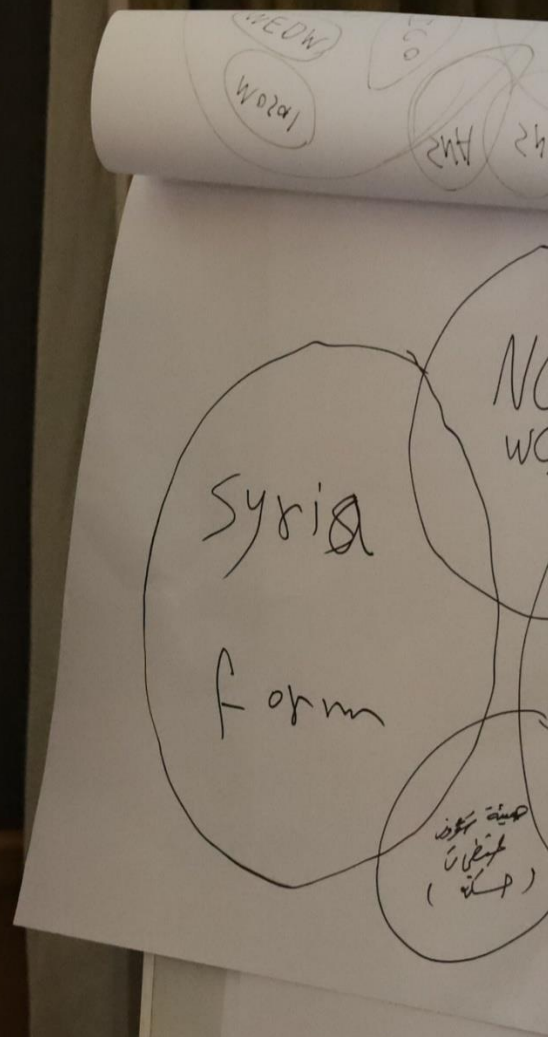


# From Presence to Decision

*Making Syrian-led Humanitarian  
Coordination Real*

*Strengthening Inclusive Coordination and  
Civil Society Cohesion in Syria*

## Bridging V



Policy Brief - June 2026

## Acknowledgements

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*This Policy Brief is made possible by the generous support of the H2H Network under the Activation Fund for Syria through the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO). The contents and opinions expressed in it should not be attributed to and do not represent the views of DEMAC, DRC and H2H Network.*



Damascus Consultation Sessions. April 2026

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## Introduction

As Syria transitions from the previous Whole of Syria coordination model to a structure at the national level, ensuring inclusive and representative coordination arrangements has become a key priority. This requires the meaningful engagement of returning diaspora, national NGOs, and local actors in contributing to shaping coordination practices and humanitarian standards. While the transition aims to improve the coherence and efficiency of coordination, it must also guarantee the effective and inclusive participation of the diverse range of Syrian civil society actors. Ensuring that these actors can contribute to decision-making processes is essential to strengthening the legitimacy, accountability, and effectiveness of humanitarian coordination in Syria.

This policy brief draws on findings from the Bridging Voices: Strengthening Inclusive Coordination and Civil Society Cohesion in Syria (B-Voices) initiative, implemented by Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination (DEMAC), the Syria NGO Alliance (SNA), and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) in Syria. It examines opportunities and challenges for inclusive coordination within the evolving humanitarian architecture from the perspective of Syrian civil society actors and presents recommendations to strengthen the participation of Syrian civil society actors. By highlighting the perspectives and experiences of diaspora, national, and local organizations, the brief seeks to inform efforts to build a more inclusive, locally driven, and accountable coordination system.

## Methodology

The findings rest on a structured evidence base gathered between February and May 2026. It comprised a desk review of the evolving coordination architecture; two full-day consultation sessions<sup>1</sup>, in Damascus (22 April with 24 participant organisations ) and Aleppo (26 April with 24 participant organisations); twelve key informant interviews with national, international, diaspora, and coordination actors; two dialogue forums, held in person in Damascus (19 May with 14 participant organisations) and online (21 May with 14 participant organisations); and a final online validation session (15 June with 16 participant organisations). Participants represented national and local NGOs, diaspora organizations and those who moved their operations back to Syria, referred to here as returned organizations, women-led organizations, and humanitarian coordination actors drawn from across Syria's main operational areas.

