

Returns to Syria - Regional Update

In Focus: Cash assistance supporting voluntary return, recovery and reintegration

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

As of 31 August 2026, an estimated **1.8 million Syrians** had returned from neighbouring countries, alongside **over 2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs)** who returned to their areas of origin. Return movements continued across the region, although patterns and volumes varied by operation.

This edition focuses on **the role of cash assistance in supporting voluntary return and reintegration**. Across host countries and inside Syria, cash assistance helps refugees and returnees address practical barriers before departure, during movement and after arrival, including transportation, documentation, baggage, food, shelter-related costs and other immediate household needs.

Cash assistance is one part of UNHCR's broader protection and durable solutions response. It complements counselling, legal assistance, information provision, protection monitoring, in-kind support, referrals and community-based services. It is not designed as an incentive to return; rather, it supports refugees and returnees who have already made, or declared, an informed and voluntary decision to return.



Total number of returnees between 8 December 2024 and 31 August 2026

“Everyone hopes to return to Syria one day, but the biggest obstacles are housing, livelihoods, and the cost of starting all over again.” — Syrian refugee in northern Lebanon.

Fatat runs Al-Hadi Skills Development Centre, a training centre in Baniyas, Tartous Governorate, that helps children and adults with disabilities develop skills and achieve greater independence. She named the centre in memory of her son, who had a disability and passed away five years ago. Following the violence that affected Syria's coastal region in March, the centre was burned and looted, leaving Fatat's family without their main source of income.

With support from UNHCR, Fatat was able to restore the centre and resume its activities. “With the grant I received, I was able to purchase the materials and equipment I needed, restore the centre, and provide it with new furniture and tools. Today, I am earning a good income, which also helps me become self-reliant,” she said.

For Fatat, the assistance meant far more than financial support. It enabled her to create opportunities for persons with disabilities to learn, work, and live more independently. Fatat's story illustrates how targeted support can help displaced communities return, recover, rebuild livelihoods, and create conditions that foster resilience and reintegration. ©UNHCR /E.Kabbas



KEY FIGURES

Since 2025, UNHCR has assisted **167,827 individuals** with return-related cash assistance across **Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Türkiye**, while **200,553 returnees inside Syria** have received return and reintegration cash assistance. Over the same period, UNHCR distributed **USD 28.1 million in host countries**, and **USD 20.7 million inside Syria**.¹



2026 host-country reach
87,345 individuals assisted
 across the five host
 countries



2026 inside Syria reach
99,949 individuals
 (27,085 returnee
 households) assisted

UNDERSTANDING UNHCR'S RETURN AND REINTEGRATION CASH ASSISTANCE

Why was return-related cash assistance introduced?

Following the political transition in Syria in December 2024, more refugees began returning or expressing an intention to return. In response to these movements, projected trends and refugees' requests for support, UNHCR expanded return and reintegration assistance under its [Regional Operational Framework](#).

The **approach provides return-related cash assistance** in country of asylum, complemented by reintegration cash assistance inside Syria for the most vulnerable returnees. Together, these two forms of support help vulnerable households meet immediate costs before departure, during movement and after arrival, including transport, documentation, baggage, food, shelter-related expenses and other basic needs.

Return and reintegration grants and vulnerability top-ups

In host countries, Syrian refugees who are registered with, or otherwise known to, UNHCR and who have made or declared a voluntary decision to return may receive a one-time return grant. **The regional standard grant is USD 100 per person** to support return-related costs, including transport and other immediate expenses. In addition, **vulnerable households may receive USD 100 to USD 300 per family** to help meet higher return-related costs linked to disability, serious medical conditions, single-parent status, child protection risks or larger family size. The grant is intended to help cover some basic return-related costs but is not designed to cover the full cost of return.

Monitoring shows that families often face costs well beyond transport fares, including moving household belongings, documentation, debt repayment, fines related to residency and visa requirements in host countries, food during travel and initial settlement expenses after arrival.

Inside Syria, eligible returnee households **may receive a one-time USD 600 reintegration grant**. Aligned with inter-agency cash assistance standards, the grant helps families meet essential needs during the first months after return, when housing, services, livelihoods and basic household costs are often most pressing.

Who receives assistance

Eligibility criteria are applied consistently across the region in line with agreed regional parameters. UNHCR aims to support as many eligible returning refugees as possible, but **coverage depends on funding, operational arrangements and engagement with national authorities**. Where full coverage is not possible, operations may prioritise specific groups.

