UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Enhanced Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria

Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon

September 2025

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Amina, pictured in front of her home in Idleb, recently returned after years of displacement.

For her and many others, the fall of the Assad government has revived hopes of rebuilding life in Syria, yet uncertainty over stability and services still shapes their daily decisions.

Executive summary

The fall of the Assad government on 8 December 2024 marked a significant turning point in Syria's political and humanitarian trajectory. This turn of events presents an opportunity to end one of the largest displacement crises in the world including for millions of internally displaced Syrians. For the 4.7 million Syrian refugees residing in Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt (as of 31 August 2025), the political transition in Syria raises hopes about the prospect of returning to their homes, together with uncertainty as to how the situation will evolve.

To capture refugees' perspectives in this rapidly evolving context, UNHCR and the World Bank launched a joint effort to generate timely, relevant data on refugee return intentions, motivations and barriers, and inform policy, programming and investment decisions.

Syrian refugees are a diverse population, each facing distinct challenges shaped by their personal histories, experiences in Syria, and life in displacement. The decision to return is deeply personal and constantly evolving, influenced by a complex mix of social, economic, and security considerations, especially changes inside Syria. UNHCR supports refugees in making informed choices about return, led by their voices and individual circumstances. Guided by refugees' intentions, UNHCR has stepped up support to those returning voluntarily including cash assistance for returnees, in host countries and upon arrival in Syria.

The June 2025 Enhanced Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions to Return to Syria Survey (eRPIS) builds on a series of surveys conducted since 2017 by UNHCR. For the first time, it adopts a panel design, targeting households previously interviewed in socio-economic and vulnerability assessments conducted in 2023–2024. This longitudinal approach enables a more nuanced understanding of how return intentions evolve in response to shifting conditions in both Syria and host countries, thereby informing more targeted and responsive policy interventions.

As of 31 August 2025, UNHCR estimates that over 860,000 Syrians have returned from neighboring countries since December 2024.[1] The June 2025 eRPIS interviewed 6,316 refugees residing in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt, six months into Syria's political transition.[2] The survey's sample design ensures statistical significance at both country and regional levels.

This brief identifies and analyzes the different elements that influence Syrian refugees' intentions to return, drawing on UNHCR's June 2025 Return Perception and Intentions Survey in the region. It highlights push and pull factors, motivations, barriers, and decision-making dynamics, offering insights on investment priorities inside Syria, particularly in housing, livelihoods, and basic services, to support voluntary, safe, and sustainable returns, while maintaining support for refugees and host communities in neighboring countries. Full methodological details, including sampling and weighting, are available in an online appendix here.

[1] UNHCR CORE, Syria Governorates of Return Overview.
[2] Türkiye was not included in accordance with the request made by the Government of Türkiye. See page 7 for spotlight on Syrian refugees in Türkiye.

> ***The biggest problem in Syria is now gone. When the situation gets better, I'd like to bring everyone back to Syria.***
>
> *Quote from a respondent in Jordan*

At the Jdeidat/Yabous border, families returning from Lebanon are among the 860,000 who have gone back to Syria since December 2024. Their journeys reflect the broader dynamics captured in the eRPIS survey: cautious optimism about security, weighed against the need for housing, jobs, and services to make return sustainable.

Photo © Andrew McConnell

Key findings

The June 2025 eRPIS reveals a nuanced picture of Syrian refugees' intentions, motivations, and barriers in relation to return to Syria.

The fall of the Assad government in December 2024, triggered a sharp and almost immediate increase in refugees stated intentions to return within a year, from less than 2% in April-May 2024 to 27% in January 2025. This has translated into action: as of 31 August 2025, UNHCR estimates that 860,000 Syrians have returned from neighboring countries. **Among those still residing in host countries, the June 2025 survey found that 18% say they intend to return within the next 12 months**.

The data was collected in June 2025 in a volatile context. Violence in coastal areas during March and April may have discouraged some respondents from considering return, while the survey predates the recent clashes in southern Syria, which could also influence future intentions. **Refugees' perceptions of safety and stability within Syria remain a key factor in their decision-making and are likely to influence short-term return trends in response to evolving conditions on the ground**.

The hope of eventual return remains strong among Syrian refugees. Overall, 80% express a desire to return to Syria one day, with notable variation across host countries: 86% in Egypt, 55% in Iraq, and 80% in both Lebanon and Jordan. The regional figure is unchanged from the January 2025 intentions survey, suggesting that long-term aspirations to return remain stable. However, these aspirations hinge on developments inside Syria, including greater stability, increased investment in and access to basic services, improved housing stock, and the resolution of legal housing barriers, as well as stronger economic and employment opportunities.

Refugees' motivations to return blend emotion with pragmatism. In addition to perceived improvements in security, the most frequently cited reasons for intending to return within the next 12 months include a strong sense of national identity ("Syria is my homeland") and the desire to reunite with family, as well as push factors in host countries including high cost of living and limited jobs. These motivations closely mirror those reported in the January 2025 intentions survey. Concerns about access to basic services in Syria also rank highly and continue to shape decision-making around return.

