



Community Peacebuilding Priorities in Syria

Analytical Paper — 11 Governorates

Based on Community Civic Dialogues | December 2025 January 2026

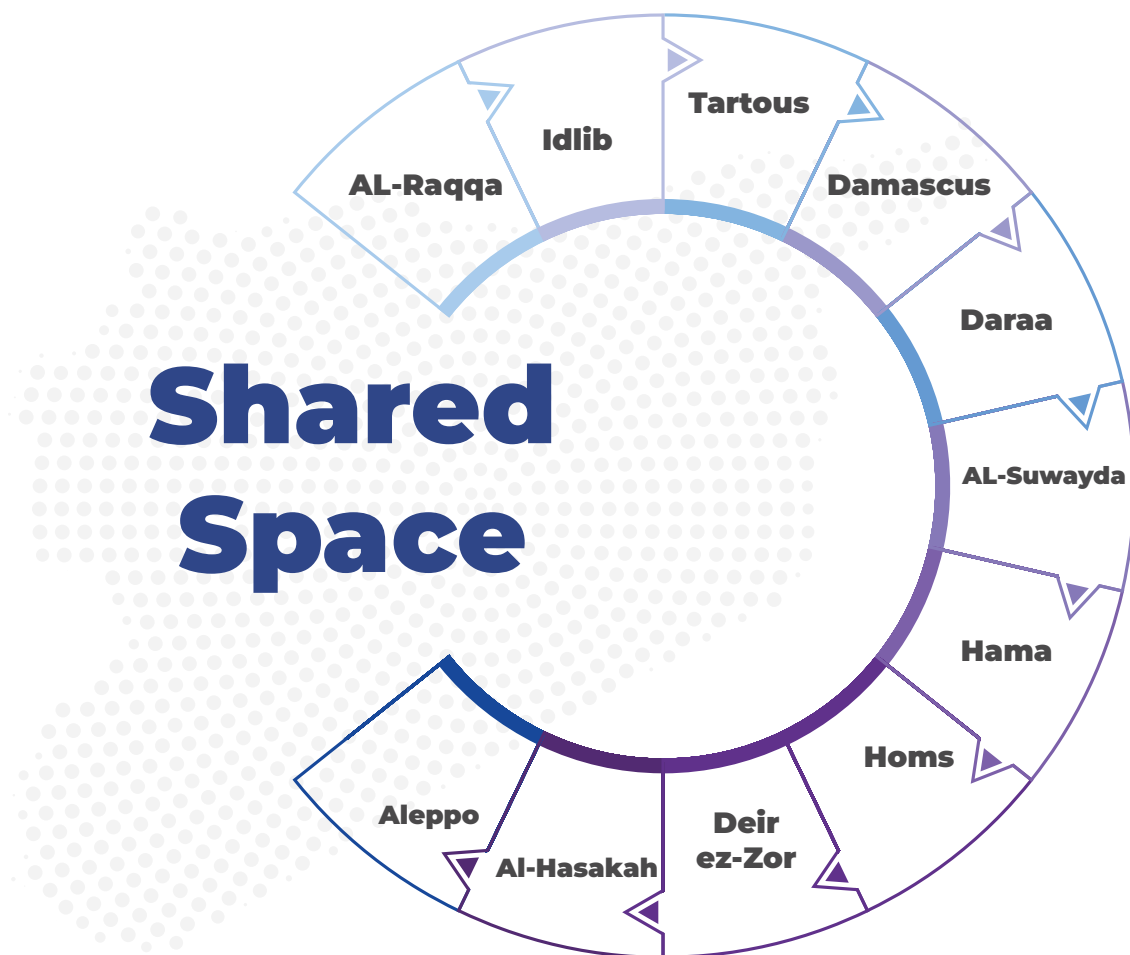
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◆ Executive Introduction:

This paper presents a consolidated analysis drawn from a series of community civic dialogues conducted between December 2025 and January 2026, covering eleven Syrian governorates. These dialogues were carried out by SYCAC across two complementary tracks, maintaining full operational confidentiality.

