

FIFTH REGIONAL SURVEY ON SYRIAN REFUGEES' PERCEPTIONS AND INTENTIONS ON RETURN TO SYRIA

Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan – March 2019



5.9% intend to return in the next 12 months

75.2% of Syrian refugees hope to return one day

69.3% hope but do not intend to return in the next 12 months



93% of the respondents planning to return to Syria within 12 months stated they plan to return to their place of origin.

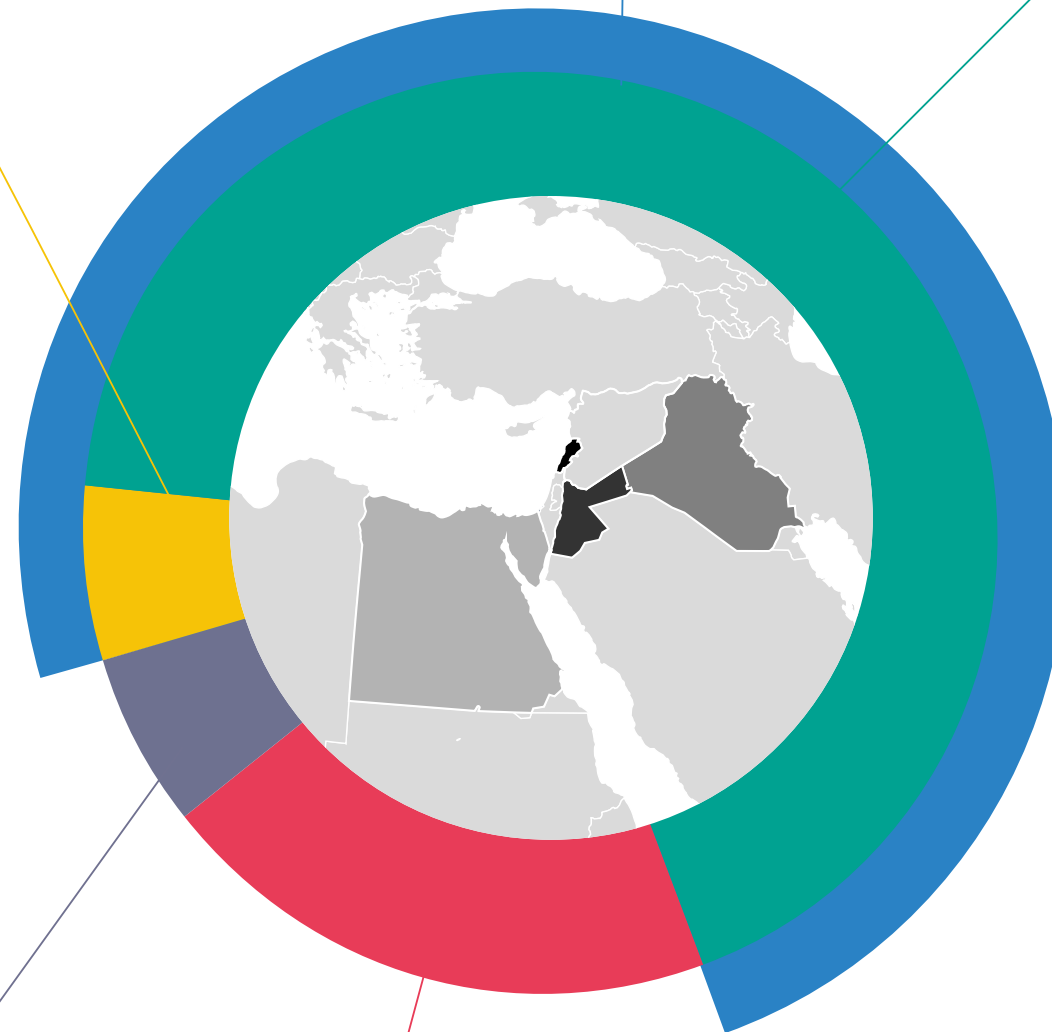
26% of the respondents intending to return within 12 months had a property intact in Syria.

89% of the respondents planning to return to Syria within 12 months had at least one family member in Syria.

48% of the respondents planning to return to Syria within 12 months believe they have sufficient information on their intended area of return for the purpose of restarting their lives.

The top five cited information needs are on:

Security Situation	██████████
Availability of basic services	██████
Availability of shelter	██████
Military exemption	██████
Livelihood opportunities	████



5.5 % are undecided

19.3 % do not hope to return

51% of the respondents undecided about their plans found it imperative to go back to Syria for a "go-and-see" visit.

49% of the respondents with no hope to return had fully or partially damaged and uninhabitable dwelling.

22% of the respondents with no hope to return had no family members in Syria.

75% of the respondents unwilling to return intend to remain in host countries.

20% of the respondents unwilling to return consider moving to a 3rd country.

Syrian refugees intentions to return in the next year may change subject to:

I. Safety & Security

The lack of predictable and sustainable physical safety in Syria is the primary factor influencing refugees' plans for the future. Refugees highlighted the situation of indiscriminate violence or risks of targeted reprisal as key obstacles to return.

