

SDC

مركز الحوار السوري  
Syrian Dialogue Center

# A Roadmap for Addressing the IDPS' Crisis in Syria

Policy Paper



## Syrian Dialogue Center

A Syrian civil institution that aims to revive and promote dialogue and deepen discussion on issues that concern the Syrian people. It also seeks to strengthen relationships, enhance cooperation, and facilitate coordination among Syrians.

Since its establishment in late 2015, the Syrian Dialogue Center has held several dialogue sessions on Syrian affairs.

The center operates through three main thematic units: the Shared Identity and Consensus Unit, and the Policy Analysis Unit, and the Social Unit.

---

Prepared by:  
Eng. Kinda Hawasli

Contact:  
Phone: +90 538 743 2358  
Email: [support@sydialogue.org](mailto:support@sydialogue.org)

The Social Unit  
22 Shawwal 1446 AH | Corresponding to: April 20, 2025 CE

 [WWW.SYDIALOGUE.ORG](http://WWW.SYDIALOGUE.ORG)

# A Roadmap for Addressing the Issue of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Syria

## Policy Report

---

The war waged by the former Assad regime against its own people after 2011 has resulted in the internal displacement of more than 7 million people across Syrian territory. This constitutes the second-largest number of internally displaced persons in the world, after Sudan. The displacement crisis has created a severe humanitarian emergency that requires a swift and comprehensive solution to ensure the rights of IDPs.

This policy report<sup>1</sup> aims to outline a comprehensive plan for addressing internal displacement, drawing on international experiences and sustainable development strategies to rebuild the social and economic fabric while ensuring the protection of human rights.

### Conceptual Framework of Internal Displacement

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are defined as: "Individuals or groups of individuals who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or to avoid the effects of armed conflict, generalized violence, violations of human rights, or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border."

IDPs are generally categorised into two groups: camp residents and urban IDPs, who choose to settle in cities and urban areas to avoid the stigma of displacement and to seek better employment opportunities.

IDPs are entitled to a range of rights stipulated in the "Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement", which fall under the broader human rights framework. These include:

- Basic human rights, such as the right to life, education and social security.

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper serves as a policy brief for a broader study on the subject prepared by the Syrian [Dialogue Center](#).

- Citizen rights, such as the right to hold public office, vote, and run for election.
- Rights acquired due to their displacement status, including access to identification documents confirming their nationality, and access to technical support and rehabilitation services.

The displacement officially ends when one of the durable solutions—outlined in the Guiding Principles—is achieved. These solutions aim to end the vulnerability or protection needs related to displacement, enabling IDPS to fully enjoy their rights like other citizens who were not displaced. The three durable solutions are:

1. Return of IDPS to their original communities.
2. Integration of IDPS into the local communities where they have been displaced.
3. Planned relocation by the state to another area for permanent settlement.

### **Syrian Displacement: Facts and Figures:**

Internal displacement in Syria began in 2011 with the outbreak of the Syrian revolution and the Assad regime's adoption of a military approach to suppress it. Data shows a steady rise in the number of IDPs as the conflict escalated, peaking at over 7.6 million people in 2014, before partially declining to the current estimate of around 7.2 million, with some returning spontaneously and without a formal or organized return plan.

Approximately 28% of IDPS reside in camps, while the majority —urban IDPS—are concentrated in major cities and towns. Additionally, Syrian internal displacement is classified as protracted, as it has persisted for over five years.

The transitional government has not yet presented a clear vision regarding the return of IDPS, and some IDPS have independently and spontaneously returned to their original areas. However, they face multiple challenges, including proving property ownership, especially in rural areas due to historical disputes, and losing official documents. Additionally, threats from landmines and unexploded ordnance pose significant obstacles to resuming economic activities and achieving stability. Moreover, there are differing preferences among IDPS regarding return; not everyone desires to go back, and many favor alternative solutions for various reasons



## **What Can Be Learned from International Experiences in Durable Solutions for IDPs?**

Several countries—such as Iraq, Sudan, Azerbaijan, Haiti, Colombia, Bosnia, and Nigeria—have experienced different displacement contexts and attempted to implement durable solutions for their IDP populations. Studying these cases in depth reveals the complexity of the process, the multiplicity of stakeholders, and the numerous challenges involved. Various positive and negative factors may critically influence the success or failure of such projects.