Findings were triangulated across these sources so that conclusions don't rest on one account. The consultation sessions provided a structured space for diverse Syrian civil society actors to engage in dialogue on the coordination space in Syria, identify key gaps and opportunities, and strengthen trust and collaboration among themselves. Building on the outcomes of the consultation sessions, the dialogue forums were used to develop recommendations and pathways towards strengthening coordination in Syria, while providing a collaborative platform for stakeholders with diverse interests to engage constructively, build consensus, and identify shared priorities for collective action. The resulting recommendations are therefore strong in qualitative depth and in cross-forum convergence, while more modest in the number of organizations directly represented. The position presented here reflects the consolidated view of participating Syrian civil society organizations and has been validated with the participants before finalizing the brief.

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<sup>1</sup> The consultation sessions were held in Damascus and Aleppo to ensure diverse geographic representation and participation from a broad range of organizations. Participants included coordinators, managers, and field staff, contributing a diversity of perspectives and operational experiences.



## Key Messages

### Power, not capacity, is the constraint

*Syrian organizations hold the access and knowledge the response needs; what they lack is a real place in decision-making. Treating this as a training gap misdiagnoses the problem.*

### Presence has not become influence

*National organizations now sit in senior coordination bodies, including the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), but participants describe that presence as largely symbolic. Representation must be made legitimate and given genuine decision-making weight.*

### Transparency is the central lever of reform

*Published selection criteria for funds, feedback to applicants, meeting minutes in Arabic, declared terms of reference of Fora's and Working groups, and shared visibility of projects and allocations would address much of what participants raised, several of these measures at minimal or no cost relative to their impact.*

### Localization must be made real

*Participants called for a concrete commitment built on sharing resources, decision-making power, and risk-sharing, rather than treating localization as a slogan, particularly as many actors perceive progress on localization to have regressed.*

### Accountability needs a second layer

*The system measures accountability to affected populations but has no comparable instrument for accountability between humanitarian actors, including donors. This is the space where funds are allocated without published criteria, monitoring visits occur without informing local partners, and meetings are called at too little notice for organizations in distant*

### Coordination failures are often masked by informal workarounds.

*While aid delivery continues through personal networks and improvised channels, weak formal coordination systems risk becoming increasingly bypassed, reinforcing long-term participation and inclusion gaps.*

## 1. A Coordination System in Transition

One of the most concrete changes within the coordination space since the political shift in December 2024 is geographic. Coordination has moved to Damascus, and that move has been costly for organizations whose coordination experience was built in the Northwest, the Northeast, or across the border. Organizations that ran cross-border operations describe long months spent relocating offices and staff, securing approvals across governorates, and rebuilding the institutional memory of how to coordinate, all while continuing to deliver services.

During the consultations, participants stated that two parts of the system were moving through the transition at different speeds. National NGOs moved quickly to build working relationships with the new authorities, while the other coordination spaces, including those led by the United Nations<sup>2</sup> (UN) and other humanitarian actors, according to coordination informants, seemed to be slower to settle. The single word "coordination" is now used for both tracks; treating them as one, obscures the fact that each presents Syrian organizations with a different set of obstacles and openings.

The government's expanding coordination role was described by many participants as a growing source of uncertainty and operational confusion. New requirements are often unclear, inconsistently communicated, and subject to

<sup>2</sup> The UN was not available for an interview within the timeframe of the report.

frequent change. Organizations, particularly those that participated in Aleppo’s consultations, reported struggling to navigate multiple approval bodies with overlapping or shifting mandates, leaving many unsure of procedures, lines of authority, and compliance expectations.

Participants emphasized that the consequences are not merely administrative. In practice, short proposal submission windows combined with lengthy approval processes often result in assistance being delayed beyond the point of relevance, with organizations unable to reach communities before critical deadlines pass. The interpretations of the government’s approach varied among participants and informants. For some, the accumulation of bureaucratic procedures and repeated delays was perceived less as institutional confusion and more as an emerging posture of control over humanitarian and recovery activities.