Structural barriers continue to significantly limit refugees' intentions to return. In addition to safety and security, the most frequently cited concerns inside Syria include housing availability and property damage, limited employment opportunities, lack of financial resources to support the journey, and inadequate access to basic services. These obstacles are consistent with findings from the January 2025 intentions survey, underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions to address them. At this critical juncture, these structural challenges outweigh personal and legal considerations unrelated to housing, which are cited far less frequently.

Many refugees seek first-hand information before deciding to return. Nearly 60% of those intending to return consider a 'go and see' visit to Syria essential before making a final decision, a figure unchanged from the January 2025 intentions survey.

Return plans typically include the whole family. Most households indicate they want to return to their place of origin. Among those planning to return within the next 12 months, 85% intend to go back to their original place of residence, consistent with the 88% reported in January 2025. Meanwhile, 93% expect to return with all family members, marking an increase from 87% in January, when respondents reported plans to return with either all immediate family or both immediate and extended family.

Property ownership is common but compromised. Some 40% of households report owning property in Syria; of these, 87% say their homes are destroyed or severely damaged, and only 12% consider them inhabitable. Additionally, 58% lack complete documentation. Risks are highest in Lebanon, where 74% report properties destroyed, uninhabitable or undocumented. These findings highlight the urgent need to rebuild housing and infrastructure as prerequisites for safe and dignified return. There is also a clear correlation between fully documented property and/or land and intention to return within the next year.

Employment is widespread yet precarious. For main income earners, jobs remain predominantly informal and unstable. Only 29% hold valid work permits in host countries, and over 90% highlight that their income is insufficient to cover basic needs. Many also rely on humanitarian assistance with 52% of households having received humanitarian assistance in the past three months. Without legal status, many are excluded from formal employment and lack protections such as health insurance, paid leave and job security. Employment status shows only a weak correlation with return intentions, likely due to uniformly high employment rates among primary income earners across households.

Economic vulnerability is widespread among refugees. Nearly all households report the main income earner is employed, yet three in four experience fluctuating earnings. 63% face significant difficulty, and 27% some difficulty, in meeting basic needs. Humanitarian assistance remains vital, especially in Jordan and Lebanon, but is increasingly threatened by funding shortfalls. Economic vulnerability is a major barrier to return, with many citing insufficient resources as a reason for not planning to return within 12 months.

After years in Jordan, 48-year-old Awatef returned to her war-damaged home in Syria with her children, including her youngest, Amir, who has Down syndrome. The family hopes to rebuild their lives, but faces daily challenges with damaged housing, limited services and the need for specialized care.

