General Notions of Ideal Security Provision

Nora-Elise Beck & Lars Döbert
Berlin & Beirut
2020

LANOSEC

This security needs assessment aims to contribute to open access information on good governance and security sector reform in Syria. It was specifically designed to understand citizens' needs and identify entry points for citizen-oriented security sector reform efforts. It analyses how the Syrian security system would need to change in order for Syrians to feel safe and secure in post-war Syria.

The survey's online questionnaire consists of 63 questions in Modern Standard Arabic. Between March and August 2018, 619 Syrians living in Germany completed the questionnaire. They came from all 14 Syrian governorates. On average, participants were 29 years old (born in 1989).

This working paper is part of a series. For an overview of the survey's objectives, content, and participants, please refer to the Introduction to the Survey and Sample Group Composition, which may be found along with all other working papers by scanning the QR code or accessing the link below:

https://www.lanosec.de/ssr-survey-syria/

About the authors

Nora-Elise Beck is a programme management expert, specialised in good governance and security sector reform. She has worked for DCAF, GIZ, and the OECD in Ramallah, Amman, and Paris. Nora-Elise Beck holds a master's degree in International Security from Sciences-Po Paris and a master's degree in Interpretation for Arabic and French from Leipzig University.

Lars Döbert is an expert in police and security sector reform as well as preventing violent extremism. He has worked for UN DPKO, UNODC, and GIZ in New York, Dakar, and Ramallah. Lars Döbert holds a master's degree in International Relations from the Free University of Berlin and a bachelor's degree in European Studies from Passau University.

As founders, they co-manage **Lanosec**, a consulting organisation for security sector reform and good governance.

Executive Summary

This working paper examines conditions for ideal security provision and the most important elements of functioning security sectors from a citizen-centred perspective. It also examines whether survey participants would resort to state institutions for help in the event of danger, and their potential motivations for doing so.

Survey results

Self-assessing their knowledge of five elements of security sector governance, survey participants indicated that they knew most about the terms *Human rights* and *Rule of law*. *Civilian oversight* and *Good governance* were the least-known terms. Younger survey participants and participants with a lower educational level were less likely to state they had good knowledge of all five terms. Men indicated they had very good knowledge more often than women, especially regarding the terms *Security sector reform* and *Good governance*.

With regard to the composition of security sectors, respondents applied a broad definition. Core security providers, such as the police or the army, belong to a security sector as much as civil society, the justice sector, the parliament, and ministries. Characteristics of a functioning security sector were manifold. Those focusing on overarching principles, such as accountability, rule of law, oversight, and serving the population yielded higher results than characteristics linked to the quality of service provision, such as effectiveness and efficiency.

In an ideal world, two thirds of all survey participants indicated they would resort to the government if they were in danger. The most important reasons for this were *The state is responsible for the protection of citizens* and *As a citizen, it is a duty to report crime*. The government's presumed capacity to deliver high-quality security provision was less of a reason. One quarter would not resort to the government if they were in danger, due mostly to concerns, fears, and negative perceptions regarding governments, reflecting a substantial lack of trust

in state security provision and governments in general. Instead, half of these respondents would rely on friends or relatives. Some would resort to civil society organisations or the media.

Conclusions

Current political developments in Syria, and the likelihood that the regime will win the war militarily, limit the prospects for comprehensively reforming the Syrian security sector. However, it is important for international actors working in and on Syria to keep in mind how Syrians envisage an ideal security sector for post-war Syria, and the minimum standards of functioning security sectors. Without taking these into consideration, long-term stability and peace will be doomed to fail. This, therefore, prompts several recommendations for further academic research as well as policy analysis and development:

» **Identify the security needs of citizens** from various environments by conducting focus group discussions, especially involving women and youth. During these discussions, focus specifically on citizens' expectations regarding accountability, oversight, and the rule of law. These characteristics were the most important ones for survey participants, in addition to a security sector that serves the population.

