

Ninth Regional Survey on

Syrian Refugees' Perceptions & Intentions on Return to Syria

Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon

June 2024

www.unhcr.org

Executive Summary

It is a fundamental right for refugees to return to their home country at a time of their own choosing in a voluntary, safe and dignified manner. Refugees are best placed to make that decision, based on their individual situation, that of their family and situation in their countries of origin.

The Syria crisis, now in its fourteenth year, remains one of the largest displacement crises in the world. Over five million registered Syrian refugees are hosted by neighbouring countries, which are suffering political, economic and social repercussions attributed to multi-layered regional and global crises in recent years. Meanwhile, in Syria, the political and security situation remain bleak and humanitarian and socio-economic

conditions are worsening. Over 12 million Syrians remain displaced internally and in neighbouring countries.

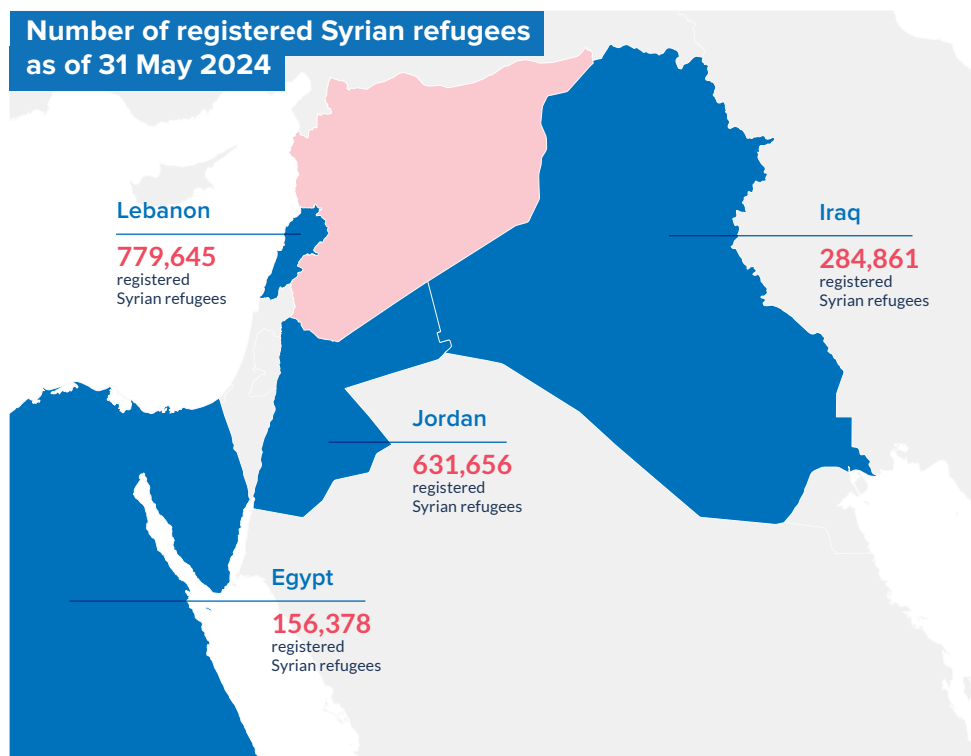
UNHCR has been carrying out a regional survey on Syrian refugees' perceptions and intentions on return since 2017 to ensure refugee voices are at the heart of discussions about their future. Refugees' intentions and decision-making will remain the main guideline for planning and programming, together with the [Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy](#).

This report presents the findings of UNHCR's ninth Return Perceptions and Intentions Survey (RPIS) among Syrian refugees.

Profile of respondents

- The respondents were **42% female** and **58% male**.
- **86%** of respondents are Focal Points.¹
- **14%** of respondents are other adults from the same household.
- **23%** of male respondents and **42%** of female respondents are single parents or caregivers.
- **33%** of respondents have one or more of their family members who faces particular risks or barriers due to discrimination or other factors.²

Number of registered Syrian refugees as of 31 May 2024



These figures refer to refugees registered by UNHCR. Latest and official figures are available here: [UNHCR data portal](#).

¹ Focal Point: In UNHCR's corporate registration, identity and case management tool proGres, individuals are registered into Registration Groups. A Registration Group contains one or more individual(s). The first individual registered in a group is designated as the Focal Point and there can only be one Focal Point in a registration group.

² Persons with disabilities, older persons, persons with special medical conditions are among other factors.

Key Findings:

- ▶ **In line with the surveys conducted since 2021, only a small fraction of Syrian refugees expressed an intention to return in the next 12 months.**
- ▶ **More than a third of Syrian refugees expressed a hope to return within the next five years.**
- ▶ **Over half of Syrian refugees still hope to return one day despite the current challenges inside Syria.**
- ▶ **Concerns about safety and security inside Syria remains the key obstacle to return while lack of livelihoods is an increasingly important factor influencing refugees' decision-making about return.**
- ▶ **Some two-thirds of respondents said that they face challenges in the host countries in their daily lives and 87% of respondents say their income is not enough to meet their basic needs.**
- ▶ **Compared with last year's findings, the percentage of refugees citing humanitarian assistance as their main source of income has declined significantly.**

The survey took place between April and May 2024 in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon.³ A total of 4,241 Syrian refugees⁴ living in those four countries were randomly selected for this survey, and 3,266 of those were successfully reached. Among those reached, 86 per cent of the respondents were adult focal points, who are often head of households and primary decision makers.

While the overall findings are broadly comparable to previous surveys, there are some notable shifts. The intention to return in the short-term remains at a very low level, with only a small fraction of Syrian refugees expressing an intention to return in the next 12 months. That result, which has been consistently low since 2021, is broadly in line with actual return trends monitored by UNHCR.⁵ However, over a third of respondents expressed an intention to return within five years, reflecting an increase in the medium-term aspiration to return compared with 2023. Similar to the findings in the last two years, over half of Syrians continue to hope to return to Syria one day. In relation to the intention to return, the results did not change significantly between male and female respondents.

