Refugees and Asylum-seekers in Syria

January – December 2024

11,482 refugees

4,759 asylum-seekers

671 new individuals registered and **61** individuals recognized as refugees

Population Demographics

51% Female Refugees

49% Male Refugees

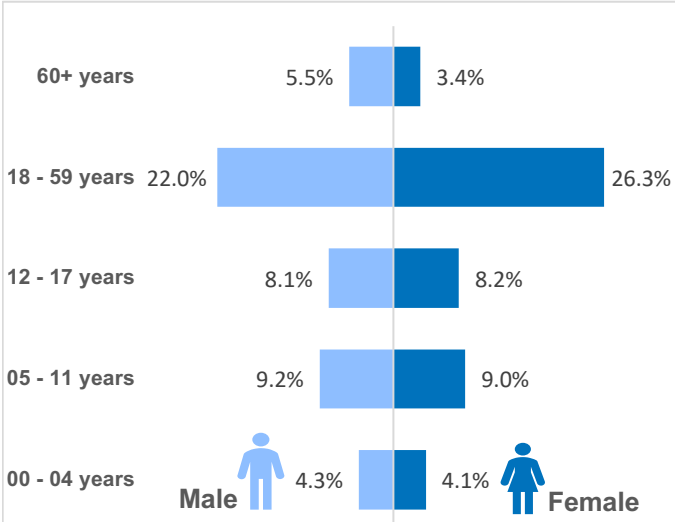
10% of refugees are elderly

41% of refugees are children

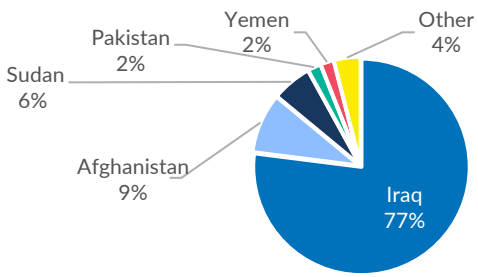
16,241 Total population

38% of refugees have special needs

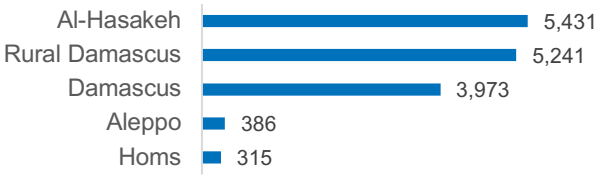
Age Distribution

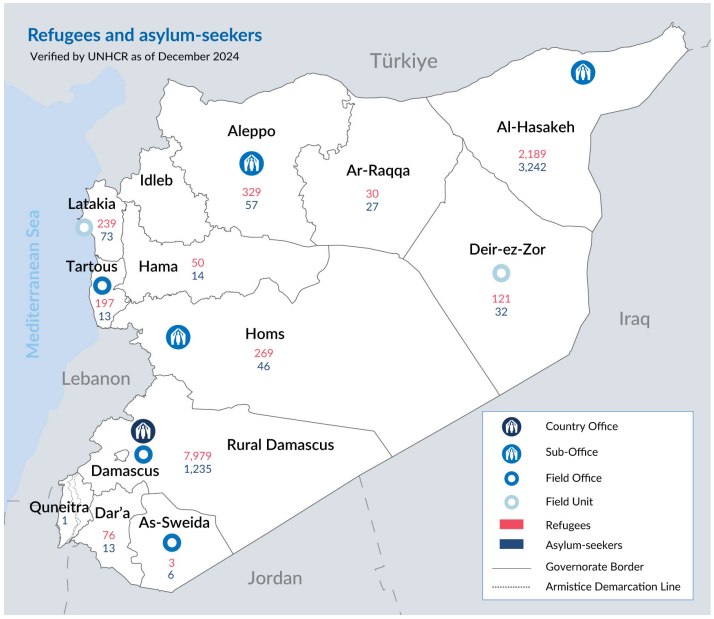


Country of Origin



Place of residence





Registration and Identity Management

Registration of people seeking international protection is critical, as it enables the **early identification of individuals with specific needs** and their **referral to available protection responses**. Additionally, registration provides comprehensive population data needed for programme planning including shelter, food, health, water and sanitation, cash-based interventions and other forms of assistance.

UNHCR identification cards provided to refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR constitute proof of legal identity, can prevent arbitrary arrest and *refoulement*, and **facilitate greater freedom of movement**. The cards also enable refugees and asylum-seekers to apply for **legal residency, register vital events** (such as birth registration), and access basic assistance in Syria.

Between January and December 2024, UNHCR registered **671 individuals** (new registrations), mainly comprising Iraqi and Sudanese nationals. Additionally, **14,877 identification cards, including renewals were issued,** representing a 4% decrease compared to **15,463** cards issued between January-December 2023. This is mainly due to the inactivation exercise[1] conducted in June 2024. The **registration helpline** received **7,853** calls during the reporting period.