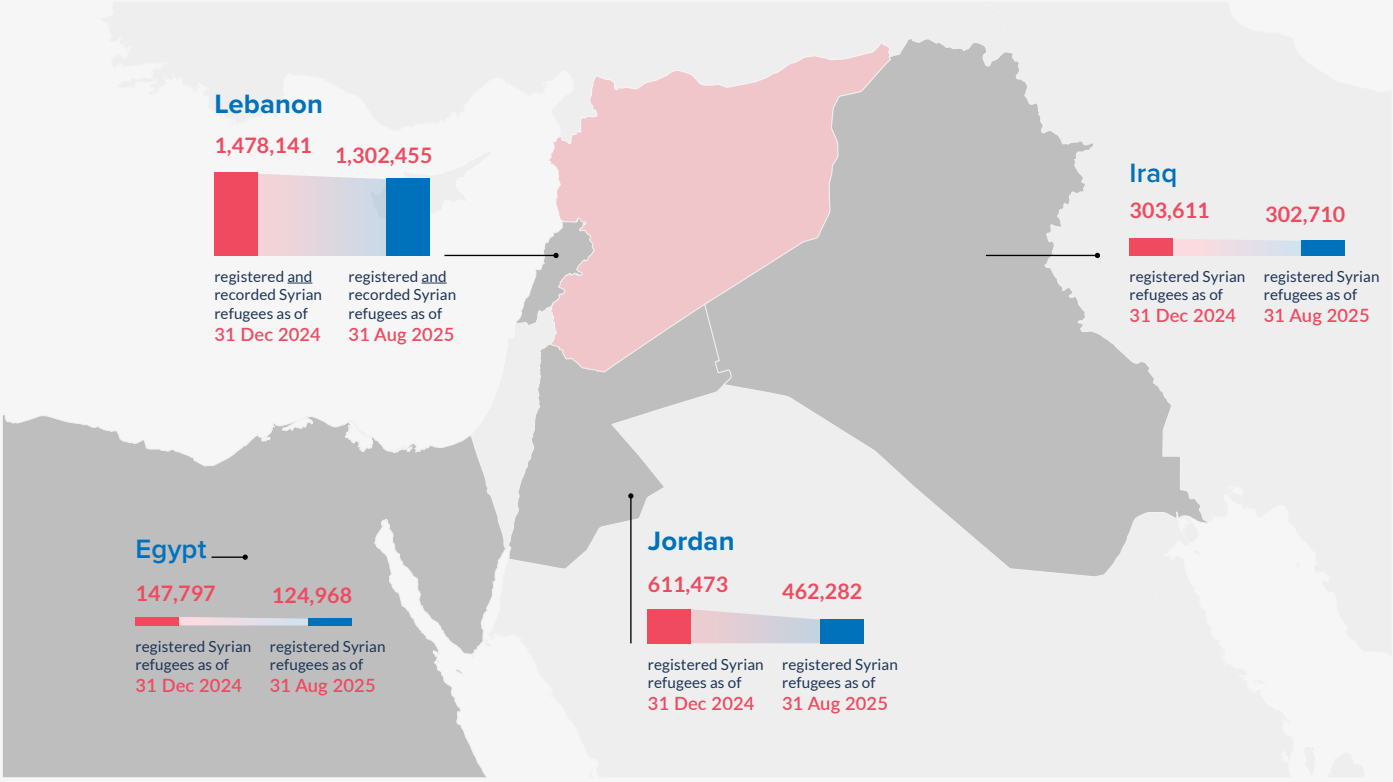
Photo © UNHCR/Vivian Tou'meh

These findings underscore the complexity of return decision-making and the need for coordinated, evidence-based approaches to support voluntary, safe and dignified returns. Syria stands at a pivotal moment, with a real opportunity to shift from prolonged fragility toward more durable stability. Nearly one in five Syrian refugees express an intention to return within the next year, and four out of five hope to return one day. To sustain and build on this momentum, international support is essential to address key challenges inside Syria. This will require targeted investments in housing, livelihoods, and basic services, particularly in areas of origin, alongside efforts to improve safety, security and economic opportunities. In parallel, international support is needed to continue supporting refugees and their host communities in neighboring countries to ensure that returns are voluntary, safe and dignified and that refugees are not pushed to return prematurely to Syria.

Methodological note:

The 2025 initiative is classified as enhanced due to its expanded scope and integration of socio-economic data from prior surveys. Supported by a strategic partnership with the World Bank, the panel design links existing datasets across Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, enabling stronger, evidence-based policy analysis. Full methodological details, including sampling and weighting, are available here.

Figure 1: UNHCR registered refugee population (31 December 2024 vs 31 August 2025)



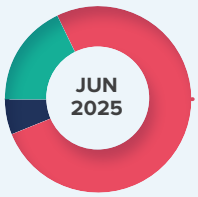
These figures refer to refugees registered by UNHCR. For Lebanon, this includes registered and recorded refugees. Latest and official figures on registered Syrian refugees are available here: UNHCR data portal.

Figure 2: At a glance

Findings: 2025 ERPIS

All respondents were asked:

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

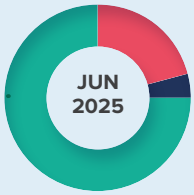


18% Yes
76% No
6% I don't know /I am undecided

If answered "No" or "I don't know/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 one day?



75% Yes
21% No
4% I don't know /I am undecided

If answered "Yes"

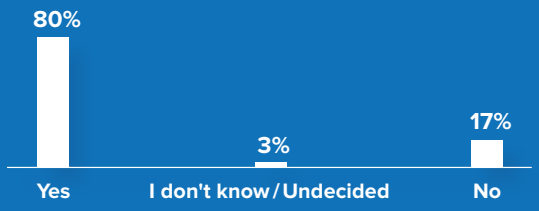
Follow-up question for respondents who answered the previous question with "**yes**":

Q3. Do you hope to return to Syria within five years?

83% Yes
8% No
9% I don't know /I am undecided

Overall hope to return

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



Box: 1: Spotlight on Syrian Refugees in Türkiye

As of end of August 2025, Türkiye hosts just over 2.5 million Syrians under Temporary Protection (TP), according to the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM). Since December 2024, more than 411,000 Syrians have voluntarily returned to Syria, bringing total returns since 2016 to just over 1.15 million.

Before leaving Türkiye, many returnees were unemployed or worked in skilled trades, agriculture, construction, or commerce. Among those returning to Syria, many expect to rely on informal labor, family support, or self-employment.

UNHCR continues to work closely with PMM to monitor returns, ensuring they follow established procedures and standards. Key drivers reported from Syrians returning include political developments, improved security, and family reunification, followed by economic hardship and housing challenges.

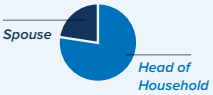
Syrians remain the largest group of foreign workers in Türkiye. In 2024, 117,334 work permits were issued, an 8.1% increase from 2023. An additional 120,284 applications under the Work Permit Exemption scheme, mainly for seasonal agricultural and livestock work, were all approved.