II. Livelihood Opportunities

Access to, or lack of, livelihood opportunities was regarded as one of the determining factors influencing decisions on return.

III. Access to Shelter

26 per cent of refugees not intending to return in the next 12 months responded that they do not have access to shelter in Syria.

V. Access to Basic Services

17 per cent of refugees not intending to return in the next 12 months responded that they do not have access to basic services in Syria.

INTRODUCTION

This report presents an overview of the key findings of the fifth round of UNHCR's Return Perceptions and Intention Surveys (RPIS) conducted between November 2018 and February 2019. For this round, surveys were conducted by UNHCR in Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Due to the operational context, Turkey did not take part in this RPIS exercise. The findings of this report represent an aggregation of country survey findings. Individual countries may have specific variations, and these can be examined through the individual country intention survey reports.

Since 2017, surveys have been conducted bi-annually to ensure the centrality of refugee voices, intentions, and concerns, better understand past, current and future dynamics related to return and provide an evidence base to support planning and programming. So far, over 13,000 Syrian refugees have been reached through a structured dialogue on their intentions. While such surveys can provide valuable insights and are a useful tool to collect important data and conclude on some findings, they have limitations,

including the fact that the reflection of refugees' intentions represents a given point in time only and may subsequently change depending on a wide range of factors.

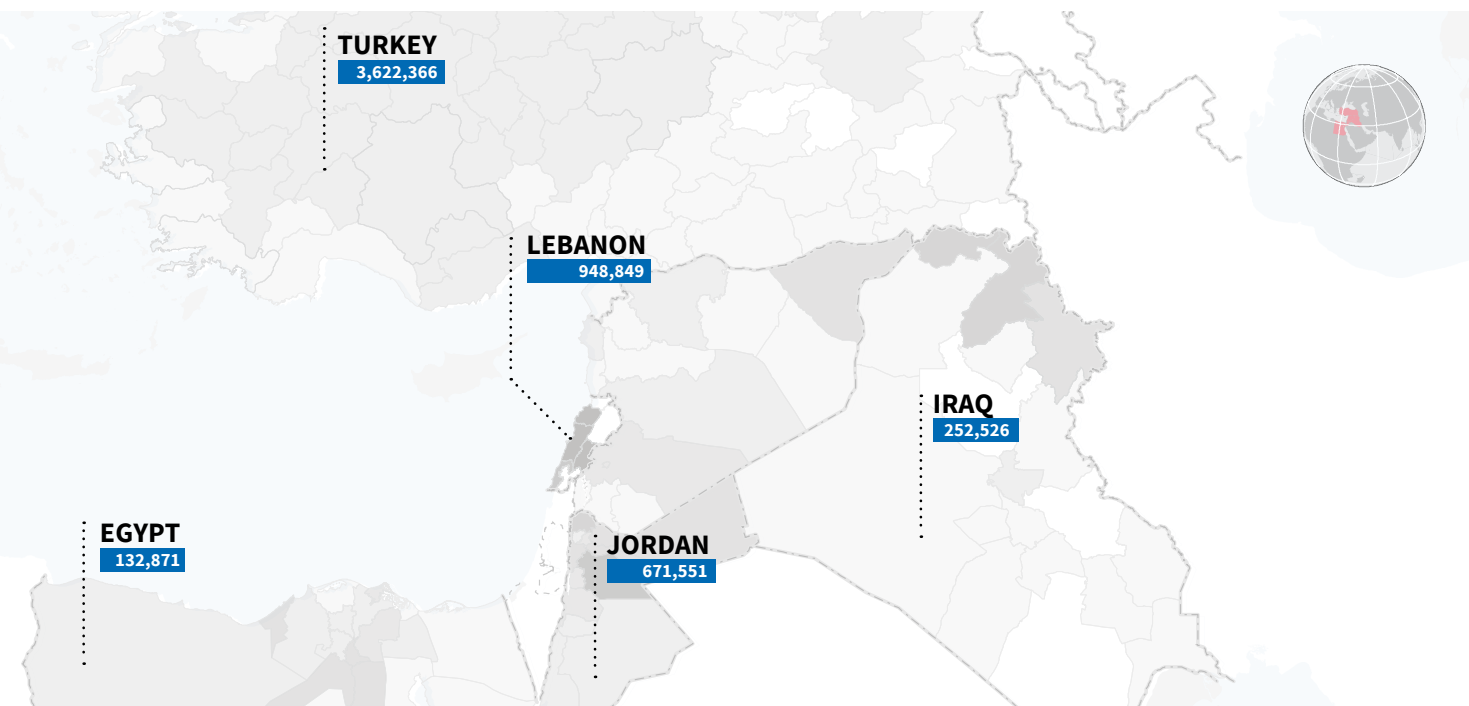
Refugees' feedback on their future intentions is crucial for operational planning. Surveys, such as this one, are one of many feedback mechanisms, implemented by UNHCR to gauge intentions and aspirations of refugees, with others including focus group discussions, individual assessments, interviews and counselling at registration and reception centers, project sites, border and protection monitoring missions and other protection and assistance activities.

The report contains three sections. Section one provides an overview of the key findings. Section two explores return intentions and dynamics from the perspective of refugees' current intentions regarding return to Syria. Section three presents the main conclusions.