» **Support capacity-building for civil society actors and media** working on Syria regarding the principles and concepts of security sector governance and reform. Increase the capacity of civil society to monitor government policies and practices pertaining to security provision and, thus, enable civil society to exercise its civilian oversight role and to advocate for the interests of citizens. Support programmes raising awareness about good governance, especially targeting women and youth, and including all levels of education.

» **Cooperate with civil society actors** to develop and design trust-building measures between citizens in the diaspora and government representatives in the countries where they reside. The fears and concerns of citizens need to be taken seriously and dealt with properly by comprehensive trust-building measures.
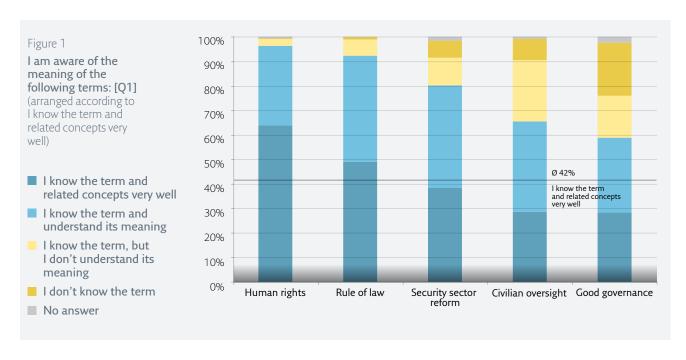
General Notions of Ideal Security Provision

This working paper deals with ideal security provision and minimum standards of functioning security sectors from the perspective of citizens. Survey participants responded to a set of questions that were unrelated to the situation in Syria in order to better understand how Syrians envision an ideal security sector, regardless of regional, political, or socio-cultural contexts.

Limited awareness of security sector governance

Security sector governance delineates how good governance principles are applied to state security provision.[1] This implies that security providers operate according to the rule of law, respecting human rights. Effective oversight mechanisms, such as civilian oversight, need to be in place. Security sector reform is the process that aims to achieve all of these goals. In order for all parties to effectively play their roles in a functioning security sector, knowledge of underlying concepts is key. Survey participants assessed their knowledge of five key terms linked to security sector governance: *Rule of law*, *Human rights*, *Civilian oversight*, *Good governance*, and *Security sector reform* (see Figure 1).

On average, nearly half of respondents (42%) stated *I know the term and related concepts very well*. *Human rights* and *Rule of law* were better-known, while *Security sector reform*, *Civilian oversight*, and *Good governance* ranked below average. *Good governance* received the most *I don't know the term* answers.

Human rights as a cross-cutting issue played an important role for participants throughout the whole survey. For example, *To live in a country that respects human rights* was the most important reason for participants to leave Syria (Question 63; for a complete analysis of this question refer to the Introduction to

Figure 1

I am aware of the meaning of the following terms: [Q1] (arranged according to I know the term and related concepts very well)

- I know the term and related concepts very well
- I know the term and understand its meaning
- I know the term, but I don't understand its meaning
- I don't know the term
- No answer

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1 For further information on security sector governance refer to Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (2015): *Security Sector Governance*, SSR Backgrounder Series, Geneva.

the Survey and Sample Group Composition). One reason for the uprising in Syria in 2011 was the constant and grave violations of human rights perpetrated by state security providers.

Besides *Human rights*, the other term respondents knew well represents a state-centred concept: *Rule of law*. The state, through the parliament and ministries, issues laws and enforces them, and is at the same time itself accountable to them. Interestingly, many survey participants indicated they had very good or general knowledge of *Rule of law* and, thus, of the role the state should play in providing justice and security services in line with international human rights norms and standards.