The purpose of these sessions was not mediation, negotiation, or service assessment. The objective was diagnostic: to understand how communities currently interpret belonging, coexistence, authority, and the prospects for rebuilding a shared political and social space after years of fragmentation.

Dialogues covered 11 governorates: Aleppo, Ar-Raqqa, As-Suwayda, Daraa, Idlib, Deir ez-Zor, Al-Hasakah, Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Tartous.

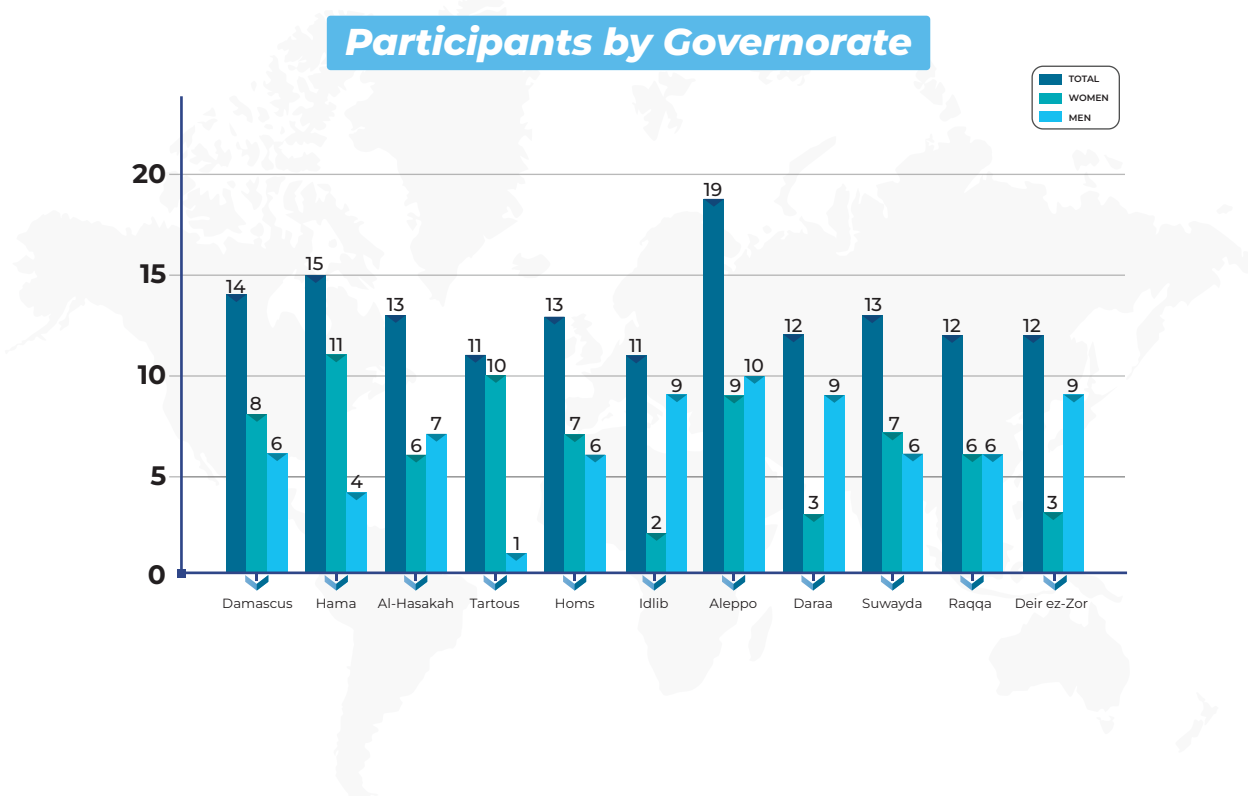


◆ Overview of Field Activities:

Between July 2025 and January 2026, SYCAC facilitated local dialogue events across eleven governorates: Aleppo, Ar-Raqqa, As-Suwayda, Daraa, Idlib, Deir ez-Zor, Al-Hasakah, Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Tartous. Al-Hasakah was covered through individual consultations due to security constraints. All sessions applied conflict-sensitive facilitation methods, ensured minimum 30% women's representation, and brought together civil society actors, community leaders, professionals, and youth from diverse backgrounds.