5th RPIS RESPONDENTS KEY INFO

- 2,016 respondents
- Common floor questionnaire
- Phone and in-person interviews
- 63% male and 37% female
- 79.8% adults between 25-59
- 13% young adult; 6% older people
- 25% female-headed households
- 75% individuals within a family
- 12% single people
- 60% registered in 2013-2014
- 61% had specific needs
- 97% with official documentation

NUMBER OF REGISTERED SYRIAN REFUGEES



data from <https://data2.unhcr.org>

KEY FINDINGS

1. The majority of Syrians hope to return one day

Survey results indicate that on a regional average 75 per cent of Syrian refugees in the four countries are hopeful to return to Syria one day. Those hoping to return to Syria one day reaches as high as 86 per cent in Lebanon. While this result is similar to findings in the previous survey, an increasing trend of people hoping to return can be observed compared to the last two years. This indicates that, at the current time, voluntary repatriation in safety and with dignity remains the preferred durable solution for Syrian refugees.

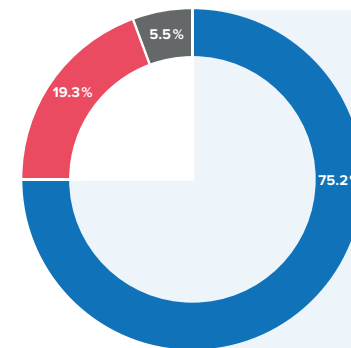
2. The majority of Syrian refugees do not intend to return in the next 12 months

While the survey found that some 75 per cent of Syrian refugees expressed a wish to return to Syria at some point, it also found that most Syrian refugees are not intending to return in the next 12 months. Only 5.9 per cent of total respondents stated they plan to return within that timeframe. Meanwhile, approximately 69 per cent of refugees who hope to return one day do not plan to do so in the next twelve months. The rest remain undecided or hold no hope of return.

3. Security, Livelihoods, and access to Basic Services among refugees key concerns

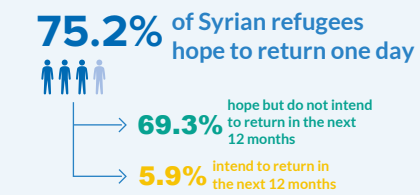
When asked about the key drivers influencing refugees' thinking on return, four broad areas emerged: 1) safety and security; 2) livelihoods opportunities; 3) access to shelter; and 4) access to basic services. These were essentially the top factors among all refugees surveyed regardless of the current intentions. Importantly, these factors also indicate the areas where obstacles will need to be removed in order for people's intentions to change.

DO YOU HOPE TO GO BACK TO SYRIA ONE DAY?

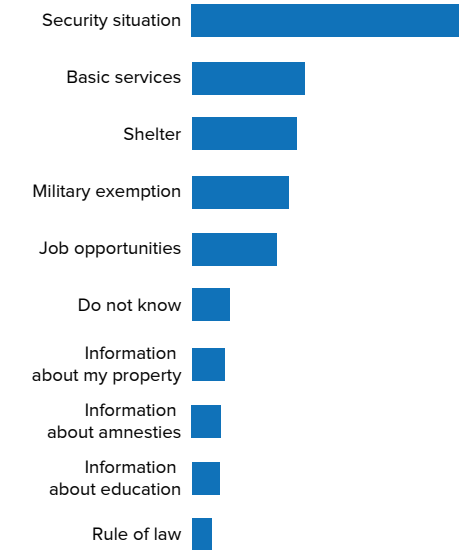


- YES
- NO
- DO NOT KNOW

WHILE YOU HOPE TO RETURN TO SYRIA ONE DAY, DO YOU PLAN RETURNING IN THE NEXT YEAR?

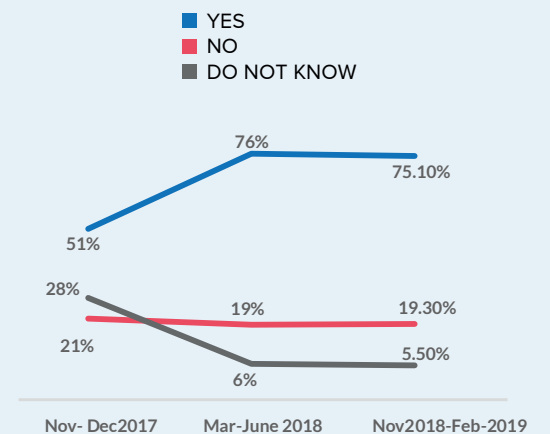


KEY FACTORS FOR DECISION MAKING ON RETURN



TREND OF THE "HOPE TO RETURN" ANSWER FROM NOV 2017 - FEB 2019

The number of people expressing a hope to return has increased over time, from 51 per cent in late 2017 to around 75 per cent in late 2018. The number of people who do not hold hope of return has remained relatively consistent. Meanwhile, the number of people who do not know if they will return or who remain undecided has gradually decreased, from 28 per cent in late 2017 to only 5.5 per cent in the current survey.



COUNTRY SPOTLIGHT

Do you plan to return to Syria in the next year?

