

Regional Flash Update #13

Syria situation crisis

7 February 2025

Key Highlights

- As of 5 February, UNHCR estimates that some 270,000 Syrians have returned to Syria since 8 December 2024. These figures are based on a triangulation of sources from outside and inside Syria and include refugees registered with UNHCR and other Syrians returning from Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, as well those transiting from beyond the region.
- On 6 February, UNHCR released its [Operational Framework for Voluntary Return](#), which outlines UNHCR's plans to assist the voluntary return of Syrian refugees and IDPs to their homes and to support their reintegration in areas of origin.
- Also on 6 February, UNHCR published the full findings of its [Flash Refugee Perceptions and Intentions Survey](#) (RPIS) conducted amongst Syrian refugees in four host countries. The overall findings mark a drastic change to intentions surveys over the past 10 years, with 27% of refugees in the region intending to return home in the next 12 months.



In Jordan, UNHCR is providing transportation assistance to Syrian refugees choosing to return based on feedback from refugee communities, requesting assistance to make the journey home. For some, the cost of transportation can act as a barrier to return. © UNHCR/Shawkat Alharfoush

Operational Framework

On 6 February, UNHCR released its [Operational Framework for the Voluntary Return of Syrian Refugees and IDPs](#). While UNHCR is not promoting large-scale voluntary returns to Syria, the Office is now in a mode of facilitating voluntary returns. This is triggered by actual and projected returns, as well as calls on UNHCR from refugees to support their return.

The Framework's objectives are to:

- Ensure return planning and implementation are anchored in international protection standards and principles;
- Ensure Syrian refugees and IDPs are able to take a free and well-informed decision on whether to return and are actively engaged in the design of return processes in a participatory manner;
- Facilitate voluntary return, including transportation and material assistance; and
- Support the reintegration of refugee and IDP returnees inside Syria, taking into account conflict sensitivity and the needs of all populations in places of return, in collaboration with broader national, UN, NGO and IFI reintegration and development programmes.

UNHCR's engagement in return processes is predicated by their voluntary character and the well-informed choices of refugees and IDPs. For this reason, the Framework includes counselling and communications activities in neighbouring countries in addition to shelter repairs, livelihoods interventions and legal assistance inside Syria, to bolster sustainability of returns.

While the Operational Framework is specific to UNHCR, **inclusive partnerships** are key to ensuring safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable returns. An inter-agency appeal for return operations from host countries is under preparation. Any reintegration activities, including those set-out in the UNHCR Operational Framework, should fall under the broader national and UN Development coordination currently being established inside Syria.

Refugee Perceptions and Intentions

In January 2025, UNHCR conducted a [Flash Refugee Perceptions and Intentions Survey \(RPIS\)](#) amongst Syrian refugees in four host countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt) with a representative, randomized sample of 3,400 respondents.

Key findings include:

- Overall, **80% of refugees hope to return to Syria one day**. Two months after the fall of the Assad government, this represents a major shift in refugee return intentions compared to the previous RPIS conducted in April 2024 when 57% of refugees expressed the hope to return one day.
- Overall, **27% of Syrian refugees expressed an immediate intention to return in the next 12 months**, a significant increase compared to the previous 2024 RPIS, when only 1.7% of Syrian refugees interviewed expressed an intention to return in the next 12 months.
- Overall, 53% of those who do not intend to go back or are undecided about returning in the next 12 months do intend to go back in the next five years.

There are significant differences in the intention of refugees to return home over the next 12 months depending on their country of asylum. These differences may be attributed to current insecurity in or the impact of years of conflict on the areas of origin of refugees surveyed in each country. Across all countries, female respondents expressed a lower intention to return in the next year – 23% for

women versus the 27% overall average. Also, 77% of respondents reported having debts in countries of asylum, which poses a barrier to return for 49% of them. While results differ by country of asylum, all showed a marked increase in intention to return in the next 12 months when compared to previous RPIS findings.

Even though intentions have drastically shifted compared to prior survey data, **55% of refugees are not yet intending to return**. Even in the best conditions, returns take time. It is crucial that assistance and protection space are maintained in host countries like Türkiye, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt, while significant investments are made inside Syria.

Country updates

Syria

As of 5 February, some 270,000 Syrians have crossed back into the country, including refugee returnees. More than 650,000 Syrians remain newly internally displaced since the escalation of hostilities in late November 2024, part of the more than [7.4 million](#) total IDPs in the country. As of late January, more than 700,000 IDPs have returned to their homes.