Inside Syria, return and reintegration grants are provided to vulnerable returnee households identified through UNHCR and partner systems, using verified socio-economic and protection information collected in host countries, and shared in accordance with applicable data protection protocols. This includes the most vulnerable households among those that were receiving basic needs cash assistance in host countries. The aim is to reach families likely to face the greatest challenges in the first months after return, when needs related to housing, civil documentation, livelihoods and access to basic services are often most acute.

¹ As of end July 2026

Good practice: Cross-border case management for returnees

A key strength of the regional approach is the use of verified eligibility and vulnerability information to support returnees after arrival in Syria. For returnees from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, biographic and eligibility data are securely transferred to UNHCR Syria once a case is closed or inactivated due to voluntary return. For Türkiye, eligibility information follows a separate data flow through national social assistance and screening systems before being transferred to UNHCR Syria's assistance management system.

Together, these arrangements strengthen continuity between support before departure and assistance after return. They help UNHCR Syria identify eligible households, conduct outreach, manage referrals and prepare payments more quickly, while reducing duplication, limiting repeated assessments and avoiding parallel processes. All data transfers are governed by established protection and data protection safeguards.

How the approach is adapted across operations

Cash assistance for voluntary return has been rolled out progressively since September 2025. The table below shows how each operation applies the regional approach in practice.

Operation	UNHCR's approach
Jordan	Return grants are provided to families who have opted to voluntarily return following an individual interview and counselling by UNHCR. Launched in September 2025 in Azraq and Zaatari refugee camps, the programme was expanded on 1 September 2026 to include refugees outside camps, following consultations with the Government of Jordan.
Lebanon	Assistance is provided through a joint UNHCR-IOM-General Security Office modality covering counselling, registration, movement and border facilitation. Following hostilities in March 2026, assistance was temporarily suspended and later resumed under a force-majeure framework before regular voluntary repatriation activities restarted on 1 July 2026.
Türkiye	Through a nationwide programme implemented with the Presidency of Migration Management, refugees who express a voluntary intention to return to Syria and who are assisted through existing social assistance and vulnerability screening mechanisms are assisted with cash. The current programme has two parts: transportation assistance and assistance to persons with special needs.
Iraq	Return grants are available through facilitated voluntary return procedures across the country. Assistance began in January 2026 for refugees returning from Baghdad and in May for refugees returning from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Since June, an additional top-up is being issued to the most vulnerable.
Egypt	Cash assistance for returns was rolled out in late 2025. Following a period of funding uncertainty in mid-2026, assistance is currently available to all Syrians returning from Egypt, with top-ups provided according to agreed vulnerability criteria.
Syria	Return and reintegration cash assistance support vulnerable households after arrival, helping them meet priority needs. UNHCR complements this support by linking them to protection, legal assistance, livelihoods, shelter and community-based services.

Evidence and impact

Monitoring across the region consistently shows that return and reintegration cash assistance helps refugees manage the costs associated with return and initial reintegration, while not acting as a primary factor in the decision to return. In **Jordan**, more than **80% of surveyed recipients reported that the grant did not determine their decision to return**, although it helped address practical financial barriers associated with a return decision they had already made. During the pilot phase between September 2025 and March 2026, **around 40% of returns from Azraq and Zaatari refugee camps took place without UNHCR cash support**, reinforcing that cash serves as an enabling measure rather than a driver of return.

A common finding across countries is that assistance is primarily used **to cover transportation and other immediate return-related costs**. In **Iraq**, all surveyed recipients used the assistance to cover transportation costs to Syria, which accounted for the largest return-related expense for more than 80% of respondents. In **Türkiye**, **96% of beneficiaries reported spending the cash on transport** and **93% confirmed that it enabled their return journey**. In **Jordan**, recipients mainly **used the grant for transportation, basic needs, debt repayment and initial settlement expenses**.

Evidence further shows that cash assistance **helps reduce immediate financial pressure** and supports families during a vulnerable transition period. In **Türkiye**, nearly **89% of respondents** reported that the assistance moderately or significantly **improved their ability to cover return-related expenses**, while **almost 90%** reported **reduced household stress**. Similarly, **inside Syria**, post-distribution monitoring found that **96% of households reported improved living conditions** and **94% reported reduced stress** after receiving return and reintegration assistance.

Assistance is reaching households facing the greatest financial constraints. In **Jordan**, cash was more frequently accessed by lower-income households, and **only 30%** of surveyed recipients reported that the grant fully or mostly covered their return-related costs. This aligns with broader evidence indicating that financial constraints can prevent the poorest refugee from returning, despite their willingness to do so.