The findings of this report represent an aggregation of regional findings and individual countries may have specific variations. When comparing the regional findings of the current survey with the results from previous years, it is apparent that intention to return fluctuates across refugee populations living in different countries of asylum.

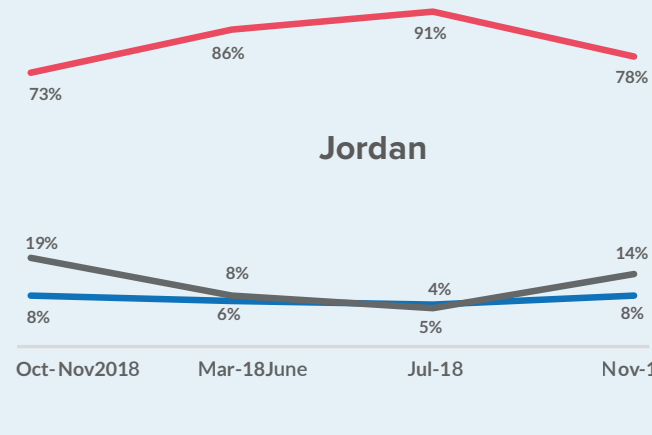
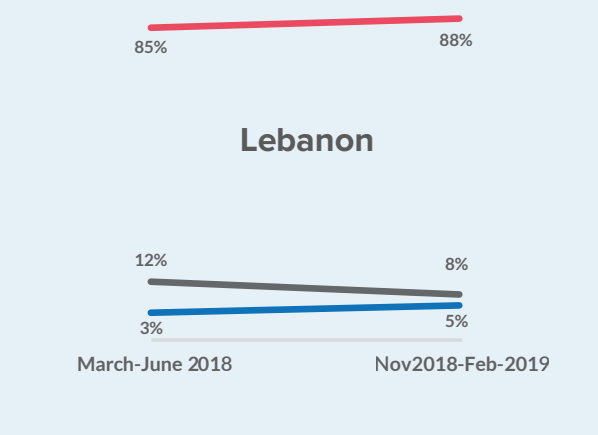
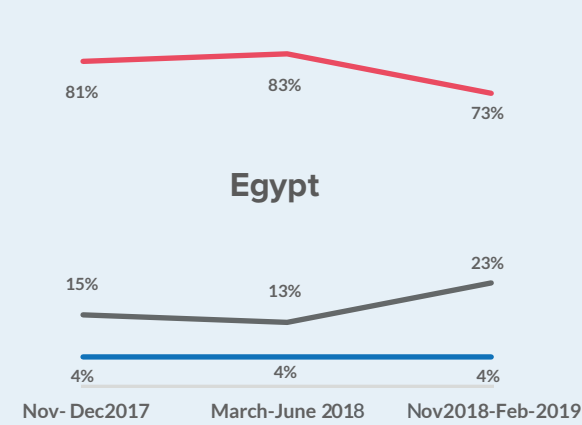
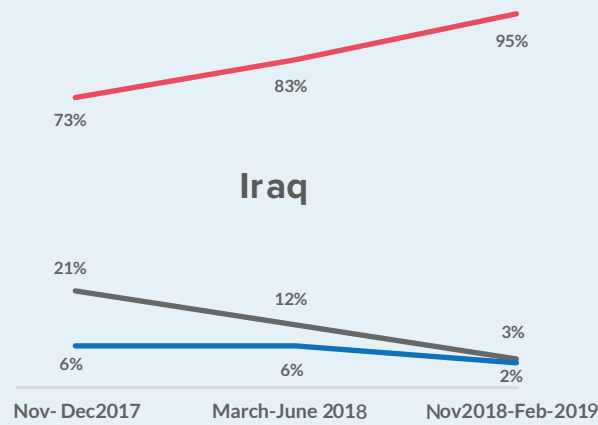
During the March-June 2018 survey, over 6 per cent of Syrian refugees in Iraq stated that they were planning to return within a period of one year, whereas only 2.1 per cent of the respondents from Iraq in the current survey expressed their intention to return to Syria within the next twelve months.

Intentions to return have increased for refugees in Lebanon from 3 per cent in March 2018 to 5 per cent in February 2019.

Intentions to return amongst Syrian refugees in Jordan show an increase from March to October 2018, while the intentions in October 2017 were in the same range as in November 2018. This is predominantly owing to key contextual factors that prevailed at the time of the surveys.

The intentions of refugees in Egypt remained relatively stable over the one and a half years, with an average of 4 per cent throughout the surveys.

■ NO
■ YES
■ DO NOT KNOW



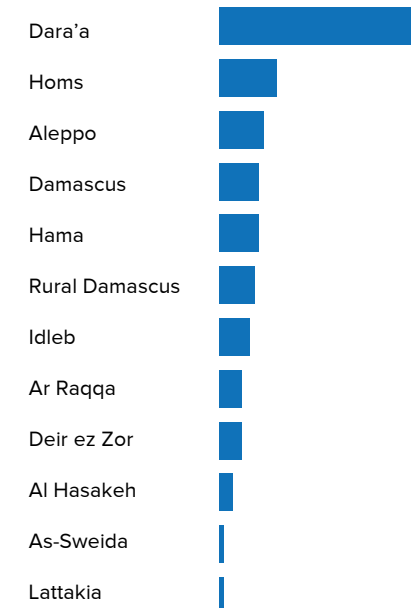
Exploring Return Planning

The top five places of origin for all respondents was Dara'a, Homs, Aleppo, Damascus, Rural Damascus and Hama. For those planning to return in the next 12 months, below is outlined where and with who they intend to go. Interestingly, the place of origin does not appear to have an impact on the intention for return.