On the contrary, several viewed the expanding oversight as driven by a preference to retain visibility over interventions, centralize information flows, and ensure alignment with broader recovery planning priorities. Despite these differing interpretations, participants broadly converged on one point: the relationship between authorities and humanitarian actors would benefit significantly from greater procedural clarity, more consistent communication, and standardized approval mechanisms that reduce ambiguity and operational delays.

When it comes to the inclusivity of the coordination space, two groups were identified as at particular risk of being left behind. Organizations in the Northeast were repeatedly identified as marginalized from the new Damascus-centered coordination structures, both because of geographic distance and the slower pace at which coordination mechanisms have reached them. At the same time, the relationship between organizations returning from the diaspora and those that remained inside the country continues to carry significant strain. Rebuilding trust between these groups is a prerequisite for a civil society that can operate collectively, and this issue cuts across both the analysis and recommendations that follow.

**Why act now.** The current transition period represents a rare policy window in which coordination arrangements, regulatory frameworks, and civil society engagement mechanisms remain comparatively fluid. Several participants emphasized that once institutional procedures harden, opportunities to shape participation rules, representation mechanisms, and operational safeguards will narrow significantly. The decisions taken during this phase are therefore likely to shape the balance between symbolic inclusion and meaningful participation for years to come.

## 2. Perspectives From Syrian Actors

The findings below are drawn from the two consultation sessions, twelve key informant interviews, and two dialogue forums. They converge strongly across two very different cities, where consultations took place, and across actors with diverse interests, the principal reason to treat them as robust.

### 2.1 Power, not capacity, is the constraint

Across both cities where the consultations took place, participants located decision-making with those who hold resources and described themselves as implementers rather than decision-makers. Informants confirmed the pattern, with one national leader describing the role of national organizations under the new model as advisory only and not necessarily acted upon. The issue is not a shortage of expertise; it is where authority sits.

*“Most of the time, we do not have any role in coordination. We are not the decision-makers, just implementers.”*

— Consultation participant, Aleppo

## 2.2 Presence has not become influence

Several national organizations now hold seats in senior coordination bodies, including the HCT, yet many participants questioned whether this representation translates into meaningful decision-making influence. Concerns were raised not only about the extent of their influence, but also about the legitimacy of the selection process itself. In several cases, participants perceived that representatives were appointed through UN-led processes rather than being directly chosen by NGO constituencies. While participants acknowledged that these processes involve stakeholder consultation, many argued that they sit uneasily alongside the long-established principle that NGOs should select their own representatives.

At the same time, participants identified one arena where national organizations feel they hold comparatively greater leverage: engagement with donors. Several noted that donors appear more responsive to their perspectives than UN coordination structures, to the extent that some organizations mentioned they now strategically engage donors as an indirect means of influencing UN decision-making. Participants therefore emphasized the importance of broadening engagement beyond the UN system and diversifying the channels through which civil society can exercise influence, including through donors, government institutions, and collective NGO alliances.

*“There are national NGO representatives in the HCT, but are they decision-makers? We do not want our presence to be merely symbolic.”*

— Dialogue From Participant, Damascus

## 2.3 Localization is widely seen to have regressed

Participants across both consultations and dialogue forums consistently described localization as having stalled and, in some areas, reversed during the transition period. This was mainly raised by organisations that were operating in areas outside former government control and outside of Syria. Their concern was not that localization language had disappeared, but that recent operational practices appeared increasingly inconsistent with earlier commitments to locally led response models and not built on gains achieved in advancing the localisation agenda.

Participants pointed in particular to the recent Syria Humanitarian Fund (SHF) allocation, from which many national organizations felt excluded without sufficient clarity regarding selection criteria or decision-making processes. It was clear from the participants that the opacity of the recent SHF allocation did more damage to trust. Several also noted a perceived increase in direct implementation by international organizations in areas where local partners had previously played a central operational role.

These concerns reflect participant perceptions of how the transition is unfolding rather than a quantitative assessment of localization trends across the response. Nonetheless, the consistency with which these examples emerged across discussions indicates a significant erosion of trust around how localization commitments are currently being applied.

Participants repeatedly returned to one framing: localization depends on three forms of sharing — resources, decision-making power, and risk. While all three were viewed as uneven, participants considered risk-sharing to remain the weakest dimension, particularly where local actors continue to absorb operational and reputational risks without corresponding decision-making authority or donor protection.

