

Relief Actors in Syria

Syria Needs Analysis Project

December 2013

This thematic report outlines the diverse range of actors currently working within Syria to provide humanitarian assistance. For the purpose of this report, assistance refers to all types of support given to people in need. The report provides an overview of the different groups of actors, their characteristics, capacity and limitations. The Syria Needs Analysis Project welcomes all information that could complement this report. For additional information, comments or questions please email SNAP@ACAPS.org

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Overview

Type of relief actors: Over 9 million people are estimated to be in urgent need of humanitarian assistance in Syria and a multitude of actors, from widely different backgrounds, and with a variety of capacities and motives, currently seek to address their needs. While most media attention is focused on the assistance provided by international actors, much of the support for those in need comes from the Syrian population itself, through communities, the diaspora or local organisations. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and local relief providers form the backbone of the humanitarian effort and distribute the largest share of assistance to those in need. Many relief actors focus on the provision of food and healthcare with few actors providing assistance in the shelter and protection sectors. In addition, the capacity of most CBOs for post-conflict reconstruction and development is very low, limiting (future) reconstruction and rehabilitation.

In areas controlled by the GoS, the traditional state structures helped by newly formed popular committees provide services, albeit with limitations due to the conflict. In areas not under GoS control, formal and informal structures have been established to provide services such as solid waste collection and education. These structures also provide assistance, where possible, primarily in the form of health service provision and food and fuel distributions. In some areas, the community has established the structures itself, while in other areas assistance is provided and coordinated by systems established by the Syrian National Coalition or (some) other opposition groups. The different structures operate alongside each other, although often with limited cooperation and at time in competition with one another. Some armed groups are also involved in the provision of assistance and provide security and relief services in areas under their control. The security context and the group controlling an area may influence who provides and who receives assistance.

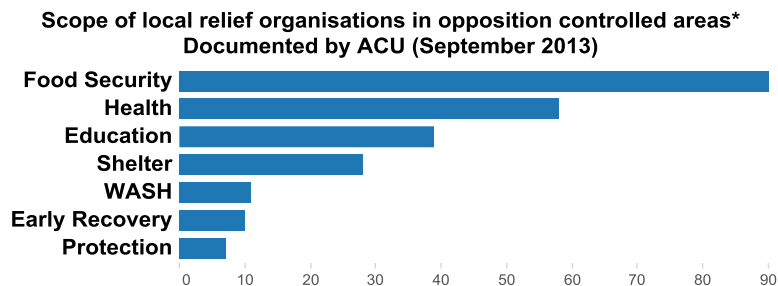
As the situation differs significantly per area, it is difficult to aggregate the different localised relief activities. However, actors operating in Syria can be loosely divided into six broad categories:

- the grassroots civilian response,
- community based organisations (including local NGOs and diaspora NGOs)
- Non-Syrian Organisations, which can be further divided into:
 - United Nations
 - International Non- Governmental Organisations, and
 - other International Organisations
- the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement
- the Government of Syria (GoS), and
- Non-Government groups, including opposition groups.

While some actors operate in accordance with humanitarian principles, others, such as armed groups, are driven by political motives.

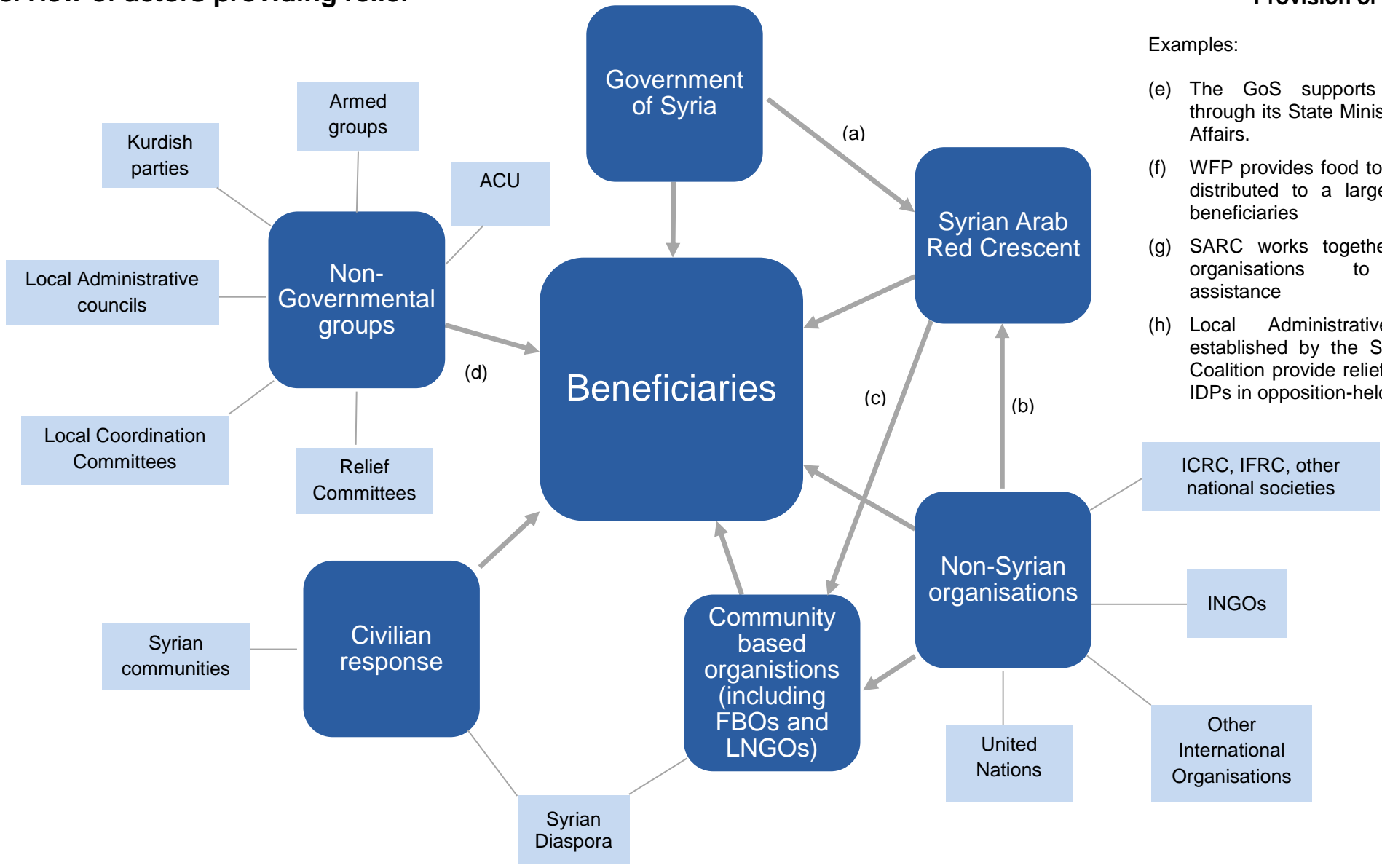
Operational constraints: Insecurity and interference by the GoS and armed groups in relief activities continues to restrict the effective delivery of relief. Syrian organisations are often hampered by a lack of technical skills and have limited access to funding and resources from international humanitarian structures. Meanwhile, as access to the affected population for international organisations remains extremely limited, more and more international actors are cooperating with and supporting local counterparts. However, ensuring accountability, especially when operating with new partners, is a major challenge.