The survey continues to highlight that conditions inside Syria tend to be the main driver of decision-making around return and a combination of factors influence refugees' intentions. Respondents cited concerns about safety and security, lack of livelihoods, basic services and housing inside Syria and concerns about conscription as the five main obstacles to return. Over half of those who indicated lack of safety and security elaborated concerns related to active conflict, presence of armed actors and lack of law enforcement.

While nearly two-thirds of respondents said that they face challenges in the host countries and 87 per cent mentioned that their income is not enough to meet basic needs, this was not cited as a main driver to return to Syria.

³ Due to the operational context, Türkiye did not take part in the RPIS exercise.

⁴ For Lebanon, refugees living in the five districts most affected by the conflict were excluded from the sample.

⁵ See: Durable Solutions Dashboard, <https://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/dashboards/#1668322954232-380b3115-0fd8>

The findings also show that among refugees who are not intending to return in the next 12 months or are undecided, 18 per cent indicated that they plan to move to another country since they are not returning in the short-term. Many of them in hope of searching for better living conditions. The findings further revealed the risk of refugees using irregular sea journeys or smuggling pathways. While the number of refugees intending to move to another country has declined compared with 2023, the trend of actual departures of Syrians from the region shows a significant increase in 2024.

Considering that more than half of Syrian refugees maintain hopes of returning one day and many within a five-year horizon, it is important that collective efforts continue to be focused on addressing the factors that refugees say are preventing their return. This survey outlines the factors which refugees are saying are barriers to their return. Addressing these barriers is also increasingly important for the large Syrian refugee youth population, many of whom have spent most of their lives in a host country.

While UNHCR is currently neither facilitating nor promoting voluntary repatriation of refugees to Syria, UNHCR calls for respect of refugees' fundamental human right to freely and voluntarily return to their country of origin at a time of their choosing. To this end, UNHCR will continue to ensure refugees have access to reliable information for their decision-making, referrals to counselling and other protection services to reduce risks.

Given the protracted nature of the crisis with the majority of Syrian refugees remaining in displacement with ongoing international protection needs, it is vital to maintain favourable asylum and protection space in host countries. Concurrently, opportunities for durable solutions are urgently needed so refugees can look to the future with hope and dignity. UNHCR calls for the international community to continue to generously support efforts to facilitate durable solutions.

Note on methodology:

While intention surveys can provide valuable insights into refugees' hopes, intentions and concerns and are a useful tool, they have limitations including the fact that the reflection of refugees' intentions represents a given point in time only and may subsequently change depending on a wide range of factors.

Most respondents interviewed were Focal Points who are often the Heads of Household and primary decision makers concerning return.

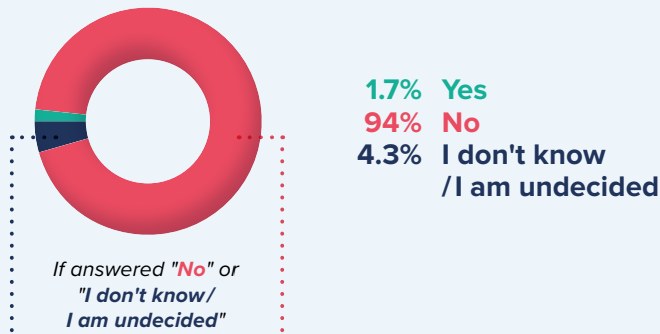
Slight differences in methodology and questionnaires between surveys, as well as the statistical margin of error, mean undue reliance should not be placed on trends over time.

Since 2017,
over 25,166 Syrian
refugees have been
reached through
perceptions and
intentions surveys,
including **3,266**
in this ninth round.

At a Glance

All respondents were asked the following:

Q1. Do you intend to return to Syria in the next 12 months?

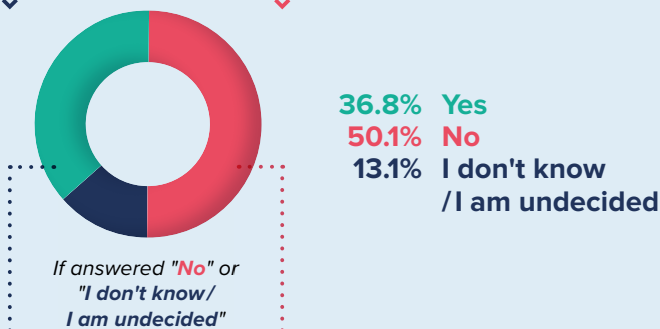


What are your plans since you do not intend to return to Syria in the next 12 months?

- 71% "I will stay in the country I currently am in"
- 18% "I will move to another country"
- 11% "I don't know / I am undecided"

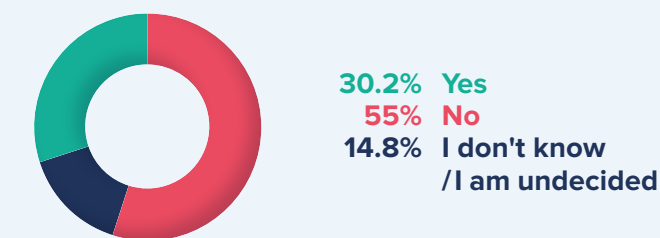
Follow-up question for respondents who answered the previous question with "no" or "I don't know / I am undecided":

Q2. Do you hope to return to Syria within five years?



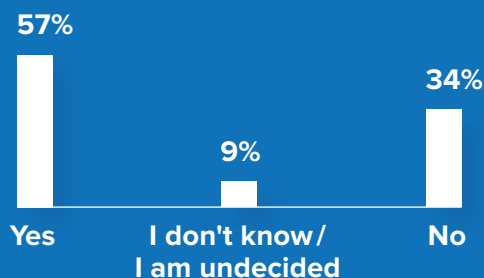
Follow-up question for respondents who answered the previous question with "no" or "I don't know / I am undecided":

Q3. Do you hope to return to Syria one day?



