THE STATE OF SOCIAL COHESION IN SYRIA AFTER CONFLICT: BELONGING, TRUST, AND PARTICIPATION

Community perspectives from 34 focus group discussions across 10 governorates

Research by People in Need (PIN)
In partnership with Sanad Youth and the Syrian Centre for Civic Action (SYCAC)
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1 Executive Summary

Why this report

Syria is at a critical juncture. The political landscape has shifted significantly since 2024, and the question of what kind of civic life is possible, and for whom, has never been more pertinent. This report, from research conducted by People in Need (PIN), in partnership with Sanad Youth and the Syrian Center for Civic Action (SYCAC), offers unique perspectives from the communities themselves, obtained from primary qualitative data collected across 11 governorates in early 2026, covering areas rarely included in a single study. It is not an expert assessment of Syria. It is an account of what people living in Syria told us about belonging, trust, participation, and the future they want. We hope that the evidence presented here could serve these communities, through organisations, donors, and policymakers working on Syria, using it to inform their work.

34
Focus group discussions

374
Participants (50% women)

10
Governorates covered

In 2026
Data collected Jan–Apr

FIVE HEADLINE FINDINGS

01

Belonging has gone local. National identity retains symbolic value, but survival and trust now operate at family, neighbourhood, and community level.

02

Representation follows power. Decision-making spaces are dominated by elites, notables, and tribal leaders. Women, youth, and displaced communities participate — but rarely shape outcomes.

03

People want to participate. But structural barriers, not apathy, constrain engagement. Fear, economic pressure, and weak institutional trust define what feels safe.

04

The economy drives tension. Poverty and unemployment are the primary fuel for community conflict, more than political or sectarian divisions.

05

Civil society is working, but under significant constraint. Local actors and informal structures resolve most disputes and deliver most support, but lack funding, coordination, and institutional protection.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Social cohesion in Syria is not a stable condition. It is a context-dependent process shaped by insecurity, economic pressure, displacement, and local power structures. Communities are not passive in the face of these pressures; they have adapted, building solidarity at the local level even as broader institutional ties have weakened.

Belonging has been reconfigured. National identity retains emotional significance for many participants, but it no longer functions as a practical anchor. Trust, solidarity, and daily life operate increasingly at the level of family, tribe, and immediate community. This shift is sharpest in areas affected by displacement and insecurity — such as Idlib, Raqqa, and Deir ez-Zor — where some participants described feeling like strangers in their own communities.

Representation in decision-making is selective and unequal. Power, proximity to authorities, and social networks determine who gets heard. Women, youth, displaced populations, and people living in poverty are systematically excluded from the spaces where decisions are made — not just underrepresented, but often absent.

Participation exists but is shaped by risk. Communities engage through volunteering, mutual support, local initiatives, and informal networks. Formal or politically adjacent participation is avoided. This is not apathy, but rather a rational response to real structural constraints, including fear, economic pressure, and persistent distrust of institutions.

Economic conditions are the primary driver of social tension. Across all locations, poverty and unemployment were identified as the main fuel for conflict between groups, including between displaced and host communities competing for aid, jobs, and resources.

The relationship between citizens and authorities is transactional. Engagement is driven by access to services, not by trust or legitimacy. Where services improve, perceptions shift temporarily, as the underlying trust deficit remains.

Local civil society and informal actors carry significant weight. Tribal mediation, community-based organisations, and informal networks resolve the majority of disputes and provide much of the practical support that formal systems do not. However, their influence does not extend to structural or policy-level issues, and they are chronically under-resourced.

PROGRAMMING IMPLICATIONS

The findings point to one central conclusion: social cohesion cannot be addressed as a standalone objective. It is produced, or undermined, by whether people have jobs, whether services function, whether they feel represented, and whether engagement with institutions carries risk. Effective interventions must integrate social cohesion objectives with livelihoods, service delivery, and governance, and must be implemented through trusted local actors using approaches that are adaptive, context-specific, and practically grounded.

2 Introduction

2.1 Context and Background

Over the course of Syria's conflict, the fabric of social life has been fundamentally altered. Communities have been displaced, divided, and restructured. Institutions that once connected people to each other and to the state have weakened or collapsed. What has emerged in their place is a patchwork of localised solidarity structures, informal networks, and adaptive coping mechanisms — resilient in some respects, fragile in others.

National identity has, in many contexts, become increasingly symbolic rather than functional. A combination of insecurity, social norms, and structural constraints has reshaped how people engage in public life. At the same time, communities have not disengaged, but they have found new forms of participation, rooted in locality, kinship, and immediate need.