Participants by Governorate:

A total of 195 participants took part across the eleven governorates (96 women, 99 men), in addition to the National Event with 40 participants (18 women, 22 men). Breakdown by governorate: Damascus 14, Hama 15, Al-Hasakah 13, Tartous 11, Homs 13, Idlib 11, Aleppo 19, Daraa 12, Suwayda 13, Raqqa 12, Deir ez-Zor 12.



Detailed Findings by Governorate

Aleppo

Dialogue within the Aleppo Peace Club revealed a city striving to rebuild social cohesion after years of fragmentation and displacement. Participants noted that prior to 2011, sectarian and ethnic identities were not the primary axes of social interaction. Waves of displacement fundamentally reshaped perceptions of belonging. Initial tensions between those who remained and those who returned have gradually subsided, thanks to deliberate efforts by civil society, community leaders, and residents. Economic opportunity and equitable service distribution were underscored as cornerstones of renewed cohesion.

Identified Priorities:

- ◆ Systematic mechanisms for effective civic participation.
- ◆ Inter-regional Syrian dialogue to counter isolation and build solidarity.
- ◆ Media literacy and access to reliable information sources.
- ◆ Formal recognition of women's role in civic decision-making.



Ar-Raqqa

Raqqa's context is shaped by successive occupations and continuous shifts in control. Collective stigmatization emerged as a central concern: some residents fear being held collectively responsible for the ISIS period, while returnees face difficulties in social acceptance. Youth were described as disproportionately affected by limited opportunities, increasing their vulnerability to extremist recruitment or migration pressures.

"Our stability did not come from the government it came from ourselves, from our councils and our traditions. We want to keep that, and also be part of Syria."

Participant, Ar-Raqqa

Identified Priorities:

- ◆ Reconciliation mechanisms that distinguish between perpetrators and communities
- ◆ Economic opportunities and alternative pathways for youth
- ◆ Sustainable support for local civil society organizations
- ◆ Safe spaces for dialogue about the recent past



As-Suwayda

As-Suwayda represents a unique model rooted in strong community-based self-organization. Participants praised the governorate's relative stability, attributing it to entrenched social consensus and locally driven governance. Divergent views emerged: some emphasized preserving the semi-autonomous governance model, while others valued structured integration with the central government. Economic pressures, especially on youth, pose risks to cohesion. Uncertainty regarding As-Suwayda's place in a future Syrian state was identified as particularly concerning.

Identified Priorities:

- ◆ Clarifying the framework of local governance within a future Syrian state.
- ◆ Building upon existing local governance systems rather than imposing external models.
- ◆ Economic opportunities for youth.
- ◆ Formal roles for women within institutional governance structures.



Daraa

As the cradle of the 2011 uprising, Daraa carries exceptional symbolic weight. Participants described how early cross-sectarian unity later fragmented under militarization and external intervention. Cautious optimism was expressed regarding improvements in local governance, while concerns about favoritism and weak accountability persist.

"We are tired of projects that start and disappear after one year. Peace needs time, and we need partners who understand that."

Participant, Daraa

Identified Priorities:

- ◆ Supporting education and economic initiatives as foundations for sustainable dialogue.
- ◆ Protection and capacity-building for civil society actors.
- ◆ Inclusive mechanisms to empower women and youth in western rural Daraa.
- ◆ Strengthening accountability mechanisms in local governance.