Demographics:

- This survey was conducted by phone with ***6,316 Syrian refugees*** between 25 May and 5 July 2025

- ***37%*** of respondents are female and ***63%*** male

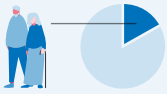
- ***72%*** of respondents are head of households and primary decision makers while ***21%*** are spouses



Household composition shows high dependency needs:

- ***85%*** of interviewed households have children

- ***17%*** of households have elderly members



- ***28%*** of respondents are single parents or caregivers

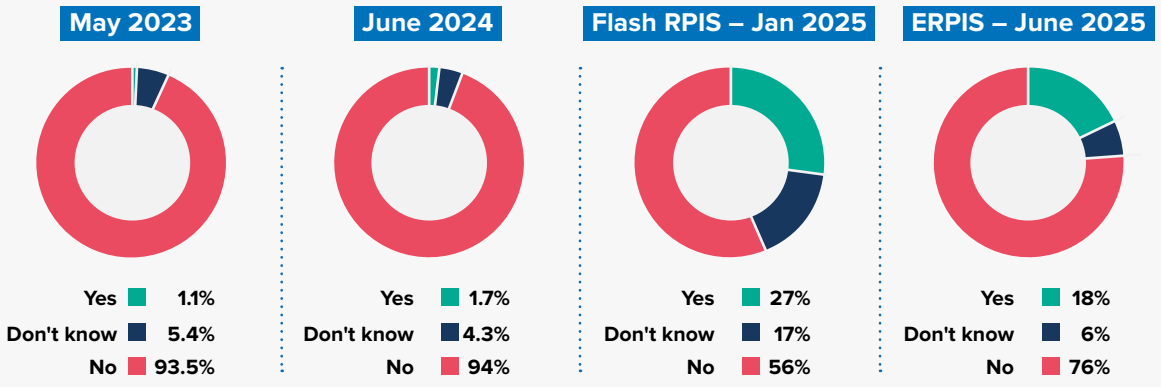
- ***14%*** are female headed households

Return intentions & influencing factors

Among those still residing in host countries, the June eRPIS survey finds that 18% of Syrian refugee households across Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon intend to return to Syria within the next 12 months (Egypt: 29%, Iraq: 4%, Jordan: 22%, Lebanon: 14%). This regional figure is lower than the 27% reported in UNHCR's January 2025 survey, likely reflecting two dynamics: some households that had planned to return earlier in the year may have already done so, while others, at the time of asking, may have reconsidered due to localized security incidents inside Syria. Importantly, the fact that overall return intentions have not accelerated points to the persistence of structural barriers, particularly concerns around safety and security, that continue to constrain refugees' ability to return.

> ***In my area of origin there's nothing, no services, no electricity. The first thing we'll need is a roof over our heads.***
>
> *Quote from a respondent in Iraq*

Figure 3: **Percentage of Syrian refugees intending to return within 12 months (Regional)**



Hope for eventual return to Syria remains high, exceeding 80% across surveyed households, though notable differences persist between host countries. The regional figure is unchanged from the January 2025 intentions survey, suggesting that long-term aspirations to return remain stable. However, these aspirations hinge on developments inside Syria, including greater stability, increased investment in and access to basic services, improved housing stock and the resolution of legal housing barriers, as well as stronger economic and employment opportunities.

Within households, decision-making dynamics on return vary. In 42% of cases, return decisions are reportedly made jointly among adult members, while 41% report that the head of household decides alone.

Return plans typically include the whole family and most households typically wish to return to their place of origin. Among those planning to return within the next 12 months, 85% intend to go back to their original place of residence, consistent with the 88% figure in January 2025. Meanwhile, 93% expect to return with all family members, marking a slight increase from 87% in January, when respondents reported plans to return with either all immediate family or both immediate and extended family. These findings highlight the need for coordinated, family-centered reintegration support inside Syria, where local infrastructure, services, and protection mechanisms will need to be strengthened to accommodate returning households.

Figure 4:
Percentage of respondents planning to return within the next 12 months who intend to go back to their place of origin

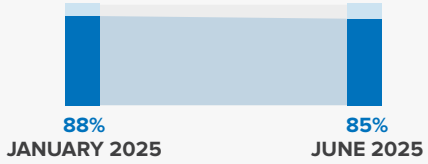
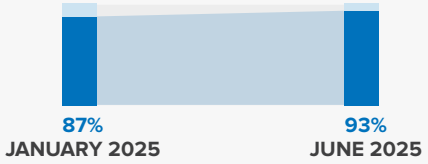


Figure 5:
Respondents expecting to return with all family members



Drivers & barriers to return

Motivations

Among Syrian refugees planning to return within the next 12 months, about one out of every two households surveyed, except in Iraq, indicate that temporarily visiting Syria before making a final decision is extremely important. This reflects a strong desire for firsthand assessment of current conditions, particularly regarding safety, housing, and access to services. In Jordan, the largest share of Syrian refugees, 59%, report that visiting Syria before returning is extremely important, followed by 50% in Egypt, 44% in Lebanon, and 28% in Iraq. However, a substantial minority, about one in three households, do not consider such visits essential, suggesting that some return decisions are shaped by indirect information, personal beliefs, or external pressures rather than direct observation.

