

# Lebanon Response Plan 2025

## Chapter: Returns

### 1. Introduction

Since 2011, Lebanon has witnessed a significant influx of displaced Syrians as a direct consequence of the protracted Syria crisis. Host to an estimated 1.4 million Syrians and 27,000 Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS), Lebanon is the country hosting the highest number of displaced persons per capita globally. The large magnitude and extended duration of this displacement have exerted considerable pressure on the nation's resources, public services, infrastructure, and environment, while at times exacerbating social tensions and intensifying political discourse.

While returns have been limited in previous years, recent political developments - most notably the fall of the Syrian regime on 8 December 2024 and the lifting of sanctions on Syria - mark a fundamental turning point in the protracted Syrian displacement crisis. This changing landscape presents a crucial and timely opportunity to advance coordinated and principled efforts aimed at facilitating the safe, dignified, and sustainable return. Hence, the Government of Lebanon and the international community have prepared a "Return Plan" (RP) to support safe, dignified, informed, and sustainable returns, while upholding the international principles and safeguarding the rights and dignity of returnees. International support for the implementation of the RP is premised on adherence to international standards on return<sup>1</sup>.

The RP is designed to uphold full respect for human rights and safeguard national sovereignty. It aligns with the Lebanese Constitution, the State's paramount interests, and international standards. These efforts are pursued within the comprehensive framework of the Lebanon Response Plan (LRP) that includes inclusive engagement with all relevant stakeholders. The principle of burden-sharing is essential to fully resolve the Syrian displacement issue, as it helps address protection concerns. Furthermore, it contributes to the gradual refinement of returnee data and strengthens border governance in line with international protection standards. It should be noted as well that while return will remain a central option, resettlement will continue to be considered as an option for specific categories.

According to the latest Return Perceptions and Intentions Survey (RPIS) conducted by UNHCR at the regional level including Lebanon in January 2025, 24 per cent of displaced Syrians and 19 per cent of PRS intend to return within 12 months. As of March 2025, more than 123,000 Syrians have departed from Lebanon to Syria, with approximately 97,000 verified by UNHCR as having returned to Syria, including 67 per cent who returned under duress and remained in Syria. The January 2025 RPIS also indicated that among displaced Syrians residing in informal settlements, 22 per cent intend to return to Syria.

The RP is a living document that will be updated in response to the evolving context. It outlines Lebanon's Inter-Agency plan to support the safe, dignified, informed and sustainable returns, in close collaboration with relevant government entities. It sets out for 2025 how UN agencies and partners will work alongside Lebanese authorities to ensure that those who are returning and those who are temporarily remaining, are adequately assisted and protected. This joint approach

---

<sup>1</sup> As outlined in Executive Committee Conclusions No 18 (XXXI) (1980), No 40 (XXXVI) (1985) and No 101(LV) (2004), including highlighting the basic right of persons to return to their country of origin, to be provided with necessary information on conditions in their country of origin, and repatriation to take place at their freely expressed wish in conditions of safety and dignity.

reflects the shared responsibility of all stakeholders involved in the response.

## **2. Outcomes**

### ***Outcome 1: Ensure Safe, Dignified, and Informed Return***

The cornerstone of the RP in Lebanon is the principle that all returns must be safe, dignified, and based on informed decisions of displaced Syrians. This approach is guided by UNHCR's operational framework and the December 2024 Position on Returns to the Syrian Arab Republic, which clearly states that displaced Syrians have the right to return to their country of origin, when they express readiness to return.

Displaced Syrians returning to Syria are offered structured and individualized counselling, including legal aid on pertinent issues. LRP partners ensure families receive return cash grants and transport coordination, while ensuring access to essential medical and nutritional services for the ones in need.

The plan is built on inclusive communication with communities through intentions surveys, focus group discussions, and returns-specific national hotlines among other tools. Protection monitoring is embedded at all stages, including at official border crossings, to ensure returns remain safe and informed.

### ***Outcome 2: Strengthen Coordination Across Agencies and Borders***

The successful facilitation of return and reintegration in Syria requires enhanced cross-border and inter-sectoral coordination between stakeholders in Lebanon and Syria in line with the sovereignty of both states. In Lebanon, the Durable Solutions Working Group (DSWG) leads the Inter-Agency Return Plan under the LRP, ensuring close coordination between UN agencies, NGOs, government institutions, and donors. The RP emphasizes structured engagement with the Government of Lebanon, particularly the Ministry of Social Affairs that plays the liaison role between the DSWG and the Inter-Ministerial Return Committee and through the GSO, which plays a central role in processing return applications and formalizing the safe and dignified exit. Based on the exchange of letters between the Government of Lebanon and UNHCR, the plan reflects a jointly agreed framework for the implementation of self-organized and organized return programmes, in alignment with national sovereignty, international protection principles, and the roles and responsibilities defined by both parties.