The fact that knowledge of the three terms *Security sector reform*, *Civilian oversight*, and *Good governance* was mixed suggests that survey participants have limited awareness of security sector governance. Only if they are aware of key concepts can citizens articulate their needs and actively participate in shaping a security sector that protects them according to their actual needs.
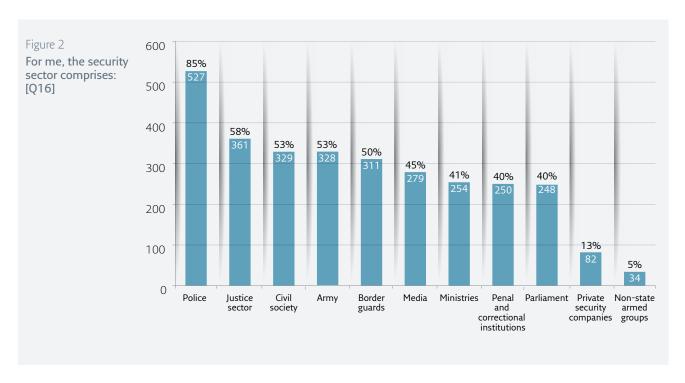
Men and women indicated very different levels of knowledge (see Table 1). On average, women selected *I know the term and related concepts very well* less often than men. This was especially the case for *Security sector reform*, *Civilian oversight*, and *Good governance*. These differences may be the result of actual differences in knowledge, but they might also be linked to varying levels of self-confidence in the assessment. By contrast, when combining *I know the term and related concepts very well* and *I know the term and understand its meaning*, women and men indicated nearly the same level of knowledge for the terms *Human rights* and *Rule of law*.

Table 1: **I am aware of the meaning of the following terms: [Q1]**								
	I know the term and related concepts very well		**I know the term and understand its meaning**		**Combined = good knowledge**		**I don't know the term**	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Human rights	65%	56%	31%	40%	96%	96%	0%	0%
Rule of law	51%	36%	42%	52%	93%	88%	1%	3%
Security sector reform	41%	19%	41%	48%	82%	67%	7%	9%
Civilian oversight	31%	15%	38%	25%	69%	40%	8%	15%
Good governance	31%	11%	31%	27%	62%	37%	19%	44%

Results also differed according to age groups and levels of education: younger survey participants indicated good knowledge of all five terms less often. The same applied to education levels. As the latter increased, from secondary school without certificate to Baccalaureate, bachelor's, master's, and PhD, knowledge gradually rose in tandem.

Respondents define the security sector broadly

How the composition of a security sector is defined directly impacts who can legitimately be involved in its reform and oversight. In a narrow definition, the security sector consists purely of core security providers, such as the armed forces, the police, and intelligence agencies. A broader definition also involves actors from other spheres, such as civil society and the media.

Figure 2

For me, the security sector comprises: [Q16]

Police	85%	527
Justice sector	58%	361
Civil society	53%	329
Army	53%	328
Border guards	50%	311
Media	45%	279
Ministries	41%	254
Penal and correctional institutions	40%	250
Parliament	40%	248
Private security companies	13%	82
Non-state armed groups	5%	34

As shown in Figure 2, the majority of survey participants understood security sectors in the broader sense. They not only selected core security providers, but attributed strong roles to civil society, the justice sector, the parliament, and ministries.
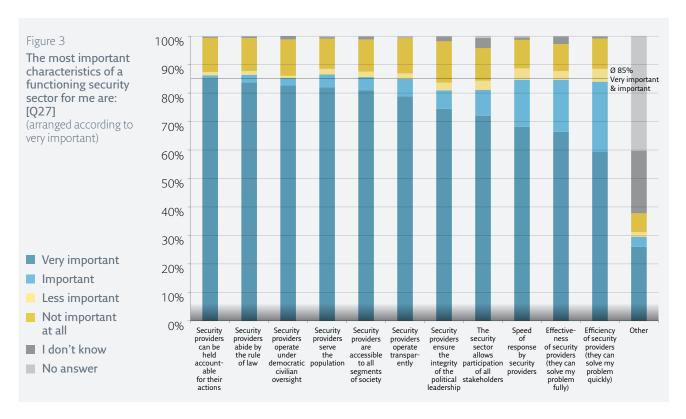
The police was the most frequently selected component of a security sector. It appears that, when reflecting on the composition of security sectors, survey participants think first about the police. The justice sector was the second most-selected component, followed by civil society. The media received more votes than ministries and the parliament. These strong results for civil society and the media show the firm conviction of respondents that both civil society and the media are part of security sectors, and can contribute to their development and reform. It is also an indication of the potential willingness to exercise an effective civilian oversight role. The high score of the justice sector might imply that survey participants wish to have a justice sector that is independent and counterbalances the weight of the security sector within a political system. It also underlines the aspect of accountability (see Working Paper 7: Envisioning a Future Security Sector for Syria).

