

# THE EU AND THE SYRIA CRISIS



*“In the 13<sup>th</sup> year since the Syrian regime violently repressed peaceful demonstrations and provoked a brutal conflict which continues to this day, we have not forgotten the Syrian people. We believe that the Syria crisis should be solved so that the Syrian people can once again live in peace and stability.*

*At the Brussels VII Syria conference, the whole international community must redouble its efforts to pressure the Syrian regime to stop abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law and commit to a political dialogue leading to a political solution, in line with UNSCR 2254 and in full support of Special Envoy Geir Pedersen.*

*The EU will continue to support all Syrians, refugees and host countries until a durable and comprehensive political solution is reached.”*

## Josep Borrell

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Vice-President of the Commission

March 15, 2023, marked 12 years since the beginning of the conflict in Syria. Violence persists across the country, and there has been little progress towards a sustainable resolution of the conflict. The recent earthquake exacerbated the suffering of the Syrian people, when humanitarian needs were already at their highest, since the crisis began. Over 90 per cent of the country lives below the poverty line. Corruption, mismanagement, and the operation of a war economy – as well as widespread human rights abuses - prevent any sort of meaningful recovery. A comprehensive political solution is required so that the people of Syria can build a peaceful future.

The European Union firmly believes that only a credible political solution in line with UN Security Council **resolution 2254<sup>1</sup>** and the **2012 Geneva Communiqué<sup>2</sup>** will ensure a peaceful future and sustainable stability for Syria and the region.

The EU continues to support a UN-mediated, inclusive, credible, Syrian-led and Syrian-owned dialogue in Geneva as the only route to a genuine political solution and a peaceful, prosperous future for the Syrian people.

The EU remains engaged with regional and international partners and with Syrian civil society to support the UN-led Geneva process. The EU also continues to provide a range of assistance to the Syrian population, as well as to refugees and the communities that host them in neighbouring countries.

The conflict has provoked a massive displacement crisis. Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan in particular, also Egypt and Iraq, have shown extraordinary solidarity over more than a decade towards at least 5.7 million registered refugees from Syria. Syrian refugees continue to require support in order to help meet the growing needs not just of the refugees, but of the communities hosting them.

The EU supports Syrian refugees and their aspiration to live safely in their own country. **The right to safe, voluntary, and dignified return is a right of refugees and internally displaced persons**, to be exercised on an individual, not a group basis. Refugees and those displaced must be able to return to their places of origin in safety, with dignity, and voluntarily. The EU supports the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

1 - United Nations Security Council resolution 2254 was unanimously adopted on 18 December 2015. It calls for a nation-wide ceasefire, unhindered humanitarian access and a political settlement in Syria.

2 - The Geneva Communiqué was issued on 30 June 2012 after a meeting of the UN-backed Action Group for Syria. It laid out a six-point plan intended to stop the violence and move the two sides towards a political settlement. It was endorsed by UN Security Council resolution 2118/2013.



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(UNHCR) in its demand that these conditions are in place before organised returns can proceed with the support of the international community: UNHCR and other mandated humanitarian organisations must have access to the entire territory of Syria in order to monitor return conditions, assess needs independently, and deliver services to all, on the basis solely of need.

Until appropriate conditions are in place, it is essential to maintain asylum spaces in host countries and to continue strengthening the resilience of refugees and the communities that host them. Hence **the EU continues to show solidarity with and support for refugee-hosting countries. The EU's assistance in response to the Syrian crisis benefits Syrian refugees and the Turkish, Lebanese, and Jordanian people**, by helping to create job opportunities and by improving infrastructure such as schools, health services, water treatment and supply.

**The EU will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only once a comprehensive, genuine, and inclusive political transition is firmly underway**, negotiated by the Syrian parties on the basis of United Nations Security Council resolution 2254 and the 2012 Geneva Communiqué.

It is the position of the EU that **accountability and justice for the victims of the terrible crimes perpetrated during the course of the conflict will be essential to the building of a peaceful future for the Syrian people**. The EU will continue to support efforts, in particular by the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria and the UN Commission of Inquiry, to gather evidence with a view to future legal action. In the absence of international judicial processes, the prosecution of war crimes and other serious crimes under national jurisdiction, now under way in several EU Member States, makes a crucial contribution towards securing justice for Syria.