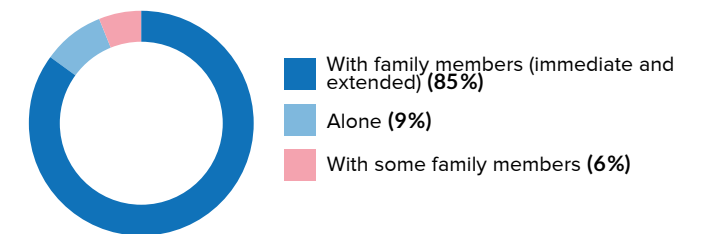
WHERE? 93 per cent intend to return to their place of origin. The top areas for planned return include Dar'a, the Damascus area, Homs, Aleppo. Only 4 per cent are planning to return to another place, while 3 per cent are undecided.

WITH WHO? Approximately 85 per cent of those planning to return in the next 12 months intend to return with their family members (both immediate and extended). Those who plan to return alone primarily have family already in Syria or want to check on the situation before bringing family. Some 18 per cent of those planning to return alone in the next 12 months indicate that this is because their family wants to remain in the country of asylum (CoA) for the time being.

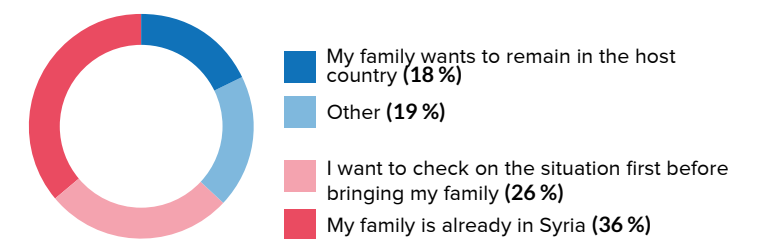
INTENDED LOCATION OF RETURN



RETURNING WITH FAMILY?



IF RETURNING ALONE, WHY?



EXPLORING RETURN INTENTIONS AND DYNAMICS

Of those surveyed in this fifth round in the four countries, the current status of intentions can be summarized into four broad groupings. These are 1) those who hope to return in the next 12 months (5.9 per cent); 2) those who hope to return one day, but not in the next 12 months (69.3 per cent); 3) those who do not hope or plan on returning (19.3 per cent); and 4) those who are undecided (5.5 per cent). This section explores the reasons, motivations, and dynamics of these four groups while acknowledging that there is a certain amount of fluidity among the groups.



1. Refugees hoping to return in the next 12 months

Of all those surveyed, some 5.9 per cent expressed hope or plans to return in the next 12 months. Those who responded positively about return and who are actually making plans to return reportedly base their decision on several factors as outlined in the graph below, including improvement in the security situation in their place of origin, family reunification, and work opportunities in Syria. Interestingly, problems and pressure in host countries was not one of the top reasons given, although it was mentioned by some respondents.

Even among those with actual plans to return, there remained significant concerns about the situation back in Syria. The most cited concerns related to safety and security, indicating that while people felt there were sufficient improvements in security to commence with actual return plans, concerns still remained. Other factors mentioned included: limited access to livelihoods and to military service amnesty. The lack of overall political solution was also mentioned by respondents as a major concern.

75.2% of Syrian refugees hope to return one day



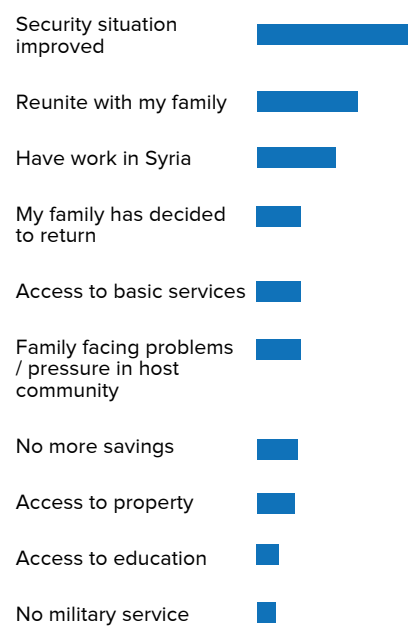
69.3% hope but do not intend to return in the next 12 months

