

Main takeaways from the Day of Dialogue (30 April 2024)

On 30 April 2024, the European Union organised the “[Day of Dialogue](#)”, bringing together over 600 representatives of Syrian civil society organisations (from Syria, neighbouring countries and the diaspora), the UN, EU Member States, partner countries and international NGOs. Participants actively exchanged on six thematic panel discussions focused on the political process and UN Security Council Resolution 2254, early recovery and resilience, the health and education sectors, livelihood opportunities in neighbouring countries, and the issue of missing persons and accountability. The key takeaways from the Day of Dialogue will be conveyed during the Ministerial meeting on 27 May by three rapporteurs from Syrian civil society (Ms. Sawsan Abou Zainedin, Dr. Hala Alghawi, and Ms. Charmain Mohamed). Here are some key takeaways from the main sessions of the Day of Dialogue:

The discussion “*Implementation of UNSCR 2254: State of play and way forward*” underscored the political nature of the crisis in Syria, and recalled that UN Security Council Resolution 2254 remains the only internationally agreed framework for achieving a political solution in Syria. Genuine engagement by all parties with the UN Special Envoy, and support in this respect from all Arab and international partners, is instrumental in advancing the political process. Panellists regretted the deadlock in the political process caused by the lack of will of authorities in Damascus, and warned that the conflict would remain active as long as this stalemate continues. It is vital that the Constitutional Committee reconvenes as soon as possible, and that efforts be stepped up to establish the inclusive transitional body for other constitutional and election-related processes. Participants also highlighted that the political process could benefit from a more inclusive interpretation of UNSCR 2254 that takes into account the diversity of groups and political projects in Syria. In addition, the involvement and leadership of women, youth and civil society actors in the political sphere are essential for the implementation of UNSCR 2254. In line with this, participants commended the contribution of the Women’s Advisory board and the Syrian Civil Society Room in advancing the political process in Syria.

The roundtable “*Triggering Meaningful Change: Investing in the health workforce in Syria*” discussed the importance of investing in human resources for health in a context of growing humanitarian needs and budget constraints. Panellists underlined that creating employment opportunities in the health sector in Syria could catalyse economic growth and act as a lever for early recovery. The panel emphasised how health is a primary factor of resilient and prosperous societies. It also noted that local and intermediary health bodies in Syria are conduits for gendered, human-rights based approaches. Panellists highlighted how these bodies have manoeuvred political deadlocks throughout the crisis and called for investing in them to fill the governance gap left by national institutions, whose effectiveness and legitimacy has diminished. Such investments would aim to bridge today’s fragmented Syrian society and what were previously local and national institutions. Investments should be long term, flexible, and underpinned by stable funding. Most critically, they should abide by the principle of “complete and not compete”. Interventions and partners should be pragmatic, encourage co-production of solutions around gender, focus on quality training, leverage regional and international actors and follow conflict sensitivity assessments.

The panel “*Education in Emergency: Barriers, and opportunities for accessing education. Perspectives from the Youth*” discussed the situation of 7 million children and teachers in Syria who need emergency education services. Issues such as economic barriers to education, overcrowding in schools, low teacher salaries, and high dropout rates are contributing to worsening this crisis. The situation of Syrian refugees in neighbouring host countries is equally concerning, as half of them are not receiving formal education. Panellists recommended addressing barriers to education by implementing a multi-sectoral integrated approach that links education to other programmatic sectors. They also highlighted the need for integrating mental health and psychosocial support within the educational framework to address

the impact of trauma on children and teachers. A holistic approach would ensure that children with specific needs, including those with disabilities, are able to access education services and psychosocial assistance. Intermittent access to traditional learning environments, and dropout rates caused by severe poverty required innovative solutions, among which panellists suggested blended learning models that combine online and face-to-face interactions and flexible learning pathways.

The panel *“Enhancing sustainability of Basic Services and Livelihood Opportunities for Refugees and Hosting Communities in Türkiye, Jordan and Lebanon”* underscored the importance of continued donor support to enhance the sustainability of basic services and livelihood opportunities in host countries as long as conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified returns of refugees are not in place. The discussion highlighted the need for new climate-adapted, gender sensitive approaches that focus on system strengthening and structural reforms in host countries. Panellists warned about the pattern of scapegoating refugees in the face of overlooked systemic concerns. In this regard, the discussion emphasised the need to combat disinformation on refugees, and to encourage community dialogues benefitting both refugee and host populations. Refugees had the potential to become agents of change in their host communities, through market driven technical and vocational training, financial literacy, and access to credit, scholarships, adequate minimum wages and fair working conditions, among others. The panel recalled the root causes of the Syrian displacement crisis, primarily political repression, and urged renewed investment in the political process as the only way forward. There was a concern that returns could be exploited for political gain by the Syrian regime or that donor-funded protection programmes would continue – treating the symptoms – without addressing the cause.

The panel *“Effective humanitarian assistance and protection as a driver for supporting resilience and early recovery in the context of the protracted crisis in Syria”* discussed the vital role of early recovery efforts in addressing the overlapping needs in Syria. Panellists emphasised that early recovery can contribute to improving the humanitarian response and its sustainability by building the capacities of communities and their resilience. Early recovery efforts are most effective when implemented through a multi-sector, integrated, and participatory approach, hence the importance of prioritising community engagement and localisation. Panellists highlighted the importance of legal certainty and predictability in stepping up early recovery, including through flexible and multi-year funding. Given the heightened vulnerability of certain groups in Syria, it is also essential to put protection at the core of early recovery efforts, and to target needs at individual, household and community levels. The panel concurred that mine action and the rehabilitation of infrastructure – including water and sanitation systems, schools and health facilities – should be at the centre of these efforts. Panellists also stressed that securing a reliable supply of electricity was vital to the delivery of all other essential services. Participants recalled the need for a continued emergency response, alongside early recovery efforts.

Panellists of the roundtable *“Justice, Peace and Right to Truth: Addressing the cases of missing persons and detainees as a prerequisite for future reconciliation”* welcomed the timely discussion considering normalisation by certain states of their relations with the Syrian regime, and lamented the insufficient efforts to support accountability for crimes committed during the conflict. The panel welcomed the establishment of the new Independent Institution on Missing Persons (IIMP). The discussion highlighted how the work of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) and the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) can complement that of the IIMP, including through data collection and information processing. Panellists considered actions to be taken in the absence of political will from de facto authorities, brainstormed how stakeholders could collaborate with the families of victims and Syrian civil society, and urged regional states to engage constructively in advancing the political process. Participants concurred that pursuing justice and accountability required intensifying efforts for addressing violations by all parties, extending the mandate of all international mechanisms and institutions. They commended efforts in courts worldwide, advocating all available avenues and pathways being used to ensure accountability for all crimes and justice for all victims.