

# Expatriate Card in Raqqa

## Implications and Development Propositions

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## INTRODUCTION

The Autonomous Administration of Northeastern Syria introduced the "Expatriate Card" system to enhance security and stability in areas under its control, including Raqqqa. This system aims to regulate the presence of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and expats by verifying their identities and preventing the infiltration of unwanted members that could pose security threats. However, many expats find the justifications for this system unconvincing, arguing that the procedures for obtaining the "Expatriate Card" add to their burdens and restrict their freedom of movement and work within these areas.

In response to the security challenges posed by ISIS/Daesh's previous control over large parts of Syria, which significantly destabilized the region, the "Expatriate Card" system was introduced as a preventive measure in 2019. It requires individuals with personal records outside of Autonomous Administration-controlled areas to obtain this card to enter and reside in northern and eastern Syria. A 2022 statement by the Interior Ministry in North and East Syria asserted that these areas have been a haven for Syrians fleeing war and terrorism, and the "Expatriate Card" system is part of their commitment to ensuring the rights of displaced persons and expats, allowing them to live normally alongside other citizens. The Autonomous Administration also claimed that the system has been effective in detecting several ISIS members attempting to use forged identity cards to move within these areas, thereby bolstering security and stability.

Despite these justifications, the "Expatriate Card" system has sparked significant debate among IDPs and newcomers to Raqqqa and surrounding areas. Many expats feel that the system discriminates against them compared to the region's original inhabitants, subjecting them to administrative and bureaucratic restrictions that hinder their ability to move and work freely. They believe there is an urgent need to review this system and develop fairer solutions for expats who have been living in these areas for many years.







## SIGNIFICANCE

Since the "Expatriate Card" system was introduced in 2019, its primary goal has been to enhance security and stability in areas under Autonomous Administration control and to regulate the presence of IDPs and expats. Despite these security aims, the system presents significant challenges for expatriates, including bureaucratic burdens and restrictions that may greatly impact their freedom of movement and work, raising concerns about the balance between security objectives and human rights.

From a social perspective, the "Expatriate Card" system should ideally facilitate the provision of essential services to IDPs and expats, such as healthcare and education. However, in its current form, the system needs to effectively achieve this goal and needs clear strategies for addressing increasing population density and resource shortages. Economically, the system has the potential to organize the local labor market if it is further developed, thereby improving the economic conditions of both the local community and expats. By offering tailored facilities that align with local market needs, the system could enhance employment opportunities and help regulate economic activities in a fair and efficient manner.

In this context, the importance of this paper lies in providing a comprehensive vision for improving the "Expatriate Card" system based on the perspectives of the local community and expats. By proposing solutions to overcome the obstacles faced by expats, the paper aims to contribute to Justice for Life's efforts in bridging the gap between local communities and decision-makers in the region. Additionally, it seeks to promote human rights and ensure a balance between security objectives and individual rights, thereby contributing to greater social and economic stability.

# OBJECTIVES

Given the challenges and burdens that the current "Expat Card" system imposes on those who have relocated to Raqqa and on residents whose records are outside the Autonomous Administration's control areas, this paper seeks to accomplish the following objectives:

- 1 . Analyzing the effectiveness of the " Expat Card ” system in enhancing security and stability:
  - Gaining insight into the security and other reasons that led to the establishment of the "Expat Card" system.
  - Assessing the system's effectiveness in meeting its goals by analyzing the security situation before and after its implementation.
  - Investigating ways to enhance communication between local authorities and the community to foster a better understanding of the system and its objectives.
- 2 . Assessing the impact of the “Expat Card” system on the local community and IDPs:
  - Examining the challenges individuals face, including vulnerable groups such as children, women, people with disabilities, and the elderly, in obtaining the "Expat Card," focusing on the bureaucratic and financial burdens and how they affect their daily lives.
  - Analyzing the impact of the " Expat Card " system on social cohesion and the relationships between the local population and IDP individuals ensures that no discrimination or exploitation occurs.
- 3 . Reviewing the implications of the " Expat Card " on the economic and living aspects:
  - Investigating the extent to which the " Expat Card " system impacts economic development and the organization of the local labor market.
  - Understanding whether the system contributes to improving economic conditions or restricts opportunities for expatriates.
- 4 . Submitting proposals for the development and improvement of the " Expat Card ” system:
  - Suggesting necessary modifications to streamline the administrative process of the system and simplify the procedures for obtaining the card.
  - Exploring ways to minimize exploitation by sponsors and enhance the relationship between IDPs and the local community.
  - Identifying actionable steps to ensure the system becomes more effective and efficient.