*“We are tired of using localization as a term without actual implementation.”*

— Consultation Participant, Aleppo

## 2.4 The returnee and diaspora dynamic cuts both ways

Two distinct groups are often discussed together but should be kept separate. **Returning organizations** relocated their leadership and operations back into Syria during or after the transition, while **diaspora organizations** continue to operate primarily from abroad. The two have different interests, exposures, and relationships to the new authorities, and the evidence gathered here speaks most directly to returning organizations and to those that never left; findings specific to still-abroad diaspora actors are lighter and are flagged as an area for further inquiry.

Returning organizations that built strong systems during the cross-border years have raised the overall standard of coordination and brought donor relationships and capacity with them. The same scale and donor access can also crowd out smaller organizations that remained inside the country: a sector that counted thirty to forty local organizations before the transition, now increased in numbers, intensifying competition for funding.

Participants were clear that this is not a uniform picture; in many cases, returning and inside organizations work well together, but the friction is real enough that building trust between them is part of the agenda. It is also closely tied to the readiness described below: a civil society that can resolve its own internal tensions is far better placed to take a leading role in coordination and to advance the localization agenda with one voice.

## 2.5 A constituency ready to act

An encouraging finding is that participants are not waiting to be empowered. Given a realistic exclusion case study activity during the consultation sessions and dialogue forums, participants produced comprehensive, evidence-based advocacy strategies built on coalitions, field data, defined demands, and contingency plans. Their working definition of advocacy "the art of using the right argument to convince the other party" prizes persuasion over confrontation.

Read against the purpose of this work, the finding is more specific than general advocacy readiness: participants are ready to be part of the change process for inclusive coordination, to engage the government and other decision-makers directly, and to advance the localization agenda. The dialogue forums turned that readiness into a single owned position: participants who had voiced real mistrust of one another converged on a shared set of recommendations.

## 2.6 Service delivery can continue even when coordination systems weaken.

One finding shapes everything that follows and is easily missed. Where formal coordination systems are confusing or difficult to navigate, organizations quietly work around them by relying on prior relationships and ad-hoc channels. Aid continues to move, which can make the overall response appear functional on the surface.

Yet this comes at a cost. When systems are routinely bypassed, the coordination structures the reform process seeks to build are weakened in practice. Over time, there is a real risk that participation gaps and unequal access to coordination spaces become further embedded, even as service delivery itself continues.

# 3. The Barriers, and the Fixes within Reach

Although participants described these barriers separately, they are experienced in practice as mutually reinforcing rather than isolated problems. Limited transparency, unclear procedures, language barriers, and weak institutional accountability combine to narrow meaningful participation, particularly for organizations outside Damascus or those with fewer resources. Importantly, participants stressed that many of these obstacles are administrative and procedural rather than financial, meaning that significant improvements could be achieved through relatively modest institutional reforms.



- **Language.** English dominates meetings and minutes. This raises the threshold for participation for organizations that work primarily in Arabic, and tends to compound existing barriers for those already less represented in English-language professional settings

*Fix: translate minutes and key documents into Arabic and hold sessions in Arabic or with interpretation.*

- **Short notice.** Organizations hear about meetings at the last minute and are not consulted on timing, location, or the reasons they were not invited.

*Fix: give advance notice, consult members on scheduling, and ensure inclusivity of invitees as relevant.*

- **Unfunded coordination.** Coordination work falls on overstretched staff with no grant line to cover it, so participation is dropped first under pressure.

*Fix: treat a partner's coordination time as a direct, operational cost.*

- **Knowledge gaps.** Many organizations, especially in former government-held areas, do not know how the system works or what their rights within it are.

*Fix: Provide accessible and user-centred Arabic guidance and peer learning on how coordination operates.*

- **Governance opacity.** Mandates are unclear and shifting across multiple government bodies, with no clear standard operating procedures. As Section 1 notes, participants interpret this less as deliberate obstruction and more as a reflection of increased governance and a tendency toward information gathering, which is precisely why clear, published procedures are the constructive response.

*Fix: unify and publish procedures in a single official handbook.*

- **Tokenistic empowerment.** Participation is limited to symbolic presence without real influence on the decisions that matter.