Coordination: A range of institutions have been developed to coordinate relief efforts. These coordination structures range from GoS approved networks to informal structures and have differing levels of support and effectiveness. With so many coordination mechanisms, and a continually evolving humanitarian environment, the coordination of assistance at anything but a local level will remain a complex issue.



**Please note that this is not an exhaustive list of all relief organisations working in opposition controlled areas – it is a categorisation of the 110 organisations identified by ACU. Several organisations provide different types of relief activities.*

Overview of actors providing relief



→ Provision of relief

Examples:

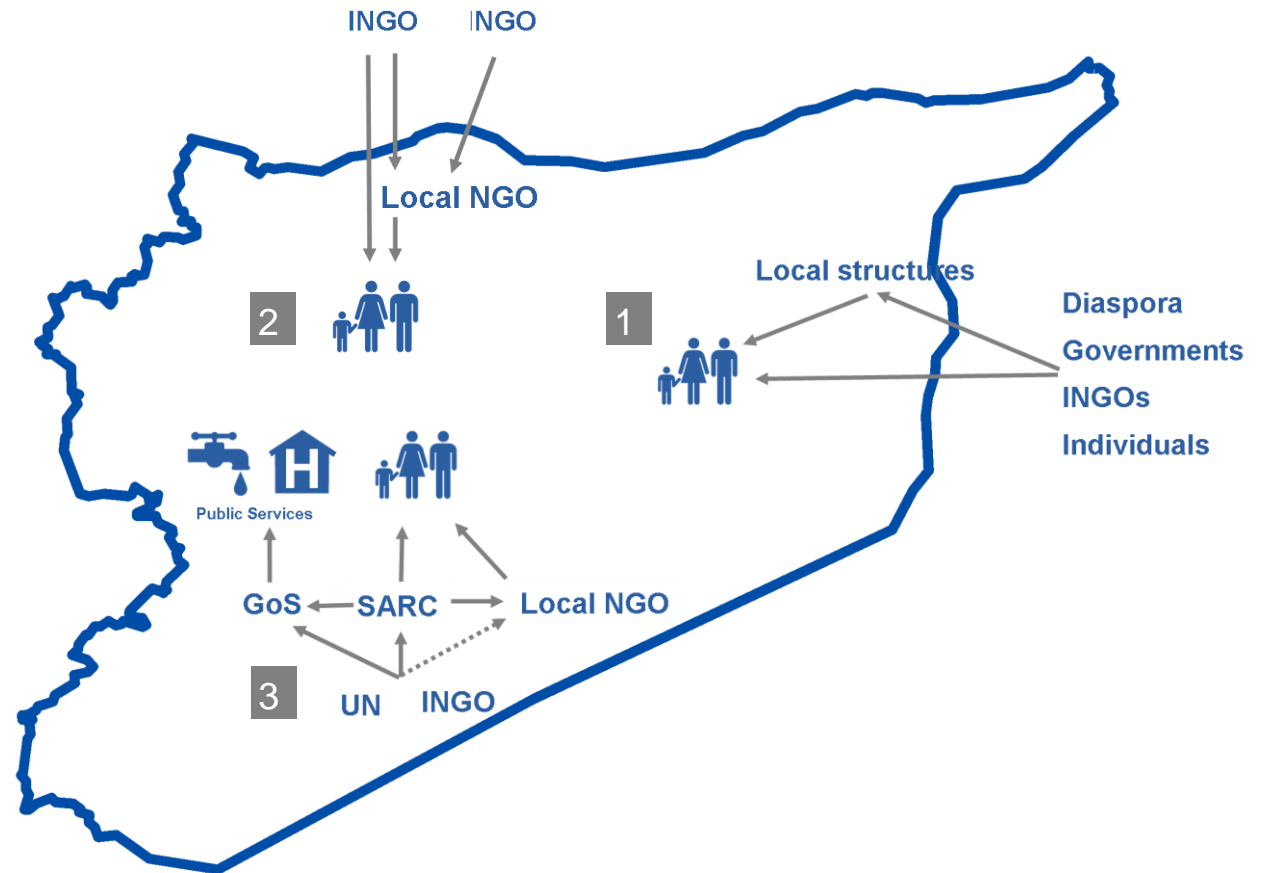
- (e) The GoS supports the SARC through its State Ministry for SARC Affairs.
- (f) WFP provides food to SARC to be distributed to a large number of beneficiaries
- (g) SARC works together with local organisations to distribute assistance
- (h) Local Administrative Councils established by the Syria National Coalition provide relief and register IDPs in opposition-held areas.