5.9% intend to return in the next 12 months

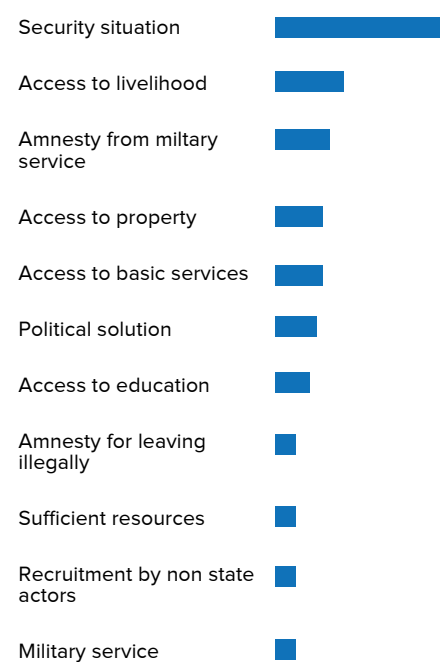
5.5% are undecided

19.3% do not hope to return

TOP REASONS FOR RETURN



MAIN CONCERNS



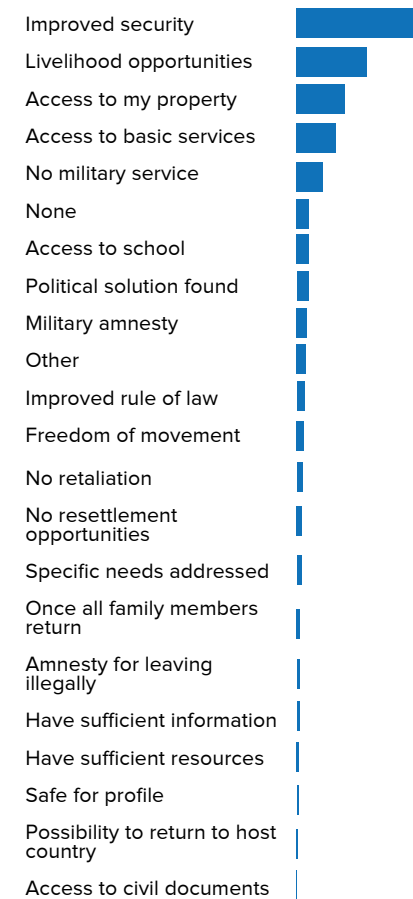
2. Refugees hoping to return one day, but not planning to in the next 12 months

The majority of respondents surveyed – 69.3 per cent – hope to return to Syria one day, but are not currently intending to return in the next 12 months. The respondents in this grouping cited the lack of safety and security in Syria, limited access to livelihood opportunities and limited or no access to shelter as key factors regarding why they do not intend to go back in the next year.

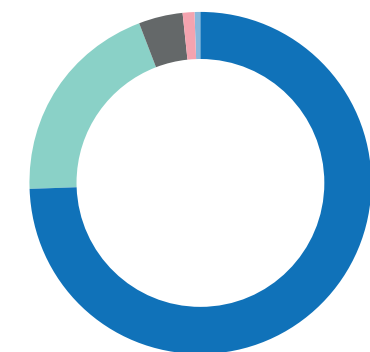
Of those who are not intending to return over the next 12 months, close to 75 per cent intend to continue staying in the host country, 20 per cent aspire to move to a third country, about 3 per cent will consider returning to Syria in more than one year and less than one per cent have not yet made any plans.

Improvement in the security situation in the place of origin/potential destination was most frequently cited as the major reason that would lead people to reconsider their return plans. Moreover, livelihood prospects and access to personal property were also cited as key factors that may cause respondents from this group to reconsider their intentions for return in the future.

IF NOT PLANNING TO RETURN IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS, WHAT WILL MAKE YOU RECONSIDER RETURN PLANS?

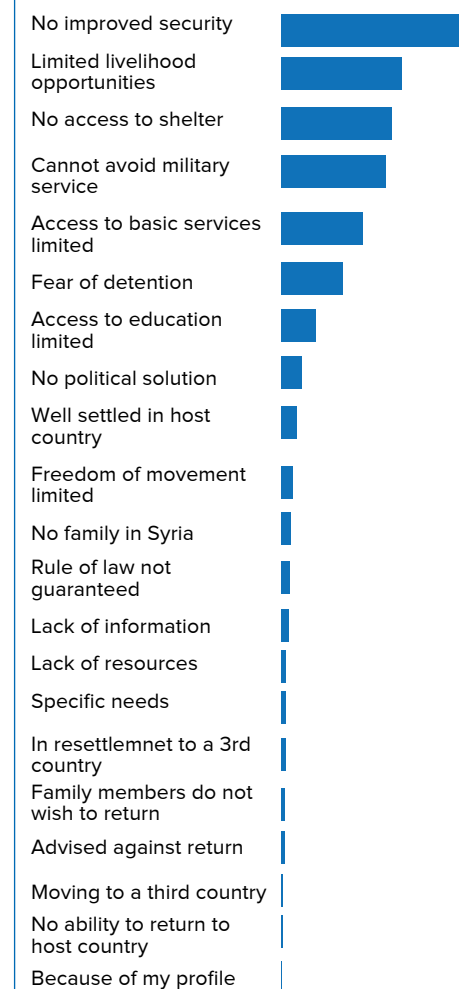


IF NOT INTENDING TO RETURN IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS, WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS?