Among respondents who indicated an intention to return to Syria within the next 12 months, the most cited motivations in addition to perceived improvements in security conditions in Syria were:

1. A strong sense of national identity – "*Syria is my homeland.*"
2. Rising cost of living in the host country
3. Limited employment opportunities in displacement settings
4. Desire to reunite with family members in Syria

These motivations highlight the interplay between emotional ties and economic pressures. While perceived improvements in security in Syria, identity and family reunification remain powerful motivators, the influence of host country conditions, particularly economic hardship, can significantly shape return intentions. Understanding this balance is crucial for designing policies that support informed, voluntary, and dignified returns while ensuring that refugees are not pushed to return prematurely.

Among the 76% of households who reported no intention to return to Syria within the next 12 months, respondents were asked what changes would affect their decision. In addition to improvements in safety and security conditions inside Syria, the most cited factors included:

1. Improvements in housing availability
2. Access to employment and livelihood opportunities
3. Sufficient financial and logistical resources to support the return journey
4. Reliable access to basic services such as healthcare and education

> ***Syria is my home, I'm alone here, my family is already there.***
>
> *Quote from a respondent in Jordan*

Barriers

For the 76% of households who reported that they did not intend to return in the next 12 months the top three reasons they highlighted are:

1. Lack of adequate housing
2. Limited access to employment and livelihoods
3. Concerns about safety and security

These concerns are consistently reported across all host countries, underscoring their universal nature and suggesting that refugees' reluctance to return is not host country-specific.

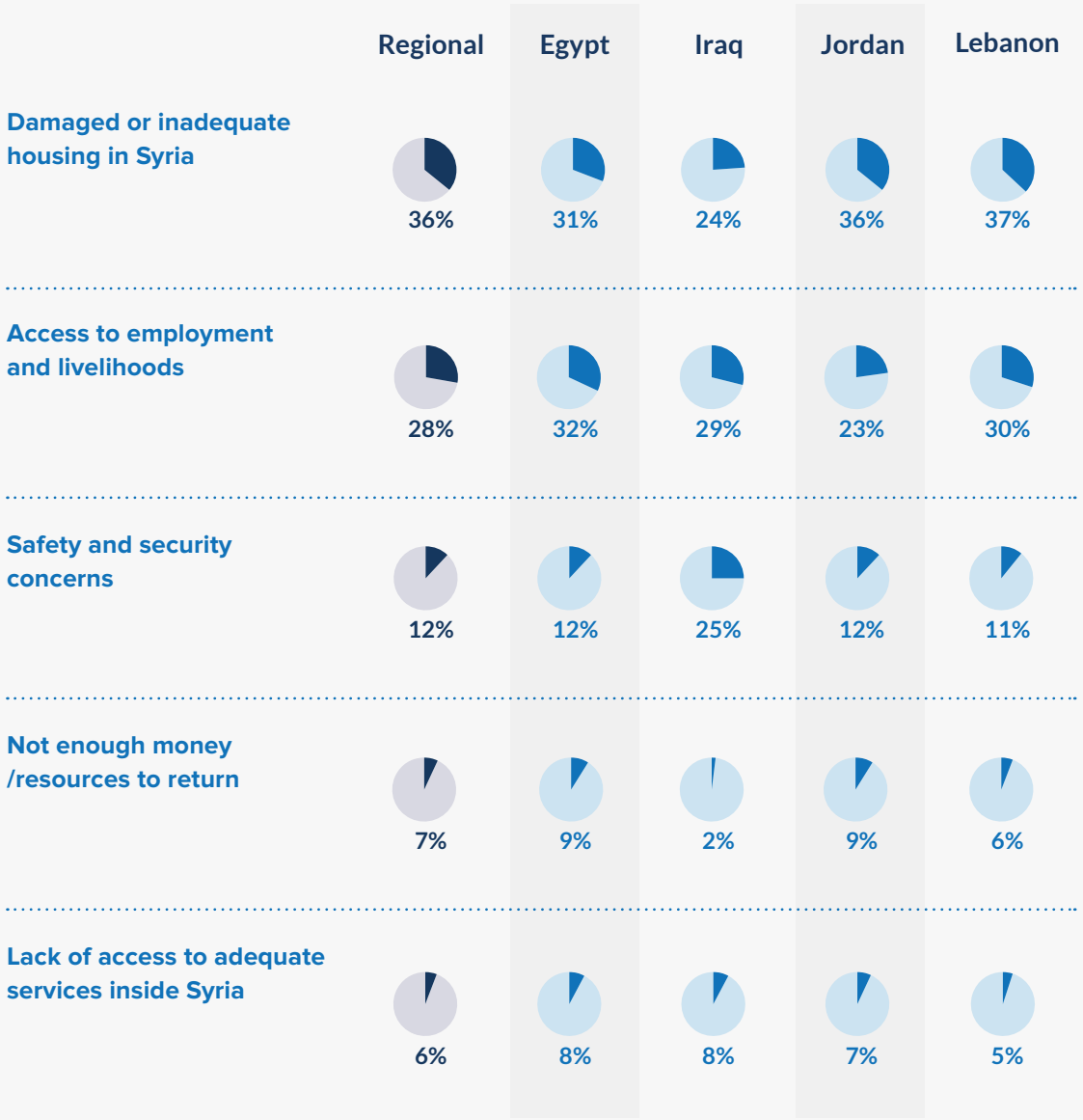
In contrast, barriers to return that were cited but less frequent include:

