



# "Young Voices" project NWS 2023

## Syrian Youth opinion polls results



# Young Voices Project

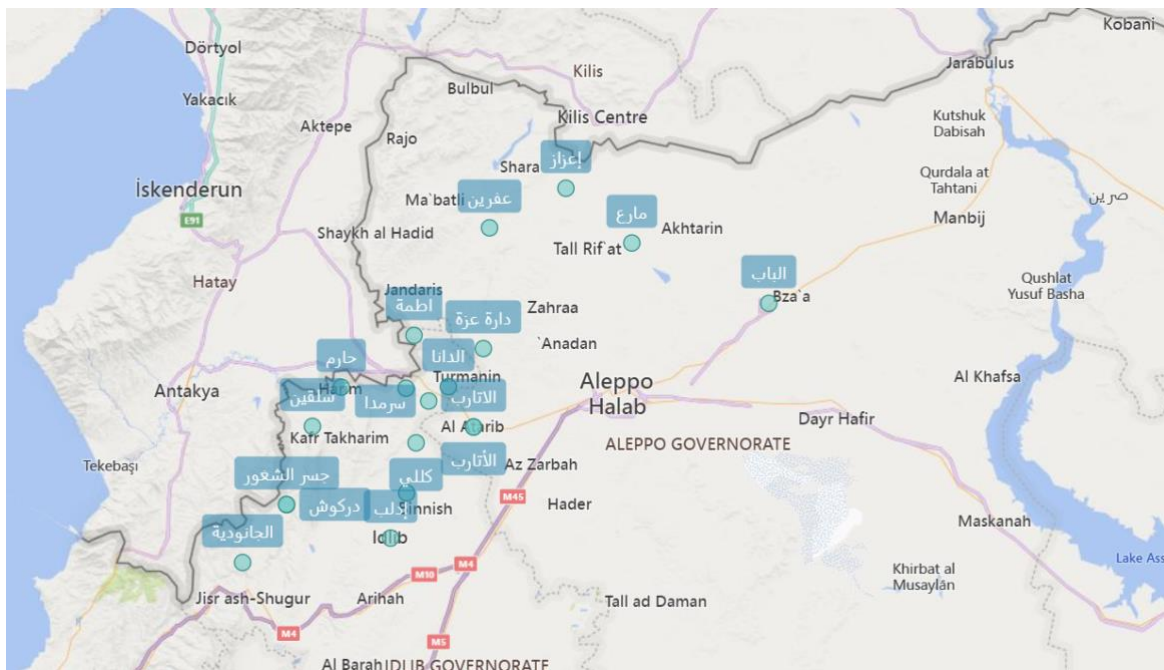
**Young Voices project to enhance the participation of Syrian youth and their inclusion in local development and the decision-making process**

The project seeks to build the capacities of volunteer teams and community committees by enabling them to possess the necessary skills and tools to assess participatory needs, conduct opinion polls, and select young leaders to represent opinion according to the community organizing approach and practice discussions, dialogues and debates, through which youth voices will be raised from teams and committees and guide the youth' candidates to develop thematic programs that reflect the voices and priorities and thus convey the voices of these youth to decision makers

## Executive Summary

Door Organization, in collaboration with the Youth of Change Network YCN, initiated the "Young Voices" project, with the primary goal of fostering greater youth engagement and inclusion in peacemaking and decision-making. This project involved empowering 40 young individuals, both male and female, from YCN committees and volunteering teams in northwest Syria. The focus was on conveying knowledge about community organization and enhancing their abilities in conducting participatory needs assessments and conducting listening campaigns. Notably, both male and female researchers actively took part in shaping the research methodology, developing data collection tools, and determining implementation strategies.

Following the initial stages, a comprehensive participatory opinion poll was undertaken, involving 400 young men and women, to gauge their priorities, needs, and the selection process for their representatives who would advocate for their interests and address their requirements. The entire process was closely supervised by data analysts.



