken by Syrian civil society organisations in Germany that address social, political, ethnic and religious divisions are important contributions in building a basis for sustainable peace and successful reconstruction efforts. Through some of their educational projects, diaspora members already act as norm entrepreneur, advocating principles of human rights, women rights, democracy or equality amongst others. Moreover, as Syrians in Germany need to be prepared to rebuild their country once the conflict has ended, integration and human capacity building are important measures in order to ensure that Syrians are equipped with the necessary skills to do so. From a policy coherence perspective, there is a clear need to not just support development orientated involvement, but also engagement in the field of integration and actions that target the wider diaspora community.

Complex crisis requires flexible and innovative responses: There is a common mistrust among policy makers that conflict-affected diaspora act almost never neutral and that they lack structures and experiences when compared to conventional development and humanitarian actors. This applies especially to those diaspora organisations engaged in humanitarian work, which face accusations of lacking commitment to the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence, and are regarded as political by default due to their identification with the opposition in the Syrian case (Svoboda & Pantuliano, 2015). While one has to acknowledge that to some extent the Syrian diaspora's engagement is political by nature, as it stems from a failure to find a political solution to

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the conflict and results from solidarity rather than neutrality, the traditional system of humanitarian and development actors is itself not immune. Instead of criticism and mistrust, a pragmatic view on engagement in conflict-affected areas would help to bridge differences and overcome the dilemmas both diaspora and traditional actors face. With this comes a need to react flexibly and transform the cooperation between both actors, moving away from a view of service-provision by diaspora or local Syrian organisations where they act as implementing bodies, to genuine partnerships on equal terms (Svoboda & Pantuliano, 2015).

Entering in dialogue with Banks to address “de-risking” measures within the Syrian context: The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) (2016) defines de-risking as the “phenomenon of financial institutions terminating or restricting business relationships with clients or categories of clients to avoid, rather than manage, risk”. Some Banks in Germany have restricted or sometimes even temporarily suspended their financial services to Syria. While money transfer operators such as Western Union can provide alternatives ways to send money, their pay-out options are restricted to some areas in Syria and, hence, do not cover the entire country (www.geldtransfair.de). There is increasing evidence that remittances are crucial to the survival of households and communities, who suffer from the consequences of protracted crisis (Kent, 2005; Zunzer, 2004). As this study has shown, the Syrian diaspora does not only remit privately, but also invest collectively in public infrastructure such as school and hospitals. GIZ and other public authorities should enter in dialogue with financial institutions to facilitate financial transfers to Syria and to mitigate the negative impacts of “de-risking” measures on the support of livelihoods, economic stability and other economic and social development benefits of diaspora contributions.

8. Conclusion

Recently there has been growing recognitions of the potential constructive role of diaspora groups in conflict resolution, peacebuilding and development. For more than five years, the Syrian diaspora has shown strong commitment in alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people, in building a strong basis for social change and political transformation and in promoting a democratic vision for the country of origin, in which all Syrians regardless of the backgrounds can live in dignity and freedom. Diaspora engagement cannot be observed just among the more established Syrian population, but also among those, who more recently migrated to Germany. Many of those young activists have accumulated knowledge and experience in working with international or local civil society organisations in Syria or in the neighbouring countries. Influenced by historical and recent migration patterns, which continue to be characterised by rather medium to high-skilled migration, many members of the Syrian diaspora are equipped with valuable skills, for contributing to peace, development and reconstruction. The involvement ranges from providing humanitarian aid to those suffering from the conflict, development initiatives that foster self-reliance, to supporting integration of the new arrivals in Germany as well as reconciliation efforts targeting the wider

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diaspora community. Hence, one can observe that transnational practices of the Syrian diaspora are not just contributing to development within the origin country context, but also promoting development in the destination country Germany.

Yet, as long as the violent conflict continues, the diaspora will not be able to achieve its full potential. There is a clear need to end the death, displacement and destruction and to find a durable political solution for this conflict on international level. While efforts in this direction have to be undertaken, in the meantime the process of reconstruction can be supported in Germany. First, human capital development of Syrian refugees, through the promotion of professional integration and trainings, helps to build a strong basis of skills, that can be applied in the reconstruction of Syria once the violent conflict has come to an end. Diaspora organisations are not just providing crucial support for the integration of Syrian refugees in Germany, but can also be involved in the mapping of skills within the Syrian immigrant population. This mapping can function as a basis for further human capacity development and for the planning of the reconstruction process.

Finally, due to ethnicisation of the conflict, religious belonging as well as ethnic, linguistic and political distinctiveness are becoming important aspects of self-identification, risking a fragmentation of the Syrian identity both in the country of origin and in the Syrian immigrant population in Germany. Hence, there is an urgent need for efforts of reconciliation in order to build a united Syrian society, based on values of inclusiveness, democracy and human rights. German development cooperation holds considerable potential to work with already existing Syrian organisations and to promote new initiatives in the field in order to foster sustainable peace and development for a new society in Syria. The different conflict narratives, aspirations, divergent interest and other potential lines of division within the Syrian diaspora should, however, not only be perceived as destructive, but also as integral part of social change and transformation. Rather than seeing fragmentation within the Syrian diaspora as a challenge, there seems a need to understand diversity as an opportunity, that, if constructively approached through dialogue, can promote social transformation and development both in Syria and Germany.