This report was produced in early 2026, at a moment of significant political transition in Syria. The civic landscape is shifting, and the evidence in this report reflects a community perspective gathered at a specific and consequential point in that process.

2.2 Objectives

This analysis aims to generate evidence-based insights on the evolving dynamics of civic participation and social cohesion in Syria, in order to inform programme design, strategic planning, and adaptive management. Specifically, it examines:

- How the conflict and its aftermath have shaped people's sense of belonging at the community, local, and national level
- Patterns of representation and exclusion in community decision-making
- The structural barriers limiting participation, particularly for women and youth
- What forms of civic participation communities consider safe and acceptable in the current context
- Sensitive topics and thresholds that shape public dialogue
- The relationship between communities and local authorities
- How local civil society and informal actors contribute to social cohesion

The findings are intended to support the design of context-sensitive interventions that strengthen inclusive participation, build trust, and expand safe civic space.

2.3 Methodology

This analysis draws on qualitative data collected through 34 focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted across 10 Syrian governorates: Aleppo, Idlib, Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, Damascus, Homs, Daraa, Suwayda, Tartous, Hama, and rural sub-districts. The discussions

were implemented by PIN in collaboration with Sanad Youth and the Syrian Centre for Civic Action (SYCAC).

A total of 374 participants took part — 189 women and 185 men — spanning age groups from 16 to 75, with deliberate inclusion of youth aged 16–24. The sample included residents, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and returnees. Single-gender FGD groups were used in some locations to facilitate open discussion in line with local social norms.

Participants were selected through purposive, access-based sampling, reflecting both diversity and operational constraints in the Syrian context. Data were analysed using a structured thematic analysis approach: responses were coded and organised into a hierarchical framework of themes, sub-themes, and codes, that were refined iteratively throughout the process.

The analysis distinguishes between patterns that recur across multiple locations and those that are context-specific, enabling cross-location comparison and the identification of localised dynamics.

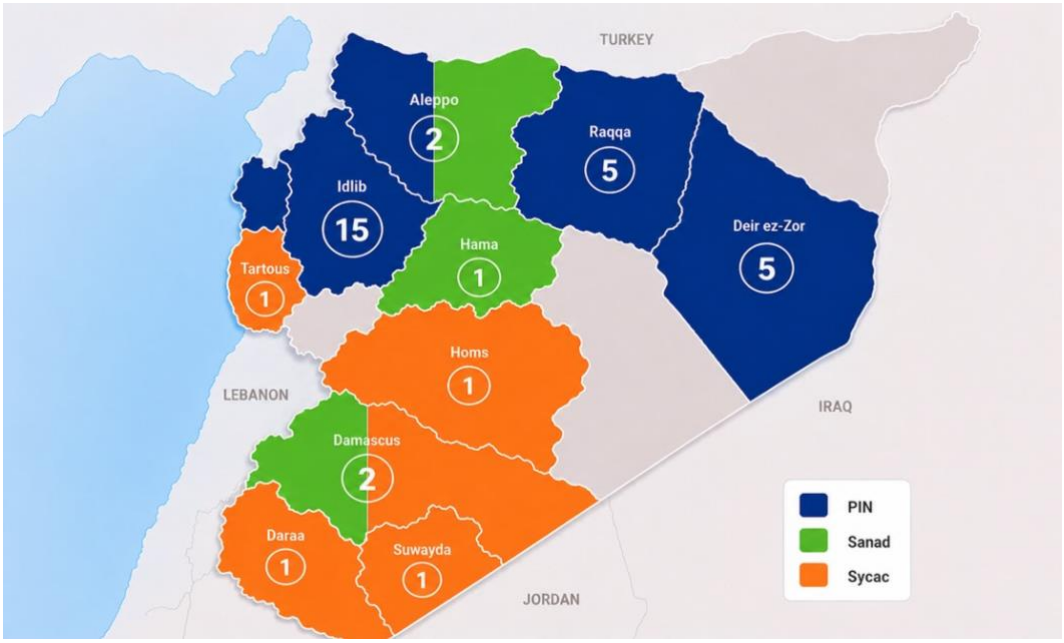


Figure 1: FGD locations across Syria. A full demographic breakdown by governorate is provided in Annex 1