Once the data from the opinion polls was thoroughly analyzed, the project proceeded with holding Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). These FGDs included the research participants as well as other young individuals from the targeted areas, aiming to explore deeper understanding into contentious issues and provide a more profound analysis of the conclusions drawn from the polls. A total of 39 FGDs were conducted in various regions of northern Syria, with approximately 20 young men and women participating in each session. It's worth noting that these sessions witnessed an unprecedented level of interaction and engagement, highlighting the widespread impact achieved by Young Voices project in these areas.

## Summary of Findings:

### 1. Youth priorities and problems at different sectors:

#### Primary Sectors

The initial part of the opinion poll focused on determining the primary sectors of young individuals by identifying the most significant issues afflicting society, as perceived by both young men and women. They were presented with various sectors to choose from, including health, education, work, community participation, media, sports, arts and culture.

SECTOR	EDUCATION	LABOR	HEALTH	COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION	SPORTS	MEDIA	ARTS AND CULTURE
MALE	193	171	142	41	28	25	21
FEMALE	109	96	78	27	8	6	29
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>50</b>
%	%79.5	%70	%58	%18	%10	%8	%13

The research findings revealed a strong consensus on the importance of education sector, ranking first with 79.5%. Following closely was labor sector, with 70%, and health sector at 58%, considering its relevance to essential community services. The remaining sectors gathered considerably lower percentages. The sector of community participation received a modest 18% support, while art and culture sector and sports sector received even lower percentages of 13% and 10%, respectively. Despite recognizing the significance of the media sector, only 10% of the participants considered it a top priority.

In the FGDS, it became evident that the majority of young people acknowledged the importance of the secondary sectors and agreed on the need to support them, albeit to a lesser extent than the primary sectors. The focus of the youth was on giving attention to the primary sectors, as they are foundational, but they also emphasized the significance of the secondary sectors as they complement the primary ones. Empowerment strategies discussed included offering training courses to enhance individual skills, hosting seminars and establishing cultural centers. Additionally, they proposed creating sports facilities and organizing trips to encourage talents through exhibitions, accompanied by incentives.

### **The most important problems that society faces in different sectors:**

**In the education sector**, high registration fees were identified as the primary problem affecting young individuals across all educational levels. Following closely was the lack of recognition of educational certificates, which university students and graduates particularly emphasized. For those without higher education, the lack of specialized staff emerged as the second most pressing concern.

Educational level	The total sample in the educational level	Number of people who chose education as a priority	Percentage
University	236	204	%78
High School	84	67	%80
Uneducated	40	31	%78
Total	<b>360</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>%38</b>

Other issues highlighted included challenges in accessing educational services and the perceived inadequacy of school curricula in terms of quality.

Problem	University	High School	Uneducated	Total
high registration fees	138	47	17	202
the lack of specialized staff	90	31	22	143
the lack of recognition of educational certificates	101	20	6	127
challenges in accessing educational services	75	19	8	102
Poor quality of the curriculum	62	26	7	95
Lack of availability of many university specializations	51	16	3	70
The available specializations are not linked to market needs	37	9	2	48

**Regarding the labor sector**, several challenges have been identified. There is a scarcity of available employment opportunities, making it difficult for individuals to find suitable jobs. Even in the available job opportunities, wages are often insufficient and fail to meet the needs of the workers. Some individuals encounter challenges in accessing job opportunities, further hindering their chances of securing employment. The sector lacks equitable and just employment standards, potentially leading to exploitative

working conditions. Women, in particular, encounter additional hurdles, such as limited work opportunities and societal restrictions that restrict their ability to pursue employment outside the home.

Working status	Gender		Total	Percentage
	Female	Male		
Student	50	40	90	25%
Not working	33	37	70	19%
Private sector	45	14	59	16%
Organizations	32	19	51	14%
Public sector	30	18	48	13%
Freelancing	35	7	42	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>100%</b>

These challenges collectively contribute to the complexities and hardships experienced within the labor sector, affecting both men and women differently.