*Fix: move designated seats from a consultative to a decision-making role.*

- **Hybrid meetings that exclude.** Online participants are quietly sidelined because priority goes to those physically in the room.

*Fix: task one person in every hybrid meeting to actively bring online participants into the discussion.*

- **Uncoordinated third-party monitoring.** Several participants described third-party monitoring visits taking place without prior communication with local partners, despite those partners being responsible for implementation and community relationships. Participants argued that this weakens mutual accountability, creates operational confusion, and reinforces perceptions that local organizations are treated primarily as subcontracted implementers rather than equal partners.

*Fix: ensure third-party monitoring is conducted through coordinated, transparent, and context-appropriate processes, including advance communication with local partners and sharing relevant findings where appropriate.*

## 4. The Civil Society Position

Read together, the two dialogue forums produced a coherent civil society position rather than two separate sets of findings.<sup>3</sup> Its headline ask is straightforward:

*Meaningful, decision-shaping participation for Syrian civil society across the whole coordination system underpinned by transparency, genuine localization, and a legal environment in which civil society can operate.*

Four areas of convergence emerged strongly enough to inform collective advocacy positions. These are presented here as broadly agreed priorities:

- **From presence to decisions.** Convert symbolic presence into genuine decision-making authority across the whole architecture, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Humanitarian Country Team, the clusters, the Syrian NGO Forum, the pooled funds, and the alliances.
- **Transparency as the organizing principle.** Published criteria, feedback to applicants, minutes in Arabic, declared terms of reference, and shared digital visibility of projects and allocations.
- **Accountability between actors.** Add the neglected layer of accountability among humanitarian actors to the existing focus on accountability to affected populations, addressing system-wide coordination gaps and improving collective responsibility for delivery.
- **Localization made real.** Binding local-partner requirements, direct funding, and genuine capacity investment rather than localization in form only.

## 5. Recommendations, by addressee

These recommendations were generated by participants in the dialogue forums and validated with the initiative participants. They are organized by the actor responsible for acting, with the priority participants placed on each.

Government - the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MoSAL), the People's Assembly, line ministries (including Education and Agriculture), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and its international cooperation directorate, and governorate and local councils

- Reform a modernized and enabling Associations Law No. 92 of 1958 with a modern legal framework that protects civic space and enables NGO operations on the basis of financial transparency and annual reporting, rather than approval requirements and cumbersome administrative procedures. (*High priority*)
- Strengthen coordinated approval mechanisms through streamlined and digitally enabled processes that reduce duplicative requirements across government entities, promote a trust-based partnership with civil society

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<sup>3</sup>This brief reflects the consolidated position of the Syrian civil society organizations that participated in the B-Voices consultations and dialogue forums. It does not claim to represent the views of all Syrian civil society.

organizations, and facilitate the timely implementation of approved projects without unnecessary administrative burden. *(High priority)*

- Make approvals simpler and one-time rather than repeated and establish local joint coordination rooms by area and sector, moving toward a single, clearly mandated coordination point. *(High priority)*
- Unify and simplify procedures in a single official handbook and involve civil society in drafting new regulations and in needs identification from the outset. *(Medium priority)*
- Establish and convene sustained, focused forums to strengthen trust and enable the exchange of expertise between diaspora and inside-Syria organizations. *(Medium priority)*
- Establish a centralized national information portal that brings together statistics, reports, and research from government institutions and other relevant stakeholders, with regular updates and coverage at national and subnational levels, digitizing records that are currently held only in print, to support evidence-based planning, coordination, and decision-making. *(Medium priority)*
- Address the financial-access constraints that push organizations to operate through bank accounts outside Syria, including transfer delays and the gap between the central-bank and market exchange rates. This sits across government, the central bank, and international policy rather than with any single ministry, and warrants a coordinated, cross-government response. *(Medium priority)*

