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EU - 2025 Day of Dialogue



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Executive Summary

The European Union's (EU) first Day of Dialogue in Damascus, held in 2025, represented a pivotal moment in Syria's post-conflict trajectory. Marking a deliberate and historic return to direct engagement within the Syrian capital after fourteen years of conflict, the event brought together the Syrian Transitional Government (STG), the EU, and a broad spectrum of Syrian civil society organisations (CSO) across six thematic roundtables. The overarching tone of the dialogue was one of cautious yet resolute optimism - a shared recognition that while the path to recovery is fraught with immense challenges, a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process is both necessary and achievable.

The discussions coalesced around several critical priorities. Foremost among these was the urgent need for comprehensive legal and institutional reform, recognised as the bedrock for a stable and just future for the country. This included the imperative to replace outdated legislation - most prominently the 1958 Civil Society Law - and to establish robust legal frameworks for transitional justice and accountability. Equally significant was the unanimous call for a strategic shift from emergency humanitarian relief to sustainable economic development, emphasising self-reliance, job creation, and the integration of marginalised populations into the economic fabric of a recovering Syria.

The central role of transitional justice and accountability in healing social wounds and fostering genuine social cohesion was consistently underscored across sessions, with participants stressing the importance of victim-centric approaches and transparent mechanisms. The STG's expressed commitment to these reforms - including the establishment of the National Commission for the Missing (NCM) and the National Commission for Transitional Justice (NCTJ) - was met with a clear demand from Syrian civil society for greater transparency, regular communication, and concrete timelines for implementation. The EU's announcement of a EUR 139 million socioeconomic recovery package, prioritising vocational education, institutional capacity building, and justice and accountability mechanisms, further solidified the international community's long-term engagement.

As a benchmark for future engagement, the Day of Dialogue laid the foundation for a new paradigm of partnership between Syria's state and civil society, and the international community. It amplified the critical importance of inclusivity, ensuring that the voices and needs of youth, women, persons with disabilities, and victims' families are not merely acknowledged but actively integrated into decision-making and policy formulation. While the dialogue illuminated significant areas requiring further attention - notably the absence of specific legislative timelines, the practicalities of addressing deep-seated sectarian tensions, the lack of unified financing strategy for reconstruction, and the need for more concrete mechanisms for diaspora engagement - it demonstrated a collective recognition that Syria's enduring recovery is inextricably linked to a unified, transparent, and accountable approach that prioritises the dignity, rights, and well-being of all its citizens.

Introduction

On 15 November 2025, the EU convened the first Day of Dialogue in Damascus - an event that brought together Syrian CSOs, representatives of the STG, and EU officials for a structured day of discussion on Syria's transition and recovery. Held in the Syrian capital for the first time, the event was conceived as both a substantive forum and a symbolic act: a signal of the EU's commitment to direct, sustained engagement with Syrian actors at all levels of Syrian society.

The Day of Dialogue was structured around six thematic roundtables, each addressing a distinct but interrelated dimension of Syria's contemporary transition period. These included an opening session on partnership, civil society, and the role of the EU; Roundtable One on Transitional Justice - Truth, Healing, and Accountability; Roundtable Two on Empowering Syria's Youth; Roundtable Three on Governance and Local Administration; Roundtable Four on Early Recovery and Livelihoods; Roundtable Five on Social Cohesion; and Roundtable Six on the transition from Humanitarian Aid to Recovery and Resilience. Each roundtable brought together a combination of governmental representatives, civil society actors, and - in some sessions - international partners and UN representatives.

This report serves as the official written record of the 2025 Day of Dialogue. It fulfils three primary objectives. First, it provides a detailed narrative account of the discussions across all sessions, capturing key arguments, areas of agreement and debate, and the exchanges that characterised each roundtable. Second, it compiles a comprehensive record of all recommendations made during the dialogue, organised by target group and sub-theme, to serve as a baseline against which the Day of Dialogue participants can assess progress over time. Third, it identifies cross-cutting themes, recurring concerns, and gaps in the discussions - including topics that merit greater attention in future iterations of the dialogue.