## SOURCES OF DATA

To achieve the objectives of this paper, two types of data were relied upon to ensure the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the analysis:

- 1- **Primary Sources:** The findings from focus group discussions held in Raqqa, where three sessions took place on July 22, August 4, and August 6, 2024. Each session included eight participants representing different segments of society, such as the local population, expats, and IDPs, as well as representatives from civil society and Autonomous Administration institutions in Raqqa. The sessions were designed with gender balance to ensure the consideration of diverse perspectives.
- 2- **Secondary Sources:** This data includes official decisions issued by the Interior Authority for Northeastern Syria related to the "Expat Card" system, along with human rights reports documenting the system's impact on IDPs and expats, prepared by the "Justice for Life" organization and other relevant organizations. Additionally, published press materials and reports addressing the system and its effects were reviewed. A thorough review informed the focus group discussions of these reports and press materials, which provided a clear framework for the discussions, encompassing all relevant aspects.

## FINDINGS

Based on the in-depth discussions that took place during the three focus group discussion sessions held in Raqqa, the following results were reached:

### The First Theme: The Role of the Implementation of the "Expatriate Card " System in Enhancing the Level of Security in Raqqa

This theme shows the motives of the Autonomous Administration to approve the "Expatriate Card" and its implications for the security situation and the position of the local community towards expats and residents.

#### Motives for Imposing the "Expatriate Card" System and the Extent of Societal Acceptance of it

1. Due to the large-scale military operations in Raqqa during the battles against ISIS, along with similar conditions in the areas from which people have been displaced, the loss of identification documents has become a significant issue. This challenge is especially critical for IDPs, as it impedes their ability to move, reside, and work in their new locations. The absence of identification papers complicates daily life and creates additional barriers, such as difficulties in registering births, accessing education, and obtaining essential services. In this context, local community representatives, civil society organizations, and expats to Raqqa emphasize the urgent need to provide identification cards as a fundamental right, particularly given the lack of other alternatives amid the ongoing conflict. However, expatriates face considerable challenges due to the bureaucratic complexities involved in obtaining the "Expatriate Card," which is often the only available form of identification for them. These bureaucratic hurdles, especially in light of the deteriorating humanitarian situation, seem unreasonable and fail to fulfill the organizational objectives they were designed for. Instead, the current form of the "Expatriate Card" tends to be discriminatory towards expats, indirectly casting them under security suspicion. This situation exacerbates their suffering, hinders their integration into the local community, and underscores the urgent need to reconsider and simplify the process of issuing this card to strike a balance between security needs and basic human rights.
2. Despite the declaration of victory over ISIS in March 2019, following the control of its last stronghold in the Baghouz area in eastern countryside of Deir Ezzor, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), supported by the U.S.-led International Coalition to Combat Terrorism, have not fully concluded their military operations. They continue to work on tasks such as maintaining stability in Northeastern Syria and pursuing the remnants of ISIS. The "Expatriate Card" can be seen as part of the security control mechanisms, as stated by the Autonomous Administration. However, representatives of the local community, civil society organizations, and expats argue that the current security situation in the region

is significantly different from that of 2019. They believe the "Expatriate Card" system should be updated to address the current security challenges, which go beyond terrorism and include issues like the widespread availability of weapons, drug trafficking, and other threats to local security. These issues, they contend, cannot be resolved by imposing additional complications on IDPs and expats in Raqqa.