At the regional level, the strategy is aligned with the 3RP Regional Strategic Overview<sup>2</sup> and leverages the Regional Inter-Agency Preparedness Plan for Returns, including linkages with the Regional Durable Solutions Working Group. Plans are underway to establish a Syria-based Inter-Agency Solutions Working Group to ensure continuity of assistance for returnees across borders. This group will facilitate information sharing on available services in areas of return, establish referral pathways, and link returnees to early recovery programming, cash-for-work schemes, and HLP restitution processes. Such coordination is critical to support the sustainability of return and to mitigate risks of re-displacement due to unmet needs or unresolved legal claims.

To support these efforts, sector-specific working groups, including Protection, Basic Assistance, Health, WASH and Education are engaged in developing operational linkages, such as harmonized referral protocols. However, cross-border data-sharing mechanisms will be

---

<sup>2</sup> [3RP 2025 Regional Strategic Overview.pdf](#)

identified through an agreed upon modality.

### ***Outcome 3: Sustain Protection and Basic Services in Lebanon***

Continued support remains essential to uphold international protection standards and to safeguard against harmful coping mechanisms that may arise from deteriorating economic and social conditions. The worsening socio-economic outlook in Lebanon has left most Syrians in extreme poverty. Coupled with the impact of escalation of hostilities and internal displacement, the situation of Syrians in Lebanon became particularly fragile. Vulnerable host communities and Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS) face similarly dire circumstances, with more than 87 per cent of PRS families living below the poverty line and relying almost entirely on assistance.

As such, the LRP ensures that humanitarian and development programming in Lebanon continues to target both returnees and those who are temporarily remaining and for the most vulnerable in the host community. Protection services, health care, education, livelihoods programming, shelter and WASH services among others must remain accessible to all.

### **3. Operational Context**

The evolving context in Syria has led to a period of transition and relative optimism in many parts of Syria, while significant uncertainties remain. Lebanon continues to face a multifaceted crisis marked by economic collapse, infrastructure degradation, and host community fatigue. Lebanon remains committed to facilitating informed returns and hosting those who temporarily remain. The durable solutions approach is framed to abide by the Lebanese laws and regulations, upholding in tandem the principle of non-refoulement.

Displaced Syrians in Lebanon reside in various housing arrangements, including those living in urban settings, in informal settlements and those in alternative shelter arrangements, each presenting its own set of vulnerabilities and differentiated needs. While approximately 17 per cent of displaced Syrians reside in informal settlements, including those located along the Litani River, some 22 per cent expressed an intention to return to Syria. While housing and settlement arrangements do not necessarily translate into greater demands for return, there is a general acknowledgement that different groups of displaced may require different modalities for return response. Displaced Syrians in informal settlements who choose to return, will be supported to do so, including through support of MOSA with information provision in the informal settlements.

Returns are expected to accelerate after the middle of the year, influenced by a combination of seasonal, social, and practical factors. One key period is the end of the academic year in Lebanon, typically around June and July, which is a significant trigger, as families tend to wait for the school term to conclude in order to minimize disruption to their children's education and coordinate transitions more effectively. Additionally, the arrival of spring and summer and the consequent agricultural season in Syria will bring more livelihood opportunities and favorable weather conditions, making travel safer and enabling returnees to resume or establish livelihoods, particularly in sectors such as agriculture and construction.

A phased operational scale-up will be implemented to match the pace of returns and evolving needs. Additionally, a unified return framework guided by international protection principles and consisting of various modalities for return, will be in place to accommodate the diverse population needs and circumstances of individuals and families seeking to return to Syria from Lebanon. Existing return modalities include the General Security Office (GSO)-facilitated returns, typically involving pre-departure registration and approval processes, to be enhanced with

support from UN agencies. Another modality is through UNHCR-supported self-organized returns, where individuals initiate their return independently but receive assistance such as counselling, transportation support, and documentation services fully implemented in collaboration with Lebanese authorities. In addition to these organized mechanisms, a significant number of returns are expected to occur through both unassisted and informal channels (such as community initiatives in informal settlements). These returns, while often spontaneous may be supported by LRP partners, and highlight the need for enhanced border and post-return monitoring to ensure the safety, dignity, and rights of returnees are upheld, and to better understand the numbers, conditions and motivations behind such movements.