THEMATIC CODING FRAMEWORK

Theme	Key Codes
Belonging & Identity	Fragmentation of national identity; localised belonging; security-driven belonging; tribal/community identity
Social Cohesion & Trust	Weak trust; social fragmentation; community solidarity; rebuilding trust; family/community ties
Representation & Power	Power-based representation; elite dominance; tribal/notable leadership; symbolic participation
Exclusion Patterns	Gender exclusion; youth marginalisation; displacement-related exclusion; poverty-based exclusion
Barriers to Participation	Fear; lack of safety; social norms; economic pressure; lack of trust; weak channels
Civic Participation	Volunteerism; service-oriented participation; community initiatives; local mediation; dialogue sessions
Sensitive Topics	Politics; religion/sectarianism; tribal issues; gender roles; property; past conflict violations
Citizen–Authority Relations	Low trust; service-based legitimacy; weak accountability; communication gaps; complaint mechanisms
Civil Society & Local Actors	Mediation; problem-solving; awareness raising; service support; limited institutional influence
Threats to Social Cohesion	Poverty; unemployment; hate speech; weapons; displacement tensions; unfair resource distribution
Support & Enabling Factors	Safe spaces; sustained funding; capacity sharing; women/youth empowerment; transparent channels
Programming Principles	Context sensitivity; local ownership; inclusion; transparency; needs-based design; sustainability

Table 1: Thematic Coding Framework. The analytical approach focused on identifying patterns, divergences, and relationships across locations and groups, rather than quantifying responses.



2.4 Limitations

The findings provide credible and nuanced insights into community perspectives across multiple locations, but should be read in light of several methodological constraints:

- **Geographic concentration:** Data collection was shaped by access and security considerations, resulting in a higher concentration of FGDs in northern areas, particularly Idlib, which may over-represent dynamics specific to those contexts.
- **Access-based sampling**: Participants were selected on the basis of accessibility, meaning the sample reflects reachable populations rather than a fully representative cross-section of Syrian society.
- **Uneven group representation**: Access constraints limited engagement with some communities in highly insecure or hard-to-reach areas, leading to potential gaps in certain perspectives.
- **Participation versus influence:** Gender balance in participation does not necessarily mean equal voice within discussions, particularly where prevailing social norms shape group dynamics.
- **Sensitivity of topics:** Issues relating to governance, identity, and social relations remain politically sensitive, which may have led participants to frame responses cautiously or avoid more critical perspectives.

These findings are therefore indicative of societal trends within the contexts covered, not statistically representative of the Syrian population as a whole. They should be read as one credible input among several when informing programme design.

3 Key Findings

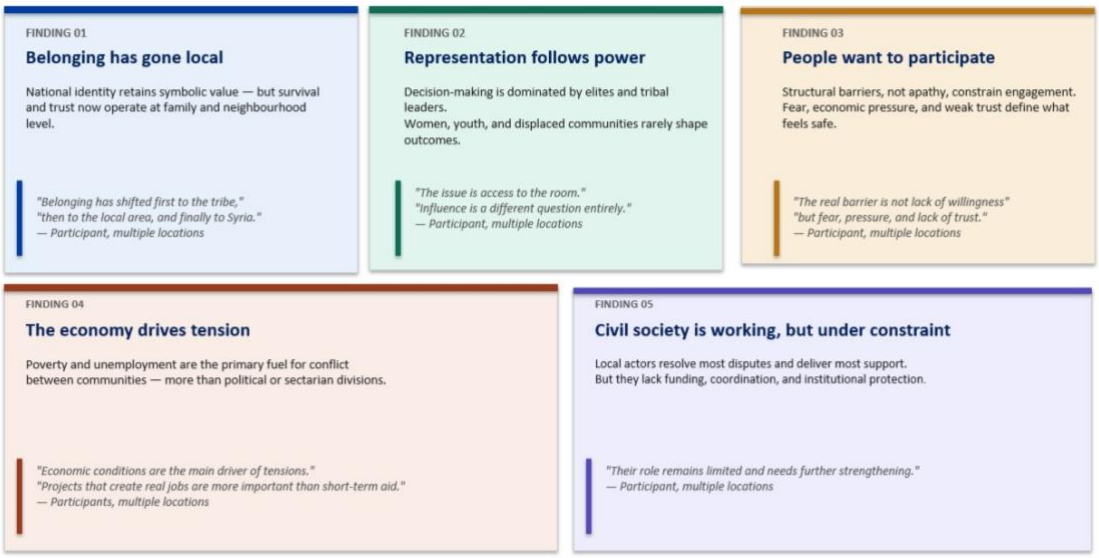


Figure 2: The five headline findings

3.1 Sense of Belonging

Belonging has gone local. National identity is weakening as a practical anchor, replaced by localised solidarity networks rooted in family, neighbourhood, and community.

Across locations, communities described a clear shift in how belonging works. A unified national identity is no longer the primary reference point for most participants. Instead, belonging has anchored itself at the local level — in family, tribe, and immediate place of residence.