3. Despite the security justifications provided by the Autonomous Administration, some session participants suspect that there is a hidden demographic agenda behind the "Expatriate Card" system. They question why **"IDPs from Ma'adan in the Raqqa countryside are required to have this card while those from Tal Abyad in the same governorate are not, raising concerns about the criteria used to implement this system"**. One participant noted that **"this selective application of the "Expatriate Card" reinforces the perception that the Arab community is being particularly targeted. Displaced individuals from Deir Ezzor and other Arab-majority areas in Northeastern Syria face these measures more strictly than the Kurdish population. This discrepancy fuels a sense of inequality and discrimination, leading some to believe that the system's true aim may not be solely security-related"**. This perceived marginalization heightens concerns among the affected populations, who fear that the "Expatriate Card" system might exacerbate social and ethnic tensions instead of promoting the security and stability it was intended to achieve.
4. Participants in the sessions agreed that the implementation of the "Expatriate Card" often seems inconsistent and poorly thought out, which only serves to deepen societal divisions and amplify tensions. The lack of clear and transparent communication and dialogue mechanisms between citizens and the Autonomous Administration institutions in Raqqa contributes to widening these gaps. This situation places additional burdens on those arriving in Raqqa and fosters a growing sense of frustration among the affected groups.
5. Despite several initiatives by local civil society organizations and community leaders aimed at establishing channels for dialogue with representatives from the Interior Ministry and other institutions within the Autonomous Administration, most participants believe these efforts have not led to any significant changes in alleviating the imposed measures. Although some representatives from the Autonomous Administration did attend the sessions and participated in the dialogue, their response remained limited to mere participation in discussions without translating these dialogues into practical actions.

## The Security Situation under the Application of the "Expatriate Card" System

Participants in the sessions voiced their concern that the security situation in Raqqa and its surrounding areas has not significantly improved since the application of the "Expatriate Card" system in 2019. Despite efforts to enhance security through this system, the region continues to face substantial challenges. Those seeking to enter the area can often bypass security checkpoints through informal routes, calling into question the effectiveness of the "Expatriate Card" in its current form.

Furthermore, individuals intending to carry out terrorist activities or compromise security are unlikely to be deterred by the requirement to obtain an "Expatriate Card", which leads many to believe that the system fails to achieve its intended security objectives. Additionally, the northeastern regions of Syria have open borders with Turkey and Iraq, which facilitates the activities of networks involved in smuggling people and weapons across these borders. Given this situation, participants argue that tightening bureaucratic procedures on civilians within Raqqa and its surrounding areas, such as through the " Expatriate Card" system, will not be sufficient to enhance security in the region.

Instead, they suggest that the focus should be on improving security infrastructure and fostering cooperation with the local community to combat security threats. Achieving this goal requires building trust between the local administration and the community through effective dialogue and the implementation of procedures that safeguard individuals' rights without imposing additional burdens that could exacerbate social tensions.

### The Impact of the Lack of Communication between the Autonomous Administration and the Local Community on Stability under the "Expatriate Card" System

Participants believe that the lack of effective communication between the local community and expats, on one side, and the institutions of the Autonomous Administration in Northeastern Syria, on the other, significantly impacts efforts to achieve stability in the region, particularly given the implementation of the current "Expatriate Card" system. Although this system is allegedly designed to enhance security and organization, it suffers from structural issues that heighten social tensions and impede stabilization efforts.

Firstly, the absence of clear and transparent communication between the administration, the local community, and expats leads to misunderstandings regarding the true purpose of the "Expatriate Card." This lack of communication breeds suspicion and mistrust among the various parties, further intensifying social tensions.

Secondly, the bureaucratic complexities that IDPs encounter when trying to obtain an "Expatriate Card" deepen their feelings of marginalization and discrimination. Without effective communication and dialogue channels, these procedures become an additional burden, exacerbating their daily struggles and hindering their integration into the local community. These challenges weaken the social bonds between expats and the local population, leading to divisions that obstruct the achievement of the desired stability.

Thirdly, the few initiatives undertaken by civil society organizations to establish dialogue with the Autonomous Administration have yielded minimal results. The lack of concrete actions following these dialogues leaves expats feeling unheard and that their issues are not being adequately addressed. This sense of exclusion amplifies frustration among the affected groups and widens the gap between them and the Autonomous Administration.

## The Second Theme: The Impact of the Expat Card on the Local Community and the Displaced in Raqqa

This theme aimed to study the bureaucratic and financial challenges faced by individuals in obtaining and renewing the “Expat Card” and analyze its impact on their daily lives and social cohesion, in addition to exploring the role of the regime in integrating the IDPs within the host community.

