



Workshop on
Durable Solutions for displaced Syrians:
A Syrian Prospective

2021
REPORT
(Istanbul, August 26)



The **Voices for Displaced Syrians Forum (VDSF)** organized the "**Durable Solutions for Displaced Syrians: A Syrian Perspective**" workshop in Istanbul, on **August 26, 2021**. In addition to the General Assembly members of the VDSF, other stakeholders, including Donors, UN agencies, human rights organizations, and coordination bodies, were also invited to the workshop.

The workshop aimed to seek answers to specific questions concerning the displacement of Syrians in and outside Syria and formulate recommendations to move forward. These questions included but were not limited to: What obstacles prevent displaced Syrians from returning in large numbers, and what should be done to overcome these obstacles? What are the learned lessons since 2018, when the UN expected many returnees to Syria? What are the prospects for those who have never left Syria, those who return to Syria, and those still displaced, particularly in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey? What actions are needed from the international community to ensure Syrians' rights are protected? What are the roles of local and international civil society organizations?

Accordingly, the participants were divided into four roundtables with the following themes:

1. Return policies and monitoring mechanisms
2. The security and living conditions in Syria and their impact on the return of refugees
3. Integration in host countries (Education, income generation opportunities, and access to services)
4. Long-term solutions for IDPs (Education, housing, civil documentation, and development)

Below is the summary of discussions and outcomes in each roundtable.

Roundtable I: Return policies and the monitoring mechanisms

Background:

In the 10th year of the Syrian conflict, a solution to the crisis continues to remain elusive. The massive displacements caused by the conflict still affect millions, as Syria is not safe for return and sustainable return mechanisms are not in place.

Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries and Europe face numerous challenges in accessing services and meeting their basic needs. A growing concern is discrimination against Syrians, not only by the host communities, but also from governments and political party representatives. In addition to discrimination, an increasingly vocal chorus of actors in host countries call for the return of Syrian refugees, while conditions for return are still not in place.

While government-controlled areas are the most insecure, violence is rampant across all regions of Syria, including armed conflict, arbitrary detention, and torture. Against this background, returns until now have been unorganized, and individually driven, therefore cannot be applied to the general refugee population.

More importantly, in the lack of safety guarantees for returning refugees, there is limited information regarding the fates of returnees once they cross the border. Significant challenges remain in place for those aiming to return to their place of origin, especially concerning legal documentation and related restrictions which hinder them from exercising their HLP rights in government areas.

Returns should be based on the principles of a safe, voluntary, dignified, and well-informed return. We cannot speak of returns without an environment built on protection thresholds and real change inside Syria illustrated by a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition.

The decision and policymaking seem to be detached from the developments and realities on the ground. One important reason for this detachment is that the Syrian civil society, led by Syrian refugees themselves, is often excluded from the decision-making process and discussion regarding Syrian issues.



Solutions & Recommendations

- The VDSF should have a seat at the table. Not cosmetic participation, but an authentic one. Including but not limited to 3RP coordination mechanisms RDSWG, 3RP Steering Committee, and technical committee. As well as the international meetings, i.e., Brussels conferences, Senior Official's Meeting (SOM) and all senior and strategic decision making and dialogue platforms.
- The VDSF believes in the right to return for Syrian refugees to Syria, but only once the conditions of returns are effectively present. This includes protection, security, and safety, and a voluntary and dignified return exclusively to the area of origin with adequate access to basic services.

- An international multi-stakeholder independent monitoring mechanism for the returns to Syria should be established in collaboration and cooperation with the Syrian civil society.

Technical and financial support should be provided to Syrian-led civil society organizations working on research, monitoring, and documenting the returns of Syrian refugees and internally displaced individuals, to monitor the respect of the necessary conditions for returns, aforementioned, including the safe, voluntary, and dignified returns to areas of origin.

- Ensure that the Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy (CPSS, 2018), and the Protection thresholds included therein, remain the central basis for any policy and programming discussion regarding returns.

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Roundtable II. The security and living conditions in Syria and their impact on the return of refugees

Background:

Security challenges are fairly common across all areas of control, as the multiplicity of military and security control is in itself still a fundamental problem in the Syrian context, while the practice of arbitrary detention, enforced conscription, uncontrolled armed factions, restrictions on freedom of movement are among the main security challenges. These are all general observations in the different regions of Syria. In addition, the military operations continue particularly in northwest and southern Syria, as well as the collapse of police and security systems has led to a deterioration in the security situation and an increase in the crime rate.

The Syrian government continues to the demographic change through systematic forced displacement policies, as most recently witnessed in southern Syria despite the reconciliations that were concluded three years ago in the region.

The collapse in local currency and ongoing economic crisis has pushed the majority of the population into deep poverty as millions struggle to meet their daily needs while unemployment is at historically high levels. In the northeast, those who have military control of the region exploit services and aid by using them in exchange for political loyalty and military conscription, which makes living conditions more difficult in this region. All humanitarian work across all control areas of Syria needs careful planning, and also needs to comply with principles of neutrality and impartiality without the involvement of parties of the conflicts, supported with appropriate monitoring mechanisms.

Ultimately, the international efforts to resolve the conflict need to be intensified in line with the internationally agreed principles and road maps. On the other hand, it is beyond doubt that these international efforts should go hand in hand with local development efforts, including supporting local economies and building local capacity.