Idlib

Prolonged conflict and repeated displacement have created an extremely complex environment in Idlib, which hosts large numbers of internally displaced persons. Participants expressed profound uncertainty about the future, crisis fatigue, and deep concern for a generation of children who have known nothing but war. Civil society in Idlib has demonstrated remarkable resilience in maintaining services and civic space under extreme conditions.

Identified Priorities:

- ◆ Education and psychosocial support for conflict-affected children and youth
- ◆ Protection mechanisms for civil society actors working on sensitive issues
- ◆ Countering normalization of violence and sectarian incitement
- ◆ Linking culture and arts with economic empowerment as tools for coexistence



Deir ez-Zor

Deir ez-Zor's eastern location and natural resources have made it a site of intense strategic competition. Economic grievances dominated discussions: oil wealth starkly contrasts with local poverty and service shortages. The ISIS occupation left deep scars. Women participants in particular emphasized the urgent need for psychosocial support and economic opportunities. A key outcome of the sessions was the launch of the "Ta'akkad" (Verify) initiative — a community-based fact-checking platform aimed at countering rumors and hate speech.

"We have lived together for generations. We can continue to do so, but we need our rights and our culture to be respected — not erased."

Participant, Deir ez-Zor

Identified Priorities:

- ◆ Countering hate speech and misinformation through the "Ta'akkad" initiative
- ◆ Economic opportunities and livelihood support to address resource grievances
- ◆ Confidence-building across both banks of the Euphrates
- ◆ Psychosocial support for communities affected by ISIS violence



Al-Hasakah

Al-Hasakah's ethnic and religious diversity — including Kurdish, Arab, Assyrian, Syriac, and other communities — makes the landscape both rich and complex. Language and cultural rights emerged as particularly sensitive issues. Participants affirmed that distinct cultural identities can be preserved within a shared citizenship framework. Women's organizations have played an exceptional cross-ethnic peacebuilding role, though they continue to face obstacles in translating grassroots engagement into formal political influence.

Identified Priorities:

- ◆ Protecting language and cultural rights within a shared citizenship framework
- ◆ Inclusive economic development benefiting all communities
- ◆ Structured youth programs to rebuild cohesion across political divides
- ◆ Formal recognition of women's organizations as peacebuilding actors



Track Two — Central and Coastal Syria

Damascus

Discussions in Damascus were marked by a high level of political awareness. Many participants follow national debates closely and are familiar with legal and constitutional questions. Yet a degree of self-censorship remained: individuals continue to weigh the personal consequences of speaking freely. Civil society faced criticism for perceived professionalization that distances it from marginalized communities. With its universities, professional associations, media actors, and experienced administrators, Damascus holds significant potential for channeling community perspectives toward national policy spaces.

Identified Priorities:

- ◆ Mechanisms for transmitting community perspectives to policy spaces
- ◆ Broadening civic engagement to reach marginalized communities
- ◆ Bridging generational divides through inclusive dialogue
- ◆ Strengthening the link between civil society and national policy processes



Homs

In Homs, the immediate sense of insecurity was more pronounced than in other locations. Participants frequently mentioned weapons, theft, kidnapping, and disputes that escalate quickly. Criminal incidents can easily be interpreted as communal threats in a trauma-saturated society. Relations between residents and returnees formed another sensitive layer. Youth participants were particularly vocal about wanting constructive spaces to discuss grievances rather than inheriting divisions from older generations.

Identified Priorities:

- ◆ Rapid response mechanisms for community-level disputes
- ◆ Trusted mediators to address escalating incidents
- ◆ Managing resident-returnee relations through structured dialogue
- ◆ Constructive spaces for youth to discuss grievances



Hama

Dialogue in Hama unfolded under the long shadow of violence. References to earlier periods of violence surfaced repeatedly not in detail, but as background knowledge shaping community expectations. Economic vulnerability also entered the conversation: competition over employment, services, and assistance risks reviving dormant grievances. Participants emphasized that perceptions of fairness in resource distribution must be a cornerstone of any peacebuilding effort.