### Issuing the Expat Card and the Challenges Related to it

Regarding the process for obtaining the “Expat Card”, participants noted that, in theory, and from an administrative perspective, the procedure requires the expat to submit a letter from the neighborhood council where they reside, which includes a certificate of residence. This must be accompanied by four personal photos, a copy of their identification card (if available), and a guarantor/sponsor from the local residents. The letter is then sent to the relevant People's House for approval, followed by ratification by the City Council, before being returned to the Civil Registry Committee, which issues the card after the required fees are paid.

However, participants pointed out that in practice, the process is far more complicated, with the examination of the application sometimes taking more than two months, in addition to facing the following challenges:

1. Participants voiced concern that the process of applying for the “Expat Card” is currently limited to a single center within the city of Raqqa. While this single center was sufficient when the “Expat Card” system was first introduced, the recent increase in arrivals to Raqqa has revealed that one center is no longer adequate to meet the growing demand. This has led to severe overcrowding, with some families being forced to wait for long hours and, in some cases, return the next day to complete their procedures. Additionally, all family members of the applicant, including children and the elderly, are required to be present at the center, which significantly increases their burden. The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that this center is not equipped with waiting areas or protection from the harsh summer sun. These conditions make the process even more difficult, placing additional strain on the most vulnerable members of society, such as children and the elderly. Participants emphasized the urgent need to expand the availability of services and improve the application procedures to alleviate the burden on expats.
2. Alongside the challenges faced by the elderly and children during the application process for the “Expat Card,” participants highlighted that the current system lacks any special accommodations or considerations for people with disabilities and women without male breadwinners who have come to Raqqa from other areas. This absence of humanitarian facilities and exceptions increases the suffering of these vulnerable groups, as they are forced to endure the same complex and burdensome procedures as everyone else, with

no regard for their unique circumstances. People with disabilities, in particular, may face physical or sensory challenges that make it extremely difficult for them to travel to and attend the designated centers, especially if those centers are not equipped with the appropriate facilities to accommodate their needs.

3. Participants observed that the costs associated with obtaining an "Expatriate Card" often impose a significant burden on IDPs. While the direct administrative fees for the card may not be inherently high, additional costs such as transportation to the designated center, the applicant and their sponsor's time away from work, and the need for multiple visits to complete the process all contribute to increasing the financial and psychological strain on applicants. These hidden costs accumulate quickly, making the process cumbersome for many displaced families who are already struggling with difficult economic conditions. Beyond the pressures of daily life and the challenges IDPs face in meeting their basic needs, obtaining an Expatriate Card becomes an unexpected additional burden. The costs incurred from frequent trips are not just material expenses; they also represent the loss of valuable time that could be spent working or seeking opportunities to improve living conditions. The requirement for the sponsor to attend the center further exacerbates these burdens, as it necessitates coordination with the sponsor, who may have their own responsibilities.
4. Participants agreed that the requirement to renew the "Expatriate Card" every six months presents a significant challenge for expats. They find themselves forced to repeat the entire process frequently, making it physically and mentally exhausting. Periodic renewal necessitates re-coordination with the sponsor, which is not easy due to the potential instability of sponsors or their other commitments. Additionally, the expat must re-collect the required papers and documents, adding even more pressure and contributing to a sense of instability.
5. The issue of exploitation by sponsors emerges as an additional obstacle. Some participants shared experiences of exploitation, where sponsors demanded payment in exchange for providing the necessary sponsorship to complete the card process. The exploitation does not stop there; some sponsors further take advantage of expats by threatening to withdraw their sponsorship if the requested amounts are not paid on time. This constant threat places expats under significant psychological pressure and risks them losing their documents and legal rights if they fail to comply with the sponsor's demands. Although such cases are relatively few, their existence highlights gaps in the current system and underscores the urgent need for greater protection for expats against such practices.