### Donors and the pooled funds - the Syria Humanitarian Fund, the Return Fund, and the pooled mechanisms

- Ensure transparent, clear, fair, and published selection criteria, and establish a feedback mechanism so that rejected applicants are informed of the reasons for rejection. *(High priority)*
- Advance the localization agenda by adopting more ambitious approaches that strengthen the leadership and meaningful participation of national actors across the full program cycle, including needs assessment, design, implementation, and monitoring, alongside expanded, more predictable, and flexible direct funding mechanisms to national entities, ensuring more context-driven, effective, and locally led responses. *(High priority)*
- Reserve a dedicated proportion of pooled-fund resources for small and emerging organizations through targeted windows or allocations, kept distinct from the localization agenda so that it is not absorbed within it, to ensure access to funding opportunities and to strengthen their institutional capacity. *(High priority)*

One such precedent is the Aid Fund for Syria's Fourth Regular Allocation (RA4), in which the full allocation was reserved for qualified Syrian national NGOs<sup>4</sup>, as a practical example of direct funding to local actors at scale. Participants argued that future funding mechanisms should build on such models by increasing direct access for national organizations, simplifying compliance requirements where possible, promoting equitable partnership arrangements, and investing in long-term institutional sustainability.

- Streamline application and reporting requirements and strengthen the recognition of field experience as a key indicator of organizational capacity for small and emerging organizations, alongside standard administrative criteria. *(High priority)*
- Increase direct and flexible funding to Syrian organizations, and move beyond short-cycle, single-activity grants toward multi-year partnerships. *(High priority)*

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<sup>4</sup>Aid Fund for Syria, Fourth Regular Allocation (RA4) Strategy. See: [aidfundforsyria.org](https://aidfundforsyria.org).

- Treat a partner's coordination role as a direct operational cost, which requires covering the staff time that local organizations dedicate to coordination at both the proposal-development and implementation stages, and adopt a more structured approach to shared risk with local partners. *(Medium priority)*
- Ensure third-party monitoring is conducted in a coordinated, transparent, and context-appropriate manner, with advance communication with local partners regarding field visits and sharing of key findings to strengthen mutual accountability and collaboration. *(Medium priority)*

### The UN coordination architecture — OCHA, the HCT, and the clusters

- Transition national organizations from a consultative to a meaningful decision-making role within coordination and funding governance structures, including clusters, advisory committees, and pooled fund allocation mechanisms, ensuring structured representation of organizations, based on clear selection processes and appropriate rotation or substitution arrangements to manage conflicts of interest and maintain operational integrity. *(High priority)*
- Ensure inclusive representation of all geographical areas across Syria within coordination structures and strengthen institutional continuity by systematically integrating previously agreed decisions and action points into subsequent sessions, alongside the use of Arabic as one of the working languages, with interpretation, translation, and other language-access support provided as needed to accommodate diverse linguistic backgrounds and ensure effective participation and accessibility. *(High priority)*
- Safeguard institutional continuity by systematically grounding each meeting in the follow-up and action points of previous sessions, so that turnover among representatives does not reset discussions and decisions to zero. *(High priority)*
- Ensure that organizations independently select their representatives to senior coordination bodies through transparent and inclusive processes, and that these representatives are fully empowered to participate in decision-making and coordination processes in line with agreed coordination principles. *(Medium priority)*

### The Syrian NGO Forum, the SNA, and emerging platforms

- Provide clear, accessible information on each alliance's vision, governance structures, and terms of reference as part of membership outreach, attaching these documents to membership calls and introducing the platform proactively to prospective members, and continue strengthening transparency, accountability, and participation through documented policies. *(High priority)*
- Encourage a structured review of the Forum's chamber-based structure to clarify its purpose, added value, and impact on coordination efficiency, and on this basis consider options to strengthen coherence and coordination across chambers, including appropriate bridging or joint communication mechanisms where relevant. *(High priority)*
- Adopt fair, inclusive membership criteria that account for emerging organizations, a clear decision-making policy, and periodic rotation of steering committees. *(Medium priority)*
- Implement targeted advocacy initiatives to strengthen the role of local organizations within OCHA and HCT coordination structures, as part of the Forum's strategic approach and three-year agenda. *(Medium priority)*
- Strengthen the strategic role of forums and alliances in advancing localization by supporting structured capacity-development pathways for emerging and smaller organizations, and by promoting a long-term vision for a sustainable local ecosystem in which Syrian bodies take on more active roles in resource mobilization and in supporting other organizations. *(Medium priority)*