The EU plans to hold a second Day of Dialogue in Damascus at the end of 2026. This report is therefore conceived as a benchmark document: a detailed record of where discussions stood in 2025, against which progress - or its absence - can be measured in the months and years ahead. It is intended as a living reference for EU and STG representatives, civil society actors, and international partners engaged in Syria's transition.

Cross-Cutting Themes

The six roundtables of the 2025 Day of Dialogue revealed a set of deeply interconnected themes that transcended individual sessions and recurred throughout the day's discussions. These themes reflect the core challenges, aspirations, and strategic priorities for Syria's transitional period as articulated by the STG, EU representatives, and the many civil society voices present. Six cross-cutting themes are identified and examined in the sections that follow.

The Centrality of Trust and Partnership

Trust and partnership emerged as the foundational theme of the Day of Dialogue - recognised by all participants not as a rhetorical flourish but as a deeply felt necessity, albeit one interpreted differently by different actors. The STG stressed its desire for genuine collaboration with civil society as a full partner in governance and reconstruction. Syrian civil society, while welcoming this framing, was consistent in its insistence that trust must translate into formal, practical steps rather than remaining at the level of aspiration.

During the opening session, Mr. Asaad al-Shaibani, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, framed the Day of Dialogue as an opportunity to build the future and foster new trust between Syria and its international partners. Ms. Hind Kabawat, Minister of Social Affairs and Labour, emphasised that rebuilding Syria requires a sincere partnership between the state and civil society, based on mutual respect and a shared commitment to the nation. From the EU side, Commissioner Dubravka Suica highlighted the indispensable role of civil society in genuine reconciliation, while Ms. Henrike Trautmann - the European Commission's Acting Director of DG NEAR B Directorate - emphasised that successful collaboration depends fundamentally on trust between citizens and institutions. A civil society representative argued explicitly that trust is built only through concrete formal actions - not through demands alone - and that CSOs must be able to maintain their independence in order to fulfil their monitoring role effectively.

The theme of trust acquired particular urgency in Roundtable One on Transitional Justice, where it was intrinsically linked to the functioning of the newly established commissions and their communication with victims' families, noting that families were relying on social media for information - leading to emotional exhaustion and financial exploitation by fraudulent actors. Another civil society representative pointed to a dramatic decline in expectations and a loss of faith in accountability, citing instances where perpetrators had threatened former victims. The National Commission for the Missing (NCM), for its part, emphasised transparency, regular reporting, published protocols, and family oversight as core principles guiding its work.

In Roundtable Five on Social Cohesion, trust was examined through the lens of a fractured social fabric. Participants noted that social cohesion in Syria is either fragile or absent, owing in part to deliberate efforts to promote division. A particularly grave concern was raised about government employees who, whether deliberately or through lack of adequate training, were

described as inciting sectarian speech - an issue that was said to severely undermine the community's trust in state institutions. Economic cooperation through micro-enterprises and entrepreneurial projects was proposed as a practical mechanism for building mutual interests and gradually rebuilding trust between diverse communities.

The Need for Legal and Institutional Reform

Across all sessions, participants called for legal and institutional reform, recognising that outdated frameworks and dysfunctional institutions are significant impediments to progress. The most prominent legal reform discussed throughout the day was the replacement of the 1958 law regulating civil society work - a piece of legislation described by multiple participants as a fundamental obstacle to the effective functioning of CSOs in the contemporary Syrian context.