Refugee Status Determination

Refugee Status Determination (RSD) is the legal administrative process by which governments or UNHCR determine whether a person seeking international protection is considered a refugee under international, regional, or national laws. RSD is often a **vital process in helping refugees realize their rights under international law**. With the agreement of the Government of Syria, UNHCR conducts RSD for asylum-seekers in the country.

By the end of 2024, interviews were conducted for **202 individuals**, **179 individuals** were submitted for review, and **159 individuals** were reviewed. Decisions were taken for **152 individuals**, out of which **61 individuals** were recognized as refugees, and **91 individuals** were rejected.

An **RSD helpline** is fully operational, providing counselling on both the RSD process and the status of asylum-seekers and refugees' individual cases. By the end of 2024, the RSD helpline had received **295** calls relating primarily to the status of individual cases and requests for cash assistance. The RSD unit is also participating in monthly community sensitization sessions to ensure asylum-seekers are informed and understand the RSD process in Syria.

Resettlement

UNHCR Syria identifies and submits resettlement cases to third countries for highly vulnerable refugees. By the end of 2024, **145 individuals went through the needs assessment/case identification process, 92** individuals were interviewed to determine their resettlement eligibility, and **50 individuals** were submitted to resettlement countries. In

[1] *This process is typically applied to refugees and asylum-seekers when their UNHCR identification cards expire or when they fail to attend required verification procedures. Inactivation generally results in the suspension of eligibility for certain services or assistance, such as rations.*

addition, UNHCR facilitated the departure of **44** individuals under resettlement and complementary pathways.

Resettlement remains one of the most sought-after service by refugees. However, resettlement countries offer limited quotas, meaning that most refugees cannot be considered for resettlement to another country even if UNHCR believes it would be necessary for their protection or to reunite them with family members.

A **resettlement helpline** offers regular counselling to refugees, providing accurate information on the status of individual cases and managing expectations. **By the end of 2024,** a total of **591 individuals** were offered counselling.

Community-based protection

By the end of December 2024, there were **113** UNHCR-supported **community centres**, out of which one related to refugees and asylum-seekers is located in north-east Syria, where many reside. UNHCR-supported community centres are designed as a "one-stop shop" which is critical for people in need, particularly in remote areas where availability of services is scarce. Moreover, community centres cooperate with other facilities and service providers to ensure complementarity in service provision. Refugees and asylum-seekers have access to all UNHCR-supported community centres and can benefit from a wide variety of protection interventions.

UNHCR also engages **97 refugee outreach volunteers** (RORVs) of different nationalities in Al-Hasakeh, Aleppo, Damascus, Rural Damascus, Homs, Latakia, and Tartous Governorates. The RORVs promote community engagement and assist in mobilizing youth to design and lead community-led initiatives. Additionally, through follow-ups and home visits, the volunteers identify and respond to the needs of vulnerable households either directly or through referrals to community centres, and other service providers including charities, local organizations, and government entities.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

By the end of 2024, **551** refugees and asylum-seekers received mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS), including individual and group counselling, with **29** refugees referred to specialized mental health services such as psychiatrists and psychotherapists. In addition, **253** older persons and persons with disabilities received inclusive care interventions by UNHCR's partners where medical and general in-kind assistance distributed to **721** refugees and asylum-seekers.

UNHCR and partners conducted **304** social/recreational activities and awareness-raising sessions for **6,086** individuals.

Child Protection

In 2024, UNHCR and partners conducted awareness-raising sessions in Damascus as well as in Al-Hol camp and Tal Hamees in Al-Hasakeh Governorate, reaching **5,393 individuals (4,500 children and 893 caregivers).** The awareness sessions covered topics on various child protection risks. As a result of the awareness-raising sessions, a positive impact was observed by the child-friendly space facilitators including improvement of children's capacities and skillsets.

By the end of 2024, a total of **71** refugee and asylum-seeker children received tailored case management services. The main identified risks in north-east Syria included child labour, child neglect, and child maltreatment. In Damascus, the top risks included school drop-out and lack of documentation. Consequently, as a result of the provided services, positive improvements were observed by child protection case managers in the children's daily lives, including relationships at home and school, and in the children's psychosocial well-being.

In 2024, **four** refugee and asylum-seeker children's clubs and child welfare committees were supported in Damascus, as well as in Al-Hol camp and Tal Hamees in Al-Hasakeh Governorate where the majority of refugee communities are located. The members of the child welfare committees and children's clubs received several trainings, including their role in the communities as well as child protection basics and referral mechanisms.

Gender-based violence

In 2024, UNHCR and partners identified and supported **132** refugee and asylum-seeker survivors of **gender-based violence (GBV)** with available multi-sectoral services (psychosocial services, livelihood opportunities, legal aid, and material assistance). Outreach volunteers helped to link the survivors with support networks within their communities.