Overall hope to return

"Overall hope to return" comprises of participants who intend to return to Syria within the next 12 months, those who hope to return within five years and also those who hope to return one day.



Context

This year's survey was again conducted amid deteriorating socio-economic and humanitarian conditions in Syria, along with a volatile political and security situation. The findings of the survey portray concerns and fears about numerous issues inside Syria which appear to be the main obstacles influencing refugees' decision-making on return and will be further explained in the following sections.

In recent years, socio-economic conditions in most of the Syrian refugee hosting countries have been compounded by regional and global crises without recovering from previous shocks. Additionally, political instability in some countries has put a strain on pre-existing protection barriers and as a result, more refugees are in dire need of assistance even as humanitarian funding continues to decline. Notably, since the last survey, not only has the war in Gaza impacted regional economies but the ongoing conflict has displaced more than 94,000⁶ people in Lebanon, including Syrian refugees.

The findings of the survey depict an extremely difficult situation for the vast majority of refugees, consistent with the country-level vulnerability assessments which are conducted every year.

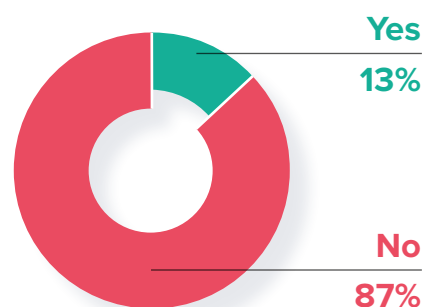
Some two-thirds of refugees responded that they and their families face challenges in the host country. Although this is a small decline in comparison to 2023, 87 per cent of refugees consider their income is not enough to meet basic needs. Between male and female respondents, proportionately more male respondents said that their income is enough. Meanwhile, only 8 per cent of respondents with at least one person in the household with specific needs indicated that their income is enough.

According to the refugees surveyed, the main sources of income range from work, humanitarian assistance, loans and credit to money from family or friends. While these sources remain the same as in previous years, the ranking reflects a significant shift with 37 per cent of respondents stating that humanitarian assistance is their main source of income, down from 61 per cent in 2023. This decline was reported by respondents in all four countries surveyed, with Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan recording the most significant drop. In all three countries, this is likely attributed to reductions in assistance made necessary by funding shortfalls during the second half of 2023.⁷

Do you and your family face challenges in the host country in your daily life?



Is your income enough for you (and your family) to meet basic needs?



⁶ As of 28 May 2024. <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/lebanon-mobility-snapshot-round-36-30-05-2024?close=true>

⁷ Vulnerability Assessment Framework: Socio-Economic Survey on Refugees in Host Communities, 2024

Lack of employment/livelihood opportunities remains the biggest challenge refugees face in their daily lives, coupled with access to financial assistance and the threat of eviction.

“ ***I don't have enough money to enrol my daughter in school.*** ”

I am alone, and I cannot support my children financially. ”

Refugees report that they struggle with basic needs such as housing, food, basic commodities like clothes and furniture, as well as medical services and medication, and school/education expenses. Furthermore, some respondents in Jordan said that they struggle to pay bills such as electricity and water.

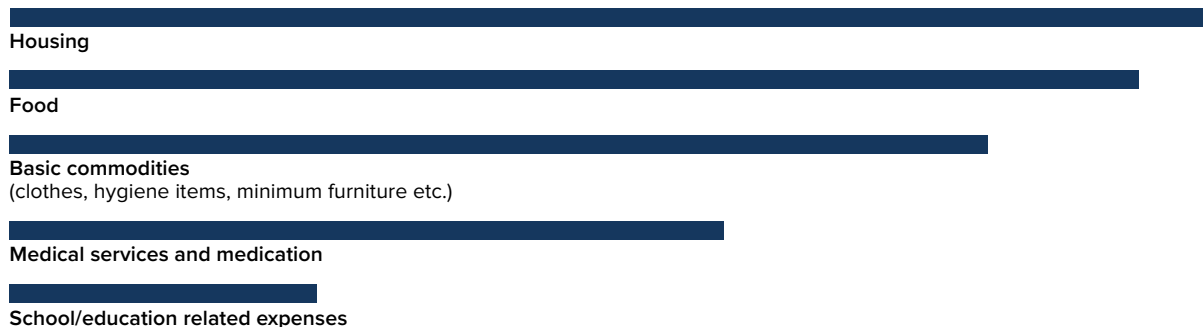
The findings of this year's survey reveal increased challenges related to tensions with the host community and lack of freedom of movement. Tensions with the host community was raised by respondents in Lebanon in particular, where over half of Syrians raised this as the main challenge in their daily life. Lack of freedom of movement was a concern for many respondents from Lebanon, as well as Iraq.

What are the main challenges you and your family are facing in the host country in your daily life?⁸



⁸ Note: This is a follow-up question for respondents who answered the question "Do you and your family face challenges in your daily life in the host country?" with "yes".

Which basic needs do you struggle with most?



Snapshot of Findings

▶ Very few refugees stated that they intend to return in the next 12 months.

- Only 1.7 per cent of Syrian refugees interviewed expressed their intention to return in the next 12 months – a small increase from 1.1 per cent in 2023.
- The increase was seen in Jordan and Lebanon, while in Iraq and Egypt barely anyone expressed an intention to return in the next 12 months.
- A bigger proportion of refugees in Iraq and Egypt responded 'I don't know/undecided' compared to those in Jordan and Lebanon.