In the dialogue's opening session, Ms. Hind Kabawat outlined concrete steps her ministry was taking, including visiting all governorates to collect feedback and committing to sharing the first draft of a new law with every Syrian before submission to the People's Assembly. She affirmed that the civil society law must be decided by Syrian civil society itself. Civil society representatives demanded a modern law guaranteeing total freedom and independence, supporting CSOs' roles in development, monitoring, and documenting violations, while ensuring transparency and accountability. Another civil society representative highlighted the bureaucratic hurdles caused by the 1958 law, which had prevented urgent aid projects from being implemented. The EU committed to supporting institutional capacity building and to establishing a hub for technical assistance in Damascus, which would allow for the STG to draw on expertise when and where needed in order to best address the needs and challenges of Syrians.

In Roundtable One, calls for legal reform were directed specifically at the transitional justice architecture. Participants called urgently for the completion and enforcement of a draft transitional justice law that classifies crimes against humanity, enforced disappearance, torture, and war crimes. They also called for an independent judicial body under the Supreme Judicial Council, staffed by judges of good standing who did not participate in the previous judicial system. One civil society representative specifically recommended that the Ministry of Justice issue a statement to courts not to take decisions in terrorism-related cases under the current Syrian penal law until a new transitional justice law is enacted.

In Roundtable Two, on Syria's Youth, legal reform centred on the need for a regulatory framework regarding Syrian youth's involvement in economic, social, and political life across the multiple ministries involved - a framework that participants argued must be jointly developed and free from politicisation. In Roundtable Five, participants called for strict legislation banning hate speech, balancing accountability with sensitivity to freedom of expression. In Roundtable Six, discussions emphasised the need for laws protecting both investors and workers, and the establishment of clear safety codes as prerequisites for encouraging economic recovery.

Transition from Relief to Sustainable Development

A significant and widely supported theme throughout the day was the imperative to shift from a humanitarian aid-dependent model to one focused on sustainable recovery and long-term economic development. This transition is viewed as essential for Syria's self-reliance and long-term stability - and, for some participants, as a matter of national dignity.

In the opening session, a civil society representative focused on how CSOs must move forward from humanitarian aid to sustainable development, and the EU's announcement of a EUR 139 million socioeconomic recovery package - focused on institution building, rural and urban recovery, and justice, accountability, and social cohesion - clearly signalled this strategic direction. Ms. Henrike Trautmann noted that EU funding for activities inside Syria was being increased fivefold, with the upcoming phase focused squarely on socioeconomic recovery.

Roundtable Two embedded the transition to development within discussions on education and employment. A governmental representative stressed the need for a strategic five-to-seven-year plan linking educational curricula to labour market needs, arguing that education must be adjusted based on market demands - for instance, for programmers or skilled labourers needed for reconstruction. Roundtable Five addressed the misuse of humanitarian aid, with a civil society representative insisting that the goal must shift from emergency response to sustainable development, and that aid must prioritise the most vulnerable groups through assistance that helps them rebuild their lives, not simply sustain them.

Roundtable Six tackled this theme most directly, with STG representatives challenging the very framing of a transition from relief to recovery, arguing that the goal must instead be to build a strong national economy that does not depend on the economy of relief at all. A civil society representative offered a parallel model in which emergency aid continues for the most vulnerable while developmental pathways are simultaneously constructed. CSOs were urged to rethink their funding strategies, moving away from donor dependency and towards models of social investment in vital sectors such as agriculture and transportation.

Inclusivity and Representation

The principle of inclusivity and meaningful representation for all segments of Syrian society was a consistent demand throughout the day. Participants were clear that processes - legislative, consultative, or otherwise - that excluded marginalised groups would lack the legitimacy required to sustain Syria's transition.

During the Opening Session, Ms. Hind Kabawat emphasised that the new civil society law would incorporate feedback from organisations across all governorates, including As-Sweida and Qamishli. A civil society representative stressed that CSOs should be empowered as full partners in governance, reconciliation, and reconstruction - not as supplementary actors. Commissioner Suica underlined that the transition must be inclusive, with civil society playing a central role whose protection is indispensable for true reconciliation.