Examples of relief flows Syria

1 Civilian response: A significant part of humanitarian aid in Syria is provided by grassroots organisations and informal governance structures such as relief committees. In some instances, individuals assume responsibility for receiving and distributing assistance to their local community. These actors receive support from a multitude of sources in and outside of Syria, including the diaspora, Governments, well-off individuals and INGOs.

2 Cross-border assistance: Although cross-border assistance from Turkey has not been approved by the GoS, several INGOs and diaspora organisations provide support to communities and institutions (hospitals/schools) in Syria. Aid is provided directly to communities, particularly in the camps along the northern border region, and through different local NGOs.

3 International organisations and SARC: From humanitarian hubs in the country, the UN and accredited INGOs provide commodities to SARC. SARC distributes these items directly through its 9,000 volunteers or through GoS accredited Syrian partners. In addition, UN and INGOs support local organisations directly. WFP for instance dispatches around 40% of food through local NGOs and CBOs, with SARC permission. The UN and INGOs also support some ministries of the GoS to restore and maintain public services such as education, the public water network and hospitals.



Information gaps

- Although the ACU has started to compile a directory of relief actors operating in opposition controlled areas, it is not public and there are no countrywide Syrian NGO directories or websites, thus only limited quantitative or qualitative information is available. Although several local and diaspora organisations maintain a website, it can be assumed that the majority of community based actors operating in Syria do not have a web presence. Reasons for this include a lack of capacity or lack of required hardware and the security risk related to publicly outlining relief operations, particularly for those organisations that are not registered with the GoS or work in areas no longer under GoS control.
- The UN, International NGOs and other International Organisations are also hesitant to share data regarding their operations, particularly concerning those in areas controlled by opposition groups, as visibility in these areas could endanger their staff and could compromise (possible future) access to GoS-controlled areas.
- Much of the assistance provided is through small initiatives ranging from volunteers providing medical services to host families providing refuge to those displaced. Whilst this type of relief is extensive and significant, it is difficult to track due to the localised and ad-hoc nature of activities. In addition, as the situation remains fluid, response activities also remain dynamic with distributions within each location varying each month as beneficiaries move location. Thus calculating relief coverage and gaps remains challenging.
- Although armed opposition groups are involved in some kind of relief provision, through the provision of services; food assistance and evacuation of the wounded, these activities are often on an ad-hoc basis and are not tracked.
- There is no reliable assessment of the relative impact of the different types of actors. While relief dispatched by many international organisations is known, the percentage of those in need served by the 'coordinated' humanitarian community; other international actors; the diaspora; the GoS and Syrian population themselves is unknown.

Pre-crisis situation

Prior to the crisis, a number of actors were involved in relief and development activities in Syria, including community based organisations, the Red Cross/Crescent Movement, the UN, some INGOs and the GoS.

Community based organisations

Background

Civil and charitable work has long played an important part in Syrian society despite the severe restrictions on freedom of expression and association that pre-date the current crisis. Because of the stringent GoS restrictions, these activities often occurred informally and until the start of 2000, there were almost no formal NGOs in Syria. However, from 2000, an increasing number of associations formalised their presence and, in 2010, official estimates of registered NGOs ranged from 300 to 2,000. ([INTRAC 2012/06](#))

In the years before the conflict, the GoS had begun to take a more active role in supporting civil society organisations with the importance of the civil society being included in both the 10th (2006-2010) and 11th Five Year Plans (2011-2015).). The Syria Trust for Development was established in 2007, under the chairmanship of Asma Al-Assad, the wife of President Al-Assad, and together with UNDP started the NGO Platform, which aimed to develop and coordinate the NGO sector. ([INTRAC 2012/06](#), [BBC 2010](#), [Al-Om 2011](#))

Legal framework

The Law on Associations, dating back to 1958, requires that associations are registered and approved by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MoSAL). The intelligence office largely administered the registration process and it could take years before organisations received official approval. As a result, some organisations maintained a low profile operating without legal status. Once an organisation had been approved, it had several obligations, including sending minutes of meetings, accounts and reports to MoSAL and, sometimes, appointing a Ministry-approved director. Any broadening of activities beyond those set out in their registered objectives had to be pre-approved by MoSAL. Prior GoS approval was required for a local organisation to make direct contact with, or receive funding from, international organisations not present in Syria. ([NRN n.d.](#), [CR 2005](#))

Faith based organisations

Faith based organisations (FBOs), such as Islamic and Christian organisations, were active prior to the crisis and were the only actors allowed to work openly and extensively with both Syrians and non-Syrians: all other Syrian organisations were limited to working primarily with Syrians while INGOs worked with non-Syrians,

primarily Palestinian and Iraqi refugees. Some religious organisations were exempt from the official procedures and were allowed to operate without registration. Some FBOs were already providing services out of mosques and churches before the crisis and have a strong base in the community. (INGO 2013/04/11, Kraft 2008)