Working status	The total sample in the Labor sector	Number of people who chose Labor as a priority	Percentage
Organizations	51	42	82%
Private sector	59	47	80%
Not working	70	55	79%
Freelancing	42	33	79%
Student	90	65	72%
Public sector	48	28	58%
<b>Total</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>%74</b>

Regarding health sector, young men and women participating in the opinion poll expressed their primary concerns. These included the inadequate number of specialized personnel and the substandard quality of health services. Furthermore, they pointed out the scarcity of medical equipment and the high expenses associated with accessing health services in the private sector.

Residence status	Gender		Total	Percentage
	Male	Female		
Resident (host community)	93	56	212	%59
IDPs	132	79	149	%41
<b>Total</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>%100</b>

difficulty of obtaining essential health services was also highlighted as a major issue.

Residence status	The total sample in the Residence status	Number of people who chose Health as a priority	Percentage
Resident (host community)	212	90	%42
IDPs	149	130	%87
<b>Total</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>% 64</b>

The destruction of educational and health facilities, roads, and other industrial and commercial infrastructure due to bombings and conflicts is recognized as a critical factor contributing to the deterioration of these sectors. Additionally, the ongoing security situation and military conflicts have resulted in the emigration of skilled professionals and capital, as well as parents' reluctance to send their children to schools and universities. Another concern raised by young men and women is the prevalence of nepotism, which they view as a significant cause leading to the appointment of unqualified personnel in various essential sectors. Young men and women cited specific examples, such as the presence of medical



staff without specialized certificates in hospitals. This situation has led to a rise in medical errors and a decline in the quality of healthcare services provided. Additionally, one of the significant reasons that worsened the issues in labor, health, and education sectors is the absence of clear strategies and plans related to these vital areas. The lack of well-defined strategies has further exacerbated the challenges faced by these sectors .

At the forefront of the challenges faced by the **community participation sector** is the absence of programs that foster youth involvement in public life. This is followed by the lack of confidence from adults in recognizing the significance of youth's role in society, as well as skepticism towards the existing local and civil structures in the region. Furthermore, the youth's unfamiliarity with the mechanisms of participation within these local and civil structures adds to the list of issues within this sector.

### Youth secondary sectors:

The primary issue highlighted by the respondents concerning the **media sector** is the lack of societal awareness regarding the importance and role of media in addressing societal issues. This lack of awareness is seen as closely connected to the media's poor representation of the needs of society. In other words, the first problem stems from the second problem. Additionally, respondents also noted that the media's lack of freedom of expression in northwest Syria is linked to these challenges in the sector.

**The sports sector** faces several significant challenges, with the low percentage of community interest being the foremost problem. Following closely are the lack of suitable venues to facilitate sports programs and the absence of targeted sports programs for young people. These issues are interconnected with two complementary problems: inadequate funding and the high cost of conducting sports programs. Together, these factors contribute to the exacerbation of the first two problems.

Education Status	Gender		Total	Percentage
	Resident	IDPs		
Male	132	93	225	%63
Female	79	56	135	%37
<b>Total</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>%100</b>

A critical concern is the societal rejection of women's participation in sports programs among young women interested in the sports sector. Addressing this requires finding effective ways to increase society's acceptance of women's involvement in sports.

Gender	The total sample in the Education sector	Number of people who chose Education as a priority	Percentage
Male	225	28	12%
Female	135	8	%6
<b>Total</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>%10</b>

**Interest in arts and culture sector** varies with education levels, being higher among those with higher education. Despite societal restrictions, young women exhibit greater interest than young men. The lack of community interest is a significant problem, evident in the youth's engagement. Moreover, limited venues and poor specialized programs contribute to the sector's challenges.