Roundtable One underscored the need for a Syrian-led, victim-centric, and non-discriminatory transitional justice process. The NCTJ confirmed that its mandate is fully inclusive, covering all victims and all crimes. Roundtable Two raised sharp concerns about gender inclusivity, with a civil society representative noting that the Arabic word for youth (shabab) often implies

male - and that women were effectively excluded from the session's framing. Panellists responded by clarifying that vocational training targets include at least 40 per cent women, and the concern was acknowledged as requiring more systematic attention.

Roundtable Five addressed the marginalisation of women at the national level directly. Despite women's clear role in preserving social cohesion at the local level, their role at the national level was described as unclear. Roundtable Six provided detailed evidence of this marginalisation: women represented only 13.3 per cent of the labour market, while 62 per cent of working-age persons with disabilities are unemployed. Participants called for direct employment standards prohibiting discrimination, workplace adaptation, and the creation of market outlets for products from vulnerable groups.

Accountability and Transitional Justice

Accountability and transitional justice were consistently highlighted as critical for healing, reconciliation, and establishing a new, legitimate state. While Roundtable One was dedicated specifically to this theme, its principles and urgency resonated across all sessions throughout the day.

In the opening session, the EU's announcement of a socioeconomic recovery package explicitly included support for justice, accountability, and social cohesion. Ms. Henrike Trautmann, confirmed EU support for the establishment of the two commissions - the NCM and NCTJ. Civil society representatives demanded that a modern law support CSO's roles in monitoring, documenting violations, and supporting Syrian society's recovery, whilst guaranteeing transparency and accountability in those roles.

Roundtable One established the framework within which accountability should be understood. The consensus was that the process must be Syrian-led, victim-centric, and non-discriminatory. The five pillars of the NCTJ - truth, accountability, non-repetition, reparation, and reconciliation - framed the discussion. Accountability was defined as holding violators accountable without exception, with the important qualification that justice requires accountability without revenge. The session also addressed the urgent need to protect documents from destruction, and for commissions to develop mechanisms to track and hold accountable perpetrators who are currently threatening former victims. The NCM committed to introducing legal procedures to criminalise extortion against families.

In Roundtable Five, a governmental representative emphasised that peace remains fragile without transitional justice, citing coastal security incidents as direct evidence of the link between unresolved grievances and social instability. The government admitted violations during those incidents and established a committee to investigate - a recognition, however nascent, of the need for accountability in security matters. In Roundtable Six, accountability was implicitly present in discussions on good governance and the rule of law, with participants arguing that strong governance is required to manage reconstruction and that donor priorities must align with national priorities - implying accountability in resource allocation.

Mine Action as a Prerequisite for Recovery

Although not a theme that surfaced in every roundtable, mine action emerged as a critical prerequisite for any meaningful recovery and development - highlighted with particular force in Roundtable Six on humanitarian aid and economic resilience. An international non-governmental organisation (INGO) representative stressed that mine action is not a standalone activity but a prerequisite for all other sectors, noting that recovery projects - rebuilding schools, hospitals, water stations, and agricultural facilities - cannot proceed on contaminated land. She added that mine action was the most underfunded sector in 2024.

The STG representative strongly agreed, highlighting that 40 per cent of agricultural land in northwest Syria is contaminated with unexploded ordinance (UXO). Past efforts were criticised for focusing exclusively on awareness sessions rather than allocating funds for clearance machinery. The Ministry responsible for the national mine action centre confirmed it is developing a plan to address contamination and is seeking UN support for demining. The discussion underscored a clear message: no sector - agriculture, housing, health, or education - can fully recover without systematic demining, yet funding for this work remains critically insufficient relative to its importance.

Recommendations

This section compiles all recommendations made during the six roundtable sessions of the Day of Dialogue, organised by target group and sub-theme. Where a recommendation was raised in multiple sessions, this is noted, as it signals particular urgency and broad consensus. Each recommendation carries a priority designation: High Priority reflects broad support and/or appearance across multiple sessions; Medium Priority reflects well-supported recommendations within a single session; and Low Priority reflects recommendations raised by a single voice or noted as desirable but not urgently pressed.