The EU welcomed the release by the United Nations Secretary-General in August 2022 of a report on Missing people in the Syrian Arab Republic. Syria has one of the highest numbers of detained, abducted and missing persons in the world. The Secretary-General's report proposes the establishment of a new institution dedicated to clarifying their fate and whereabouts, and to providing support to victims, survivors and the families of those missing. The EU is ready to consider ways of supporting the new mechanism.

## EU SANCTIONS



Since 2011, the EU has put in place targeted sanctions against the Assad regime and its supporters, in response to the violent repression of the civilian population. EU sanctions seek to bring about a change in the policy or in the conduct of the regime. In the case of Syria, sanctions are a clear signal that the repressive policies of the regime, including the expropriation of land for political purposes, as well as the production and use of chemical weapons, are considered unacceptable by the European Union. They are intended to

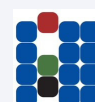
help persuade the Syrian regime to engage in negotiations of a lasting political settlement of the Syrian crisis in line with UN Security Council resolution 2254.

EU sanctions in view of the situation in Syria principally target specific individuals and entities. The EU imposes a travel ban and an asset freeze on 322 individuals and 81 entities (companies, organizations) directly responsible for the violent repression of the civilian population. None of these people, or organisations, may access the EU, and their assets in the EU are frozen. Just two months ago the list was again expanded to include individuals and entities responsible for the trade in narcotics, notably Captagon, which enriches the inner circle of the regime and provides it with revenue to maintain its policies of repression. The EU also imposes certain economic measures concerning specific sectors, designed to impact the regime whilst minimising any potential negative impacts on the civilian population.

EU sanctions are specifically targeted and are also designed to avoid impeding the provision of humanitarian assistance to any part of the country. Nor do they prohibit the export of food, medicines, or medical equipment by the EU to Syria, or in any way target Syria's healthcare system. It is the regime in Damascus that is responsible for the suffering of the Syrian people, not the sanctions regime.



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# HOW IS THE EU HELPING?



**Saving lives**  
by addressing the **humanitarian needs** of the most vulnerable across the country and in the region



**Supporting the UN-mediated intra-Syrian negotiations** for a genuine political transition



**Strengthening Syrian civil society** organisations providing community support to the population and promoting democracy, human rights and freedom of expression: Syrians must be safe and free, able to live in dignity in their own country



**Promoting national reconciliation**, transitional justice, justice for detainees, missing persons and their families, and **accountability** for war crimes



Supporting the **resilience of Syria's population** and society, **refugees** in neighbouring countries, and of the **communities and countries that host them**

**€30 billion**

Since the start of the conflict in 2011, the EU and its Member States have mobilised over **€30 billion** to help those affected by the Syrian war. This makes the EU collectively the **largest provider of international aid in response to the Syria crisis**, delivering humanitarian, stabilisation and resilience assistance inside Syria and in neighbouring countries.

## BRUSSELS VII CONFERENCE ON “SUPPORTING THE FUTURE OF SYRIA AND THE REGION”, 14-15 JUNE 2023

The overarching objective of the Brussels Conferences is to support the Syrian people inside Syria and across the region, and mobilise the international community in support of a lasting political solution to the Syria crisis, in line with UN Security Council resolution 2254. As was the case at the six previous conferences, participants will address the most critical humanitarian and resilience issues affecting the Syrian people, and neighbouring countries hosting people forcibly displaced from Syria. The Conference will renew the international community's political and financial support for Syria's neighbours, particularly Türkiye, Lebanon, and Jordan, as well as Egypt and Iraq. Brussels VII will be the main pledging event for Syria and the region in 2023. As in previous years, the Conference will also provide a platform for dialogue with civil society and NGOs active in Syria and the region in the weeks leading up to the conference - through an online survey and targeted discussions with EU and UN local partners in Syria and the region - as well as through the Day of Dialogue itself, on 14 June.



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