- Debt inside Syria
- Legal and documentation issues
- Advice from others not to return
- A family member holding citizenship in the host country
- Social and community tensions
- Lack of family to reunite with in Syria

While these factors are present, their relatively low frequency suggests that Syrian refugees' decisions are driven by structural and systemic conditions inside Syria, such as housing, jobs, and safety. This underscores the need for durable solutions that address core infrastructure, economic and job growth, and security challenges in Syria.

After 12 years in Jordan, 78-year-old Ikrimah Ahmad Al-Sarrees returned to his damaged home in Daraa with his daughters and grandchildren. His widowed daughter Basmah reopened a small pastry shop but the family still struggles to survive amid financial hardship and the need to repair their home.

Figure 6: **Main reasons for not intending to return to Syria within the next 12 months**



Respondents were specifically asked whether they had safety concerns about returning to Syria, and if so, to identify their top two concerns. More than 3 out of 4 reported that they did have safety and security concerns (77%) with the most cited security issues including kidnapping, the presence of armed actors, theft, communal violence and unexploded ordnance.

Property ownership & housing stock in Syria

Some 39% of Syrian refugees report owning land or property in Syria: 25% own property only, 3% own land only, and 11% own both. However, the condition of these assets is overwhelmingly poor: 87% of property owners report their property as destroyed or severely damaged, and only 12% consider their house inhabitable.

While most households possess some form of documentation for their land and housing, 58% of property owners lack complete documentation required to prove legal ownership. These gaps in documentation, combined with widespread destruction, highlight persistent challenges related to Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) rights, which have been widely cited by refugees and returnees as barriers to return and reintegration, particularly in Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon.

To estimate the proportion of property considered "at risk," we aggregate households that either lack documentation or report their housing as fully destroyed or uninhabitable. The analysis reveals Syrian refugees in Lebanon face the highest level of property at risk, with 74% of households affected, compared to 69% in Jordan, 57% in Egypt and 63% in Iraq. These findings underscore the urgent need to rebuild housing stock and critical infrastructure in the areas most affected by destruction, as a prerequisite for enabling voluntary, safe and dignified return.

Figure 7: Summary of key indicators on housing land and property and property at risk

Responses:	Egypt	Iraq	Jordan	Lebanon
Own property	30%	25%	36%	42%
Have all documents for property	63%	45%	42%	40%
% with no document	29%	47%	51%	53%
% whose house is reported as destroyed	51%	41%	46%	55%
% whose house is inhabitable	24%	23%	14%	9%
Property at 'risk' (% of all owners)	57%	63%	69%	74%

There is a clear correlation between documented ownership of property and land and the intention to return to Syria. Refugees who report owning property and land with valid documentation are significantly more likely to express an intention to return within the next 12 months. This relationship is particularly strong in Egypt and Jordan, where documented ownership appears to play a more influential role in shaping return intentions.

Employment outcomes for main income earners and economic stability of households

This analysis focuses exclusively on the employment status of the household's main income earner and does not reflect overall employment levels among the Syrian refugee population. We examine the link between employment status and the intention to return to Syria within the next 12 months, using the ILO Labor Force Survey framework to assess the employment status of each household's main income earner.

Employment among main income earners of Syrian refugee households is widespread but often informal and precarious. While 96% of households' main income earners are employed in some capacity, only 29% hold valid work permits, and 52% report receiving humanitarian assistance in the past three months. Employment is predominantly informal and low-skilled, 63% are day laborers, and 51% report significant month-to-month income variability, highlighting the economic vulnerability of refugee households despite high employment rates of main income earners. These conditions underscore the limited protection and stability associated with refugees' experience in host-country labor markets: without legal status, many are excluded from formal employment, lack access to labor rights and social protections such as health insurance, paid leave, or job security, and remain vulnerable to sudden income loss and unstable working conditions. There is a weak correlation between employment status and intentions to return to Syria, due to the high employment rate of main income earners across the sample.

Across all countries, work remains the primary source of household income. However, humanitarian assistance is the second most frequently reported source, most households rely on UNHCR (52%) and WFP (42%) assistance to supplement income streams, with notable variation across countries. In the context of the current humanitarian funding crisis, this secondary source of income is at significant risk. The June data collection occurred before the full impact of these funding cuts. Future rounds will closely monitor their effects, which may further exacerbate challenges in meeting basic needs.

In addition to income and humanitarian assistance, slightly less than one in ten households report receiving remittances and on average only 15% report sending money to friends or family inside Syria.