For the Syrian Transitional Government

Legal and Institutional Reform

High Priority

- Draft and enact a modern Civil Society Law to replace the outdated 1958 legislation, guaranteeing total freedom and independence for CSOs, supporting their roles in development, monitoring, and documenting violations, and ensuring transparency and accountability in their operations.
- Complete and enforce the draft Transitional Justice Law. Before adoption by the People's Council, the draft should be shared with CSOs and victim leagues for feedback. The law must classify crimes against humanity, enforced disappearance, torture, and war crimes, and define appropriate penalties including non-judicial remedies such as political and administrative exclusion.

Medium Priority

- Establish an independent judicial body under the Supreme Judicial Council, staffed by judges of good standing who did not participate in the previous judicial system, mandated with classifying and defining penalties for crimes against humanity, enforced disappearance, torture, and war crimes.
- Enact strict new legislation banning hate speech and holding promoters accountable in a manner sensitive to freedom of expression, alongside legislative and executive procedures to criminalise hate speech and violence in education and public discourse.
- Introduce laws to protect the market investors, and workers, including clear safety codes.

Low Priority

- Align national laws with relevant international treaties.
- Provide legal awareness to communities on hate speech laws.

Transitional Justice and Accountability Mechanisms

High Priority

- The NCM and NCTJ commissions must establish clear and real mechanisms for participation and coordination with families and civil society, including the proposed launching of the Council of Families and the Council of Mother to monitor and lead the NCM's work.
- The commissions must issue regular public communications, including monthly reports and regular television appearances, to update families who lack internet access.
- Communication channels must be opened immediately, as information is urgently needed by victims' families who currently have no reliable source of official updates.

Medium Priority

- Introduce legal procedures to criminalise extortion against victims' families by individuals, organisations, or websites.
- Ensure strategies are in place to protect documents from ministries and prisons from being hidden or destroyed.
- Develop mechanisms to track and hold accountable perpetrators currently threatening former victims.
- Prioritise compensation and reparation that meets the diverse needs of families, whether material or in-kind.
- Address the economic deprivation of victim families, potentially through a social security or salary system to ensure a breadwinner in every affected household.

Low Priority

- The Ministry of Justice should issue a statement directing courts not to take decisions in terrorism-related cases under the current Syrian penal law until the transitional justice law is enacted.

Youth Empowerment and Education

High Priority

- Develop a strategic five-to-seven-year plan for education, jointly developed by civil society, government, and the private sector, linking curricula to labour market needs including AI education and vocational training.

Medium Priority

- Establish multi-disciplinary Youth Clubs in every governorate to serve as centres for education, sports, culture, and small business incubation and acceleration.
- Finalise the national youth strategy within three to four months, with a clear definition of youth and explicit priorities drawn from constellations with relevant ministries and CSOs.
- Consider establishing Local Youth Councils for 2027, drawing on experiences from the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, and Tunisia, to create a fair and transparent mechanism for youth representation.

Social Cohesion and Inclusion

High Priority

- Ensure the real participation of women in decision-making processes at all levels - not merely as symbolic presence. Women's formal exclusion from national-level processes, despite their central role at the community level, represents a significant governance deficit.

Medium Priority

- Address the conduct of civil servants who incite hate or sectarian speech, whether deliberately or through lack of adequate training, and ensure that government cadres are properly qualified in human rights standards.
- Recognise the primary responsibility of the state in maintaining social cohesion.
- Speed up procedures for the disarmament and integration of armed factions within the Ministry of Defence.

Low Priority

- Recognise the As-Sweida massacres at the state level as a precondition for the meaningful participation of women from that region in the national dialogue - as they had refused attending national dialogue sessions until the STG would do so.
- Coordinate with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour to provide sign language interpretation services, treating this as a new required professional function to ensure inclusivity for persons with disabilities.