Funding availability will determine the scale and quality of return support operations, including transportation assistance, cash grants, pre-departure medical checks, and cross-border programming. It is expected that funding for the RP will be provided from the LRP through both new funding and reallocations from sectors.

#### **4. Core Components of the Return Plan<sup>3</sup>**

The operationalization of return from Lebanon is structured around five interrelated components<sup>4</sup> that together aim to ensure an informed, safe, and dignified return process for displaced Syrian and PRS. The return process is pursued in full respect of Lebanon's national sovereignty and legal framework, as reaffirmed in the Exchange of Letters and Council of Ministers Decision No. 27 (Session of June 16, 2025), underscoring national commitment to its implementation in partnership with the international community.

- 1. Preparatory activities** are foundational to the plan. In early 2025, the return strategy was formally introduced through socialization and dialogue processes, with a focus on aligning national actors, particularly the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), GSO, and Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) with the Inter-Agency action plan. Technical committee meetings convened and have brought together humanitarian partners to clarify roles, responsibilities, and operating principles. As part of these preparations, targeted capacity-building activities are being planned to support local authorities, partners, and representatives of displaced Syrians in understanding the international protection principles of return and the rights-based foundations of the action plan. These training cover topics such as international protection standards, eligibility screening, civil documentation, and the facilitation of informed decision-making by displaced households.
- 2. Community engagement and communication with affected populations** are at the center of the return plan. Multiple modalities are being deployed to ensure that displaced Syrians have access to timely, accurate, and actionable information regarding conditions in Syria and the procedures for return. Regular surveys of RPIS are being conducted to track Syrians' intentions, decision-making factors, and evolving concerns. These are completed by participatory methods, including focus group discussions. A website and national hotline have been activated and dedicated for return, offering clarifications on return modalities. Meanwhile, partners and MoSA are working through community structures to disseminate verified information on services available in areas of return, and procedures for enrolment in return programs. MoSA will prioritize information dissemination among displaced persons in informal settlements. Messaging is

---

<sup>3</sup> Considered as preliminary and non-binding to the Lebanese Government, waiting for the outcome of the tripartite dialogue amongst Lebanese and Syrian authorities, in addition to discussions with the UNHCR.

<sup>4</sup> The five components are grounded in the protection framework outlined by UNHCR and implemented through an Inter-Agency approach coordinated by the Durable Solutions Working Group (DSWG).

harmonized across platforms to reduce confusion, combat rumours, misinformation, and uphold informed decision-making. Community engagement and communication with affected populations activities aim to invest in a successful, sustainable and permanent return. Support for community initiatives for return will also be assessed and supported, wherever possible within the unified framework and in line with international principles.

**3. Return counselling and processing** represent the core operational step in facilitating repatriation in an expediting manner. Before returning, displaced Syrians are contacted to undergo detailed, family-level counselling sessions. These sessions verify the family composition, assess vulnerabilities, and examine access to key documentation such as civil records and academic transcripts. Families are then referred for specialized support, such as legal assistance and educational documentation and school registration procedures. The Education sector will advocate for expedited access to academic transcripts - particularly for higher-grade students—and certification for out-of-school children in formal education. Coordination with the Whole of Syria (WoS) Education Sector and MEHE will support returning children's access to Lebanese academic certificates and ensure continuity of learning. Efforts will also focus on addressing administrative and academic barriers to facilitate reintegration into the Syrian education system. In collaboration with WoS partners, children will be referred to available programs, including remedial and Arabic language support. Community awareness will be raised on school enrolment procedures in Syria through targeted outreach and communication channels. Those cleared for return attend in-person appointments at one of six designated Return Centres, located in Beirut, Mount Lebanon, Zahle, Baalbek, Minieh and Akkar. At these centers, each adult family member is interviewed separately to ensure the decision to return is informed and an individual choice. While cross border disease surveillance and coordination between the Health sector in Lebanon and Syria Health cluster continue, families receive pre-departure health screening, including vaccinations for children and nutrition support for pregnant women and newborns. Nutrition services include the provision of micronutrient and energy-based supplies for children under 5 and pregnant/breastfeeding women, with ongoing support at the Masnaa border. At vaccination sites along border crossings, the Nutrition sector will support the distribution of nutrition supplies, malnutrition screening, and dissemination of key Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) messages. Activities also include education on optimal IYCF practices and the distribution of nutritional supplements to children and mothers. A return cash grant of USD 100 per person is provided through secure modalities, either through prepaid cards or cash disbursement. A Repatriation Form (RF) will be issued<sup>5</sup>, detailing the names, intended area of return, and date of departure. Syrians also provide written consent acknowledging the implications of their decision to return, including the closure of their UNHCR file in Lebanon. The RF will also serve as a one-time identification document to facilitate movement through security checkpoints. Return counselling and processing aim to invest in a successful, sustainable and permanent return.