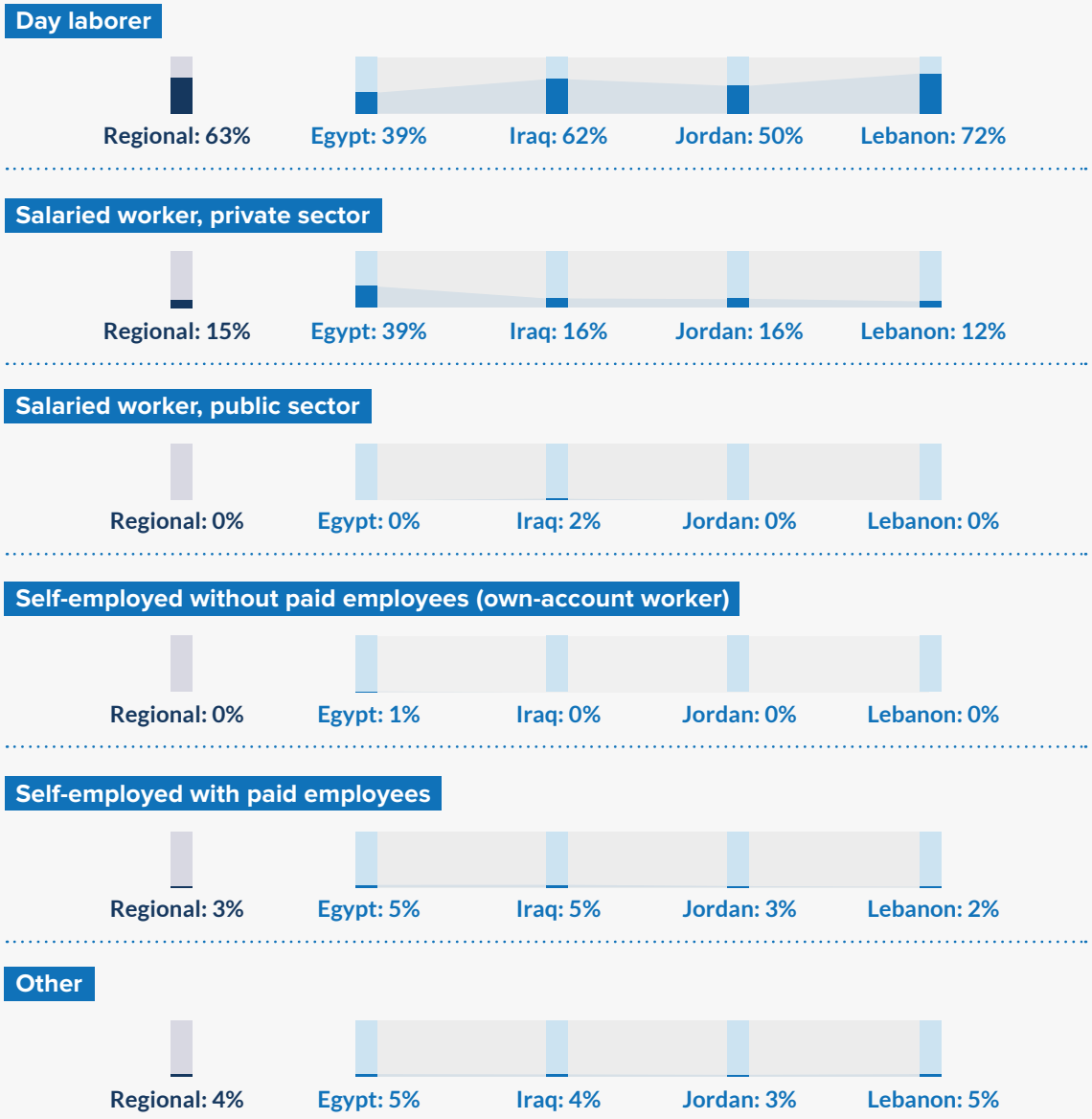
Figure 8: Top 5 sources of income for household

Responses:	Egypt	Iraq	Jordan	Lebanon
Work	94%	93%	78%	90%
Humanitarian assistance	16%	19%	58%	53%
Other	4%	5%	6%	5%
Community assistance	5%	6%	6%	5%
Remittances	6%	6%	7%	4%

Over two out of three Syrian refugee households, 76%, report that their income varies from month to month, with 51% experiencing significant fluctuations. The lack of stable monthly income poses serious challenges, contributing to financial stress, limiting households' ability to plan, save, or consistently meet basic needs and likely complicating efforts to prepare for a successful return to Syria.