The key success factors for implementing durable solutions, particularly in protracted displacement cases, can be summarized as follows:

1. Integrating humanitarian and development expertise with local knowledge during the project design phase, while genuinely involving both IDP and host/original communities after understanding their needs and concerns.
2. Designing flexible projects that can adapt to changes over time and respond to the evolving needs of displaced populations.
3. Coordinating efforts with national and local authorities to ensure government ownership of return initiatives, facilitate knowledge transfer, and prevent obstruction.
4. Considering local business and labor market needs, including required skills and profitable products.
5. Ensuring that projects are contextually appropriate and beneficial to both IDPs and host/original communities, with inclusive planning and implementation.
6. Integrating return and resettlement efforts into broader national development strategies, supported by multi-year funding.
7. Including strong urban planning in city-based projects to preserve the architectural identity of areas while offering innovative, sustainable housing solutions.

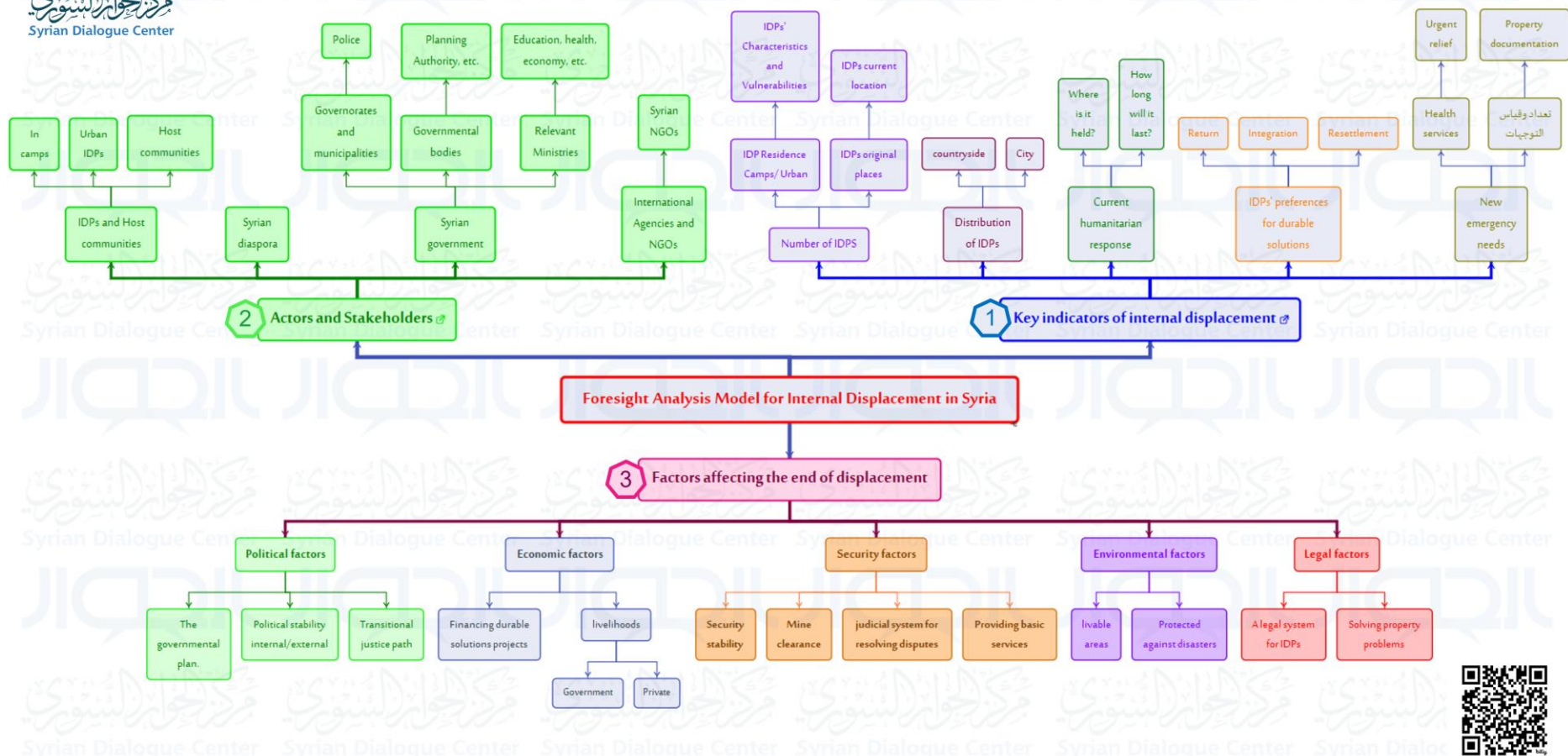
## **Prospective Analysis and Future Scenarios for Ending Syrian Displacement**

Several key factors are essential for planning the end of displacement in Syria. These include:

- Understanding critical indicators and data related to displacement, such as the distribution, numbers, locations, vulnerabilities, and preferences of IDPs;
- Addressing the underlying causes of continued and renewed displacement, such as insecurity, recurring conflict, landmine contamination, and lack of basic services;

- Ensuring the safety of buildings, rebuilding markets, and supporting both public and private livelihoods.