This week, UNHCR continued to provide legal support to refugee returnees and IDPs, including awareness raising sessions and assistance with civil documentation proceedings for returnees from Lebanon in Al-Hassakeh and Ar-Raqqa. Many returning families report having lost their IDs, family booklets and Housing, Land and Property (HLP) documents, making this type of assistance more and more pressing. Increasing numbers of IDPs and returnees are approaching UNHCR for support given the negative implications that lack of documentation can have for accessing rights and services.

Awareness raising sessions on landmines and unexploded ordnance are also ongoing each week in various parts of the country – especially important given the persistent threat these remnants of war pose to civilian populations, particularly children and agricultural workers. According to HALO Trust, the number of people killed or wounded by landmines and other explosive devices in Syria has reached [crisis levels](#) – more than 400 since December 2024. As temperatures warm up, school terms end and more people decide to return home, the risks of casualties will only increase.

Shelter remains a critical issue and potential barrier for return. According to the RPIS results, of the 61% of refugees who own a home in Syria, 81% report that it is either fully destroyed or partially damaged and uninhabitable. Based on observations on the ground, UNHCR estimates that in parts of Aleppo Governorate, nearly 60% of houses are uninhabitable, forcing families to create temporary shelters with plastic sheeting, while others live in UNHCR-supported hosting centres. Still others are staying with relatives, often in overcrowded conditions. In some areas, families living in homes owned by other refugees who intend to return are under pressure to vacate.

Underscoring these issues, the UN Syria Commission of Inquiry [report](#), released on 6 February, notes in detail the patterns of systematic, largescale destruction of civilian infrastructure and homes over 14 years of conflict in Syria and emphasizes the need to address HLP rights and violations in order to avoid exacerbating social tensions and fuelling future grievances.

Türkiye

Since flights reopened from Istanbul to Damascus on 23 January, UNHCR's teams in Türkiye have been present at Istanbul International Airport to monitor voluntary returns to Syria, in addition to the regular presence border crossing points.

On 4 February, Syria's Interim President Ahmed Al-Sharaa [visited](#) Türkiye and met with President Erdoğan, his second international [trip](#) after Saudi Arabia earlier this week.

Lebanon

Daily crossings at official border points continue at a low but steady rate, averaging 1,000 entry and exit movements per day. Additionally, movements continue to take place across borders through unofficial crossing points.

As of 4 February, the government's Disaster Risk Management reported approximately 94,000 arrivals from Syria in Baalbek Governorate, including 20,000 Lebanese returnees. Among the arrivals, some 36,500 people, mostly Syrians, are living in 200 informal collective shelters, and another 57,600 are living in the community. The numbers have risen from last reporting due to new insecurities in Ghour, Homs Governorate, causing additional displacement. In response to cross-border displacement, UNHCR is coordinating closely with the authorities to focus material assistance.

Jordan

As of 27 January, nearly 25,500 refugees registered with UNHCR have returned from Jordan to Syria since 8 December 2024.

From 4 to 6 February, UNHCR organized transportation for more than 200 refugees in Azraq camp and Amman who expressed interest to return to Syria. Prior to departure, UNHCR conducted in person interviews to ensure the decision to return is voluntary and well-informed and provided counselling and information on availability of services inside Syria.

Iraq

Since 8 December, over 5,000 Syrians have returned from Iraq to Syria, including almost 400 registered refugees. This includes Syrians who have returned through the Peshkhabour border crossing and the Al-Qaim border crossing. The number of registered Syrian returnees increased compared to the previous week, with an average of 18 individuals returning daily.

During the reporting period, UNHCR continued to observe arrivals from Syria to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, mainly from Al Hassakeh, Aleppo, and Ar-Raqqa Governorates. During the reporting period, approximately 1,420 individuals arrived through the Peshkhabour border crossing. Family visits, medical purposes, marriage or transit to other destinations are the main reasons for arrivals, with most expressing their intentions to return to Syria following the visit.

Egypt

Since the 8 December 2024, 4,586 closure requests involving over 9,467 Syrian refugees in Egypt have been submitted to UNHCR's offices, averaging 121 requests per day compared to the November 2024 average of just 7. UNHCR Egypt continues to receive more than 100 calls per week to the Infoline requesting case closure appointments.

Useful links

- [Regional Flash Update #12, Syria Situation Crisis](#)
- [UNHCR Operational Framework for Voluntary Return of Syrian Refugees and IDPs \(February 2025\)](#)
- [January 2025 Refugee Perceptions and Intentions Survey \(RPIS\)](#)
- [UNHCR Position on Returns to the Syrian Arab Republic \(16 December\)](#)
- [Syria Situation Data Portal](#)
- [UNHCR Help Site](#)

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