Figure 9: Status in employment of main income earners in Syrian refugee households, based on ILO ICSE-18 classification

Responses:



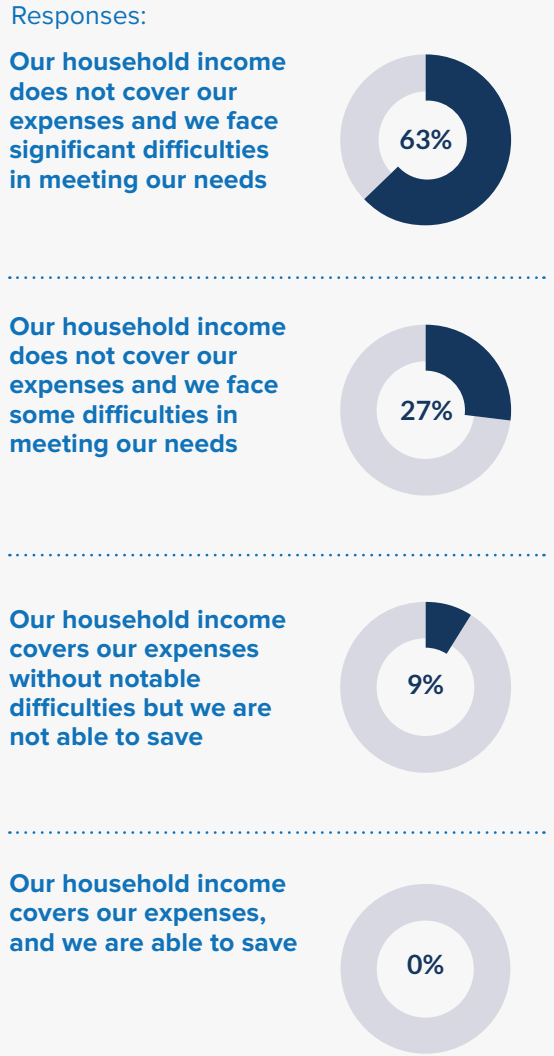
Across all four countries, primary household earners tend to work in a common set of sectors, mostly in low-skill jobs. Construction emerges as a key sector of employment, alongside several service industries, notably Accommodation and Food Services, Other Service Activities, Wholesale and Retail Trade and Administrative and Support Services.

However, there are notable country-specific differences. In Egypt and Iraq, Transportation and Storage emerge as key employment sectors for Syrian refugees, replacing Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery, which is more prominent in other contexts.

Figure 10: Top employment sectors of Syrian refugees across four countries (Regional)

Nine out of ten households across the region report facing either some or significant difficulties in meeting their basic needs, with 63% experiencing significant hardship. While the overall rate remains high, Egypt has the lowest proportion of Syrian refugees reporting inadequate income to meet household needs. In contrast, Syrian refugees in Lebanon report the greatest difficulty in covering household expenses with their available income.

Figure 11: Self-reported household income adequacy (Regional)



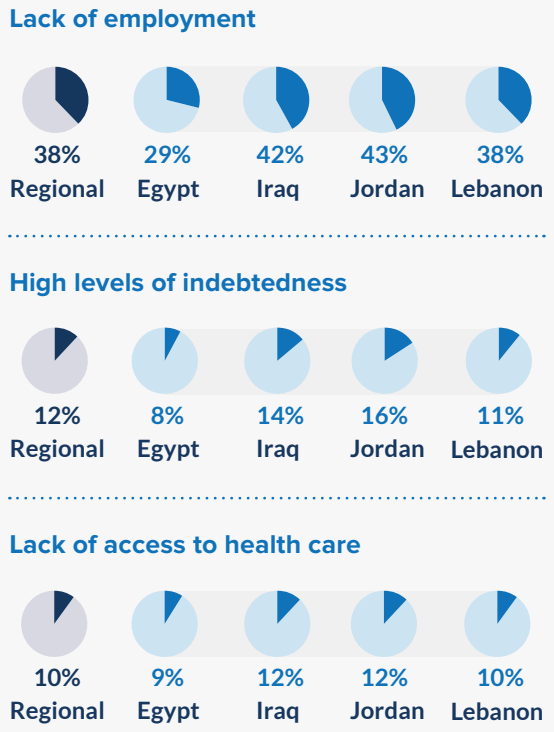
For the nine out of ten households that report struggling to cover their expenses with available income, respondents were asked which basic needs they found most difficult to meet. The most frequently cited needs Syrian household's struggle to meet include housing (24%), food (23%), and services: healthcare (17%), electricity (10%) and education and water (5% each). These findings highlight the core areas of vulnerability among Syrian refugee households facing financial hardship.

Most of the households report having household debt in the host country, 86%, while only 12% have debt inside Syria.

Households identified their main daily difficulties as finding employment, managing high levels of debt and accessing healthcare.

Syria. Homs Governorate: Jassim speaks with UNHCR staff outside his shelter in Al-Qusayr, after returning from Lebanon. He and his family face ongoing economic hardship and the challenge of rebuilding life amid destroyed homes and scarce livelihoods.

Figure 12: Top reported difficulties in daily life among Syrian refugees



These persistent vulnerabilities not only undermine well-being in host countries, potentially acting as a push factor for return to Syria, but also pose a significant barrier to safe and voluntary repatriation, with many citing inadequate financial and logistical resources as key reasons for not planning to return within the next 12 months.

Together, these findings underscore the urgent need for sustained support to both refugees and host communities, while investing in conditions inside Syria that can enable safe, voluntary and sustainable return.

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