Capacity

Scope: Before the crisis, Syrian organisations were highly centralised and urbanised, with most located in Damascus or the south, and the rest generally found in the cities. Freedom of movement for organisations differed by governorate. In Al Hasakeh, relative freedom from GoS surveillance and repression granted civil society entities crucial space in which to operate; although this space was constrained by the dominance of the Kurdish Democratic Union. (Integrity 2013, INTRAC 2012/06)

Many Syrian organisations, particularly religious and traditional associations, focused on relief-type activities while community organisations, developmental NGOs and the Syria Trust organisations focused more on developmental activities. Prior to the crisis, an estimated 50% of NGO resources was spent on health activities. The GoS did not allow organisations to work on issues considered politically sensitive, such as human rights, quality of education, democracy and civil society. (Integrity 2013, INTRAC 2012/06, INTRAC 2012/06)

Systematic repression of associations weakened the civil society structure and capacities of Syrian NGOs were reportedly low, particularly in areas such as project cycle management and strategic planning. A lack of training of staff members and an institutional culture that emphasises leadership and initiative solely at the top of an organisation, contributed to the weakness of organisations. In addition, diversity within organisations was limited: there was a tendency for the senior management to give priority to men, older people, and those with political or financial status to serve on the management team. (INTRAC 2012/06, Al Akhbar 2006, CR 2005, INTRAC 2012/06)

The Ministry of Social affairs and Labour MoSAL, the main regulatory body for Syrian associations, had only limited capacity to coordinate and regulate associations, as it was a small ministry with limited resources. (INTRAC 2012/06)

Coordination: In 2007, an NGO Platform was established, as a tool for coordination with and amongst civil society organisations. This Platform organised the first International Development Conference in Syria in January 2010. Only registered NGOs were part of the Platform and its effectiveness was reportedly limited. No other coordination mechanisms exist. (UNDP 2009, INGO 2013/04/10)

INGOs

International NGOs were not granted permission to work in Syria until 2008 when, after the large-scale influx of Iraqi refugees overwhelmed existing capacities, the GoS granted access to over 20 INGOs. By 2010, 14 international NGOs were operating in Syria, including ACF, DRC, IMC, IRC and Mercy Corps, specifically tasked with working with the Iraqi refugee population (an estimated 1 million by 2011).

Before the Syrian crisis, INGOs operating in Syria already faced significant challenges. Any NGO seeking to work in Syria needed to reach a Memorandum of Understanding with SARC. The application procedure took a minimum of 4-6 weeks. Several NGOs withdrew from Syria after failing to reach such an agreement. For those INGOs granted approval, operations were subject to stringent control and regulations. For instance, the SARC had to approve all payments and activities and organisations were obliged to have a shared bank account with SARC from which both parties needed to approve any disbursement. Strict salary caps were imposed for Syrian employees and only a limited number of international staff members could be hired. Some organisations, including Agha Khan Development Network (AKDN) and religious organisations, were exempt from these procedures. (USCRI 2009, Kraft 2008, Government sources 2010, IMC 2010, INTRAC 2012/06)

UN

Several UN organisations were operational in Syria before the start of the crisis, including FAO, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework for the period 2007-2011 provided the strategic framework for these UN organisations. 3 different humanitarian appeals were issued by the UN in 2008 and 2009, all related to the drought in north-eastern Syria. In addition, Syria was covered under 3 UN Regional Response Plans for Iraqi refugees between 2009 and 2012. (Kraft 2008, UN 2009)

Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) is the largest humanitarian organisation in Syria and was established in 1942. Between 2007 and 2009, SARC has assisted around 300,000 individuals yearly with a peak in 2010 of around 500,000 following the drought response, providing a range of services. As all Red Cross/Crescent national societies, SARC has an auxiliary role to the GoS, providing support to health and social services as well as disaster management when needed. Since the Iraqi refugee crisis, the SARC has been the official partner of all international organisations working in Syria. Relying on a broad network of volunteers across the country, SARC had over 10,000 trained volunteers at the start of the current crisis. (IFRC 2012, Kraft 2008, UN 2009, IFRC 2013/03/12, SARC n.d.)

Other components of the Red Cross/Crescent Movement had operations in Syria before the start of the conflict and the IFRC for instance issued 4 different emergency appeals, to respond to drought, the Iraqi refugee crisis and flooding. The ICRC has been working in the country since 1967. ([IFRC n.d.](#), [IFRC 2012](#), [LogCluster 2009](#), [ODI 2012/06/15](#))

Government of Syria (GoS)

Before the crisis, the GoS was providing an estimated 500 Billion Syrian pounds (8 Billion USD) per year as subsidised goods and services to citizens, including the provision of subsidised bread (at 25% of its market value), free education and medical services. In addition, a national poverty reduction strategy has been in place since 2005 and the GoS has provided assistance to the Iraqi refugees and those affected by the drought in 2008. Apart from specific national policies, most development and relief assistance was provided through SARC or the Trust Fund. ([AGENFOR 2012/12/31](#))

Current situation

Civilian response

The Syrian people themselves provide much of the assistance to those in need. Relatives, neighbours and friends are traditionally supporting each other, with the large majority of IDPs estimated to be residing with host families. Wealthy individuals are reportedly buying food and non-food items and distributing them personally to displaced people in their neighbourhoods. Syrian expatriates are sending financial assistance to their relatives, albeit with restrictions due to US and EU sanctions on banking transactions. In addition to individual initiatives, the uprising has seen the emergence of many local communities' initiatives. With the collapse of services in some areas, communities have organised themselves to take up tasks such as basic first aid, garbage collection and the provision of education. Other activities include setting up and operating field hospitals; provision of medicine, food, non-food items and funds to displaced families.