Identified Priorities:

- ◆ Equitable resource and service distribution
- ◆ Addressing historical memory of violence through structured dialogue
- ◆ Strengthening socio-economic cohesion across communities



Tartous

In Tartous, emotions connected to the events of March 2025 were still close to the surface. Participants described fear, uncertainty, and a perception of collective punishment. At the same time, many pointed to positive examples where local notables, religious leaders, or respected families intervened effectively to prevent escalation. Isolation was a recurring theme some attendees felt their region is often discussed by outsiders without sufficient listening.

Identified Priorities:

- ◆ Protection from identity-based stigmatization
- ◆ Sustaining dialogue continuity beyond one-off events
- ◆ Engaging marginalized communities through inclusive outreach
- ◆ Economic opportunities for youth



Cross-Cutting Dialogue and Coordination

In addition to the eleven local events, a broader consultative process brought together representatives from the various Syrian regions covered, with the aim of synthesizing findings and building a shared vision. This process produced three key outputs:

- ◆ **Community Peacebuilding Priorities Paper:** A synthesis document combining the outcomes of the local events, including in-depth analysis, shared advocacy messages, and practical recommendations
- ◆ **Shared Priorities Framework:** A unified framework outlining ten peacebuilding pillars agreed upon collectively, covering governance, justice, security, economic recovery, women and youth leadership, the information environment, and social cohesion
- ◆ **Coordination Networks:** Strengthened communication channels and working relationships among actors from across the covered regions

Cross-Cutting Structural Themes

The dialogues across the eleven governorates surfaced seven shared structural themes. Their independent emergence across diverse geographic and political contexts underscores their depth and makes them viable entry points for future programming.

1. Citizenship, Belonging, and the Search for Protection

One question dominated all sessions: who protects me, and on what basis? When citizenship is not perceived as a reliable reference point, people rationally seek alternative shelters — family and tribal networks, sectarian ties, locality, wartime affiliations, or economic alliances. Over time, these coping strategies solidify into political identities. Identity fragmentation is less a cultural phenomenon than a governance deficit. Rebuilding coexistence requires institutional predictability, equal treatment, and visible rule application.

2. Security as the Precondition for Political Engagement

Whenever discussions moved toward the future, they returned to personal and communal safety. Participants questioned whether speaking openly might later carry consequences. The widespread availability of weapons amplifies these anxieties. Without a minimum sense of protection, communities hesitate to invest emotionally or politically in long-term reconciliation projects. Security is not a parallel track to peacebuilding it is its entry point.

3. Transitional Justice and the Past That Shapes the Future

Calls for accountability were not abstract — they were described as necessary recognition of suffering. Participants feared that ignoring violations would institutionalize inequality between victims and perpetrators. At the same time, many voiced uncertainty about feasibility, sequencing, and political will. Unmanaged expectations may easily transform into renewed anger. Communities want honesty about what is possible and what will take time.

4. Hate Speech and Disinformation

Participants described how quickly unverified news spreads and how easily it fuels panic. Some religious and political messages were seen as deepening division rather than calming tensions. Trusted local figures were able in some cases to de-escalate when they intervened early. Many communities lack trusted intermediaries capable of quickly containing tensions. Peacebuilding work must account for operating within a distorted information environment.

5. State-Society Relations

The absence of everyday interaction between citizens and institutions emerged as a recurring theme. Long histories of corruption and exclusion continue to shape perceptions. Even when reforms are discussed, participants wait for tangible evidence in daily administrative practice before altering their views. Participants did not reject the idea of institutions; rather, they condemned unpredictability and perceived favoritism.

6. Women and Youth Between Informal Agency and Limited Influence

Evidence from all locations showed that women and youth play significant roles in easing tensions at family and neighborhood levels. Yet they rarely hold formal decision-making positions, and their contributions remain largely invisible in official spaces. Fourteen years of crisis have prepared them for leadership, but structured pathways to access remain absent. Future initiatives must open genuine corridors toward leadership and representation.