▶ More than one-third of refugees expressed a hope to return within the next five years.⁹

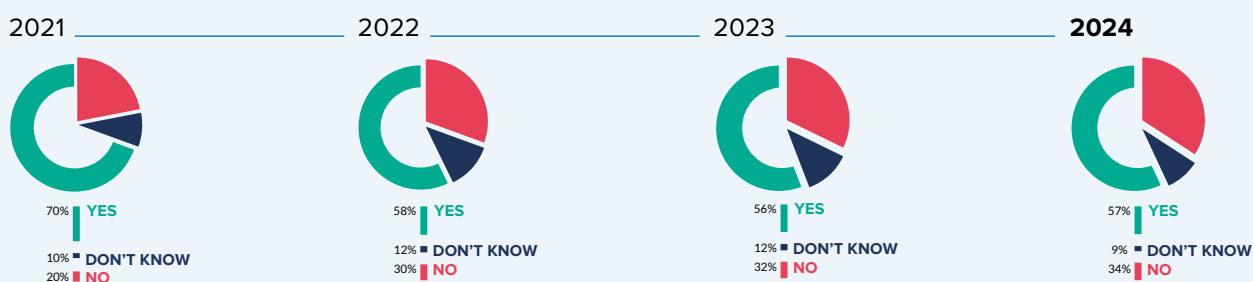
- Among those who do not intend to return in the next 12 months or were undecided, 37 per cent of refugees indicated their intention to return within five years. This result reflects an increase of 10 per cent compared to 2023.
- The percentage of those hoping to return within 5 years was highest in Lebanon (48 per cent).
- Jordan had the second-highest percentage of those hoping to return in 5 years (27 per cent) followed by Egypt (13 per cent) and Iraq (12 per cent).

⁹ Note: This question was only asked to respondents who do not intend to return in the next 12 months. This question to measure medium-term intentions was added to the survey in 2021.

▶ Over half of Syrian refugees still hope to return one day despite the current challenges inside Syria.

- Similar to the findings from 2022 and 2023, nearly 57 per cent of respondents expressed an overall hope to return either in the next 12 months, five years or one day. Conversely, 34 per cent said that they have no intention to return to Syria in any of these timeframes while 9 per cent remain undecided.
- This result was similar for male and female respondents while the rate of people who indicated an overall intention to return one day increased by almost 2 per cent for those who have at least one member of their household with specific needs.
- Lebanon had the highest percentage of respondents expressing an overall hope to return (65 per cent), which has increased from 57 per cent in 2023. In contrast, only a quarter of the respondents in Iraq wished to return in the next 12 months, five years or sometime in the future.

Overall hope to return over the years



▶ **Concerns about safety and security inside Syria remains the key obstacle to return while lack of livelihoods is an increasingly important factor influencing refugees' decision-making about return.**

- A range of safety and security issues continue to significantly impact decision-making about return.
- More respondent cited the lack of livelihoods / work opportunities in Syria as a barrier to return compared with 2023 with 57% of refugees citing this factor compared with 50% in 2023.
- Lack of access to adequate basic services including health, water and power, and the lack of adequate housing also remain among the most important obstacles to returning.
- Concerns about conscription also remained among the top five barriers to return showing an increasing trend compared with previous surveys.

▶ **Some two-thirds of respondents said that they face challenges in the host countries and 87% said that their income is not enough to meet their basic needs.**

- Lack of employment/livelihood opportunities, tensions with the host community, lack of access to financial assistance and healthcare, and the threat of eviction are the main challenges refugees face in their daily lives. Refugees in Egypt in particular, highlighted the high cost of living in the host countries.
- Refugees are struggling to cover the cost of housing, food, and basic commodities. A sizeable number of respondents especially in Jordan referred to difficulty in paying electricity and water bills.

▶ **Compared with last year's findings, the percentage of refugees citing humanitarian assistance as their main source of income has declined significantly.**

- 37 per cent of respondents stated that humanitarian assistance is their main source of income, down from 61 per cent in 2023.
- This decline was observed across the region with Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan recording the most significant drop. This is likely due to reductions in assistance made necessary by funding shortfalls during the second half of 2023.
- While the survey shows an increasing number of refugees relying on work as their main source of income since 2022 as humanitarian assistance has declined, country vulnerability assessments demonstrate rising poverty rates among refugees in all settings,¹⁰ suggesting that income earned from work is not sufficient by itself to replace humanitarian assistance.

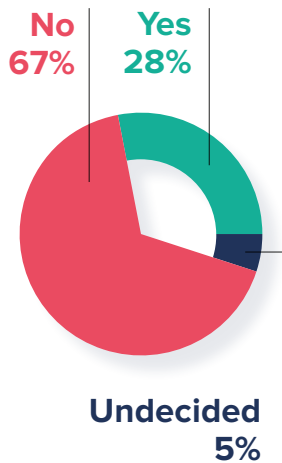
¹⁰ *Vulnerability Assessment Framework: Socio-Economic Survey on Refugees in Host Communities, 2024*

Country Spotlight

Similar to previous rounds of the survey, the trends related to return intentions are largely consistent across the four countries. Overall, the intention to return in the next 12 months remained at very low levels across the region. By contrast, an increasing percentage of refugees in Egypt and Lebanon expressed their intention to return within five years, while fewer people in Iraq and Jordan indicated a medium-term aspiration to return.

Would it be important to visit Syria before deciding on return?

(all respondents)

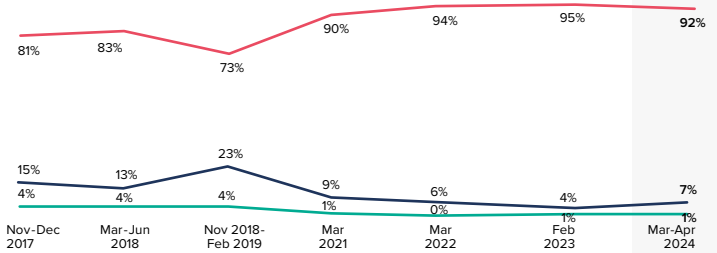


Do you intend to return to Syria in the next 12 months?

