OCV researchers brief no 1

Dear all,

Welcome and thank you for joining us in our work looking at Syrian diaspora voting. We have researchers working for five days in each country - in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Sweden.

I will be coordinating your work with Maroun. Please don’t hesitate to be in touch with us at any time. We also encourage you to be in touch with each other and will set up a WhatsApp group.

Please feel free to organise your time as you would like. But you must be available on Thursday 20 May and we ask you to complete your work by Friday 28 May if possible.

**Your main tasks are**:

* Desk research: gathering basic information on the Syria diaspora in-country (one day)
* Establish contact with Syrian diaspora leaders and conduct informal and formal interviews (using a semi-structured methodology as provided). Discussion groups could also be held if appropriate.
* Facilitate a limited online survey by members of the Syrian diaspora with as varied a profile as possible.
* View external signs of voting at the Syrian embassy on the OCV election day (Thursday 20 May). It appears that voting may be from 7am to 7pm but please try to find out locally.
* Provide information and meeting records to us, as well as on-going feedback and a short final report.

**Reporting**

We ask you for the following reporting. We assume this will be Arabic, but if you prefer you can write in English. We will provide templates for all of these.

* Desk research summary – likely just a few pages covering basic information you can obtain that is specific to your country. This could include:
* Numbers of Syrian diaspora in the country
* Numbers of Syrian refugees in the country
* Main locations of the Syrian diaspora within the country, and whether any are in camps / camp-like settings
* Host country identity documents available for the Syrian diaspora and any information on up-take
* Public narratives on Syrian refugees/diaspora

- what is meant by this point exactly, the general Swedish narrative and discourse about refugees (Syrians specifically) in Sweden? Is it my general impression from the conversations in media, or should I study media conversations more systematically?

* Main Syrian diaspora community groups in the country
* Public information from the Syrian embassy on registration and polling arrangements (eg on their social media) and nature of comments
* Media reports on OCV in the country for these elections
* Interview notes – a record of the main points from your interviews (formal or informal). You can also attach recordings from focus groups (if participants have consented to being recorded). Please add these on a rolling basis to the template provided.
* Election day report – a record of main findings eg on external signs indicating voting, signs of additional security, apparent flow of people (voters) to the embassy, comments from voters (if any), media interest (if any), any other comments.
* Final concluding report – a short summary (one or two pages maximum) of 1) your main findings, 2) your overall analysis and conclusions, and 3) your main recommendations.

These templates will all be available in shared folders on google drive for you to access and add to at any time.

**Gathering the views of Syrian diaspora**

Our main aim is to get a variety of views from the diaspora to help us understand the challenges diaspora face in voting and possible ways forward in the future. We ask you to use a variety of methods to get these views: informal interviews, formal interviews, focus groups and the online survey. You will have to work out what works best in your setting.

Surveys help us gather information in a standardised way on individual’s personal experience and views. Generally you may have to complete the survey with the person (rather than leaving them to fill out the online form alone). We ask you to try to have 20 surveys completed if possible.

Interviews enable you to go into more depth with people, to talk about more sensitive subjects and to explore ways forward. These are less about people’s personal situations and more about gathering their views on the situation in general. Interviews may be more suitable for more senior representatives. They may also be informal. Similarly you may want to try a focus group discussion. We ask you to try to have 5 interviews completed if possible.

Please try to gather the views of a diversity of people eg who are eligible/ineligible to vote, from different home locations in Syria, women as well as men, from varied living arrangements in the host country, people of different age groups.

**Meetings and possible focus group discussions**

* Suggested introductory points:
* Thank you for speaking with me today.
* I am working for the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) as a researcher looking at the voting situation for the Syrian diaspora. IFES is an independent organisation based in the US. IFES has researchers in four countries who will conduct a number of interviews with and share a short survey. We hope our recommendations will be useful for improving future voting opportunities for the Syrian diaspora.
* All information given is completely anonymous. I won’t be using your name, and I won’t talk about what you have said to anyone else I interview or speak with.
* I will take notes for sharing key points with colleagues.
* Suggested questions:
* What do you think of the information available on participating in these elections? Do people know about them?
* What puts people off or makes it difficult for Syrians in this country to vote in Syrian elections?
* Have you heard reports or seen any signs of intimidation or pressure on people to vote?
* Has the COVID pandemic affected your potential participation in this election? If *yes*, then how?
* Why do you think there are fewer women recorded in the diaspora than men and what could be done to help women be involved in future elections?
* In the future do you think it would be better for diaspora to register and vote in Syrian embassies or other neutral locations?
* In the future do you think it would be better if voting for Syrian diaspora is run by the current Syrian authorities or with the involvement of the United Nations?

