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بداية جديدة **Neuanfang**
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Event report:

Building Bridges for Syria's Future: Diaspora Engagement in Reconstruction – Annual event of the platform “A New Beginning for Syria” with Federal Minister Reem Alabali Radovan

Held under the auspices of Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development Reem Alabali Radovan, the first anniversary of the platform “A New Beginning for Syria” was marked on 21 April 2026 with a full-day event at the Humboldt Carré in Berlin, attended by more than 270 participants. The Syrian government was represented at high level by Hind Kabawat, Minister of Social Affairs and Labor. More than a year after the fall of the Assad regime, Syria continues to face major reconstruction challenges. The event aimed to recognize the many contributions and achievements of the Syrian diaspora in Germany in advancing reconstruction in Syria.

1. Welcome and opening: Development Minister Reem Alabali Radovan and Hind Kabawat, Syrian Minister of Social Affairs and Labor

The event was jointly opened by the two ministers. It was preceded by a photo exhibition featuring impressions from reconstruction projects by members of the platform “A New Beginning for Syria”, which the ministers visited.

Federal Minister Reem Alabali Radovan emphasized that the BMZ platform “A New Beginning for Syria” was established a year ago in response to impulses from German-Syrian civil society to channel the commitment of the diaspora and stakeholders in Syria toward reconstruction. She referred to the platform’s now more than 1,500 members and highlighted concrete results, including the “Syria Emergency Aid” initiative launched by Malek Alkoairi, which delivered relief supplies to a hospital in Damascus. She called for continued networking and dialogue. BMZ is supporting civil society initiatives on both sides (Germany/Syria) through instruments such as the Takamul Fund. She concluded by advocating open exchange with civil society, strengthening German-Syrian relations, and reaffirming the Federal Government’s commitment to peace and stability in the region.

Minister Hind Kabawat paid tribute to Germany’s solidarity and highlighted the opportunity for a Syrian new beginning built on bridges between the diaspora, the state, local communities, and civil society. She outlined a vision for return that requires dignity, security, voluntariness, and genuine opportunities, and emphasized the importance of jobs, the rule of law, inclusive institutions, and the central role of women. Kabawat described the diaspora as a key resource for knowledge transfer, innovation, and institution-building. Through the platform, networking, the development of ideas, and meaningful participation from abroad are to be facilitated. The Minister called for unity, collective healing, and transitional justice in order to build a democratic, inclusive, and rule-of-law-based future for Syria together, despite differing experiences.



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Three representatives of the Syrian diaspora then presented their German-Syrian reconstruction initiatives as success stories: **Robel Mutlu** (Syriac Cross), **Abdulaziz Ramadan** (DOZ e.V.), and **Farah Khalifeh** (Abjad Initiative for Education e.V.). A Q&A session with the audience concluded this opening segment.

2. Panel discussion: Building Bridges for the Future – “New” forms of cooperation between the diaspora and Syria

The panel explored the potential of diaspora engagement from the perspectives of academia, the Syrian government, civil society, and implementing agencies. There was consensus that, given Syria’s sensitive transition phase, protecting civic space, establishing reliable legal frameworks, and including marginalized groups must be central. For the diaspora’s role in reconstruction, key needs include transparency about shared principles and fault lines, better access to hard-to-reach areas, local investment, and exchange with international diaspora experiences. To implement shared visions, trust, safe spaces for local knowledge exchange, and viable cross-sector cooperation are also essential.

Speakers’ contributions:

- **Martin Russell** (The Diaspora Institute) highlighted the diaspora’s significant potential as a shaping force in Syria’s reconstruction. Beyond financial investment, it can wield powerful diplomatic capital. Overcoming polarization and adopting a long-term strategic orientation are crucial.
- **Bahjat Hajar** (Deputy Minister; Syrian Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor) stressed that the Syrian government welcomes diaspora engagement. Meaningful forms include capacity development and reorientation in key sectors — such as the economy, public administration, and institutions — toward a new sectoral culture. Priorities include closing camps by 2027 and digitizing and equipping state institutions.
- **Ashraf Rajab** (Madaniya) emphasized the need to expand and protect civic space and to build strong civil society structures in Syria. He called for a clear legal framework to enable engagement and for inclusive openness toward diaspora organizations.
- **Hafiza Hamoud** (Mehad Germany e.V.) advocated for equal partnerships and needs-based support. She highlighted the successes of women’s initiatives and addressed representation and access gaps, particularly for marginalized groups, youth, and women. She also stressed the importance of long-term funding, inclusion of local actors.
- **Thomas Müller** (GIZ) highlighted trust as a key factor and the basis for GIZ’s work in Syria. This requires creating spaces to systematize local knowledge and perspectives. Building long-term partnerships beyond project cycles and leveraging cross-sector and cross-regional initiatives are vital.



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3. Marketplace of engagement

More than 30 organizations (civil society diaspora relief organizations, implementing agencies, business associations) took part in the marketplace, presenting their German-Syrian initiatives and projects. Participants gained insights into the diverse engagement of the Syrian diaspora in creating future prospects in Syria. The format created space for exchange, networking, and potential cooperation.