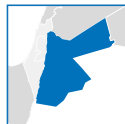
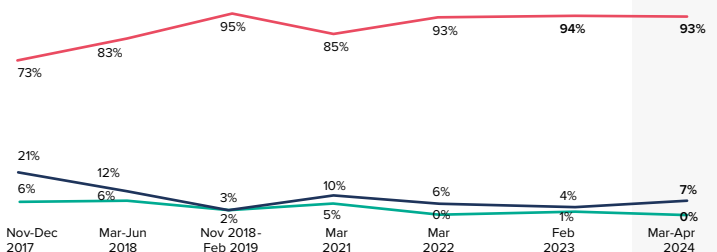
■ No ■ Don't know ■ Yes



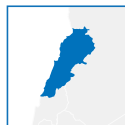
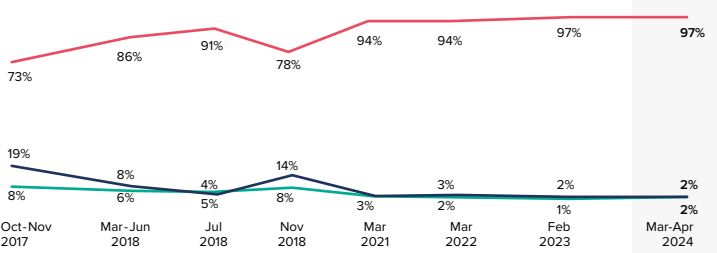
Respondents in Egypt



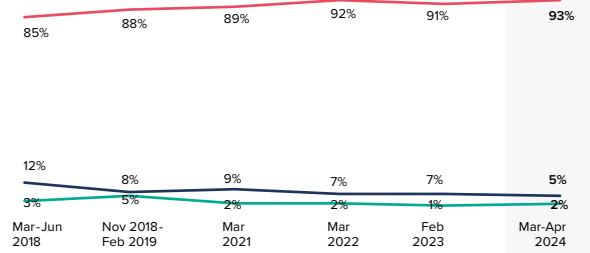
Respondents in Iraq



Respondents in Jordan



Respondents in Lebanon



Disclaimer: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

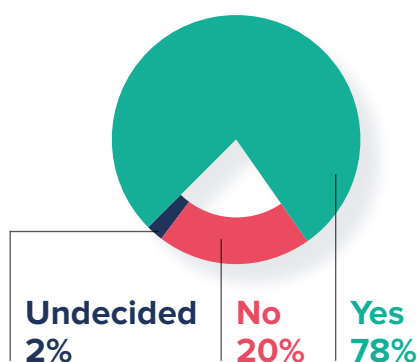
Access to Information and Knowledge

Access to information is crucial for refugees so that they can make informed decisions about their future. In comparison to last year, a significantly higher share of refugees responded that they feel they have sufficient information to decide on whether or not to return – from 61 per cent in 2023 to 78 per cent in 2024.

Refugees across the four countries explained that they find information on the security situation, employment and livelihood opportunities, and basic services such as education, health, food, water, electricity, and transportation inside Syria most useful. Additionally, information on military service, including exemptions, and available shelter and or the condition of their property were mentioned as other useful pieces of information.

The findings also revealed some degree of correlation between accessing information and intention to return. For example, refugees who answered they do not have or are unsure if they have sufficient information were more likely to indicate a disinterest in returning to Syria.

Do you feel you have sufficient information to decide on return to Syria?



“
The living conditions are expensive.

In Qamishli, where I was, I got information through social media that there are kidnapping and killing.

I don't want to collect any information about Syria, because I have nothing to do with Syria. I have no one left in Syria and I have nothing left there.

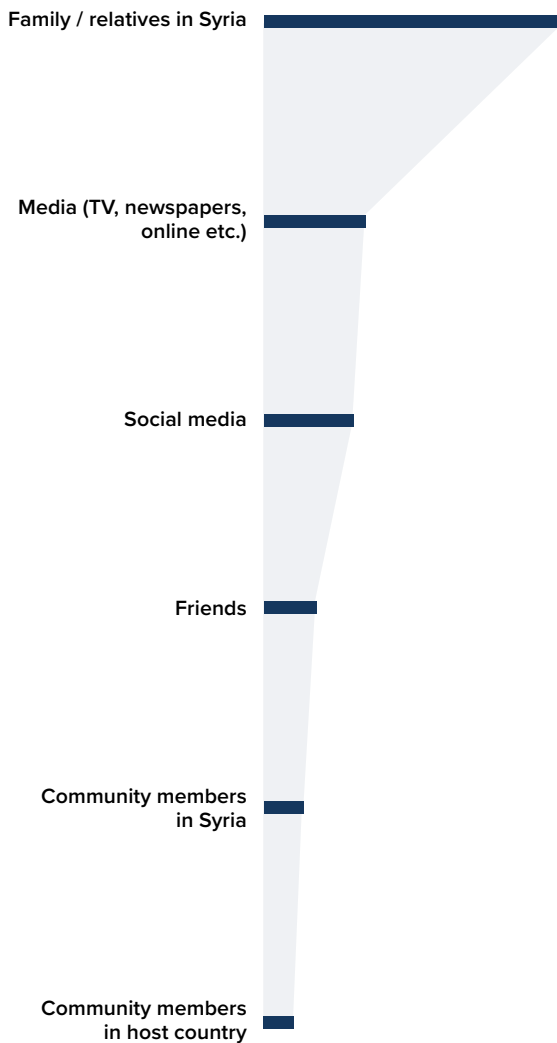
When I see and hear the news, my health condition is getting worse, so I try not to see and hear.

Information about me and my family - if we are still wanted by the state.