This pattern is most visible in areas affected by insecurity and displacement. In parts of Idlib and Raqqa, participants described belonging as fragile, shaped by fear and instability.

> *"Many now feel like strangers within their own community."*
> **Participant, Idlib/Raqqa**

In Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa, the weakening of trust — combined with displacement and shifts in power structures — has contributed to a sense of alienation and reduced attachment to both local and national identities. In more stable areas, local solidarity has strengthened as a practical coping mechanism.

> *"People rely on each other for survival."*
> **Participant, relatively stable location**

But national belonging has not disappeared. It remains present as an emotional and symbolic reference for many participants, particularly older generations. What has changed is its practical weight in daily life. Economic pressure, displacement, and the erosion of social institutions have produced a transition toward more conditional, localised forms of belonging, and safety, proximity, and trust networks define how people relate to their communities.

3.2 Representation in Community Decision-Making

Representation follows power. Those who are already influential — such as tribal leaders, notables, individuals with political connections — dominate decision-making spaces. Women, youth, displaced communities, and people living in poverty are systematically excluded.

Across all locations, representation in community decision-making is perceived as selective and unequal. It is linked to proximity to power, social influence, personal networks, and economic or tribal status. Those who feel represented are, overwhelmingly, already connected to authority structures.

Key patterns across locations:

- **Decision-making is concentrated among powerful actors:** In Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor for example, decisions were consistently described as concentrated among de facto authorities, notables, traders, tribal leaders, and individuals with political or social connections.
- **Women remain weakly represented in formal spaces:** Across Homs, Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, and Khan Alsubul, social norms, male dominance, and the absence of safe spaces restrict women's influence, despite women having active informal roles in mediation and community support.
- **Youth representation is uneven:** In Aleppo/Shahba and Hama/Al Shariaa, some young people accessed decision-making through initiative or influence networks. In Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, unorganised youth were described as effectively marginalised with no meaningful participation channels.
- **Displaced people and marginalised groups are frequently excluded:** In Damascus/Jisr, rural populations, people with disabilities, and those without established networks were identified as absent from decision-making. In Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, displaced and returned communities were sometimes perceived as temporary and therefore without legitimate voice.

Overall, representation is not wholly absent, but it remains stratified. Effective programming must therefore move beyond symbolic inclusion, and create genuine pathways for women, youth, displaced communities, and people living in poverty to influence decisions that affect their lives.

3.3 Barriers to Participation in Public and Community Affairs

The barriers to participation are structural, not motivational. Communities want to engage, but what constrains them is a combination of fear, economic pressure, weak institutional trust, and social norms — not apathy.

> *"The real barrier is not lack of willingness but a combination of fear, livelihood pressures, lack of trust, and social constraints."*
> **Participant, multiple locations**

Economic realities dominate day-to-day decision-making. Participation is frequently seen as a secondary priority compared to securing income to meet daily needs.

Limited trust in whether engagement produces change further reduces motivation, particularly among the youth. For women, barriers are compounded by social norms and expectations around appropriate roles in public life, and customs and traditions are seen as limiting women's participation.

Overall, participation is present but adapted. It is cautious, selective, and shaped by a constant calculation of risk and perceived benefit. Effective interventions must therefore address the conditions that make participation unsafe or pointless, not simply create more forums for engagement.

3.4 Safe Civic Participation

What communities consider 'safe' participation is practical, local, and non-political. Civic engagement has not disappeared but has taken forms that minimise risk.

Across various contexts, participation is considered safe when it responds directly to practical community needs rather than touching politically sensitive issues. Common safe forms include volunteer work, awareness activities, and small community initiatives. In more constrained environments, safe participation retreats further into informal and low-visibility spaces.

> *"The best form of participation is one that improves people's lives without creating conflict."*
> **Participant, multiple locations**

Civic engagement has not disappeared, but has adapted — finding forms that communities can sustain within the boundaries of what feels acceptable and safe. As such, programming that starts from these existing forms, rather than imposing formal civic participation frameworks, is significantly more likely to succeed.

3.5 Sensitive Topics in Public Discussion

Public dialogue in Syria operates within clear limits. Communities know what they can and cannot raise and they navigate those limits carefully.

Participants across various locations identified consistent categories of sensitive discussion, which include politics, religion, tribal relations, conflict history, and gender roles. These boundaries are not merely informal. They reflect real perceived risk.