Additionally, UNHCR conducted **several** GBV awareness sessions on psychological violence, deprivation of resources, opportunities and services, child marriage, sexual harassment, and physical violence, for **2,086** adolescent and adult women in Rural Damascus, as well as in Al-Hol camp and Tal Hamees in Al-Hasakeh Governorate. As a result of the awareness-raising sessions on behavioural change, higher levels of awareness and implementation of prevention measures designed by the communities were observed during the assessments conducted by GBV team members.

By the end of 2024, **three** refugee **women's committees** consisting of 30 refugee women continued their community involvement in Rural Damascus to enhance the role of women in decision-making and designing activities, including for the prevention of GBV.

Cash assistance

Cash assistance continues to be the most efficient and dignified way to allow vulnerable individuals meet their basic needs, especially in the prevailing economic situation. As of 1 March 2023, the multi-purpose cash grant – which refugees were already receiving – was extended to asylum-seekers when UNHCR had the resources to do so. Refugees and asylum-seekers currently have equal access to cash assistance, subject to their specific needs and vulnerability assessments. The legal status is no longer used as a criterion to determine eligibility for cash assistance.

Additionally, exceptional financial assistance (for urgent and unforeseen protection needs) continued during the reporting period. Multi-purpose cash grants (MPCGs) and winterization grants targeted both asylum-seeker and refugee families who were prioritized based on demographics and specific needs. The assistance was provided through a cash-over-the-counter modality.

By end of 2024, **monthly multi-purpose cash grants** were provided to **5,651** households (**15,684 individuals**) for three cycles.

Legal Assistance

Lack of identity and travel documents, irregular status, and **limited knowledge on national legislation and procedures** are the main legal challenges encountered by refugees and asylum-seekers in Syria, affecting their ability to secure residency and register vital events, as well as limiting their freedom of movement and access to basic rights and services.

In response to some of these challenges, UNHCR provides **legal assistance** on a range of issues such as *refoulement*, residency, civil documentation, registration of vital events (particularly birth registration), detention, exit visas, prevention and response to GBV, and child protection issues.

The legal assistance includes counselling and support for legal interventions before courts and administrative bodies as well as awareness-raising activities conducted either through direct sessions or printed materials to disseminate information and raise the awareness of refugees and asylum-seekers on the applicable laws and procedures.

Until the end of 2024, UNHCR legal assistance programmes provided support to **6,794** refugees and asylum-seekers on various legal matters. Out of the mentioned total, **3,206** refugees and asylum-seekers benefited from legal services related particularly to **birth registration and certificates**.

Legal assistance on detention and refoulment

During 2024, UNHCR recorded arbitrary detention of two refugees in Syria, one for violating residency law and the second for similarity of names. During the reporting period, **44** refugees and asylum seekers were reported to be detained for suspicion of involvement in criminal actions (theft, terrorism, illegal money exchange, fraud, drug abuse/trade). UNHCR intervened successfully and secured the release of 17 individuals from detention upon clearance from relevant authorities, and it continues to provide legal assistance to the remaining cases. By 8 December 2024, the total number of refugees and asylum-seekers in detention was 28. However, following the collapse of the previous regime, all detainees were released. This includes cases at the depository centre, the central prison, and the refugees/asylum-seekers arrested at security branches. UNHCR continued its legal support and assistance to the released refugees and asylum-seekers in detention through communication with them to verify their status and needs. However, the majority of those released are unreachable, which hindered status confirmation.

Additionally, UNHCR recorded the deportation/refoulement of 12 Iraqi refugees within the reporting period, despite its active advocacy efforts, due to alleged involvement in criminal activities.

UNHCR, through its awareness raising activities, continues to emphasize to refugees and asylum-seekers their obligation to abide by the laws and avoid any involvement in illicit activities.

Legal Advocacy

- UNHCR successfully advocated regarding the delayed renewal of residency permits and short validity of residency receipts given to Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers residing in north-east Syria. Also, UNHCR advocated for Palestinians from Iraq to obtain an annual residency instead of the 3–6 validity of residency permit that was given to them. These advocacies aimed to ease the burden on concerned individuals resulted from the repeated visits to the immigration offices to submit renewal requirements. Consequently, several facilitated procedures were introduced which helped refugees and asylum seekers on their residency matters.

- Following the issuance of the Amnesty Decree 27 of 2024 which granted a general amnesty for a range of crimes committed prior to its issuance, with some exceptions for financial penalties. UNHCR successfully advocated with Immigration Directorate to waive penalties and forego imprisonment for exceeding residency and illegal entry offenses as outlined in Law 2/2014 and Law 12/2022. As a result of this waiver, and upon conducting awareness-raising campaigns aiming to communicate with relevant communities about the issued waiver, and urging them to legalize their status, over 430 individuals benefited from the amnesty, regularizing their residency status without paying fines or facing imprisonment.