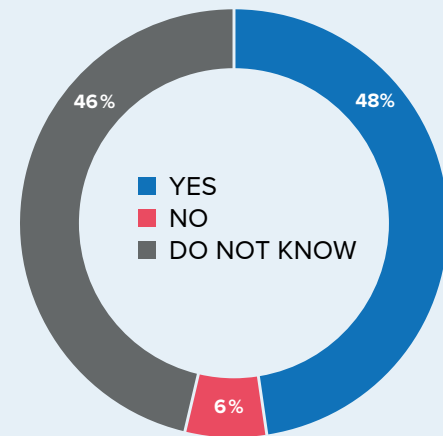
Stay in host Country (74.68%)
 Move to a 3rd country (19.76%)
 I do not know (4.10%)
 Will eventually return to Syria one day (1.04%)
 No plans (0.43%)

MAIN CONCERNS



Information and Knowledge

DO YOU FEEL YOU HAVE SUFFICIENT INFORMATION TO DECIDE ON YOUR INTENTION TO RETURN?

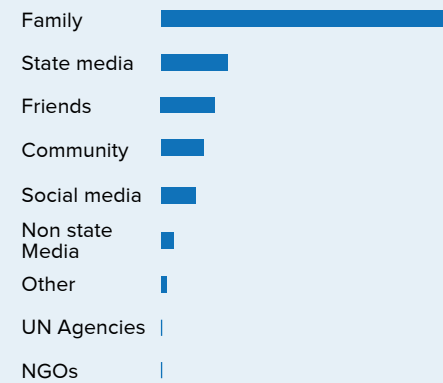


Access to information is critical in order for refugees to make an informed decision on their return plans. Around half of refugees surveyed indicate they have sufficient information to decide on their return. At the same time, the majority of refugees expressed strong need to receive more regular information from trusted sources, especially related to security situation at place of origin, availability of basic services and shelter facilities.

The survey clearly showed a wide range of knowledge-sharing practices and information sources which refugees use to gather information. The main sources of information continue to be family members/acquaintances, including those who returned to Syria, as well as state media.

Interestingly, social media was also cited as one of the top sources of information. For the time being, respondents did not view humanitarian organizations as a major source of information.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFO



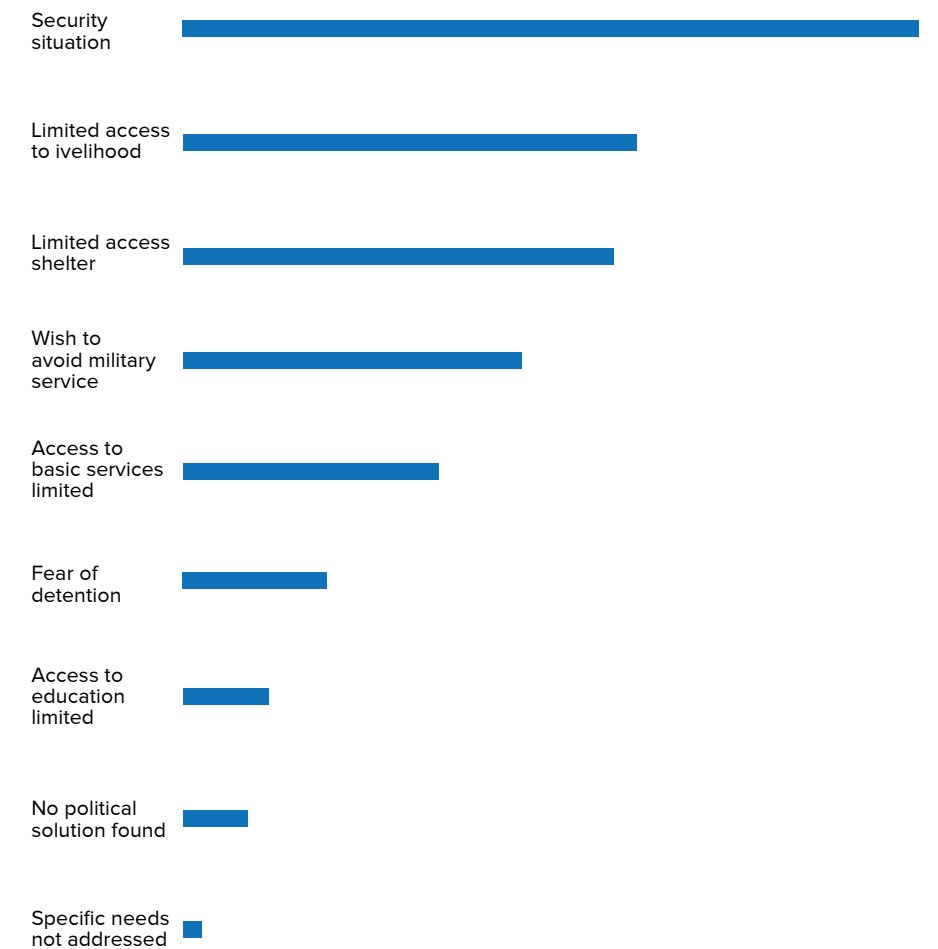
3. Refugees holding no hope of return

Some 19.3 per cent of people surveyed maintained that they held no hope of returning to Syria. Almost half of this group had fully or partially damaged and uninhabitable dwelling. Comparably, there is no significant difference on the status of the dwelling for other groups combined. This finding explains why access to shelter appears as one of the key decision-making factors on return for Syrian refugees.