> *"Political topics may lead to tensions or conflict."*
> **Participant, multiple locations**

Sectarian topics carry particular risk of deepening divisions. Discussion of women's roles or domestic matters can lead to social stigma. Some areas reported greater openness, but this remains highly context-specific. The ability to have difficult conversations depends on trust, careful framing, and the setting in which discussion takes place. So, programming that does not account for these dynamics, risks reinforcing the very silences it aims to address.

3.6 Citizen–Authority Relations

Relations between communities and authorities are conditional and transactional. Trust is not absent, but it is dependent entirely on whether services are delivered and whether grievances are acknowledged.

Engagement between communities and authorities are seen as driven by necessity, not confidence in institutions. Where services improve, perceptions shift, but only temporarily.

> *"There is a general lack of trust due to the inability to meet basic needs."*
> **Participant, multiple locations**

Concerns about transparency and responsiveness persist across locations. The trust deficit is not simply a communication problem, but rather reflects a deeper gap between what institutions provide and what communities need. Closing that gap requires visible accountability, clear feedback mechanisms, and sustained follow-through. Trust built on service delivery is fragile; trust built on accountability can last.

3.7 Community and Civil Society Roles

Local civil society and community structures are the primary safety net in many areas. They fill gaps that formal systems have not, but they operate without adequate resources, coordination, or institutional support.

Where formal systems are limited or absent, communities and civil society organisations have stepped in, providing mediation, service support, community initiatives, and informal governance. Civil society also serves as a bridge between communities and authorities, supporting dialogue and awareness.

> *"Their role remains limited and needs further strengthening."*
> **Participant, multiple locations**

These actors are highly effective at the community level, but they are not effective at influencing structural or systemic issues — which are the ones that need addressing the most. Sustained investment in their capacity, coordination, and protection would significantly expand their impact.

3.8 Local Actors' Influence and Community Voice

Local actors are trusted, proximate and fast, but their influence does not reach the decisions that matter most. Community voice exists, but the channels to decision-makers are fragmented and their effectiveness is inconsistent.

Communities have access to a range of channels through which they can try to raise concerns, including through local councils, community leaders, civil society organisations, notables, social media (used with caution), and complaint systems (where follow-up exists). The problem is therefore not access to channels, but whether those channels lead to action.

> *"They lack influence in issues that require funding or policy-level decisions."*
> **Participant, multiple locations**

In some settings, participants described a near-total absence of effective pathways, noting the lack of realistic channels to reach decision makers.

In Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa, traditional channels remain dominant while women's and youth voices are largely invisible. In Idlib, multiple tools are in use, but their impact is inconsistent. The main challenge is sustainability and effectiveness, not capacity, where the gap is between participation and influence.

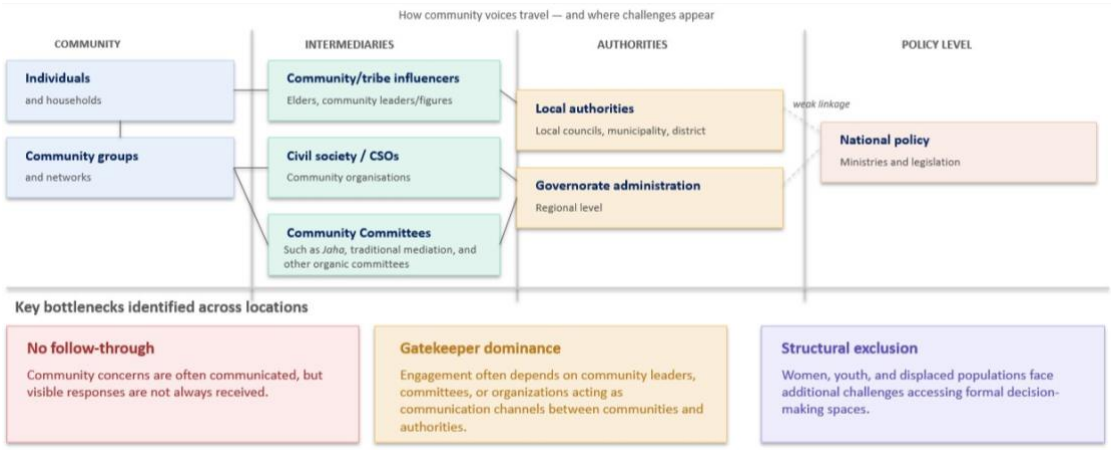


Figure 3: Community voice channels: pathways from community to decision-makers and the key bottlenecks identified

3.9 Threats to Social Cohesion

Economic conditions are the primary threat. Poverty and unemployment generate more tension within and between communities than political or sectarian divisions, compounding every other threat.

Across all locations, poverty and unemployment were consistently identified as the primary driver of social tension. These pressures are compounded by displacement-related divisions and competition for scarce resources.