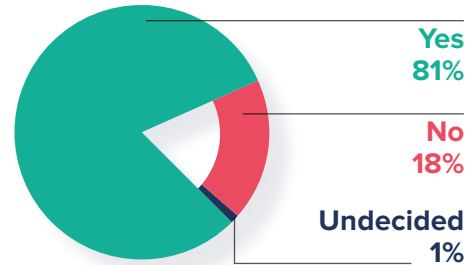
”

The majority of respondents indicated that they still have family members in Syria (81 per cent). The findings demonstrate that the majority of refugees rely on information from family or relatives residing in Syria, as in previous years, when considering whether to repatriate. Refugees also rely on information from media, social media, friends and community members in Syria which represents the same trend since 2019.

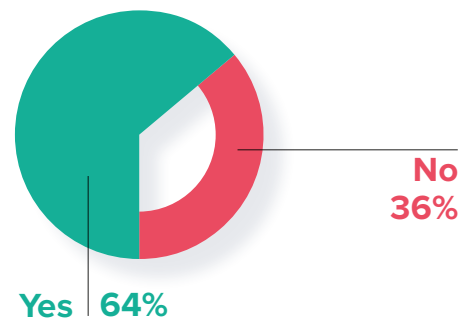
Main sources of information



Do you have (extended) family members in Syria?



Do you or a member of your household own/have a house in Syria?



Respondents who answered 'yes', stated:



75 per cent of refugees stated that their houses are either fully damaged or partially damaged and uninhabitable.



Only some **18 per cent** are aware that their houses in Syria would be inhabitable either because they are intact or only partially damaged.

“
The house is taken by armed actors.
 ”

Return Decision Making

This section explores the reasons and motivations for return. It is presented according to three broad groups to facilitate analysis. These are 1) those who intend to return in the next 12 months; 2) those who do not intend to return in the next 12 months; and 3) those who are undecided.

1. Refugees intending to return in the next 12 months

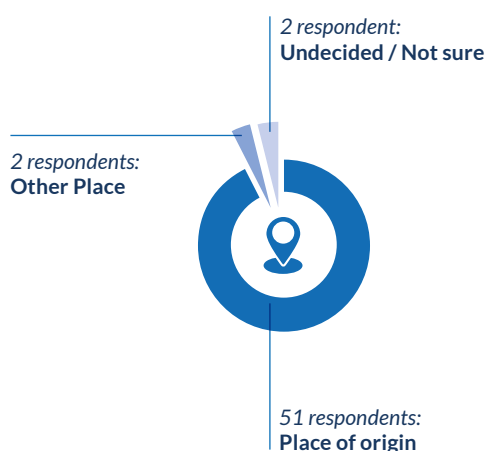
Of the 3,266 refugees reached in the survey 1.7 per cent expressed an intention to return in the next 12 months. This is a slight increase from the previous survey in which only 1.1 per cent indicated an intention to return. At the same time those who expressed no intention to return in the next 12 months also increased by 1 per cent, whereas the percentage of people undecided to return has slightly reduced.

Among the small number of refugees who expressed an intention to return in the next 12 months, living conditions in the host countries were mentioned as key motivators, followed by the wish to reunite with family in Syria.

“ I want to return to my country. Everyone prefers back... to your own country. I want to return to Syria to visit my husband's grave. ”

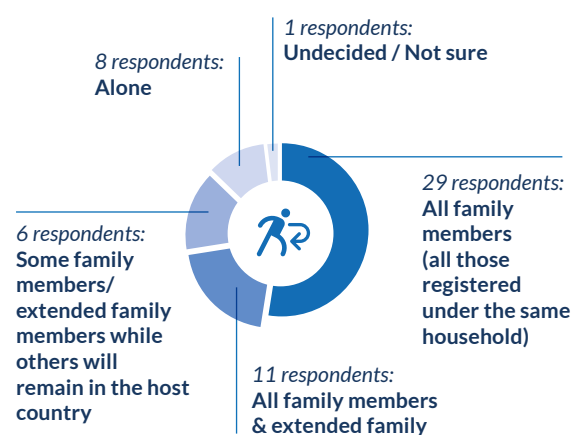
Where do you intend to return to?

Shares based on 55 responses



Whom are you intending to return to Syria with?

Shares based on 55 responses

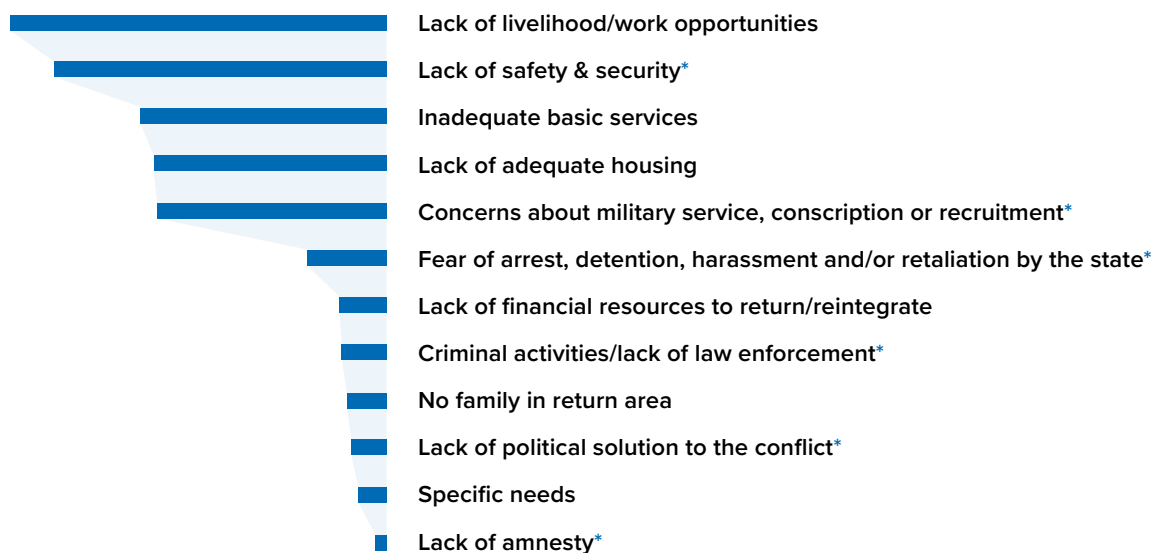


2. Refugees not intending to return in the next 12 months

In line with trends observed in previous rounds of the survey, the vast majority of respondents expressed that they do not intend to return in the next 12 months. This finding was consistent across all four countries, with the results in Jordan reflecting a small increase of people with no intention to return in the immediate future.