Economic Recovery and Resilience

High Priority

- Prioritise mine action as a prerequisite for all other sectors - agriculture, reconstruction, health, education, and water - with funds allocated specifically for clearance machinery rather than awareness sessions alone.
- Work to build a strong national economy that does not rely on the economy of relief.
- Develop and implement a clear national recovery plan, including the National Plan for Mitigating Crisis based on the 250-item risk matrix, to attract investors and provide systematic recovery pathways.

Medium Priority

- The Ministry of Emergency and Disaster Management should continue enhancing social resilience and developing early warning systems and evacuation plans.
- Create equal job opportunities for vulnerable and marginalised groups including women, persons with disabilities, and the elderly.
- Involve the government in the design of donor projects from the outset to guarantee alignment with national priorities.
- Put in place laws and permissions facilitating the dignified and voluntary return of displaced persons.
- Address the Euphrates and Al-Hasakeh water shortages as a national emergency, including through direct negotiations with Türkiye.

Low Priority

- Conduct an assessment of water needs and climate security in cooperation with EU institutions.
- Keep the Al-Hasakeh water station issue outside political polarisation while prioritising swift maintenance.

General Governance

Medium Priority

- Lay the groundwork for transparent, accountable institutions that serve all Syrians, ensuring that all voices are genuinely heard and reflect the full diversity and richness of Syrian society.

Low Priority

- Treat the outcomes of the Syrian National Dialogue Conference as a starting point for a comprehensive national dialogue process.
- Create visible and tangible changes rather than relying on dialogue alone.
- Actively cultivate a discourse of dialogue, rather than one of refusal and hatred.

For the European Union and International Community

Strategic Alignment and Funding Principles

High Priority

- Align donor priorities and project designs with the national priorities set by the STG, ensuring effectiveness and genuine national ownership.
- Shift aid priority from emergency response to sustainable development, focusing on livelihood projects, vocational education, and small income-generating projects that allow people to rebuild their lives rather than remaining in a state of dependency.

Medium Priority

- Avoid 'quick fix' and short-term projects of six months or less, and focus instead on long-term, sustainable solutions.
- Ensure that funding supports the holistic vision of a unified Syria and is not channelled in ways that challenge national unity.

Low Priority

- Avoid a 'one size fits all' approach, given the dramatic variation in needs between regions such as northwest Syria and the Damascus countryside.
- Coordinate among donors to identify who can invest in what.
- Ensure donor funding is flexible and benefits all levels of the population.
- Avoid categorising peace-building or support for families of detainees as purely political issues.

Specific Areas of Support

High Priority

- Increase funding for mine action, specifically for clearance machinery rather than awareness sessions.

Medium Priority

- Support the rehabilitation of basic services including health facilities, schools, water, and energy infrastructure.
- Provide financial and technical support for transitional justice mechanisms, particularly the NCM and NCTJ.

Low Priority

- The UN should develop a national alternative strategy on societal peace that goes beyond simplistic frameworks.
- Draw on experiences from other post-conflict societies as models for curricula reform and addressing shared pain.

For Civil Society

Governance, Sustainability, and Independence

High Priority

- Maintain organisational independence in order to fulfil the crucial role of monitoring state institutions and providing honest feedback, both critical and constructive.
- Rethink organisational strategies to ensure financial sustainability without relying solely on external donor funds, exploring models of social investment and self-funding.

Medium Priority

- Institutionalise and share information to avoid fragmentation and duplication of efforts.
- Address internal divisions and actively include organisations from all geographical areas of Syria to foster national unity within civil society.
- Adhere to transparent bylaws and clear financial procedures when engaging in investment activities.

Low Priority

- Adhere to impartiality and non-bias, particularly in aid distribution planning.

Advocacy, Social Peace, and Victim Support

High Priority

- Actively work against hate speech and promote dialogue between cultural, religious, and ethnic communities to build bridges of trust and mutual understanding.