In this context, stakeholder engagement is expected in the planning process to end displacement, including internally displaced persons, host communities, government officials, local and international humanitarian and development organizations, and diaspora members (Figure 1).



Nonetheless, a set of future scenarios can be anticipated when addressing the issue of internal displacement. These scenarios depend on the availability of four main factors, ranked in order of importance:

1. Achieving a reasonable level of security and stability.
2. Existence of a governmental plan to address displacement.
3. Building effective partnerships with stakeholders.
4. Securing the necessary funding.

The main scenarios include (Figure 2):

**1. Scenario of Chaos, Renewed Displacement, and Violence:**

This occurs in the absence of security and a clear governmental plan to end displacement. It leads to the resurgence of displacement and exacerbates the humanitarian crisis.

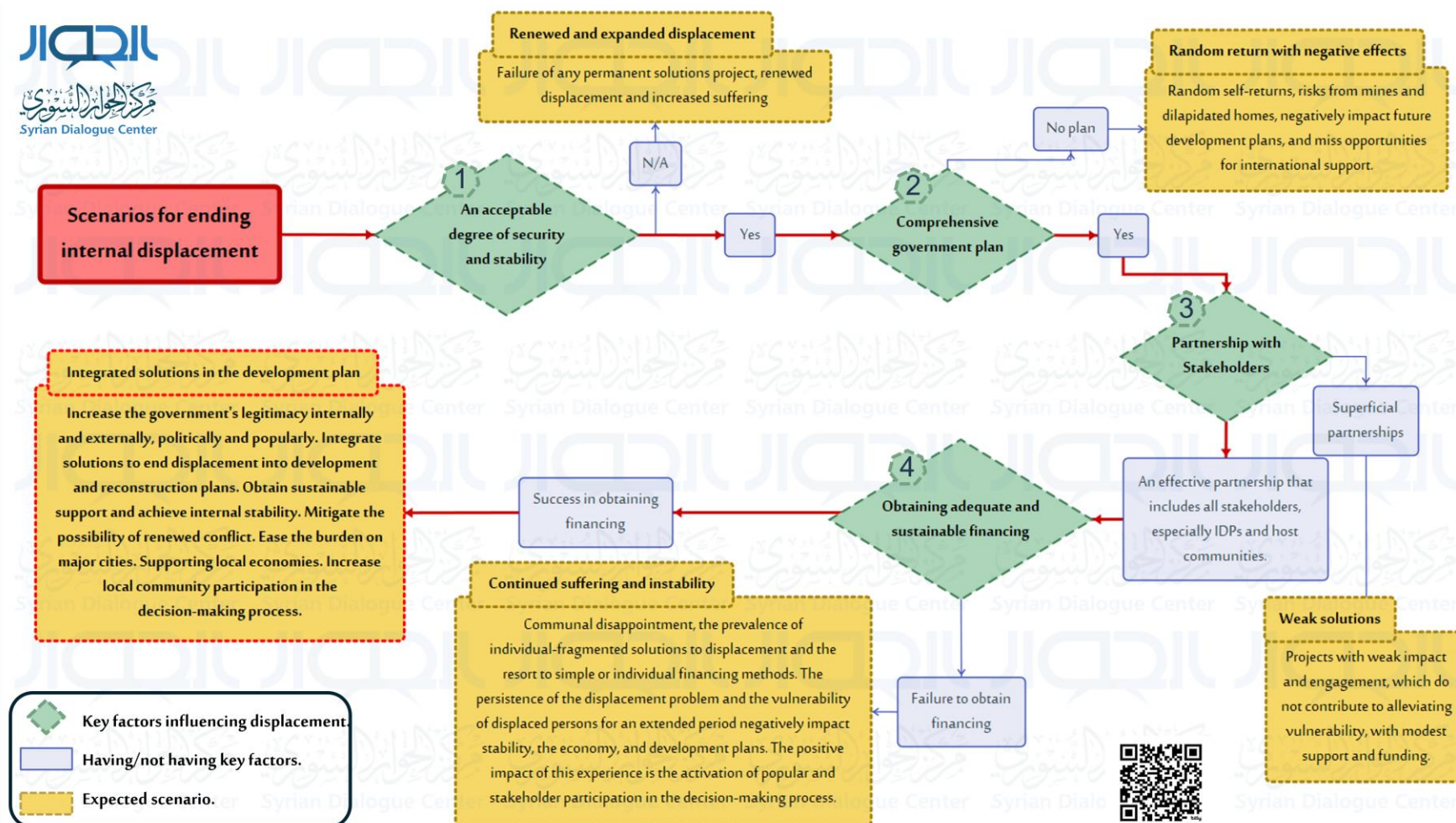
**2. Scenario of Continuation of the Current Situation (Unstable Security and No Governmental Plan):**