7. Imagining a New Social Contract

Participants agreed that the previous arrangement between citizens and authority has irreversibly eroded. Conversations consistently turned toward the need to redefine mutual obligations — grounded in dignity, clarity, equal application of law, predictability, and accountable governance. At the same time, participants stressed that change must be gradual and credible. There is willingness to participate in shaping this future, but people want seriousness and continuity.

Comparative Governorate Priorities

Governorate	Key Identified Priorities
Aleppo	Effective civic participation mechanisms, inter-regional Syrian dialogue, media literacy, formal recognition of women in decision-making
Ar-Raqqa	Reconciliation mechanisms distinguishing perpetrators from communities, economic opportunities for youth, sustainable CSO support, safe spaces for dialogue on the recent past
As-Suwayda	Clarifying local governance framework, building on existing systems, economic opportunities for youth, formal roles for women in institutional governance
Daraa	Education and economic initiatives, protection for civil society actors, inclusive mechanisms for women and youth, accountability in local governance
Idlib	Education and psychosocial support for conflict-affected children, protection mechanisms for civil society, countering violence normalization, linking arts to economic empowerment
Deir ez-Zor	"Ta'akkad" fact-checking initiative against hate speech, economic and livelihood support, confidence-building across the Euphrates, psychosocial support for ISIS-affected communities
Al-Hasakah	Protecting linguistic and cultural rights within a shared citizenship framework, inclusive economic development, structured youth programs, formal recognition of women's organizations
Damascus	Mechanisms for transmitting community perspectives to policy spaces, broadening civic engagement, reaching marginalized communities, bridging generational divides
Homs	Rapid response mechanisms, trusted mediators, managing resident-returnee relations, constructive spaces for youth dialogue
Hama	Equitable resource distribution, addressing historical memory of violence, strengthening socio-economic cohesion
Tartous	Protection from identity-based stigmatization, dialogue continuity, engaging marginalized communities, economic opportunities for youth

Comparative Governorate Priorities

The dialogues across the eleven governorates reveal shared national challenges alongside nuanced local variations. The following recommendations emerge for future programming:

A. Localization with National Cohesion

Interventions should respond to specific local contexts while building a shared national framework. Communities need spaces to articulate their local priorities and contribute to a broader Syrian dialogue.

B. Security as the Foundation of Everything

Peacebuilding activities cannot take root in environments where participants fear the consequences of honesty. This requires not only physical security, but also protection from political retaliation and social stigmatization.

C. Genuine Representation for Women and Youth

Women and youth have demonstrated competence and commitment, but lack systematic pathways to decision-making. Programs must create real avenues for influence — not merely symbolic consultative roles.

D. Economy and Peace as Two Sides of the Same Coin

In participants' minds, peace cannot be separated from economic opportunity. Programs addressing governance and reconciliation without tackling livelihoods will appear disconnected from daily concerns.

E. Honesty in Addressing Justice

Rather than avoiding difficult files, programs should create spaces for honest discussion about feasible justice mechanisms, sequencing, and constraints. Managing expectations transparently is as important as pursuing justice itself.

F. Building on Existing Local Resources

All locations demonstrated examples of local actors successfully managing conflicts. Programs should identify, support, and connect these actors rather than construct parallel structures.

G. Addressing the Information Environment

Misinformation and hate speech generate immediate risks during crises. Peacebuilding must incorporate rapid-response strategies, trusted intermediaries, and media literacy components.

H. Long-Term Commitment as a Necessity

Participants across all locations expressed fatigue with short-cycle projects. Credibility requires multi-year commitment, even when activities begin modestly and expand gradually.

I. Inter-Regional Dialogue as a Tool for Solidarity

Creating opportunities for Syrians from different regions to exchange experiences combats isolation and builds solidarity. Carefully designed exchange programs can help communities learn from one another's experiences.



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