At the same time, only 13% selected private security companies, and only 5% see non-state armed groups as components of the security sector. Apparently, survey participants think security provision should not be in private hands.

Most important characteristics of a functioning security sector

Survey participants rated the importance of eleven pre-defined characteristics of potential relevance to a functioning security sector. An underlying goal was to learn whether respondents defined 'functioning' in terms of quality of service provision (e.g., effectiveness and efficiency of the security providers) or in terms of overarching principles setting the frame for security providers to operate (e.g., accountability and rule of law).

The first observation is that all characteristics were deemed important for a functioning security sector in one way or another (see Figure 3). On average, variables (without *Other*) reached 85% for the values very important and important. Looking in more detail into the different answer schemes, results show that survey participants preferred overarching principles such as accountability, rule of law, oversight, and serving the population over other characteristics. It appears that a security sector that is merely fast in response,

Figure 3

The most important characteristics of a functioning security sector for me are: [Q27] (arranged according to very important)
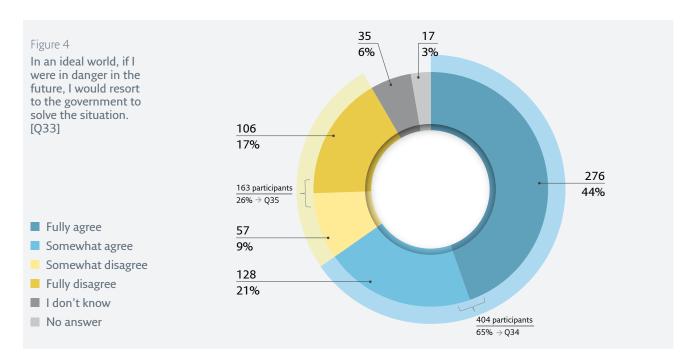
efficient, and effective is less functional in survey participants' eyes than a security sector that can be held accountable for its actions, abides by the rule of law, and is placed under civilian oversight. The purpose of a security sector is also crucial: survey participants stated that it should serve the population. Furthermore, participation is a central element. The fact that security providers are accessible to all segments of society, and that the security sector allows the participation of all stakeholders, are also more important than the quality of actual service provision. Effectiveness and efficiency received the lowest numbers of very important answers. However, when adding the number of important answers, they also came very close to the average of 85% of high importance for all variables.

The option *Security providers are ensuring the integrity of the political leadership* received the highest number of negative responses: nearly one fifth of participants completely rejected this idea. This could mean that this group opposes the politicisation of security institutions, or that they reject security institutions being used exclusively for the benefit of specific actors.

Trusting governments and state security provision

Many Syrians had traumatic experiences with the Syrian government and its security institutions before and during the war (see Working Paper 2: Insecurity and Injustice in Syria before and during the War). The following four questions explored survey participants' general attitudes vis-à-vis statehood and the legitimacy of governments to provide security and justice to citizens. Would they - under ideal world conditions - address government actors in the event that they needed help in a dangerous situation? Or would they refuse state authority and seek different solutions and actors?