These initiatives are not part of a formal structure, and are characterised by their ad-hoc nature. Consequently, there is no information on the scope of these types of activity. It can, however, be assumed that, as the crisis has been on-going for almost 3 years and an estimated 50% of the population are living in poverty, the resources available for such initiatives are increasingly strained. ([SCPR 2013/10](#), [AGENFOR 2012/12/31](#), [INTRAC 2012/06](#))

CBOs

Types

Syrian non-governmental organisations: The presence of NGOs in Syria was severely limited before March 2011, and most Syrian organisations currently operating in the country were formed during the crisis. Palestinian organisations are the exception: several were already operational before the crisis and have currently expanded their activities. Many organisations are working for and within their own community, while others cover larger parts of the country. To avoid the lengthy GoS registration procedures, newly established organisations often work under the umbrella of already registered NGOs. The GoS continues to stringently monitor the activities of those NGOs operating in GoS-controlled areas and only 70 national NGOs are authorised to cooperate with international actors. Other Syrian NGOs, primarily those working in areas no longer under control of the GoS, work without GoS permission and are forced to conceal their activities. ([ECHO 2013/04/22](#), [SHARP 2013/12](#))

Diaspora organisations: The GoS estimates that up to 15 million of its citizens were residing abroad in 2010. A significant part of the assistance to civilians comes through these individuals, often working together in diaspora organisations. One individual working for a diaspora organisation estimates that there are over 500 diaspora organisations, ranging from very small initiatives supporting one community to larger operations covering multiple governorates. Of those diaspora organisations publicly portraying their activities, the large majority focus on the provision of health care; gathering information and raising awareness. Some of these organisations coordinate amongst each other in official coordination structures. The Coalition of American Relief Organisations Supporting Syria was for instance established to coordinate the activities of 15 American diaspora organisations. (PI 2013/10, [Syrian Observer 2013/08/07](#), [SEO 2013/04/04](#), [Economist 2010/06/03](#), [MSF 2013/03/07](#))

Faith based organisations: Faith based organisations (FBOs) continue to enjoy relative freedom compared to other organisations and are not as closely monitored by the GoS. Their large network, often based on pre-crisis structures, enables FBOs to work inaccessible to others providing assistance such as food and education. Religious buildings such as churches and mosques are being used as shelters for IDPs and as distribution channels. ([DEC 2013/12/13](#), [CBO 2012/06/16](#), INGO 2013/04/11)

Limitations

Insecurity and GoS impediments: The GoS continues to suppress activities of local NGOs viewing many as allies of foreign actors, hostile to the GoS. In GoS controlled areas, only those local NGOs with strong ties with the GoS are able to operate. ([ODI 2012/06/15](#))

Most organisations were established during the current crisis and focus on relief with a resultant short-term and reactive approach and almost no longer-term planning. There is limited capacity for reconstruction and development. (NGO 2013/04)

Most organisations work in a specific geographic area, and few have operations throughout the country. Almost all organisations claim to work with all the affected while a few target specific groups, such as children or Palestinian refugees. Although the ACU intends to provide some coordination, there is reportedly little coordination, or trust, between CBOs within Syria. (PI 2013/10)

Involvement in relief activities is a large security risk. Many volunteers working with formal and informal organisations have been arrested, tortured, and in some cases killed while providing relief in contested areas. ([INTRAC 2012/06](#))

Capacity: As training is limited, a lack of management capacities continues to hamper operations of CBOs. In addition, large-scale displacement has resulted in a 'brain-drain', whereby educated Syrians choose or are forced to flee the country, decreasing the number of trained professionals available to manage relief

operations. Although 2 INGOs working in Syria indicate that there is no shortage of educated, willing and able workers, many available individuals reportedly lack the skills required for emergency response. ([Integrity 2013](#), [RI 2013/04/25](#), [DEC 2013/12/13](#))

The conflict has altered the role of Syrian CBOs: whereas, prior to 2011, activities and skills primarily focused on development activities, CBOs currently provide humanitarian assistance, necessitating a completely different approach. In addition, as security was not an issue before the crisis, the capacities to operate in the highly insecure environment are often not in place.

A few CBOs have been able to partner with international NGOs to deliver supplies. As GoS restrictions have historically limited cooperation between local and international actors within Syria, local organisations often do not have the know-how needed to tap into the resources and skills of the international humanitarian structure and are unaware of the existing structures, and donor requirements and possibilities. At the same time, the international community has limited experience with working with Syrian organisations and is struggling to establish effective partnerships. (NGO 2013/04, [Refugees International 2013/04/25](#))

CBOs have difficulties in applying for funding from international donors and abiding by strict donor requirements. Before the crisis, much of the funding came from individual donors and Gulf countries, with little reporting and accountability requirements attached. Few organisations know how to monitor their projects or to write reports in English. ([INTRAC 2012/06](#), [Refugees International 2013/04/25](#))

Red Cross/Crescent Movement

SARC is the main actor involved in the assessment of the needs, the identification and registration of the most vulnerable people and the distribution of relief items. All international assistance is coordinated by SARC, although due to capacity limitations SARC may authorise either national CBOs or international NGOs to distribute relief directly. Almost 3 million people are receiving assistance on a monthly basis through SARC, in collaboration with local NGOs, UN agencies, international NGOs and supported by the Red Cross/Crescent Movement. The organisation relies on about 9,000 volunteers, working in 14 branches, one per governorate. ([IFRC 2013/11](#), [ICRC 2013/11](#), [IFRC 2013/09/18](#), [ECHO 2013/05/24](#), [CRS 2013/10/05](#))

Each of the 14 branches of SARC has a fair degree of autonomy and operations differ significantly among governorates, as do reporting structures. Whilst individual volunteers seek to uphold the principles of impartiality and neutrality, the senior management of the organisation is perceived by some as being too closely aligned with the GoS. While many branches in opposition-held areas continue to function, there are reports of some opposition groups preventing SARC activities.