Solutions & Recommendations

- Achieving a comprehensive political solution in accordance with UNSC Resolution 2254 is indispensable to all efforts.
- Directing support and funding programs to improve living conditions and improve basic services.
- Neutralizing the humanitarian sector - particularly education and health from conflicting parties.
- Ensuring that services reach the entire population in Syria without allowing the authority in Damascus to restrict aid and determine its movement, especially by managing the health crisis during the Covid-19 and its failure to deliver medical aid to the northeast and the continuation of the siege and prevent UN convoys from reaching southern Syria.
- Developing an integrated strategy for the camp areas by strengthening local economies.
- Ensuring the preservation and issuance of official and personal documents (property - official papers).

Roundtable III: Integration in host countries

Background:

1. Challenges in the field of access to services:

- The root of the problem with legal papers and official documents

2. Challenges in the field of access to job creation:

- Lack of interest groups representing the interests of refugee workers or businesses with relevant facilities
- Exploiting the refugees by host countries as a bargaining chip to receive more external funding
- Lack of skills and difficulties to enter the labour market, especially after Covid-19
- Donors focus on the emergency response at the expense of development projects which would develop employability skills and enhance job creation
- Adapting negative coping mechanisms by refugees as a result of lack of integration programs
- Lack of inclusive project design practices that would incorporate local participation including refugees

3.v Challenges in the field of education

- In-school bullying, exclusion, and marginalization due to lack of community integration and social cohesion between the host community and refugees
- Insufficient support in the education sector for host countries
- The legal status of Syrian educational staff and the failure to integrate Syrian teachers into the educational process in host countries
- No clear pathways for the future of refugee graduates

Solutions & Recommendations

- Promoting the legalization of Syrian refugees within host countries, including recognition of certificates, work permits, and ID cards
- Supporting social cohesion between refugees and host communities
- Activating UNHCR's role in host countries other than Jordan
- Further strengthening host community infrastructure to enhance access to services
- Sensitizing donors to adapt their programs to avoid adopting negative coping mechanisms
- Increasing support for vocational education to create jobs for young males and females
- Enhancing counselling and guidance for refugees regarding services available in the host country
Increasing the quantity and quality of centres and facilities that contribute to integrating refugees into the host community and bridging the gap between them by way of organizing awareness sessions, language education, and similar activities.

Roundtable III: Integration in host countries

Background:

Sustainable solutions for internally displaced persons are among the most complex problems related to the Syrian context. Finding durable solutions for displaced persons in northwest Syria, in particular, is linked to an integrated response to ensure the legal, physical, social and psychological security of displaced persons, not to affect the rights of the host communities, to ensure a response to their needs, to find solutions to the issue of civil documentation, as well as to take into account the infrastructure of displacement areas and their condition and efficiency to provide sustainable services for host and displaced communities.

The challenges concerning displaced persons in northwest Syria include resettlement and demographic change, limited habitable areas and lack of supervision or standards in construction and a general lack of urban planning, camps or communities of displaced persons built in dangerous areas such as mountain slopes, difficult-to-reach areas or at risk of flooding. Furthermore, oftentimes due to limited space for displaced families multiple families live in a single house increasing protection risks, especially for children and women. Unfortunately, due to the increased population in a relatively short timeframe, it will be difficult to meet the needs of housing in the near future.

In terms of donors, there exists a gap in terms of the strategies of donors and humanitarian organizations. The donor strategies mainly focus on providing emergency shelter while the affected communities need structured settlements linked to basic services and infrastructure.

In terms of civil documentation, main challenges include lack of documents either because they did not exist or were lost after displacement, the difficulty of obtaining new documents and the diversity of their issuers, the challenges of the reliability of issued documents, the challenges of organizing contracts between the owner from the host and the displaced communities, and lack of a clear and unified judicial system to guarantee rights.

With regard to infrastructure and access to services, apart from the fact that the available infrastructure was not sufficient for the population before 2011, the infrastructure was increasingly damaged both because of the conflict and from the population pressure resulting from displacement, resulting in crises in the availability of clean water and sanitation systems.



Solutions & Recommendations

- Call on local actors, international actors and supporters to reach sustainable solutions by modifying support strategies for housing that provide displaced people with material, psychological and social security requirements and secure access to services.
- Adopting a strong human rights-based approach to preserve the rights of the host communities and IDPs in such areas as the safe and dignified return of IDPs, finding solutions for the recognition of civil documentation of IDPs, moving from emergency shelter solutions to sustainable housing solutions with appropriate services and infrastructure taking also into consideration of privacy and dignity concerns of populations, and adopting an urban planning approach with the participation of affected communities.
- Designing strategic interventions in the areas of infrastructure and services and requesting donors to fund them in the context of the absorption of a large number of displaced persons in northern Syria regions within an infrastructure that was unable to achieve safe and adequate access to services by residents even before 2011.
- Advocate for bridging the gap between displaced persons' expectations and donor strategies by involving displaced persons more in identifying their needs, protecting their rights, choosing appropriate shelter solutions that provide psychological, social and legal security for displaced persons and host communities, and directing individual and private donors to work in line with international donor strategies and displaced persons' needs and preserving their rights.



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