## International NGOs

- Translate localization commitments into binding requirements for genuine partnership with local actors in implemented projects, and demonstrably implement the partnership frameworks already agreed but not yet applied. Recognize and address the continued engagement of national organizations as sub-implementers rather than as genuine partners, ensuring their meaningful participation. *(High priority)*
- Advance meaningful localization: Move beyond tokenism by ensuring earmarked funding and meaningful participation of local organizations in decision-making, while strengthening equitable partnerships between international and local actors. Promote effective, complementary partnerships that enhance coordination, resource mobilization, and technical expertise, in line with the principles of localization and effectiveness. *(High priority)*

## Diaspora-led and returning organizations

These recommendations address both organizations still operating from abroad (diaspora) and those that have relocated back into Syria, which the brief treats as distinct actors. They concern relationships internal to Syrian civil society, and are addressed here as a Syrian-to-Syrian matter rather than to international actors.

- Strengthen equitable and strategic partnerships between diaspora-led organizations and organizations inside Syria, advancing toward more balanced collaboration and shared decision-making. *(Medium priority)*
- Support measures that build mutual trust and accountability between diaspora and local actors, and promote greater exchange of institutional memory, expertise, and capacity strengthening between them to reinforce a more cohesive and resilient Syrian civil society ecosystem. *(Medium priority)*
- Invest deliberately in rebuilding trust across Syrian civil society as a whole, among diaspora, returning, and inside-Syria organizations regardless of where they were based, treating these relationships as ones to be actively strengthened rather than assumed. *(Medium priority)*

## Syrian civil society - collective and self-directed

- Strengthen Collective Voice: Strengthen coordination through structured, inclusive mechanisms that build consensus on shared positions and enable unified external representation where feasible, including through thematic or geographic coalitions that preserve diversity while improving coherence, legitimacy, and collective policy impact. *(High priority)*
- Launch and sustain an inclusive, continuous national dialogue as a shared platform for aligning priorities, coordinating decisions, and advancing collective recommendations across stakeholders. *(High priority)*
- Ensure inclusive program design that accounts for all vulnerable groups, and maintain clear, safe feedback channels so that the perspectives of affected communities inform coordination. *(Medium priority)*
- Invest in practical training on coordination systems and partnership requirements and develop coordination knowledge as a shared resource through experience-sharing, peer learning, and accessible Arabic-language guidance on how the system works. *(Medium priority)*
- Expand the geographic reach of coordination to areas usually not effectively reached, including Deir ez-Zor, Raqqa, Hasakah, and other peripheral areas, so that organizations and communities outside the main centers can take part in coordination meetings and decisions. *(High priority)*
- Broaden advocacy from a focus on individual vulnerable groups toward community-level outcomes, including social cohesion, peacebuilding, and protection, so that advocacy reflects the needs of affected communities as a whole. *(Medium priority)*



## 6. Toward Syrian-led Coordination

The transition has handed Syrian civil society something it has not had before: a moment in which the rules of coordination are genuinely open, and a position of its own that is both evidenced and owned. The diagnosis is settled. Syrian organizations have the access, the knowledge, and increasingly the institutional strength the response needs; what they lack is a real place in the decisions that govern it and adequate resources to take an effective decision-making role. The remedy is not another round of capacity-building for actors who are already capable, but a deliberate transfer of decision-making weight, organized around transparency and made durable by a legal, accountable, and enabling environment that lets civil society operate while acknowledging the opportunity to strengthen the capacities and knowledge of small and emerging organizations.

Many of the core asks in this brief are matters of will rather than budget. Translating minutes into Arabic, publishing the criteria behind a funding decision, sending an explanatory email to a rejected applicant, funding a partner's coordination time as a direct cost, or informing a local organization before a monitor visits its area, none of these requires significant new resources. This is not to minimize the funding gaps that participants raised repeatedly and that remain real; rather, it is to say that the low-cost measures are the difference between a coordination system where Syrian organizations help shape and one they quietly route around.

The ask is modest in cost and large in impact. Giving the position that civil society has built a route forward — one that does not require starting from the beginning each time — would allow a ready constituency to act. That constituency prefers persuasion and effective collaboration, and it has asked to act together. The window is open now, and it will not stay open indefinitely.

*“We exist for the Syrian people, and humanitarian work is not a business.”*

— Women-led Organization Leader