## Impact of the Expatriate Card on Social Cohesion and Relations between Locals and IDPs

Challenges associated with the issuance of the "Expatriate Card" in Raqqa significantly impact social cohesion and the relationship between the local community and expats, as highlighted by participants during the sessions. These challenges contribute to creating an environment filled with tension and frustration in several ways:



1. **Increasing Social Tensions and Divisions:** The implementation of the "Expat Card" system, which targets IDPs from areas outside the control of the Autonomous Administration and expatriates from regions like Deir Ezzor and Ma'adan while excluding other areas, fosters a sense of discrimination among the various social components in Raqqa and the incoming populations. In some cases, this card is perceived as a symbol of administrative discrimination. This real or perceived discrimination can widen the gap between the local community and expat groups, threatening the social cohesion needed to stabilize the region. Additionally, the lack of effective communication and dialogue channels with local authorities, coupled with the neglect of concerns and demands related to easing the "Expat Card" procedures, turns these tensions into an ongoing source of societal divisions. This reinforces the expats' feelings of being treated as second-class citizens, intensifies anger and hostility towards others, and undermines the potential for achieving sustainable social stability.
2. **Discrimination and Exploitation:** Exploitative practices not only add to financial burdens but also foster feelings of injustice and discrimination. Many expats perceive the system as intentionally designed to be unfair, making them susceptible to exploitation due to their vulnerability and limited ability to assert their rights in a legal and just manner. This situation complicates social dynamics in a society already grappling with various social and economic issues. Such exploitation can intensify tensions between different population groups and heighten the sense of injustice, potentially leading expats to withdraw from the local community and further weakening social cohesion.
3. **Psychosocial Fatigue:** The need to renew the "Card" every six months, involving repeated paperwork and interactions with sponsors, not only drains expats' time and resources but also contributes to psychological exhaustion and instability. When individuals experience ongoing, complex, and taxing procedures, their ability to integrate positively into the host community diminishes. This fatigue can result in social isolation as expats struggle to engage fully in community life.
4. **Eroded Trust in Institutions:** Bureaucratic hurdles and the lack of effective legal protection against exploitation undermine trust in local institutions. When expats observe that the system is not only inefficient but also susceptible to misuse for personal gain, their faith in Autonomous Administration diminishes. This diminished trust exacerbates the divide between expats and authorities, obstructing efforts to foster communication and collaboration. Without trust, building a cohesive and stable society becomes challenging.

## The Third Theme: The Implications of the "Expatriate Card" on the Economic and Living Aspects

This theme focused on examining and understanding the various impacts of the "Expatriate Card" system on regional economic development. It aimed to explore whether the "Expatriate Card" could potentially boost economic opportunities for IDPs or, on the other hand, impose additional barriers that impede their integration into the local economy.

### The Impact of the "Expatriate Card" on Economic Development and the Local Labor Market

According to participants, the "Expatriate Card" has a dual impact on economic development and the local labor market in areas controlled by the Autonomous Administration. On the one hand, the card facilitates and regulates movement, which somewhat improves regional security, although informal routes are still used. It also allows cardholders to obtain commercial registration, a crucial step for starting a business. However, securing this registration involves meeting all the paperwork requirements for the card and navigating a lengthy and complex application process for the commercial register.

These complexities create an investment-unfriendly environment, particularly in Northeastern Syria, including Raqqa, where strict regulations govern import and export operations, the transfer of commercial materials, and product pricing. These restrictions pose significant challenges for expats looking to work and invest in the region, making it difficult to overcome bureaucratic obstacles. As a result, many expats may feel discouraged and choose not to apply for the "Expatriate Card" due to these complexities and the broader difficulties of the local labor market.

The "Expatriate Card" is more than just an administrative document; it is part of a broader system that includes relevant commercial and investment laws. If the Autonomous Administration is genuinely committed to fostering economic development and opening the local market to investment, it must reconsider how to streamline these processes to encourage more expats to engage with and contribute to the local economy.

Additionally, the current version of the "Card" does not address the urgent need to attract specialized skills, particularly in critical sectors such as health and education. Northeastern Syria, including Raqqa, faces a severe shortage of qualified personnel in these fields, which undermines the provision of essential services for both local and expat populations.

The absence of a clear or incentivizing mechanism within the "Expatriate Card" system to attract these crucial competencies exacerbates the shortage. For instance, providing exemptions from some of the complex requirements or expediting the card application process for highly skilled professionals could help address this issue. Still, such provisions are lacking in the current system. As a result, skilled professionals encounter the same bureaucratic challenges as others, leading

many to seek opportunities elsewhere or migrate rather than contribute to local development. This gap in attracting talent hampers the region's ability to achieve sustainable development and limits progress in health, education, and other essential sectors. By not addressing these needs, the "Expatriate Card" system risks missing valuable opportunities to improve infrastructure and advance economic and social development.