Beneficiary feedback across operations demonstrates a clear preference for cash assistance as a modality. **Satisfaction rates in Türkiye reached over 98%**, while 97% expressed a preference for receiving assistance in cash. **Inside Syria**, **99% of surveyed households** also reported preferring cash assistance, reflecting the value of flexible support that allows families to address their most pressing needs.

Overall, the evidence points to the added value of cash assistance in supporting return and early reintegration: it provides timely and flexible support, helps vulnerable households overcome immediate financial barriers associated with return, and reduces stress during the transition. At the same time, cash assistance should be understood as one element of a broader return and reintegration response, rather than a standalone solution. Sustainable return depends on complementary investments in civil documentation, housing, livelihoods opportunities, education, healthcare, protection and community-based services. Families continue to require sustained support in these areas to rebuild their lives and reintegrate successfully.

Delivery, safeguards and accountability

UNHCR delivers return and reintegration cash assistance through established payment and assistance systems adapted to each context. Depending on the operation, this may include financial service providers, digital payment channels, direct communication with beneficiaries, WhatsApp messaging, referrals to legal assistance, and links to protection and community-based services. These systems help ensure that assistance reaches forcibly displaced and returnee families efficiently and cost-effectively.

Cash assistance at scale and low cost: In 2025, delivery costs represented only 1-3% of total cash assistance expenditures, ensuring that the vast majority of resources reached families directly.

Timely delivery remains challenging inside Syria. Liquidity constraints, currency arrangements, limited access to Syrian SIM cards and civil documentation barriers can delay outreach, communication and payments. UNHCR is addressing these constraints through engagement with authorities, phased roll-out with financial service providers, digital communication channels, strengthened safeguards and legal assistance referrals for civil documentation.

These challenges have contributed to delays for some eligible households. As funding and operational capacity remain limited, not all identified needs can currently be met.

FUNDING AND SCALE-UP NEEDS

Funding shortfalls are affecting return-related cash assistance. **In Egypt**, unrestricted return cash assistance was on hold because of funding limitations for a period of four months in 2026. As a result, some families who would otherwise have been eligible could not receive unrestricted cash assistance during that period. **In Syria**, beyond operational challenges, demand for return and reintegration cash assistance significantly exceeds available resources. **UNHCR currently has a reachable waitlist of approximately 70,000 eligible households, but available funding covers only 37,500 households.** An additional **USD 20 million is required** to provide cash assistance to returnees during the first months after arrival.

Sustained and flexible funding is essential to keep return and reintegration support protection-sensitive, predictable and responsive to changing conditions. Continued support will help maintain assistance before departure, strengthen early reintegration after arrival and reduce the risk that vulnerable families rely on harmful coping strategies as they rebuild their lives.

UNHCR is grateful for the support of donors who contributed to its Syria situation response in 2026, including:

Australia | Austria | Belgium | Canada | Country-based pooled funds | Denmark | España con ACNUR | European Union | Finland | France | Germany | Iceland | Ireland | Japan | Japan for UNHCR | Luxembourg | Netherlands (Kingdom of) | Norway | Other private donors | Private donors in Italy | Private donors in the Netherlands | Private donors in the Republic of Korea | Republic of Korea | Spain | Sweden | Sweden for UNHCR | Switzerland | UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland |

USEFUL LINKS

- ◆ [UNHCR Middle East Situation: Emergency Update #23 as of 9 September 2026](#)
- ◆ [UNHCR Operational Framework for Voluntary Return of Syrian Refugees and IDPs](#)
- ◆ [Enhanced Refugee Perceptions and Intentions Survey \(eRPIS\)](#)
- ◆ [UNHCR Position on Returns to the Syrian Arab Republic \(16 December\)](#)
- ◆ [Syria Situation Data Portal](#)
- ◆ [Syria is Home Platform](#)
- ◆ [UNHCR Help Site](#)
- ◆ [UNHCR HELP Egypt](#)
- ◆ [UNHCR Jordan return dashboard](#)
- ◆ [UNHCR HELP Jordan – Voluntary Return page](#)
- ◆ [UNHCR HELP Lebanon – Voluntary Return page](#)
- ◆ [UNHCR HELP Türkiye – Voluntary Repatriation page](#)

For more details, please contact UNHCR MENA Regional Bureau in Amman, Jordan at: MENAreporting@unhcr.org