In November 2013, over 70% of the SARC branches reported that areas in their governorates were completely inaccessible for a shorter or longer period. Apart

from the conflict and widespread insecurity, the major obstacle to SARC operations is a lack of equipment: even prior to the crisis only 2 of the 14 branches had ambulances. ([IFRC 2013/11/19](#), [SARC 2013/04/24](#))

SARC receives funding, goods and support from several other Red Cross/Red Crescent societies. IFRC has issued 4 emergency appeals to support the work of SARC during the current crisis. The ICRC, often with support of SARC, currently restores water supplies, supports medical services and undertakes family reunification. An ICRC program to visit detainees to monitor their conditions and prevent mistreatment has stalled since May after just two visits to central prisons in Damascus and Aleppo. ([Reuters 2013/03/15](#), [ICRC n.d.](#), [ICRC 2013/11](#))

INGOs

By December 2013, 16 INGOs obtained permission from the GoS to operate in the country. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs currently manages registration of humanitarian agencies and organisations. This registration process is ambiguous and the decision to grant permission appears to be somewhat ad hoc, with no clear guidelines or rules. Not all organisations registered with the GoS are currently operational in Syria due to bureaucratic hurdles and operational constraints. For instance, some organisations failed to establish the required agreement with SARC and are therefore unable to implement projects, while others have not received visas to start up operations. INGOs that are operational in the country are under stringent control and all activities have to be approved by the GoS. ([SHARP 2013/12](#), [NGO 2013/04/10](#), [ODI 2012/06/15](#), [ECHO 2013/04/22](#))

An unknown number of NGOs operate cross-border, notably from Turkey, into areas controlled by opposition forces, without permission of the GoS. Some NGOs operate remotely in both government and opposition controlled areas without Government permission.

International organisations with GoS permission to operate in Syria:

UN	DSS, FAO, OCHA, OJSR, ORHC, RC/UNMAS, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHABITAT, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNRCO UNRWA, WFP, WHO
INGO	<p>Currently operational : Action Contre La Faim – Spain, Armadilla, Danish Refugee Council, Help - Germany, Institut Européen de Coopération et de Développement, International Catholic Migration Commission, International Medical Corps, Merlin, Mercy Corps, Oxfam GB, Première Urgence, SOS International, Terre des Hommes-Italy.</p> <p>Currently not operational: ADRA, NRC, Secours Islamique France</p>

UN

15 UN organisations and departments are operational in Syria, as is IOM. However, as it is necessary for the UN to work closely together with the GoS, humanitarian space is extremely limited, with the GoS tightly controlling the location and type of UN interventions. However, some improvements in this field have been made, with the GoS allowing some assistance to opposition-controlled areas. After lengthy negotiations, the deployment of a senior Regional Humanitarian Coordinator to oversee the response was agreed with the GoS in April 2013. ([ODI 2012/06/15](#), [OCHA 2013/04/18](#))

Since the start of the crisis, the UN, in cooperation with the GoS, has launched 3 Syria Humanitarian Response Plans (SHARP). The latest one (the 2014 SHARP) was published on 16 December and requests USD 2.3 billion to fund 122 projects between January and December 2014. ([UN 2013/01/16](#), [Carnegie Endowment 2013/04/01](#))

Government

Since the beginning of the crisis, the GoS has often restricted humanitarian activities by blocking access to certain areas, as well as delaying registration, visas and programme approvals. There are reports that the GoS deflates the number of those in need and displaced in certain areas. However, at the same time, the GoS continues to provide an important part of the support to communities in Syria, including subsidised items and support to health centres. Although the GoS has contributed to the humanitarian effort, the international sanctions, deteriorating economy and lack of control over certain areas hindered its capability to provide support. Despite these constraints, one GoS source reports that in the 2014 budget, the GoS allocated SYP 50 billion to relief compared to 30 SYP billion in 2013 budget. ([SANA 2013/09/23](#), [DEC 2013/12/13](#))

Non-Governmental groups

Local relief structures

Where GoS administrative structures no longer function, a variety of parallel structures are evolving, primarily to fill the vacuum in previously GoS-run public services. They are less well structured and coherent but have been effective in some areas as the main public service and relief provider.

The new opposition structures have in some places imitated the pre-conflict structures they are replacing, in other areas it has been more spontaneous, local and less hierarchical, developed by affiliations of local activists. What is clear is that the structures in place at a local level in opposition areas vary greatly across the country. There is no single definition of this structure; multiple overlapping structures are known to exist in some areas. At the same time, nationally,

attempts have been, and are continuing to be, made to standardise relief provision by the adoption of formal opposition governance through the Syrian National Coalition and the ACU (Assistance Coordination Unit), the opposition structure seeking to coordinate relief efforts. In practice, this is a work in progress and an aspirational framework.

At a local level, Local Administrative Councils, Local Relief Committees and Local Coordination Committees work with varying levels of effectiveness in different areas to manage practical relief planning and distribution.