Transport is organized and facilitated, which provides logistical support at designated staging areas where displaced Syrians are re-verified, receive final medical clearance through fit-to-travel checks, and are assisted with tagging and loading their luggage. Families are then transported to official border crossing points. GSO finalizes the exit procedure by stamping the RF, and waivers of administrative or legal penalties related to residency and overstay are implemented with the Lebanese authorities. Transportation activities include the provision of support for persons with specific needs (PSN) requiring

---

<sup>5</sup> The Repatriation Form is issued jointly by UNHCR, stamped by GSO at crossing points, and recognized by the Government of Lebanon as a formal return attestation and one-time identification document.

specialized arrangements to facilitate their return. Border infrastructure, including health and WASH facilities, is being rehabilitated to ensure conditions conducive to a dignified and orderly departure. This includes the installation of external gender-segregated latrines, water tanks, tap stands with water trucking and desludging services, and the rehabilitation of the wastewater treatment system. Light hygiene kits are also being provided at staging areas through the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM).

- 4. Cross-border coordination and enabling activities** aim to sustain returns. A dedicated Solutions Working Group will be established in Syria to coordinate information flows, ensure continuity of services, and link returnees to existing programs. Technical and vocational skills training for Syrian displaced should take place inside Syria to support sustainable return. These activities are aligned with existing sectoral strategies and do not require repurposing or additional funding. The skills gained through these training—within sectors permitted by national regulations—are transferable and may contribute to the reintegration, early recovery, and reconstruction processes in areas of return. Returnees will also be connected to income generating opportunities such as cash-for-work and community rehabilitation projects in Syria. Mapping of HLP restitution mechanisms and evidentiary requirements for property claims is ongoing, with the results to be used by legal actors in Lebanon to guide displaced Syrians in securing relevant documentation prior to departure. The Inter-Ministerial Committee will coordinate with Syrian authorities on cross-border movement and organized transportation to ensure protection and proper border management.
- 5. Monitoring and feedback mechanisms** are included in the plan to ensure accountability and responsiveness. The DSWG, supported by its Technical Working Group, will oversee regular tracking of return figures, return modalities, and overall trends. The safety, and sustainability of returns will be monitored at multiple points, from Return Centers to border crossings and through post-return follow-up. Community engagement tools, including RPIS, feedback channels, and complaint mechanisms, will be maintained and expanded to capture real-time inputs from displaced Syrians. These mechanisms also provide a safeguard against misinformation and coercion, ensuring that the return process remains firmly grounded in protection principles. The Inter-Agency response will remain adaptive, with the ability to revise programming based on emerging risks, funding fluctuations, and developments inside Syria.

## **5. Risks assessments and Mitigation**

While 2025 presents new opportunities for voluntary return, the strategy faces several key risks that require close monitoring and proactive mitigation.

The fluid situation in Syria remains one of the significant risks. To mitigate this, returns will be guided by real-time conflict analysis, protection monitoring at borders, and area-based risk mapping coordinated with the official competent authorities and with partners inside Syria.

Funding shortfall threatens the ability to scale return support. Significant investment is needed for transportation, cash assistance, health and nutrition screening, vaccination and coordination. Targeted donor outreach and prioritization frameworks are in place to help sequence activities and avoid gaps in critical support. In line with international humanitarian principles, particularly burden-sharing.

The DSWG will continuously review these risks, adapting the response to uphold protection

standards in an evolving regional context. In addition, regular coordination meetings between the Inter-Ministerial Committee and the international community are foreseen to ensure effective implementation, address emerging challenges, and monitor progress towards safe and sustainable return.

## **6. Funding Requirements**

The Lebanon chapter of the 3RP includes a dedicated return preparedness envelope under the broader USD 2.99 billion appeal.<sup>6</sup> Return-related activities require repurposing of funds and new injections to enable cross-border support and sustainability amounting to an estimated range of USD 150 million.

Finally, facilitating a well-planned return process will not be a closure, it will be the beginning for a better future: for Syrians to return to their homeland and reclaim their lives in dignity, and for Lebanon to rebuild its resilience and foster its stability.

[Annex 1: Inter-Agency Return Action Plan Matrix.](#)

---

<sup>6</sup> The total LRP appeal amounts to USD 2.99 billion, which includes all sector budgets as well as the additional USD 87.3 million top-up for return-related needs.