### The Role of the “Expatriate Card” in Improving or Restricting Economic Opportunities for Expats

At the individual level, the "Expatriate Card" has a dual impact on those arriving in Raqqqa. It can either open doors to new economic opportunities or become a significant barrier to economic and professional stability. Ideally, the card is intended to regulate expats' presence and ensure their legal participation in the local labor market. However, the reality is more complicated, as the bureaucratic processes involved in obtaining and renewing the card impose a heavy burden on expats.

Many expats are compelled to navigate complex and costly procedures to obtain and renew the card, which requires significant effort. Participants in the sessions shared experiences of expats who lost their jobs due to the expiry or delay in issuing the card, particularly affecting those in civil society organizations, office jobs, and education. Despite their skills and competencies, these expats often face limited job options that do not reflect their true abilities, leading many to pursue self-employment, which may not offer the same economic stability.

In these conditions, Raqqqa's work environment becomes less welcoming to expats seeking to build a stable life. Economic opportunities diminish, especially for those without strong local social connections or property ownership. Consequently, the “Expatriate Card”, rather than facilitating integration and enhancing economic opportunities, often becomes an additional obstacle that exacerbates expats' isolation and hinders their ability to capitalize on available opportunities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Through extensive and in-depth discussions on the "Expatriate Card" system across three focus group discussions held in Raqqqa, several key recommendations emerged from various stakeholders, including local community representatives, civil society organizations, and expats themselves. **In the light of the Autonomous Administration's decision to retain the "Expatriate Card" amid its social and economic impacts, these recommendations offer practical and viable solutions. The aim is to ease the challenges faced by newcomers in Raqqqa, improve their conditions, foster better integration with the local community, and ultimately enhance regional stability in a more sustainable manner.**

### At the Security Level

#### Reassessment of the Security System to Keep Pace with New Challenges

Given the rapid security changes since 2019, it is crucial for the Autonomous Administration to reassess the "Expatriate Card" system to address current threats such as the proliferation of weapons and increased drug smuggling. This review should prioritize enhancing security while avoiding undue burdens on newcomers from specific areas. It is important to strike a balance between security needs and human rights in this reassessment.

#### Strengthen Partnership with the Local Community to Ensure Security

To improve security effectively and sustainably, the Autonomous Administration should strengthen its collaboration with local communities. This can be achieved by establishing joint committees that include representatives from both the administration and the local community, with the main goal of monitoring and addressing security threats. Engaging the local population in the development of security policies helps build mutual trust, supports long-term stability, and streamlines the processes for issuing, amending, and implementing various laws and decisions, including the "Expatriate Card".

#### Review Demographic Policies to Ensure Social Justice

The Autonomous Administration must ensure that the "Expatriate Card" system does not introduce any demographic factors that could impact the population balance in Raqqqa. The system's goals should be confined to enhancing security and stability without disrupting social relations or ethnic balance in the region. This can be achieved by regularly reviewing policies and ensuring their fair and transparent implementation.

## Enhancing Transparency and Communication with the Local Community and Expats

To ensure a clear understanding of the true objectives of the “Expatriate Card” system, the Autonomous Administration should enhance communication channels with both the local community and expatriates. Civil society can actively contribute by organizing awareness workshops and holding regular meetings with community representatives and expats. These activities can help clarify the security objectives and provide guidance on obtaining and using the card. Additionally, utilizing media platforms to share information periodically can improve transparency and build trust among all parties involved.

### At the Level of Procedures for Obtaining the "Expatriate Card"

#### Streamline Bureaucratic Procedures to Ease the Burden on Expats:

Given the challenging humanitarian conditions faced by IDPs, the Autonomous Administration should streamline the process for obtaining the “Expatriate Card.” This involves a comprehensive review of current procedures to reduce the number of required documents and make exceptions for the most vulnerable groups, such as women, heads of households, individuals with disabilities, and the elderly.

#### Expansion and Improvement of Card Issuance and Renewal Centers:

To prevent overcrowding and improve access to services, additional centers for issuing and renewing the "Expatriate Card" should be established in various areas of Raqqa, or the role of neighborhood councils should be enhanced. These centers should be well-equipped with benches, sun protection, and specialized services for the elderly, children, and persons with disabilities to enhance waiting room conditions.