Medium Priority

- Act as coaches for youth organisations, building their internal capabilities - vision, mission, bylaws - and advocacy skills, including networking and the use of appropriate tools to influence decision-making.
- Manage the expectations of victims' families regarding immediate financial compensation, being realistic about what commissions can provide given the resource constraints they face.

Low Priority

- Spread content to enhance civil peace and establish a social contract for equitable citizenship.
- Provide vocational training to help Syrian youth enter the labour market with confidence.
- Support voluntary groups of university graduates by facilitating internships in relevant companies.

Recommendations for the Private Sector

High Priority

- Engage in social investment by investing in underserved areas and sectors - such as vital infrastructure - rather than only in profitable areas, thereby aligning business activity with social impact.
- Implement just policies and clear standards encouraging the direct employment of women and persons with disabilities, prohibiting discrimination and ensuring physical accessibility in the workplace.

Medium Priority

- Provide an outlet for selling products from small and medium projects led by vulnerable groups, such as women engaged in local food production.
- Partner with CSOs and organisations to provide services to the communities from which profits are derived.

Low Priority

- Invest in ideas emerging from youth incubators, benefitting from the skills and energy of young people.

Gaps in the Dialogue and Recommendations for Future Sessions

Despite the comprehensive nature of the discussions, several critical topics were either consistently under-addressed or entirely absent from the roundtables. Identifying these gaps is essential for refining future engagement strategies and ensuring a more holistic approach to Syria's transition. This section presents each gap and its implications in turn, before setting out concrete suggestions for the 2026 Day of Dialogue.

Identified Gaps and Their Implications

Absence of specific timelines for legal reform: While the urgent need for new laws - most prominently the Civil Society Law and the Transitional Justice Law - was a recurring theme, concrete short-term timelines for their drafting, public consultation, and enactment were notably absent. Ms. Hind Kabawat described a process of collecting feedback but did not commit to a specific legislative schedule. This creates uncertainty for CSOs and international donors, hinders planning and investment, and risks eroding trust in the government's commitment to reform. It may also delay the establishment of crucial legal frameworks for accountability and civil society operation.

Under-addressed sectarian divisions and security challenges: Although social cohesion was discussed in depth in Roundtable Five, the practical security challenges of overcoming deep-seated sectarian divisions - and ongoing unrest in specific regions such as Sweida and the coast - were not developed into actionable plans. References to these incidents were brief and not followed by concrete strategies for de-escalation or community reconciliation. Failure to directly address these underlying dynamics risks undermining social cohesion efforts and perpetuating cycles of violence and mistrust.

Absence of syndicates and professional unions: The role of syndicates and professional unions was almost entirely absent from the dialogue, despite their significant potential in institutional reform, economic recovery, and social cohesion. One civil society representative briefly noted in Roundtable Five that syndicates and professional chambers could be more effective than CSOs in uniting members regardless of background, but this point was not developed further. Excluding these established professional bodies represents a missed opportunity to leverage existing expertise, networks, and advocacy capacity in rebuilding state institutions and the economy.

Unclear funding strategy for reconstruction and transitional justice: The massive cost of post-conflict recovery - spanning areas such as reconstruction and transitional justice - was acknowledged as a severe challenge, particularly in Roundtable One. However, a clear, unified funding strategy was largely absent from the dialogue, with no concrete financial roadmap

emerging across these areas. This gap was particularly evident in relation to reconstruction and transitional justice, both of which carry substantial and distinct financial implications. Without such a roadmap, there is a significant barrier to implementing critical recovery mechanisms and considerable ambiguity for potential international donors.

Lack of practical mechanisms for diaspora engagement: The importance of the Syrian diaspora was highlighted in the opening session, with reference to nearly one million Syrians in Germany, many of them very successful, prepared to contribute to rebuilding. However, specific, actionable mechanisms for how the diaspora can contribute - beyond general appeals to open the doors - were not detailed. Without concrete mechanisms, the vast potential of the Syrian diaspora in terms of expertise, financial investment, and international advocacy remains largely untapped.