In Question 33, survey participants stated whether they would resort to the government, in an ideal world, if they found themselves in danger. Participants could choose from among six different options. Depending on the selection, they received some or none of the following three follow-up questions (see Figure 4). Participants that fully agreed, or somewhat agreed, received Question 34: 'In an ideal world, why would

Figure 4
In an ideal world, if I were in danger in the future, I would resort to the government to solve the situation. [Q33]

- Fully agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Fully disagree
- I don't know
- No answer

35
6%

17
3%

106
17%

163 participants
26% → Q35

57
9%

128
21%

276
44%

404 participants
65% → Q34

you resort to the government if you were in danger?' Respondents who selected *somewhat disagree* or *fully disagree* were also asked why they would not resort to the government (Question 35) and to which alternative entity they would resort instead (Question 36). Respondents who selected *I don't know* or *No answer* received no follow-up questions.

Overall, two thirds would resort to the government in an ideal world if they were in danger, while 26% would not. Participants knowledgeable of *Rule of law* in Question 1 (see section Limited awareness of security sector governance above) were more likely to agree to the statement. 9% of all survey participants selected *I don't know* or *No answer*. These results mean that many participants confirmed their supportive attitude towards statehood and the government's primary role in restoring safety and justice in the event that citizens were in danger. It appears respondents were able to conceive of state authority in general as a source of protection, rather than a threat, under ideal conditions. Apparently, in abstract terms, they related positively to statehood, regardless of the negative experiences they might have had in Syria.

Table 2: **In an ideal world, if I were in danger in the future, I would resort to the government to solve the situation. [Q33]**

	Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Fully disagree	I don't know	No answer
Men	46%	21%	9%	17%	4%	3%
Women	36%	17%	12%	17%	15%	3%

On average, men were more likely to resort to the government if they were in danger than women (see Table 2). Men seem to trust the state's ability to protect more than women, even though they felt less safe and secure than women before and during the war (see Working Paper 1: Safe Spaces and Protection in Syria before and during the War). The fact that fewer women would resort to the government in the event of danger may indicate that women do not trust governments to provide services according to their needs or in an appropriate way. It might also be linked to limited knowledge of general concepts of security sector governance and the roles and responsibilities of state institutions, since more women than men selected *I don't know*. A security sector dominated by men could also be a deterring factor. Further research is required.
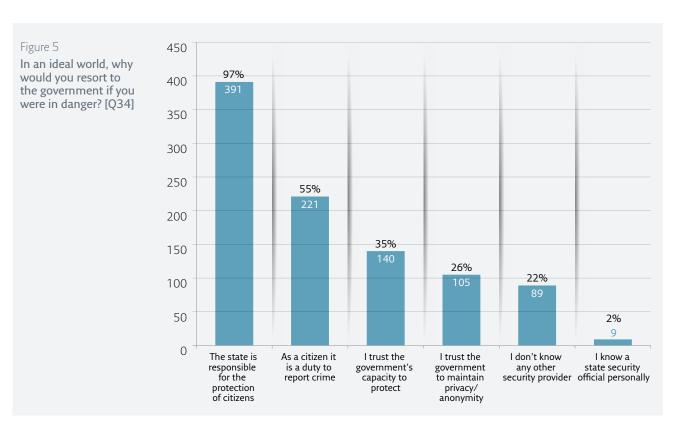
Reasons for resorting to the government in an ideal world

Two thirds of all survey participants indicated that they would resort to the government if they were in danger. These participants appear to possess a certain level of trust in state security provision and statehood. As a follow-up, they explained why they would do so (Figure 5).

By far the most important reason was the attributed responsibility of the state to protect its citizens (97%). Half as important was the duty of citizens to report crime (55%). In this regard, respondents referred to a two-fold responsibility. First, the state holds the primary duty to protect its citizens from harm (variable *The state is responsible for the protection of citizens*). Second, citizens also bear a share of responsibility to maintain public order by informing the authorities (variable *As a citizen it is a duty to report crime*). However, the government's capacity to deliver high-quality security services (variables *I trust the government's capacity to protect* and *I trust the government to maintain privacy/anonymity*) are less compelling arguments. This reflects participants' expectations of a functioning security sector (see above section The most important characteristics of a functioning security sector). Here, efficiency and effectiveness were also among the least important characteristics.