#### Reducing the Financial Burdens Associated with the Card:

Administrative fees can be a barrier for the most vulnerable groups, so the Autonomous Administration should consider reducing or removing these fees for individuals with no income or limited income. Additionally, opening more centers with strategic geographical distribution throughout Raqqa could help ease the financial burden associated with traveling to and from these centers.

#### Activating the Breadwinners’ Sponsorship for his/her Family:

It is crucial to modify the expatriate sponsorship system to cover all family members, ensuring protection and stability for expatriate families. A single sponsor should be responsible for the main breadwinner. Once the "Expatriate Card" is issued to the breadwinner, it should automatically extend to all dependent family members without requiring separate sponsorship processes for each

individual. This approach would streamline the registration and integration process for expatriate families, enhance their sense of security and stability in the new area, and ensure that the entire family is covered under one legal framework.

#### Expat Card Validity Extension:

To alleviate the psychological and financial burdens on expats, it is recommended to extend the renewal period of the card to be longer. This amendment will reduce the risk of expats losing their jobs due to the expiry of the card and enhance their social and economic stability in Raqqa.

#### Anti-Exploitation by Sponsors:

To prevent exploitation, it is important to enhance the role of the Expats Committee and create an effective, confidential complaints system where expats can report exploitation by sponsors without fear of reprisal. Supervision of sponsors should be increased to ensure they do not exploit expats, with strict penalties for those who violate the rules. Additionally, organizing the sponsorship process systematically involving tribal sheiks could help reduce instances of exploitation.

### At the Level of Strengthening Community Cohesion and Trust in Institutions

#### Creating Effective and Sustainable Dialogue Channels:

Autonomous Administration should establish communication channels with expats and the local community through periodic hearings, joint task forces to assess the "Expat Card" system, and other procedures. Developing the system based on community feedback will help identify problems and propose suitable solutions, thereby supporting social cohesion and improving the effectiveness of the "Expat Card".

#### Enhancing Communication and Building Trust between the Community and Local Institutions:

Permanent dialogue platforms should be created to bring together expats, the local community, and the Autonomous Administration in a neutral setting. Local civil society organizations, with support from the authorities in Raqqa, should lead these initiatives to address common challenges and develop mutually agreed-upon solutions. Enhancing transparency in decisions related to the "Expat Card" system and other measures while clearly communicating security objectives to dispel doubts will help build trust and strengthen regional stability.

#### Promoting Social Cohesion through Joint Activities:

Civil society organizations should initiate awareness campaigns that highlight the importance of solidarity between the local population and expats, emphasizing that everyone is affected by the

conflict to help ease any existing tensions. Additionally, promoting joint activities like cultural events, craft workshops, and community projects will strengthen social bonds and bridge the gap between expats and the local community.

### **A Comprehensive Review of the System and the Application of Unified Standards:**

The Autonomous Administration should carry out a thorough review of the “Expatriate Card” system to ensure it is applied fairly and without discrimination to all expats. This can be accomplished by generating periodic reports on the system's effectiveness and its effects on social and security stability and adjusting based on concrete findings. Regular reviews will help continually improve the system and prevent divisions among different social groups.

## **At the Economic Level**

### **Improve the Working Environment**

To effectively integrate expats into the local labor market, the data gathered during the “Expatriate Card” application process should be utilized. This information can help create a comprehensive database of the practical and scientific skills that expats offer. With this database, training and qualification programs can be developed in collaboration with civil society organizations to integrate expats into the local job market systematically. Additionally, communication platforms should be established to connect expats with local employers, facilitating the recruitment process and maximizing the use of expats' skills. These efforts will not only improve the living conditions of expats but also enhance the local market by introducing new, qualified talent that supports the advancement of the local economy.

### **Developing the Procedures of the "Expatriate Card" to Attract Professional Competencies:**

To attract top-tier professionals, it is important to exempt them from some of the complex procedures or speed up obtaining the card. This could involve issuing special cards with additional privileges to encourage these skilled individuals to settle and contribute to local development.

### **Promote Investment Opportunities and Facilitate Business:**

To improve the economic environment for expats, it is essential to simplify the procedures for obtaining a commercial register and streamline the process for acquiring the necessary licenses to start projects. These changes will directly contribute to strengthening the local economy.