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Appendix A: Interview guide

QUESTIONNAIRE IDENTIFICATION	
x.1 Questionnaire Number	
x.2 Date	
x.4 Location interview	
x.6 Organisation name	
x.7 Organisation contact person	
x.8 Contact person phone number	
x.9 Contact person email address	
x.10 Organisation mailing address	
x.11 Consent to share contact details with GIZ?	<input type="checkbox"/> 0. No <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Yes

Interviewer introduction

Thank you very much for speaking with me. I am a researcher from Maastricht University/United Nations University-MERIT in the Netherlands, and I am studying the ways in which organisations like yours engage (or do not) with social, economic, and political life in Syria as well as in Germany. The purpose of this study is to figure out, to which extend and through what activities diaspora organizations contribute to the peacebuilding process in Syria. The research seeks to understand how organisations like yours are structured, what kinds of activities you undertake, and what are your organization’s primary goals. I’m collecting this information as part of a project commissioned by GIZ (German Development Cooperation), which hopes to use this information both to understand different types of engagement activities and to investigate which organizations could participate in development initiatives in cooperation with GIZ. I will take note of whatever we talk about today—as we speak, you will see me writing information down. I want you to know that I will share the information with the other project staff, but we will not share your information beyond our team and will keep it confidential. To ensure I have an accurate record of our discussion, do I have your permission to record our talk?

One of this study’s goals is to have a roster of diaspora and migrant organisations that can be used to foster participation in homeland development initiatives. Do I have your permission to share your contact details with GIZ?

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A. Introductory question

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

1. Can you tell me a bit more about your migration experience?
 - a. How was your life before you left Syria?
 - b. What year did you migrate to Germany?
 - c. What were the reasons for your migration?

B. Syrian Diaspora

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

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

C. Basic Organisational Information

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

1. What motivated you to become engaged?
2. In what year was this organisation established? [*Potential follow-up/prompts: Have you been with the organisation for much of/not much of its history? Have you seen it change much in the time you’ve been here?*]
1. Why was the organisation established, and why at that time?
2. What would you say is the goal or the “core mission” of the organisation? Has it changed over time?
3. What kind of organisation do you consider [name of organisation]? For instance, would you consider it a humanitarian organisation, political organisation, a professional network, a religious organisation, etc.?
4. Is your organisation registered?

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5. What is the size of your organisation's membership (excluding staff)? Does this include both active and inactive members? (What is the size of both groups?)
6. Is the size of your membership consistent, or does it fluctuate?
7. What is the composition of your membership? What is the distribution in terms of:
 - a. Gender
 - b. Age
 - c. Generation (e.g., first, second, etc.)
 - d. Ethnic group
 - e. Other characteristic [Education or skill level]
8. How is your organisation financed?
9. Is the organization part of any larger network of organisations, like an umbrella organization for all Syrian diaspora organisations, or a transnational migrant platform, or something similar? Why or why not?

D. Current Organisation Activities in Conflict

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

1. In your opinion, how would a peaceful Syria look like and how could peace be achieved?
 - a. How do you perceive the role of the Syrian diaspora?
2. What does your organization do to contribute to peacebuilding? (*Please, describe all activities in detail*) [Prompt: Does your organisation have fund-raising events, and if so, for what causes? Does your organisation have a mentorship programme? How does your organisation engage with the wider Syrian community?]
3. Have these core activities changed over time?
4. Where do these activities take place? For instance, are some activities run exclusively from Country of destination while others take place in Syria or in the refugee camps?
5. Why have these activities become the focus of your organisation? What inspired these activities?
6. Aside from these "core activities", what other sorts of actions or events does your organisation take part in? [Alternate formulation: In a typical year, what activities will your organisation have carried out?]
7. Does your organisation raise collective remittances? [Prompt: if yes, how is the money transferred to Syria/refugee camps, challenges?]

E. Cooperation

1. Are any of your organisation's activities run in cooperation with other organisations or institutions, either in Country of destination or somewhere else? If so, which ones and how? [*In other words: does your organization cooperate with others to execute certain activities?*]

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- a. Do you cooperate with other Syrian diaspora organisations from [Country of residence] or other countries of residence? Why or why not? If yes: Could you give me the names of the organisations?
2. How does your organisation interact with stakeholders in Syria/neighbouring countries?
 - a. What kind of Stakeholders are these?
 - b. Does your organisation support any specific group in Syria?
3. Does the government in Germany have programmes in place to facilitate cooperation with stakeholders in Syria/neighbouring countries?
4. Do you see potentials for cooperation with the German Development Cooperation (For instance, BMZ, GIZ)?
5. If yes, through which means/forms?

F. Main Challenges and future Plans

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

1. What would you like to see the organisation achieve in the future? [For instance, what are its short/medium/long-term goals?]
2. What are its key challenges/obstacles now and in the future?

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