Organizations represented with a stand included:

Abjad Initiative; Adopt a Revolution; Akademie für interkulturelle Bildung und Soziales; Agentur für Wirtschaft & Entwicklung (AWE); Aram Lab UG; Association of Syrian Alawites in Europe (ASAE); Balsam Deutsch-Arabische Gesellschaft für psychosoziale Gesundheit (DAGP); BINAA e.V.; Bundesverband mittelständische Wirtschaft (BVMW); Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ); Deutsch-Syrische Forschungstiftung e.V.; Deutsch-Syrischer Verein (DSV) e.V.; DWIA – Diaspora Women in Action; Engagement Global; Freie Deutsch-Syrische Gesellschaft e.V. (FDSG); Football Dreams Berlin; Global Clearance Solution; Ihsan e.V.; KfW Entwicklungsbank; NextGen Syria e.V.; “New Start for Syria” platform; Prisons Museum e.V.; SawaSyria; Städtepartnerschaft Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg – Dêrik e.V.; Stichting White Helmets Foundation/Truth Guardians; Syrian German Medical Association (SGMA) e.V.; Syrian Science Council; Syrian Youth Assembly; Syrischer Kulturverein Passau e.V.; Syrmania; The What If (TWI); Vejîn Initiative; Verband Deutsch-Syrischer Hilfsvereine (VDSH); Verband Kurdischer Ärzte in Deutschland e.V.; Verein SyrienHilfe e.V.; Violess e.V.; Wiederaufbaukanäle Syriens e.V.; World of Peace e.V.; Ziviler Friedensdienst (ZFD).

In a separate room, the workshop “Designing successful projects – effective, sustainable and eligible for funding” took place in parallel to the marketplace. **Ulrike Lauerhaß** (Advisor, EZ Small-Scale Projects Fund, Stiftung Nord-Süd-Brücken) and **Stephan Clauß** (Project Advisor, bengo/Engagement Global) were available in this advisory format to discuss questions on project development and implementation.

4. Brief reports from the workshops

In four separate exchange rounds, participants discussed the following topics in depth in the afternoon:

- The fishbowl discussion “**Achieving more together: The European diaspora in Syria’s reconstruction**” featured **Rand Sukhaita** (Syrian Civil Society Network Platform), **Rania Ali** (Madaniya), and **Rashed Alrashed** (Globally Connected), alongside numerous audience participants. A key asset highlighted was the combination of two perspectives: the diaspora’s access to European discourse spaces and its knowledge of local realities in Syria. Together, these form an important basis for diaspora diplomacy. Persistent challenges include fragmentation and polarization within the Syrian diaspora, the perceived artificial division between the “diaspora” and “Syrians on the ground,” and high bureaucratic barriers. A trauma-sensitive approach to planning and implementing activities was



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emphasized. The session was moderated by **Hannes Lambrecht** (“New Start for Syria” platform).

- The women-only workshop “**Women from the diaspora in Syria’s reconstruction**” was grounded in the core insight that reconstruction remains incomplete without women’s participation. Participants greatly valued this safer space for joint reflection. They noted that the diverse realities of women’s lives — including challenges related to working hours, care responsibilities, and the varying contexts of women inside and outside Syria — have not yet been sufficiently considered. Participants expressed deep concern about inadequate protection and the rise of digital violence and hate campaigns against women. With regard to the platform, areas for improvement were identified to ensure safe, non-discriminatory, and repression-free communication channels. Participants also expressed a desire for political support, specifically noting the need for an active role by the Syrian Embassy in Germany in promoting women’s issues. They further emphasized the need for better access to information on projects supporting women’s rights in Syria, as well as networking with national and international women’s networks to create a safe environment for collaboration and mutual support. The workshop was moderated by **Maria Al Abdeh**.
- In the workshop “**Economic engagement for Syria’s reconstruction**”, platform members from the private sector convened. The session opened with short inputs from **Salam Said** (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung), **Ghiath Bilal** (Frankly Solutions), **Yusuf Alsatom** (Tamkin), and **Saad Baradiy** (iproplan Planungsgesellschaft). Participants then discussed key barriers to private-sector engagement by diaspora actors in Syria and identified solutions, including better networking between Germany and Syria, mutual advice on market entry in Syria, and alignment with the new Syrian investment law. The workshop was co-organized with **Claude Blachette** (InfoDesk Syria, AWE) and moderated by **Ghiath Bilal**.
- In the workshop “**Syria 2035 – Civic education and participation**”, participants first developed a shared 2035 vision for a Syria in which political participation, social inclusion, and civic engagement are sustainably strengthened. Building on this vision, they used a backcasting approach to identify key prerequisites and fields of action. Priority topics that emerged included enhanced civic education, an inclusive and transparent electoral system, a multilingual and independent media landscape, and a national dialogue process during the transition phase. Participants also formulated concrete entry points for development cooperation: supporting an inclusive constitutional process, strengthening political participation and independent civil society structures, and establishing long-term, flexible, and structural funding mechanisms for Syrian civil society actors. The workshop was moderated by **Majid Albunni**.



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5. Closing

The event powerfully underscored the strong commitment and diversity of the Syrian diaspora, as well as the urgent need for long-term support. The day concluded with a summary and closing remarks by **Annette Chammas** (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development). At the evening reception, participants once again had the opportunity to exchange and network, accompanied by Syrian finger food and music by **Wassim Moukdad**. The recommendations and needs articulated for the platform during the event will inform future activity planning and the platform's further development.

Further information

For updates on upcoming events under the "New Start for Syria" platform, please subscribe to our [email distribution list](#) join our [LinkedIn group](#). We warmly invite you to join.