Educational level	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
University	143	93	236
High School	56	28	48
Uneducated	26	14	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>360</b>

Educational level	The total sample in the educational level	Number of people who chose arts and culture as a priority	Percentage
University	236	38	%16
High School	48	11	%19
Uneducated	40	1	%2.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>%14</b>

## 2. Youth representation:

The second part of the opinion poll focused on the criteria and mechanisms of selecting youth representatives. The research aimed to understand why certain youth figures representing the Syrian revolution are/ are not agreed upon in international forums. It investigated the criteria and mechanisms for choosing youth representatives, exploring ways to enhance trust in the selection process.

Youth representative selection criteria:

The research revealed several essential criteria that young people consider when choosing their representatives in elections. The top criteria include the educational level and practical experience of the candidate, which is seen as crucial for awareness, culture, and the ability to tackle challenges with creativity and innovation, setting an example for the younger generation. Additionally, it is preferred that the candidate is a Muslim, as most of society is, and belongs to the young category to better understand their issues, needs, and aspirations, fostering a stronger connection with the youth. The participants demonstrated a tendency to undervalue the significance of local, ethnic, and national criteria in choosing their candidates. Instead, they preferred candidates who were distant from political and military tensions.

This reflects a clear civic orientation among the youth group concerning the selection of their representatives.

The gender of the candidate emerged as a controversial criterion among young men and women. Male youth rated this criterion with a significance of 3.1 out of 5, whereas young women attributed less importance to it, giving it a rating of 2.5 out of 5. Interestingly, young women showed relatively greater openness to being represented by candidates of both sexes compared to young men.

The difference in perception is reflected in the responses of young males, who associate leadership, rationality, and social abilities more strongly with males. Some of them attributed this view to societal customs and traditions that limit women's participation in public life, which aligns with the challenges observed in the community participation sector in the first section of the poll.

Some young women found the candidate's gender criterion important, echoing views of young men about men being more suited for practical matters due to experience and rationality, whereas women might be influenced by emotions. Some young women attributed the importance of the gender criterion to societal norms that favor men due to the patriarchal nature of the society. They expressed the need for more opportunities for women to represent the youth group to counter this phenomenon.

On the other hand, some individuals approached the significance of the gender criterion from a different perspective. They did not view it as a matter of distinguishing between male and female capabilities but rather as a means to achieve balance in representation. They emphasized the need for a balanced representation of both sexes, recognizing that certain issues might be better represented by women while others by men. This approach aimed to foster inclusivity and ensure that both genders have an equal chance to represent the youth category.

## Youth Selection Mechanisms:

The research shows the preference of young men and women to resort to direct elections as a first mechanism to reach the appropriate representatives (51%), which is a positive indicator of the possibility of activating a youth parliament based on voting and elections. While 18% - less than half of those who prefer the election mechanism - considered that the best mechanism for reaching the appropriate representatives is through the recommendation of trusted persons or entities. On the other hand, 14% of the respondents believed that there should be preparation courses for young people, through which the best ones are selected, as a good mechanism to reach the appropriate representatives.

In addition to the mentioned mechanisms, around 9% of the respondents, mostly university students, considered universities and student bodies as appropriate avenues for finding suitable representatives. A smaller percentage believed in evaluating candidates through specific tests or utilizing social media platforms for actors to market themselves and be selected as representatives. These diverse perspectives highlight the range of approaches young people envision for identifying appropriate representatives within the youth category.

Furthermore, the research revealed that the majority of participants (53%) trust programs that select representatives on their behalf, while 33% have limited trust, and 14% lack trust in these programs. Notably, there was a strong consensus among the participating youth regarding the necessity of having a dependable electoral commission to enhance trust in the electoral process.

Moreover, the research affirmed the wide agreement among youth on the importance of granting all Syrian youth the opportunity to exercise their electoral rights, irrespective of their affiliation with voluntary or charitable institutional entities. The emphasis was on inclusivity, ensuring that all young individuals have a fair access to participate in the selection process.



— Have Your Say —

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