In Kurdish areas, a similar structure exists. The Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the Kurdish Council constitute the Supreme Kurdish Committee. Together they distribute relief material through relief committees of Kurdish Local councils. In addition, several Kurdish NGOs are operational in areas where Kurds reside. (AFP 2013/04/11)

The extent to which this local action is coordinated more strategically at a regional, governorate or national level depends on security, access and the factions involved in an area.

Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU)

The ACU was established by the Syrian National Coalition in December 2012 as a mechanism to coordinate effective assistance delivery. It works with opposition structures such as local administrative councils, local NGOs and civil society groups to identify needs, deliver assistance and bolster institutional capacity. According to the ACU, the body receives requests for aid and funding from a multitude of actors and channels these requests to international NGOs and donor governments. The following graph indicates the type and number of coordination structures that are in contact with the ACU. (PI 2013/10, Refugee International 2013/04/25)

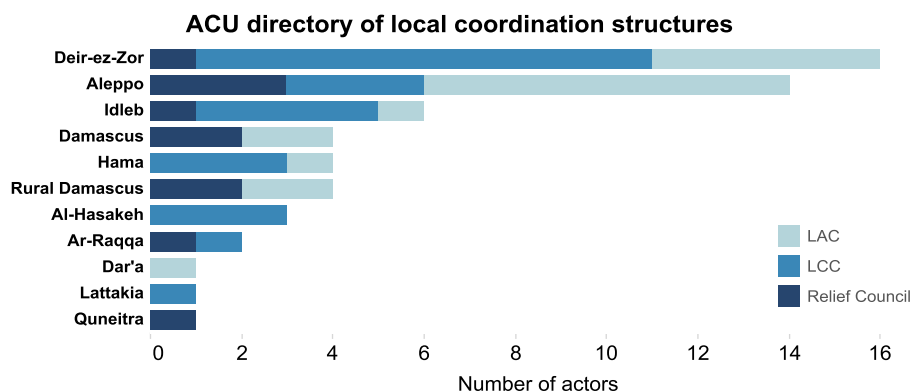
Limitations

Assistance providers struggle to find ways to collaborate efficiently with local authorities, as there are many representatives and leaders; the structure differs significantly by area and remains fluid. Local coordination committees in opposition-controlled areas lack clear organisational structures, responsibilities, and authorities. In addition, there is a lack of a clear decision-making process, leaving it up to individuals to decide which services should be offered, how and to whom. (NCS n.d., MSF 2013/03/08)

Armed groups

Several opposition groups provide food, medicine and evacuate people from conflict-affected areas. Often this relief is provided in areas of intense conflict where no other groups can operate. The Al Nusra Front for instance reportedly coordinates flour provision in opposition-controlled areas in Aleppo city. The success of Islamist groups in winning strategic battles, often around key civil infrastructure such as water supply dams and electricity plants mean that they also have a key, if indirect, role in critical service provision that such infrastructure provides. (The Guardian 2013/04/09, INGO 2013/04, Carnegie Endowment 2013/04, AlertNet 2013/04/09)

Islamist groups are providing much needed assistance to affected populations in a move to gain respect and influence in local communities. The targeting of assistance by the FSA, the Jabhat al Nusra and other factions can be based on ideology, ethnicity and religion. Hence, the groups are sometimes biased with regard to whom they assist. (INGO 2013/04/14, CAO 2013/04/03)



Operational context

Operational constraints

All relief actors operational within Syria face significant operational challenges caused by active hostilities, a proliferation of checkpoints, targeting of staff and assets, widespread insecurity and a lack of transport. Those organisations operating with GoS approval face additional bureaucratic challenges with all activities of national and international organisations subject to a lengthy approval process. This approval process also applies to each additional project established by organisations already registered to work in the country. Visas for international staff are often pending for months and each assistance truck needs a permit signed by two ministers to enable clearance through GoS checkpoints. Prior to publication, assessment reports and other publications require the approval of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This is often a lengthy and cumbersome process. Humanitarian space in the north is limited as well, with insecurity and GoS constraints limiting the movement of humanitarian convoys from Damascus to the north and northeast. At the same time, access to northern areas for international organisations operating from Turkey is being increasingly restricted by ISIL checkpoints along the border region and the threat of kidnappings. (Noria 2013/12/05, WFP 2013/11/20, OCHA 2013/11/20, IFRC 2013/11/19, ODI 2012/06/15, OCHA 2013/03/22)

Accountability

Due to the significant operational constraints, accountability towards donors and beneficiaries is challenging and international relief actors working with local partners highlight the difficulties of monitoring relief projects. As a large number of Syrian organisations were established during the crisis, there is no track-record of these organisations, making it difficult to judge their capacities.

As a result, international actors operating through local partners are forced to compromise their normal standards of monitoring and reporting. For instance, organisations are often forced to report only on relief items 'dispatched', rather than distributed, as monitoring of distribution is highly difficult. National and international organisations indicate that donor requirements are often unattainable in the highly insecure environment, and inflexible financial requirements. (PI 2013/11, PI 2013/11)

To address some of the monitoring constraints, the Internet is increasingly used as not only a method of sharing information with beneficiaries and donors, but also as an accountability tool. One NGO mentioned using Facebook to share information with the beneficiary community on goods and funds received. If the stipulated assistance is not distributed, the organisation will be held accountable by the target community. (DEC 2013/12/13, NGO 2012/04/10)

Coordination

GoS Coordination structures

In response to the crisis, the Syrian Higher Relief Committee formed a ministerial committee to coordinate and distribute aid. Different relief committees coordinated by the Higher Relief Committee monitor the level of displacement and the needs in specific areas: local committees were formed on a governorate, district and neighbourhood level, to monitor the needs of those displaced in and outside of collective centres. (INGO 2013, Tishreen Newspaper 2013/01/29)