Unaddressed accountability of government employees in relation to hate speech: A serious concern was raised in Roundtable Five by a civil society representative that employees in government institutions incite hate speech or sectarian speech - often unintentionally, due to lack of adequate qualification - and that this severely breaks the community's trust in state institutions. This critical internal governance and training gap was not addressed by government officials present. It directly undermines trust in state institutions and points to the need for internal reform, training, and accountability mechanisms within the civil service.

Limited discussion on culture and the arts as tools for cohesion: While social cohesion was a major focus of the dialogue, the role of cultural diversity, arts, and shared heritage in bridging divides was only briefly mentioned. A participant in Roundtable Five stressed the need to celebrate cultural diversity and use cultural programming to bridge divides, citing Lebanon's Adyan Association, the interfaith organisation that promotes religious diversity and coexistence through education and cultural dialogue, as a model - but this was not developed further. Neglecting the cultural dimension misses a powerful tool for reconciliation, identity building, and fostering a shared sense of national belonging.

Suggested Focus Areas for the 2026 Day of Dialogue

To effectively address the identified gaps and further advance Syria's transition, future iterations of the Day of Dialogue could incorporate the following strategic tracks and sessions.

- 1. Dedicated thematic working groups with legislative timelines.** Establish focused working groups for each major legal reform initiative - the Civil Society Law and the Transitional Justice Law. Where labour-related issues such as women's participation in the workforce and occupational safety were raised, these should be folded into the relevant working group's remit rather than treated as a standalone legislative track. These groups should be tasked with presenting concrete draft legislation, detailed consultation processes with CSOs and affected communities, and agreed short-to-medium-term timelines (six to eighteen months) for their enactment by the People's Assembly. This would move discussions from general commitment to specific, measurable actions.
- 2. Security and reconciliation track.** Dedicate a specific session to the practicalities of disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration of armed factions, particularly within the Ministry of Defence, and to the broader agenda of security sector reform. This track should also address the management of localised sectarian tensions and ongoing security incidents,

with concrete strategies for de-escalation, community-based reconciliation, and the role of local governance in maintaining peace.

3. **Syndicate and professional union forum.** Integrate representatives from key syndicates - lawyers, engineers, doctors, teachers, journalists - and professional chambers into a dedicated forum exploring their roles in rebuilding state institutions, setting professional standards, contributing to vocational training, and advocating for economic development and social justice.
4. **Diaspora investment and expertise summit.** Create a dedicated, action-oriented track for the Syrian diaspora, facilitating direct engagement between diaspora professionals, entrepreneurs, and investors with relevant Syrian ministries and local authorities. The focus should be on presenting specific investment projects, technical assistance models, and knowledge transfer initiatives, with clear mechanisms for implementation and follow-up.
5. **International financing and reconstruction panel.** Convene a high-level panel bringing together major international stakeholders - including the EU, UN agencies, the World Bank, and regional development banks – with the STG. The objective should be to collaboratively develop a long-term, comprehensive financing framework for reconstruction, reparation, and transitional justice, including mechanisms for donor coordination, transparency, and accountability in fund allocation.
6. **Internal governance and civil service reform.** Dedicate a session to internal governance within state institutions, focusing on civil service reform, training, and professional development. This session should address issues of qualification, impartiality, and the prevention of hate speech by government employees, drawing on best practices in civil service ethics and human rights training.
7. **Cultural heritage and arts for social cohesion.** Incorporate a session exploring the role of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, arts, and shared narratives in fostering social cohesion and reconciliation. This could involve discussions on cultural preservation, art-based peace-building initiatives, and educational programmes that celebrate Syria's diverse cultural identity, drawing on examples from other post-conflict contexts.