What are the main reasons why you are not intending to return to Syria in the next months?

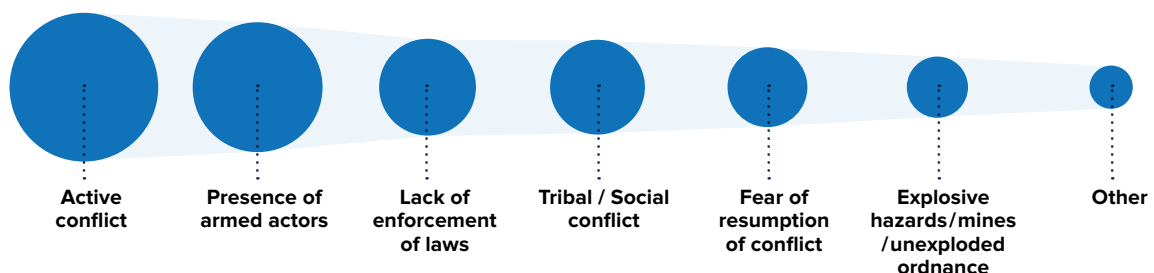
Note: This was a multiple-choice question and it was only asked to respondents who do not intend to return in the next 12 months.



* These are a range of safety and security issues.

Main safety and security issues

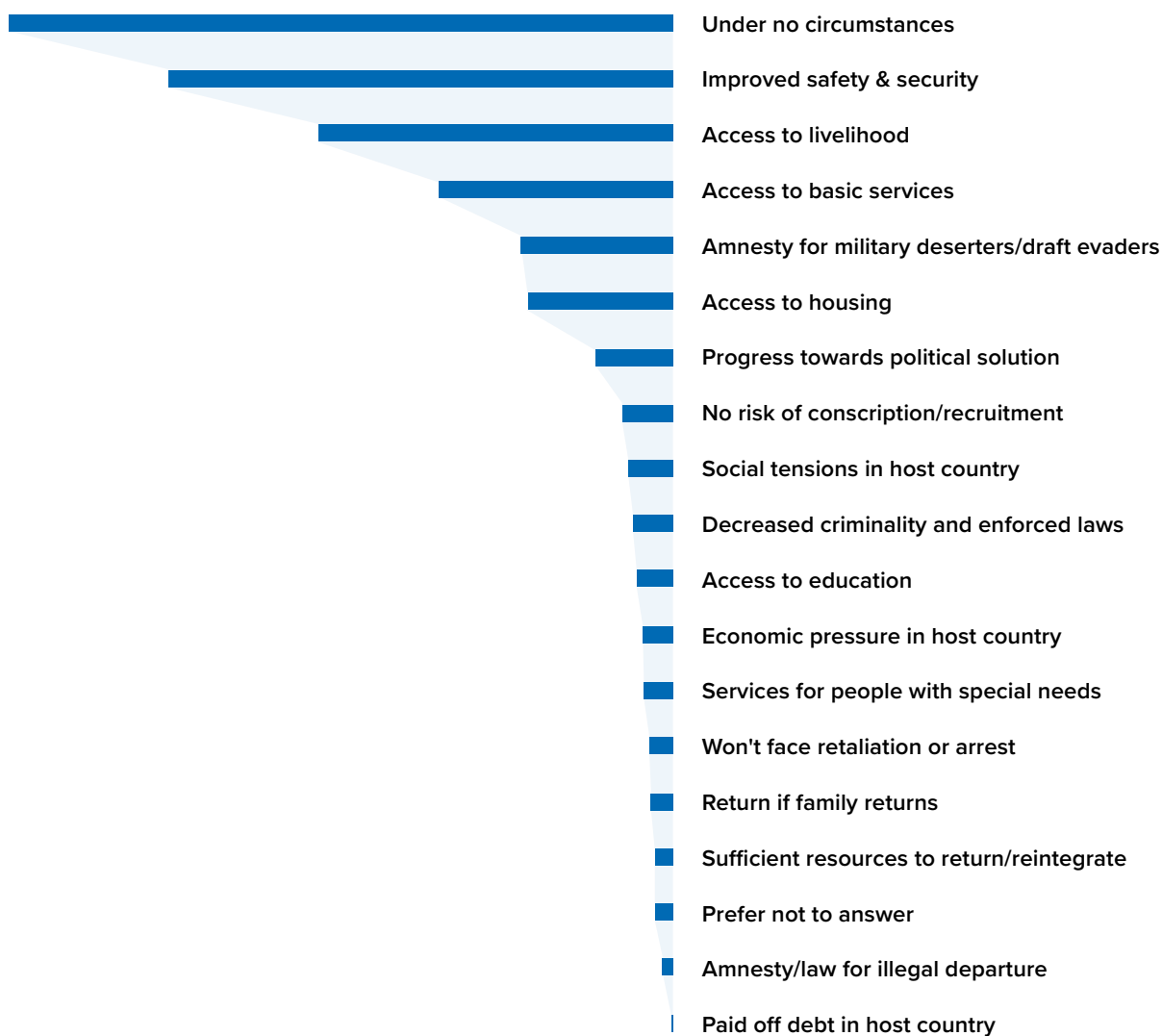
This question was only asked to respondents who answered lack of safety and security as a reason not intending to return in the next 12 months.