> *"Competition over aid and jobs creates conflict between residents and displaced people."*
> **Participant, multiple locations**

Additional risks include weak trust, social fragmentation, and the persistence of conflict-related narratives. In some contexts, participants also highlighted weapons proliferation, crime, and social divisions linked to past conflict. Social cohesion is shaped as much by economic realities as by social or political dynamics, and any programme that ignores economic conditions will struggle to make lasting progress across these communities.

3.10 Aspirations for Change

Communities want practical improvements in daily life, and not abstract cohesion. Their aspirations, for jobs, services, and representation that works, are the foundation on which trust can be rebuilt.

Participants consistently framed their aspirations in concrete terms. Priorities across locations included basic services, sustainable livelihoods, functioning infrastructure, and

trust in institutions, noting that improving services will increase trust between the community and the government.

> *"Projects that create real jobs are more important than short-term aid."*
> **Participant, multiple locations**

Social and participatory priorities were also present, particularly around inclusion, dialogue spaces, and the rebuilding of community trust. But they were consistently framed as secondary to the material preconditions that make participation meaningful. Social cohesion, as communities understand it, is an outcome of improved services, economic stability, and genuine representation, and not a starting point or a standalone objective.



4 Recommendations for Programming

Communities across all locations were consistent in one message, that interventions must be practical, inclusive, and responsive to daily needs. Standardised approaches that do not reflect local dynamics will not work. Context-specific adaptation is not optional, as it is seen as the foundation of effectiveness.

Core programming principles (from the communities)

- Start with community-led needs assessment and participatory design.
- Ensure inclusion of women, youth, and marginalised groups.
- Work through trusted local actors and existing community structures.
- Link dialogue to tangible outcomes (services, livelihoods).
- Apply transparent and fair targeting and distribution mechanisms.

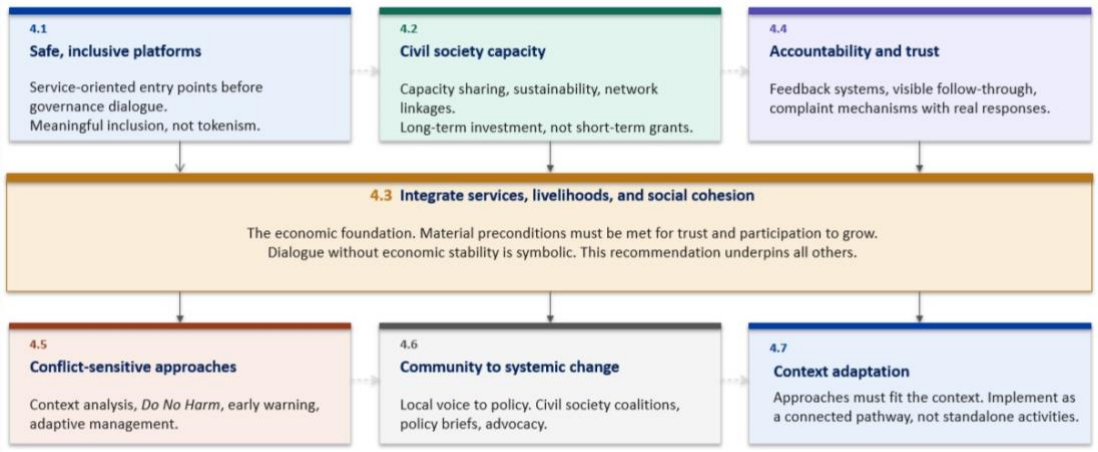


Figure 4: Six programming recommendations

4.1 Establish and Support Safe, Inclusive Platforms

What the evidence says: Belonging is increasingly localised, participation is constrained by fear and economic pressure, and service-oriented and informal activities are the most widely accepted forms of engagement.

So, design community-led structures that combine service delivery, dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving as entry points for civic engagement. In high-risk contexts, prioritise service-oriented and informal activities, such as volunteering, community initiatives, awareness sessions, before introducing governance dialogue. In more stable contexts, explore structured engagement with authorities.

Also ensure meaningful representation of women, youth, displaced communities, and marginalised groups through deliberate outreach, transparent selection, and capacity sharing. There should be a concerted effort to move beyond tokenistic inclusion toward genuine influence.

4.2 Invest in Local Civil Society and Coordination

What the evidence says: Local actors and civil society organisations are doing critical work in mediation and community support, but lack institutional influence, coordination capacity, and sustained funding.