**Survey**

The survey is in Arabic and aims to be easy to use on a mobile phone, although a computer would be easier for open-ended questions. As people may not feel comfortable filling a survey in online, we anticipate that you may need to assist people in completing the survey. The survey is available at <https://forms.gle/rdCCu3Dp2gEseNCGA>. Please give us feedback after you have completed a few so that we can make adjustments as needed.

When explaining the survey, you can state: It is being undertaken to understand more about the voting situation for the Syrian diaspora. The overall data will be used by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) to make recommendations for improvements in the future. IFES is an independent organisation based in the US. All information given is completely anonymous. We ask only one person per household to fill out a survey as we are trying to hear from people with a diverse range of experiences. The survey is in Arabic and should take approximately 20 minutes to complete on a mobile phone or computer.

FYI, here are the planned questions:

* Which country are you currently living in?
* What is your gender?
* How old are you?
* When did you leave Syria?
* Did you get an exit stamp on your passport when you left Syria?
* Have you visited Syria since you left?
* Do you consider yourself as having been forcibly displaced from Syria?
* Are you registered with UNHCR?
* Since leaving Syria have you voted in any Syrian election?

If *yes*, what have been your main reasons for having voted?

If *no*, what have been your main reasons for not having voted?

* Do you currently have a valid Syrian passport?

If *yes*, does it have an exit stamp?

* What other identification documentation do you have?
* Do you have a record of your 11-digit national identity number?
* On what date is diaspora voting taking place?
* Do you know if diaspora need to register to vote?
* Have you registered to vote in the 2021 presidential election?
* Do you think you will vote in the 2021 presidential election?
* Has the COVID pandemic affected your potential participation in this election?

If *yes*, then how?

* How do you get information on Syrian elections?
* Have you experienced anything that could be seen as intimidation or political pressure in regard to diaspora voting and the Syrian elections?
* In the future do you think it would be better for diaspora to register and vote in Syrian embassies or other neutral locations?
* In the future do you think it would be better if voting for Syrian diaspora is run by the current Syrian authorities or with the involvement of the United Nations?
* In the future do you think it would be better if diaspora could register even if they don’t have a valid passport with an exit stamp?
* Do you have any thoughts on what could help more women take part in future elections?
* Do you have any other comments and recommendations for future voting by the Syrian diaspora? Please give brief answers.

**Background information**

Syrian diaspora who want to vote must actively register and vote in-person at a Syrian embassy by presenting a valid passport with an exit visa stamp. The Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates (MFAE) is responsible for registering voters, verifying their eligibility to vote, and for organizing the voting process. Registration for voters closed on Sunday 25 April.

Syria has a total of 46 embassies, a consulate in Istanbul (and no Embassy in Ankara), and representation to international organisations in the Hague, Geneva and New York. For the 2014 presidential election, voting is reported to have taken place in 32 countries. This year, of the 46 embassies listed, 17 made announcements online for the registration of voters for the 2021 presidential elections, as did the consulate in Istanbul. Online announcements were primarily made through embassy Facebook pages and on websites, with links to google forms for registration (which seemed to vary between countries). It is not clear that diaspora voting will be possible in all the countries where it has been announced, as host-country agreement is required. For example, in 2014 there was no diaspora voting in Turkey.

While you are focusing on the specifics of your research country, you may also be interested in the following useful websites.

[O HYPERLINK "http://www.mofa.gov.sy/ar/embassies/"fficial list of Syrian embassies](http://www.mofa.gov.sy/ar/embassies/), Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates.

[UN HYPERLINK "https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/1\_Demographic%20Profiles/Syrian%20Arab%20Republic.pdf"Department of Economic and Social Affairs ( HYPERLINK "https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/1\_Demographic%20Profiles/Syrian%20Arab%20Republic.pdf"DESA](https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/1_Demographic%20Profiles/Syrian%20Arab%20Republic.pdf))

UNHCR, [Figures at a Glance, June 2020](https://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html) and UNHCR [Operational Portal for the Syrian Refugee Situation](https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria).

Thank you and good luck!

All the best,

Hannah and Maroun

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