In this case, a basic level of stability and safety exists, but no government plan is in place. This results in spontaneous and uncoordinated returns, exposing returnees to housing safety risks, unexploded ordnance, and lack of essential services. It hinders future development plans and wastes opportunities to gain international support and funding to address internal displacement.

**3. Scenario of Stability with a Participatory Government Plan:**

This represents the optimal scenario. When stability is achieved and the government shows willingness to address the issue, it requires a comprehensive plan involving all relevant government institutions (economic, educational, health, judicial, etc.), along with IDPs, host communities, civil society, and international actors. The success of this scenario hinges on the ability to implement a participatory plan that reflects the needs of all stakeholders and secures adequate international funding. This plan would contribute to stability, sustainable development, and poverty reduction, and would also enhance the legitimacy of the current government both locally and internationally.





## Recommendations and Proposed Policies to End Internal Displacement in Syria

Planning for the return of IDPS is a fundamental component of peacebuilding and a key indicator of conflict de-escalation. It may also serve as a pathway toward lifting international sanctions and gaining legitimacy through cooperation with international institutions. Empowering IDPS to take ownership of displacement-ending projects—allowing them to decide their own fate and offering options aligned with their preferences—is crucial to the success of such efforts. This is especially effective when the government supports their choices and helps them determine when, how, and where to move, without imposing unwanted solutions.

- However, durable solutions to displacement face serious challenges, including:
- Securing flexible and long-term support.
- Achieving real improvements in living standards and services for returnees.
- Ensuring safety, political stability, and the prevention of renewed violence.
- Most importantly, the presence of a strong and experienced government with a clear will to resolve the issue in cooperation with local and international civil society, grassroots communities, and the diaspora.

Accordingly, to effectively address the Syrian displacement crisis, we propose the following key recommendations and implementation steps:

- 1- **Establish a comprehensive legal framework:** This should include bodies, legislation, and regulations that define the legal status of IDPs, clarify their rights and the state's responsibilities, assess their vulnerabilities, and outline the material and psychological support they require.
- 2- **Identify needs and preferences:** Conduct a national survey to document the number and locations of IDPs, collect contact information, and assess their preferences regarding return or integration, along with their immediate and long-term needs. A digital platform should be created to track their evolving conditions, updates on planned projects, and progress made.
- 3- **Launch a comprehensive national project to end displacement:** In collaboration with local civil society organizations and international partners, implement a national strategy with a clear timeline. Actively involve IDPs and host communities in project design based on their priorities. Begin with pilot initiatives and scale up based on real-world findings.
- 4- **Activate safety measures and remove remnants of war:** Through nationally led, internationally supported demining and explosive remnants clearance programs.

- 5- **Establish a property dispute resolution authority:** Engage local communities in resolving ownership disputes, particularly those involving undocumented properties or transactions made under siege and displacement conditions.
- 6- **Support host communities:** Invest in infrastructure and services in areas hosting IDPs to meet their combined needs.
- 7- **Focus on rural development:** Promote the concept of “reverse return” by revitalizing rural areas, thereby balancing development between cities and rural regions and reducing pressure on urban infrastructure.
- 8- **Engage Syrian expatriates in reconstruction and return processes:** Encourage them to contribute their expertise or invest in small and medium-sized enterprises in their original communities.
- 9- **Provide training to promote community participation:** Equip both IDPs and host communities with tools and awareness to engage in participatory governance and local development.
- 10- **Integrate solutions for both IDPs and refugees:** Where possible, design projects that accommodate displaced and refugee families from the same households, to maximize impact and jointly address housing, stability, and labor market challenges.
- 11- **Mobilize flexible and long-term funding:** Secure sustained financial resources to ensure the full implementation of proposed projects.



اِندِاق

مركز الحوار السوري  
Syrian Dialogue Center



sydialogue



www.sydialogue.org