Furthermore, among those who do not intend to return to Syria in the next 12 months, over 44 per cent stated that no circumstance would change their current decision, showing an increasing trend since 2022. At the same time, other refugees noted that they would consider changing their current decision when safety and security is improved and when they are confident that there are livelihood and work opportunities inside Syria.

Under what circumstances would you consider changing your current decision and returning to Syria?

Note: This question was only asked to respondents who do not intend to return in the next 12 months.



“
I don't have a house in Syria. I have been in the host country for more than 13 years. I have no relatives living in Syria now. My children don't know anyone in Syria. it will be difficult for us to start living in Syria again.

I have very bad memories – my son was killed there, and the other is missing.

I am a single woman; I do not have work to afford all my needs.

I hope to be resettled even though I do not have a resettlement case. If I do not get resettled, I am thinking to travel irregularly to a foreign country.

As many in the community, I will take a smuggling path. But it's hard for me, because I don't want to lose or hurt any of my children in this way.

”

Refugees not expressing an intention to return in 12 months were asked about their plans; some 70 per cent indicated that they would stay in the host country where they are at present. The percentage of refugees saying that they intend to stay in the host country where they are currently living has increased from 2023, notably in Egypt and Jordan, but is lower than in 2022, when the share was nearly 80 per cent of those polled.

A further 18 per cent of refugees not intending to return in the coming 12 months expressed an intention to move to another country mainly in search of better living conditions, as well as access to health services and education. This reflects a slight decline in the intention to move to a third country compared with last year. Of those wishing to move to another country, many hope to do so via resettlement or other means, including irregular onward movement.

Although it is not representative as a regional finding, it is important to take into consideration additional feedback from refugees on the drivers to move to another country:

- Some refugees specifically mentioned their hope to be resettled despite not having resettlement cases with UNHCR.
- Some refugees from Lebanon mentioned that tensions with the host community, discrimination and instability in the host country are motivating factors to move to another country. In Iraq, a few stressed the importance of better futures for their children.

3. Undecided about return

The percentage of refugees who are undecided about returning in the next 12 months continued a downward trend with a decrease from 5.4 per cent to 4.3 per cent in 2024. The decline is mainly due to the results from Jordan and Lebanon, where only 1.6 per cent and 4.6 per cent of respondents respectively provided a response of 'I don't know/I am undecided'. Meanwhile, the same trend was

not observed in Egypt or Iraq. When asked about the main issues that could help them decide, respondents indicated that safety and security, livelihoods, access to basic services, availability of adequate housing and confidence in an amnesty for military deserters or draft evaders were the main factors that could help them in their decision-making.

Annex: Methodology

During the Ninth round of the RPIS, conducted between April and May 2024, a total of 4,241 Syrian refugees residing in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan were contacted. Of these, 3,266 were successfully reached and consented to be interviewed.

Profile of Respondents

3,266 respondents

58% male and 42% female

86% of respondents are Focal Points

13.5% of respondents are other adults from the household

0.5% are children aged 15 years or above

91% possess at least one valid document showing Syrian origin

Sampling strategy and data analysis

The RPIS is conducted through a common questionnaire which is used by all participating country operations. The aim of the sampling approach used for this survey was to generate a representative sample of the overall population of Syrian refugees known to UNHCR in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon. A random sample was drawn from UNHCR's databases in the four participating countries, with the sample size per country proportionate to their share of the Syrian refugee population known to UNHCR.¹¹

Who answered the survey?

The majority (86 per cent) of the respondents reached were Focal Points of the case, most of whom were male. The remaining 14 per cent were either the spouses, other adult household members or children aged 15 years or above. About 42 per cent of the respondents were female and Focal Points.

¹¹ For Lebanon, refugees living in the five districts most affected by the conflict were excluded from the sample.

Limitations

Survey findings reflect refugees' intentions at a given point in time only and may subsequently change. Of those contacted for the survey, about 77 per cent could be reached. Data from a sample can be used to extrapolate findings related to the population of interest. The small size of the sample compared to the overall population will add some uncertainty about the point estimates for the population, resulting in an interval as calculated below. Given the sample size of 3,266 respondents, the uncertainty around the estimates for the main variables of interest is rather low.

Although data collected through previous surveys provides an interesting perspective of trends over time, the survey methodology and questionnaire varied slightly across the different rounds of the survey. Therefore, the analysis focused on the current data, comparing only the most reliable indicators over time.

Use of the Survey Data

UNHCR will continue to use the data generated from the survey and associated analysis to generate insights and inform its operational response, programming, and policy and advocacy efforts in the region, in line with its Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy.

Methodology:

The margin of error (half the width of a confidence interval) for a proportion under simple random sampling has been calculated using the formula:

$$e = \sqrt{\frac{z^2 \frac{a}{1-a} \hat{p}(1-\hat{p})}{n}}$$

This expression formalizes the fact that with sampling theory, it is possible to statistically generalize findings from a sample to a population, but a degree of uncertainty must be taken into account due to the fact that not everyone in the population group was interviewed.

$$z^2 \frac{a}{1-a}$$

in this formula is the critical value of the standard normal distribution reflecting the confidence interval desired, 1.96 for 95 per cent in this case.

$$\hat{p}$$

is the proportion of the sample for which the outcome indicator is true, and n is the sample size. For the intention to return in the next 12 months, this results in a margin of error, on the regional level, of 0.0044. The 95 per cent confidence interval therefore is 1.2 to 2.1 per cent. For the questions related to the overall hope to return, the 95 per cent confidence interval, using the same formula, ranges from 55.0 to 58.4 per cent.



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