As such, strengthen the organisational capacity, technical skills, and coordination of trusted local actors — civil society organisations, community-based organisations, and informal structures that hold community legitimacy. Provide sustained support including mentoring and peer learning in conflict analysis, dialogue facilitation, mediation, advocacy, and evidence generation.

Support institutional sustainability through funding for organisational development, governance systems, and strategic planning. And finally, link grassroots actors to broader networks to amplify their voice, strengthen advocacy, and reduce fragmentation.

4.3 Integrate Service Delivery, Livelihoods, and Social Cohesion

What the evidence says: Across all locations, participants prioritised livelihoods, service access, and fair resource distribution as central to rebuilding trust. Economic pressure is the primary barrier to participation and the primary driver of tension.

So, systematically link service provision and economic recovery with social cohesion objectives. Design community-led initiatives that address both material needs and social cohesion, such as joint livelihoods projects, infrastructure rehabilitation involving diverse groups, service delivery through inclusive community committees.

And ensure transparent, participatory prioritisation of resources. These include providing flexible funding mechanisms that enable communities and local organisations to implement locally defined priorities rather than externally determined ones.

4.4 Strengthen Accountability and Citizen–Authority Relations

What the evidence says: Citizen–authority relations are transactional and characterised by low trust, weak accountability, and limited meaningful input channels. Trust is built through visible delivery and responsive communication, and not through dialogue alone.

Therefore, establish community-owned monitoring and feedback systems that document priorities, track commitments, and generate evidence for advocacy. And support

structured dialogue platforms between communities, civil society, and authorities, with clear agendas, documented outcomes, and follow-up mechanisms.

Finally, pilot complaint and response mechanisms with visible, timely follow-through. Build authority capacity in inclusive participation and conflict-sensitive service delivery. And document and share positive examples of responsive governance, as communities are watchful for evidence that engagement can produce change.

4.5 Apply Conflict-Sensitive and Adaptive Approaches

What the evidence says: Significant geographic variation exists in conflict drivers, sensitive topics, and safe participation modalities. Displacement tensions, hate speech, sectarian narratives, and property disputes are key threats in specific locations.

Therefore, ground interventions in participatory conflict and social cohesion analysis at the community level to identify tension drivers, exclusion patterns, sensitive topics, and cohesion opportunities before designing activities.

Also establish community-based early warning and response mechanisms enabling rapid detection of emerging tensions and locally led responses. Apply *Do No Harm* principles systematically: assess potential negative impacts, implement mitigation measures, and monitor for unintended consequences. And maintain geographic and programmatic flexibility to adapt as dynamics shift.

4.6 Link Community Engagement to Systemic Change

What the evidence says: Civil society influence remains limited to community-level issues, with weak linkages to broader governance and policy processes. Communities want change at a systemic level, but have no realistic pathways to achieve it alone.

Connect community-level participation and evidence generation to structured policy dialogue and advocacy at the governorate and national levels. And support civil society coalitions to translate community priorities into policy briefs, advocacy campaigns, and engagement with authorities.

Also establish multi-stakeholder platforms convening civil society, technical experts, and civic actors to analyse evidence, align approaches, and develop coordinated recommendations. And create feedback loops ensuring that any policy gains are visible to communities. Institutionalise successful models through government partnerships, ensuring methodologies are adopted beyond individual project cycles.

4.7 Integration and Context Adaptation

These recommendations are mutually reinforcing and should be implemented as an integrated pathway connecting participation, representation, service provision, accountability, and trust-building, and not as standalone interventions. Context-specific

adaptation is essential: approaches that work in displacement-affected areas (Idlib, Raqqa) differ significantly from those appropriate in post-conflict contexts (Aleppo) or urban government-controlled areas (Damascus, Homs). Long-term sustainability therefore requires linking community initiatives to broader governance frameworks, strengthening local institutional capacities, and creating the enabling conditions for locally led social cohesion that outlasts any single project cycle.

