



## Inclusive Transitions: Youth Agency in Syria's Political Future *Summary Report of the Syria Panel Session*

On 13 May 2025, as part of the 2025 Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development, the *Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa* (SDI) convened a panel session focused on Syria's political transition and the inclusion of youth in shaping the country's future. Organised in collaboration with the *Middle East Council* (MEC), a number of Syrian young activists, diaspora leaders, and regional experts, the session embraced a "reverse panel" format—cantering youth voices first, followed by expert reflections.

The discussion explored themes of justice, governance, unity, economic resilience, and narrative building in post-conflict Syria. Furthermore, a key theme was the necessity of lifting sanctions on Syria, the session was convened through a participatory, personal, and forward-looking lens.

### **Moderator:**

- **Ann Måwe**, Director, Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa

### **Youth Speakers (in alphabetical order):**

- **Omar Alshogre** (Syria/Sweden), Syrian Emergency Task Force
- **Wafa Mustafa** (Syria/Germany), The Syria Campaign
- **Celine Kasem** (Syria/Canada), Human Rights Activist
- **Ehab Badwi** (Syria/Germany), Syrian Youth Assembly

Wafa Mustafa opened the discussion with a powerful testimony, linking personal experience of her father's disappearance with broader calls for

justice for Syria's disappeared. She emphasised the essential role of the Syrian diaspora in documenting violations and pushing for transitional justice and international accountability, especially in the face of ongoing impunity.

Omar Alshogre addressed the delicate balance between applying pressure on authoritarian structures and avoiding harm to civilians. Notably, he—who once advocated for imposing sanctions on the former regime—is now calling for a careful review of existing sanctions and encouraged the international community to support governance reforms that centre human rights.

Celine Kasem spoke to the fragmentation within Syrian society and the need for inclusive dialogue that reflects the country's pluralism such as the de-Baathification of the mindsets and ways of governing. She stressed that youth have a critical role in developing citizenship-based narratives that challenge sectarianism and promote national reconciliation.

Ehab Badwi highlighted the importance of economic engagement and entrepreneurship for Syria's recovery. He identified the Syrian diaspora as a key resource for innovation, skill transfer, and investment in local, youth-led initiatives that build resilience from the ground up.

Following the youth-led segment, a panel of experts engaged in a “shadow panel” format, a method used by the SDI to encourage and amplify intergenerational dialogue. Seated opposite the youth speakers, the experts listened to their interventions before offering reflections and policy-oriented insights, both in response to the panellists and to the broader audience. The shadow panel included the following experts:

- **Jessica Olausson** (Sweden), Head of MENA Department at the *Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs*, acknowledged the humanitarian implications of sanctions and advocated for a principled, people-first approach to economic measures.
- **Dr. Dalia Ghanem** (Algeria/Qatar), Senior Fellow and Director of the Conflict and Transitions Program at *Middle East Council on*

*Global Affairs*, urged for meaningful youth involvement throughout policy development cycles, not just during implementation.

- **Dr. Ahmed Sager** (Saudi Arabia), Vice President at *Gulf Research Centre*, stressed the need to rebuild national unity beyond sectarian lines and to invest in Syria's human capital.
- **Dr. Siobhan O'Neil** (Ireland/Netherlands), Head of Project at *United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)*, questioned how transitional justice models can adapt to low-resource settings while still centring youth perspectives.

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### **Participant Engagement & Format Reflections**

The **shadow panel format** was praised for shifting traditional power dynamics and creating space for youth-led framing of complex policy issues. Participants responded positively, with several audience members sharing reflections on the value of intergenerational dialogue and the potential of youth to shape long-term peace and reconciliation efforts.

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### **General conclusions that could be drawn from this discussion were:**

**Embed youth leadership** in peace processes, constitution drafting, and governance transitions.

**Redesign sanctions frameworks** to minimise harm to civilians while maintaining accountability.

**Strengthen diaspora engagement** as a channel for advocacy, resources, and knowledge transfer.

**Support youth-led entrepreneurship** and economic innovation as tools for post-conflict recovery.

**Promote inclusive national narratives** that emphasise shared citizenship over identity divisions.

**Lift sanctions on Syria**, as the recent regime change has rendered the existing sanctions obsolete.

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## **Conclusion**

The session affirmed the centrality of Syrian youth and diaspora communities in shaping a peaceful, inclusive, and just future for Syria. With deep commitment, insight, and lived experience, the panellists demonstrated the importance of placing youth at the forefront of high-level dialogue. The shadow panel approach was widely recognised as a best practice for centring youth voices in policymaking spaces. It is worth noting that a key theme and major conclusion of the session was the urgency of lifting sanctions on Syria. As a backdrop to the discussions at the Stockholm Forum, and after the seminar, participants and organisers were reached by the news from US President Trump's meeting with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, in which they signaled the intention to lift US sanctions on Syria.