Nearly a quarter had no family members in Syria, compared to 12 per cent average for those who are undecided or hope / plan to return.

The main reasons for people holding no hope of return are outlined below. The reasons are relatively consistent between host countries.

WHAT ARE THE REASONS BEHIND YOUR INTENTION NOT TO RETURN?

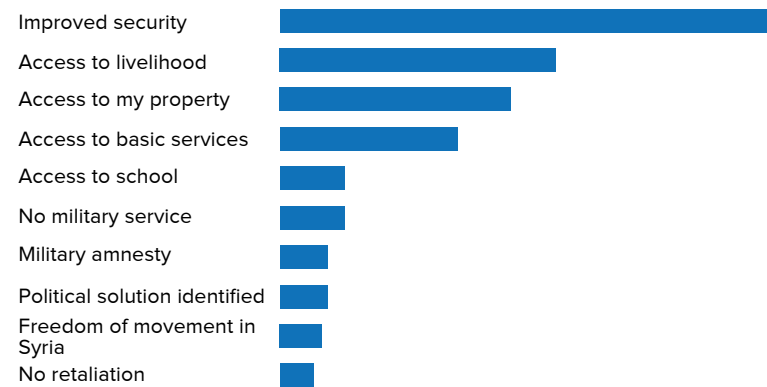


4. Refugees undecided on whether to return

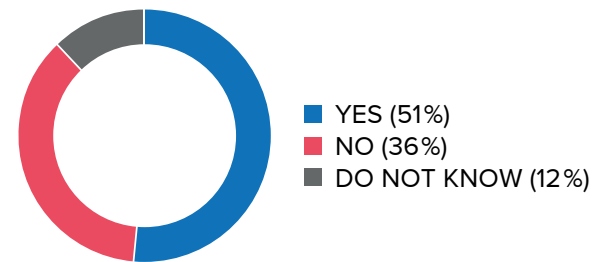
Of the 5.5 percent of those respondents who are undecided about their return plans, over 90 per cent indicated that an improvement in the security situation at the place of origin/potential destination, livelihood prospects and access to personal property and basic services will assist them in making their decision. Access to basic services and education services are the next most common factors cited by those who remain undecided. These results are closely aligned to those who hold a hope to return one day, but are not planning to in the next 12 months.

Around half of the respondents from this group stated that it is important for them to visit Syria prior to making a final decision on return.

WHAT CAN HELP YOU DECIDE ABOUT YOUR RETURN PLANS?



IS IT IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO VISIT SYRIA IN ORDER TO DECIDE ON YOUR RETURN PLANS?



CONCLUSION

One of the key purposes of intention surveys is to place refugee voices at the center of discussions and planning on their future. Refugees should be considered the best judge of when they can return in safety and dignity. It is vital that the international community listens to them and respects their choices.

It is clear that – at the current time – a majority of Syrians hope to return one day. However a much smaller group is intending to return in the next 12 months. For the remainder decisions will be subject to prevailing factors, including safety and security; livelihoods opportunities; access to shelter and access to basic services. While the number of people undecided about return is decreasing, the percentage of Syrian refugees with no hope to return remains relatively steady.

These results emphasize the importance of maintaining a comprehensive protection and solutions strategy. Such a strategy seeks to: 1) support host country resilience; 2) enable refugee self-reliance; 3) expand access to resettlement and other safe pathways to a third country, and; 4) plan for and support voluntary, safe, and dignified return of refugees to Syria.

As it relates to supporting host countries and refugees, the data collected through large-scale surveys enables UNHCR and partners to duly integrate the intentions, concerns and expectations of Syrian refugees into current and future plans, strategies and programming in Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.

The large number of refugees expressing a hope to return also underscores the importance of continuing with efforts to remove obstacles for return. Many concerns have been outlined in this report – these are what refugees are saying inhibit their return. Progress and clarity on off-cited issues, such as access to civil documents, access to basic services, including education, will help refugees make more informed decisions and may gradually result in obstacles to return being removed, contributing to refugees being able to return in safety and with dignity.

It is also recognized that a significant percentage of respondents maintain that they do not hold hope or plan to return to Syria. While intentions can shift over time depending on dynamics inside Syria and across the region, the size of this cohort underscores the necessity of continuing to support host countries and communities that so generously continue to host large-scale refugee populations. It also stresses the importance of expanding access to resettlement and other safe pathways to a third country – a critical act of responsibility-sharing by the international community which enables durable solutions for the most vulnerable refugees.

As a result of the survey, a number of refugees reported not having sufficient information on their area of origin before returning. Ensuring safe, unhindered and regular humanitarian access inside Syria can not only enable humanitarian organizations to provide assistance but also contribute to presenting reliable, objective and timely information to refugees so they can make informed decisions on their future.



UNHCR DIRECTOR'S OFFICE IN AMMAN / MARCH 2019

For further information:
http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria_durable_solutions