Reasons for not resorting to the government in the event of danger and preferred alternatives

Approximately one quarter of survey participants stated that - even in an ideal world - they would not resort to the government if they were in danger. It seems there is a general lack of trust in governments to actually protect citizens and provide them with security amongst this group. However, it is difficult to distinguish between a general rejection of statehood per se and a distrust solely in governmental security provision. In the two follow-up questions, this group further explained why they would not resort to the government and to whom they would resort instead.

Figure 5

In an ideal world, why would you resort to the government if you were in danger? [Q34]
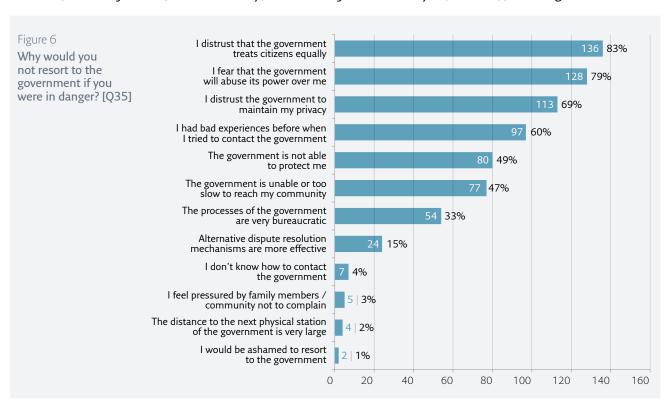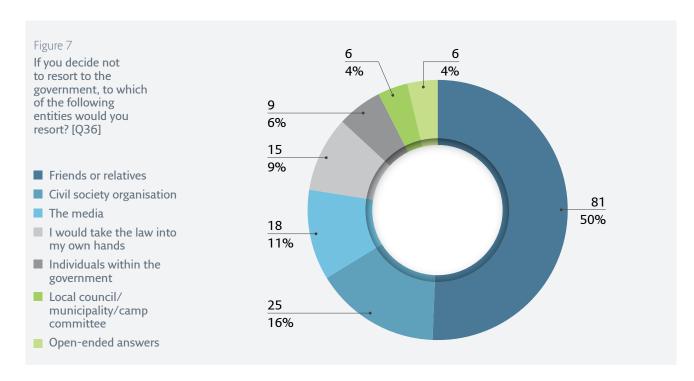
Very few participants selected reasons that directly affect them in terms of mobility (variable *The distance to the next physical station of the government is very large*), knowledge (variable *I don't know how to contact the government*), and personal issues (variables *I feel pressured by family members/the community not to complain* and *I would be ashamed to resort to the government*). These four variables together accounted for only 10% of the responses (see Figure 6).

By contrast, most survey participants chose variables that dealt with fears, concerns, and negative perceptions regarding governments: *I distrust that the government treats citizens equally*; *I fear that the government will abuse its power over me*; and *I distrust the government to maintain my privacy*. It seems that participants expressed a deep personal conviction reflecting a substantial lack of trust in governments. Many of these answers may be the result of negative experiences with governments in the past. 60% stated they would not resort to the government again because they had bad experiences before. However, some respondents seemed to have a negative image of state security provision in spite of having had no personal experiences. Trust-building efforts are needed to allay these fears and to persuade this group of the ability of governments to provide security and protection to citizens.

Potential tangible deficits of state institutions (variables *The government is not able to protect me*; *The government is unable or too slow to reach my community*; and *The processes of the government are very bureaucratic*) were also selected very often, but remained secondary to answers dealing with subjective concerns, fears, and perceptions. In the open-ended variable, participants indicated further reasons for their distrust in governments, mainly linking state security provision to corruption, bribery, and favouritism.

Figure 7 shows the alternative entities to which survey participants would resort. Half of those unwilling to resort to the government in the event of danger would rather contact friends or relatives. Apparently, these participants only trust persons with whom they share close ties and relations. They would rather not refer to support structures outside these realms. Other options mentioned relatively often were civil society organisations and the media. 9% indicated they would take the law into their own hands. Three pre-defined variables, *Political factions*, *Private security*, and *Senior of a tribe or mayor (mukhtar)*, did not get selected at all.