5 Annexes

5.1 Annex 1: Locations and Participant Demographics

#	Governorate	District / Sub-district	Partner	Total	Women	Men	Age range
1	Aleppo	Maaret Atareb	PIN	7	7	0	20–60
2	Idlib	Maaret Masreen	PIN	5	5	0	35–60
3	Idlib	Armanaz	PIN	6	6	0	21–59
4	Idlib	Sarmada	PIN	4	4	0	24–43
5	Idlib	Tarmanin	PIN	5	5	0	20–57
6	Idlib	Idlib City	PIN	6	6	0	19–54
7	Idlib	Saraqep City	PIN	19	7	12	29–73
8	Idlib	Khan Alsobol	PIN	15	0	15	18–50
9	Idlib	Sheikh Idris	PIN	21	6	15	23–59
10	Idlib	Maaret Dibsi	PIN	13	0	13	30–51
11	Idlib	Kafr Omiem	PIN	15	6	9	19–57
12	Idlib	Saraqeb	PIN	8	3	5	25–75
13	Idlib	Kafr Amim	PIN	15	5	10	25–70
14	Idlib	Shikh Idris	PIN	11	8	6	25–75
15	Idlib	Maardebsi	PIN	16	5	11	25–75
16	Idlib	Khan Alsubul	PIN	14	5	9	25–75
17	Deir ez-Zor	Al-Sa'wa	PIN	5	2	3	16–24
18	Deir ez-Zor	Al-Saghir	PIN	5	3	2	16–24

19	Deir ez-Zor	Al-Harmoushiya	PIN	5	3	2	16–24
20	Deir ez-Zor	Al-Hawaij Boumusa'a	PIN	5	3	2	16–24
21	Deir ez-Zor	Mahimadiya	PIN	5	2	3	16–24
22	Raqqa	First Neighbourhood	PIN	9	5	4	16–24
23	Raqqa	Second Neighbourhood	PIN	10	6	4	16–24
24	Raqqa	Third Neighbourhood	PIN	10	5	3	16–24
25	Raqqa	Western Al Maqasim	PIN	10	7	3	16–24
26	Raqqa	Western Al Maqasim (2)	PIN	11	8	3	16–24
27	Daraa	Daraa	SYCAC	12	3	9	—
28	Homs	Homs	SYCAC	13	7	6	—
29	Suwayda	Suwayda	SYCAC	13	7	6	—
30	Tartous	Tartous	SYCAC	11	10	1	—
31	Damascus	Damascus	SYCAC	14	7	7	—
32	Damascus	Damascus (Jisr)	Sanad Youth	17	11	6	18–27
33	Aleppo	Aleppo (Shahba)	Sanad Youth	19	9	10	20–28
34	Hama	Hama (Al Shariaa)	Sanad Youth	19	9	10	20–28

Total: 374 participants | 189 women | 185 men | 34 FGDs | 10 governorates

5.2 Annex 2: Guiding Questions

Q	Guiding Question
Q1	How has the conflict changed people's sense of belonging to their community, locality, or Syria as a whole?
Q2	Who feels represented today in community decision-making, and who feels excluded?
Q3	What prevents people, especially women and youth, from participating in public or community affairs?
Q4	What forms of civic participation feel safe and acceptable in the current context?
Q5	Are there topics that are difficult or risky to discuss publicly in your community? Why?
Q6	Are there groups or issues that need to be handled carefully to avoid tensions or misunderstandings?
Q7	How do communities currently perceive the relationship between citizens and local authorities?
Q8	What roles are communities and civil society already playing in addressing local problems?
Q9	Where do local actors succeed, and where do they lack influence?
Q10	What kinds of support would help local actors contribute more effectively to social cohesion, peacebuilding, and inclusive governance at the local level?
Q11	How can community voices realistically reach decision-makers today?
Q12	What issues most urgently threaten social cohesion in your community today?
Q13	What positive changes would you like to see in the next 2–3 years?
Q14	If one initiative were to be prioritised, what should it focus on?
Q15	What advice would you give organisations designing a national programme on social cohesion and peacebuilding?
Q16	What would make initiatives more effective, inclusive, and relevant to your community?

5.3 Annex 3: Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition / Context
Focus group discussion (FGD)	A facilitated group discussion (typically 6–12 participants) used to gather qualitative insights on community perceptions, attitudes, and experiences.
Governorate	Syria's primary administrative division (equivalent to a province). Syria has 14 governorates; this study covered 10.
IDP (internally displaced person)	A person forced to flee their home who remains within their own country's borders.
Civil society organisation (CSO)	Non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations, and informal groups operating outside government and the private sector.
Notable (*Wajaha*)	A locally influential figure — often a respected elder, community leader, or person with ties to authority — who mediates between communities and formal structures.
De facto authority	An entity exercising governmental functions in a territory without internationally recognised sovereignty. In Syria, this includes HTS (Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham) in parts of Idlib and the SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces) in parts of north-east Syria.
Purposive sampling	A non-random sampling method in which participants are selected intentionally based on specific characteristics relevant to the research question.
Thematic analysis	A qualitative research method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data.
Social cohesion	The bonds that bring society together — including shared identity, trust between groups, civic participation, and willingness to cooperate. In fragile or post-conflict settings, social cohesion is typically understood as a process and an outcome, not a fixed state.

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