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates (MoFAE) coordinates the humanitarian response between and within the various sectors of the GoS. The main coordination structure between the GoS and the humanitarian community is the Steering Committee, which is chaired by the Deputy-Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates. In addition, several humanitarian actors communicate directly with line ministries on constraints and priorities for response. (SHARP 2013/12, DEC 2013/12/13)

UN led coordination

The UN response in Syria is led by the UN Country Team and the Humanitarian Country Team (UNCT/HCT) that includes international NGOs accredited in Syria. In Damascus, 8 sectors are operational to coordinate and support the activities of those actors which received permission of the GoS to provide relief in Syria:

Sector	Sector lead
Health	MoH/WHO
WASH	SARC, MoWR, UNICEF
Nutrition	MoH/UNICEF
Education	MoE/UNICEF
Protection and Community Services	MoSA, UNHCR, UNFPA, UNICEF
NFI/Shelter	MoLA/UNHCR
Food and Agriculture	MAAR, MoSA, WFP, FAO
Early Recovery and Livelihoods	UNDP, MoLA, MoSA

Source: SHARP 2013/06

Alternative coordination structures

In addition, some fora have been established to coordinate relief activities in specific geographical areas. The LAC and LCCs are examples of coordination structures for activities of different relief actors in opposition-controlled areas, with different levels of effectiveness depending on the area of their operations. In Aleppo a 'public emergency case committee' was established, which coordinates all relief activities in all areas of Aleppo, including those that are no longer under

GoS control. Apart from coordination, the committee undertakes negotiations with different armed factions on issues such as humanitarian access. Outside of Syria, at least 2 INGO coordination fora exist to coordinate activities of those working through local partners into Syria. ([Refugees International 2013/04/25](#), [DEC 2013/12/13](#))

Funding

Sources of funding for humanitarian assistance range from individual donations from locals and expatriates to funding from other countries. Only international organisations and the LCCs provide some information on the sources of funding (the LCCs reported receiving over USD1.6 million in 2012) while other actors do not specify the source of their funding. ([LCC 2013](#))

Nearly every Muslim donates 'zakat', a religious donation which is usually given to a mosque or Muslim organisation. The Zakat forms a large part of the income of Muslim organisations. There are some limitations to the Zakat, the donations must benefit people directly and cannot be used for expenses such as salaries. There is a large Syrian diaspora, with (groups of) individuals providing a considerable number of donations, often in cash which is smuggled across the border. ([AFP 2012/06/06](#), [MSF 2013/03/07](#))

Much of the international humanitarian assistance is earmarked for disbursement through the United Nations and related agencies. The USD 2.3 billion requested in December 2013 will for instance focus on projects coordinated by the UN. Albeit less, a significant amount of funding is also being channelled to actors operating outside of the GoS-controlled system. However, most traditional Western donors are reluctant to fund cross-border operations that do not have GoS consent. ([DFID 2013/04/13](#))

Most assistance for civilians in opposition-controlled areas reportedly comes from 3 sources: the Syrian diaspora, countries supporting the opposition, and political and religious solidarity networks. A part of the funding is directly linked to the political and religious background of the actor. ([GO 2013/03/08](#), [MSF 2013/03/06](#))

Acronym list

ACU	Assistance Coordination Unit (of the National Coalition)
CBO(s)	Community-Based Organisation(s)
DFID	Department of International Development (United Kingdom)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FBO(s)	Faith-Based Organization(s)
FSA	Free Syrian Army
HARP	Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan for Syria
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP(s)	Internally Displaced Person(s)
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
INGO(s)	International Non-Governmental Organisation(s)
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
J-RANS	Joint Rapid Assessment of Northern Syria
LAC(s)	Local Administrative Council(s)
LCC(s)	Local Coordination Committee(s)
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoWR	Ministry of Water Resources
NGO(s)	Non-Governmental Organisation(s)
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (United Nations)
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (United Nations)
PYD	Democratic Union Party
SARC	Syrian Arab Red Crescent
SHARP	Syrian Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan
SNC	Syrian National Coalition
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDSS	United Nations Department of Safety and Security
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRWA	UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organization

Previous SNAP reports

- **Regional Analysis for Syria** January – November 2013
- **Thematic reports**
 - Aleppo Governorate Profile April 2013
 - Legal Status of Individuals Fleeing Syria June 2013
 - Impact of the conflict on Syrian economy and livelihoods July 2013
 - Syrian border crossings September 2013
 - Assessment Lessons Learned September 2013
 - Lebanon baseline data October 2013
 - Cross-border movements of goods December 2013
- **Scenarios** February and September 2013

All reports can be found on: <http://www.acaps.org/en/pages/syria-snap-project>

Forthcoming SNAP reports

- **RAS** Start February 2014
- **Thematic reports:**
 - Governorate profile: Al Hasakeh January 2014
 - Palestinian refugees in Syria January 2014
 - Syria: remote monitoring of needs and partnerships Start 2014

Disclaimer – Information provided is provisional as it has not been possible to independently verify field reports. As this report covers highly dynamic subject, utility of the information may decrease with time.

References – ACAPS and MapAction would like to thank all organisations that have provided input to this report. Please note that all sources which are available online are hyperlinked (underlined, in brackets). Information sourced as 'PI' refers to personal interviews with persons unknown to the SNAP project. Information sourced as a 'Trusted Source' refers to information received from an actor known and trusted by the project.