Figure 6

Why would you not resort to the government if you were in danger? [Q35]

Category	Value	Percent
I distrust that the government treats citizens equally	136	83%
I fear that the government will abuse its power over me	128	79%
I distrust the government to maintain my privacy	113	69%
I had bad experiences before when I tried to contact the government	97	60%
The government is not able to protect me	80	49%
The government is unable or too slow to reach my community	77	47%
The processes of the government are very bureaucratic	54	33%
Alternative dispute resolution mechanisms are more effective	24	15%
I don't know how to contact the government	7	4%
I feel pressured by family members / community not to complain	5	3%
The distance to the next physical station of the government is very large	4	2%
I would be ashamed to resort to the government	2	1%

Figure 7

If you decide not to resort to the government, to which of the following entities would you resort? [Q36]

- Friends or relatives
- Civil society organisation
- The media
- I would take the law into my own hands
- Individuals within the government
- Local council/ municipality/camp committee
- Open-ended answers

6
4%

6
4%

9
6%

15
9%

18
11%

25
16%

81
50%

Participants also had the opportunity to indicate other reasons in an open-ended variable. Some stated they would leave the country, while others would use money or personal connections to solve their problems. Some saw God as a last resort, or stated that nobody could possibly help them.

Recommendations

Current political developments in Syria, and the likelihood that the regime will win the war militarily, limit the prospects for comprehensively reforming the Syrian security sector so as to turn it from an oppressive regime-protecting sector into one that provides security in accordance with the needs of Syrian citizens. However, it is important for international actors working in and on Syria to keep in mind how Syrians envisage an ideal security sector for post-war Syria, and the minimum standards of functioning security sectors. Without taking the security needs of citizens into consideration, any future approach for peacebuilding and establishing stability in Syria will be doomed to fail in the long run. This, therefore, prompts several recommendations for further academic research as well as policy analysis and development:

» Identify the security needs of citizens from different environments (cities, villages, refugee camps, diaspora) by conducting focus group discussions, involving women and youth in particular. During these discussions, focus specifically on citizens' expectations regarding accountability, oversight, and the rule of law. These characteristics were most important for survey participants, in addition to a security sector that serves the population.

» Support capacity-building for civil society actors and media working on Syria with respect to the principles and concepts of security sector governance and reform. Survey participants see civil society and the media as parts of the security sector. Thus, they could potentially contribute to its reform, once a political window of opportunity opens. Increase the capacity of civil society to monitor government policies and practices pertaining to security provision and, thus, enable civil society to exercise its civilian oversight role and to advocate for the interests of citizens.

» Support programmes raising awareness about good governance, especially targeting women, and including all levels of education. The principles of good governance are important elements of good security sector governance. Citizens need to be aware of them to be able to articulate their needs and defend their rights. Women and youth were less likely to indicate having very good knowledge of good governance. Thus, awareness-raising programmes need to be designed in a way that makes them attractive to all parts of the society, including these groups.

» Work together with civil society actors to develop and design trust-building measures between citizens and governments. Although this should ideally happen within Syria too, many factors determine the feasibility, such as the political will of the government and the personal safety of civil society members. Thus, it is recommended to start with Syrians living in the diaspora and government representatives in the countries where they reside. One quarter of all survey participants would not even resort to the government under ideal conditions. The fears and concerns of these people need to be taken seriously and dealt with properly by comprehensive trust-building measures. If not implemented successfully, in the medium or long term, this could lead to a fragmentation of the society and/or a radicalisation of individuals that distrust the state and feel neglected by it.

» Ensure the participation of women in all these processes. In this survey, women were less likely than men to resort to the government in the event they were in danger. Conduct further research to analyse women's attitudes in particular, but also men's, towards statehood and state authority and publish the results. Support initiatives informing citizens, especially women, on the functioning of government and security institutions.