

Area-Based Programming and Humanitarian Early Recovery

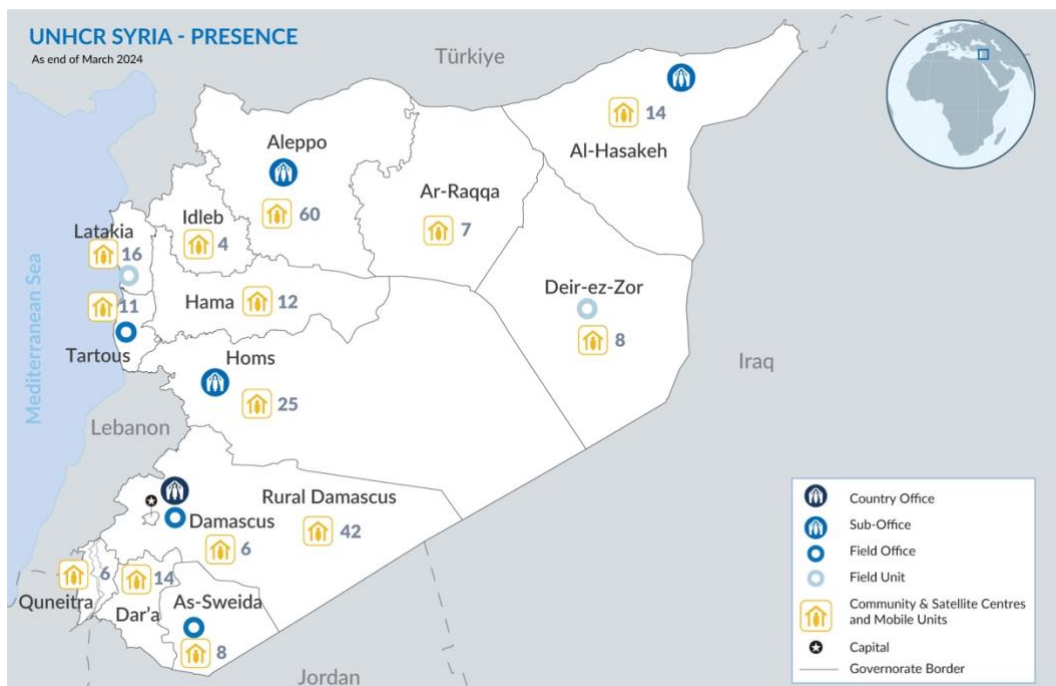
April 2024

The Syria crisis is now in its fourteenth year. The UN estimates that 16.7 million people need humanitarian assistance across the country. While the security situation in some parts of the country is unpredictable, the economic deterioration is pushing more people into poverty especially after the 2023 February earthquakes.

Access to basic services and livelihoods is limited. Syrians are increasingly unable to cope and meet their basic needs. The UN estimates that 85% of households are unable to meet basic needs, and an estimated 15.4 million people – more than 65 per cent of the Syrian population - is food insecure. ([2024 Humanitarian Needs Overview](#))

UNHCR provides protection services and assistance to refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced people (IDPs), returnees, stateless people and host community members based on their identified needs and vulnerabilities. In line with UN and donor policy, UNHCR has responded by expanding its humanitarian early recovery activities.

KEY FIGURES	POPULATION OF CONCERN								
<p>85% of households are unable to meet basic needs*</p>	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Internally displaced people*</td> <td>7.2M</td> </tr> <tr> <td>IDP returnees**</td> <td>155,325</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Refugee returnees ***</td> <td>6,240</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Refugees & asylum-seekers****</td> <td>17,333</td> </tr> </table>	Internally displaced people*	7.2M	IDP returnees**	155,325	Refugee returnees ***	6,240	Refugees & asylum-seekers****	17,333
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<p>75% of people in need of assistance are women and children*</p>									
<p>100% Inflation rate in Syria since February 2023*</p> <p><small>*Source: 2024 HNO</small></p>	<p><small>* Source: 2024 HNO</small> <small>** Source: OCHA, January-July 2023</small> <small>***Source: UNHCR verified returns in 2024</small> <small>**** Source: UNHCR, March 2024</small></p>								



Area-Based Programming

UNHCR defines **area-based programming** as a multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral approach that responds to the interrelated needs of all population groups living in a defined geographic area.

(Source: Policy on UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement)

UNHCR is committed to working with all forcibly displaced and stateless persons and to promoting the socio-economic inclusion of people under its mandate. In line with these commitments, and in partnership with other agencies, UNHCR seeks to maximize opportunities to respond through area-based approaches and integrated programming that are inclusive of all relevant population groups in a given operational context. This includes situations where vulnerable populations live together (e.g., IDPs, refugees and asylum-seekers from other countries, returning refugees and IDPs), and/or with host communities.

As outlined in UNHCR's [Policy on Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement](#), area-based approaches and integrated programming aim to leverage opportunities and resources available to UNHCR and partners to advance protection and solutions in a manner that builds on and promotes local systems, including the capacities, knowledge, and resources of local communities, using a bottom-up and participatory age, gender and diversity-sensitive approach.

UNHCR programmes are aligned with the objectives developed with the UN and Humanitarian Country Teams and are informed by joint assessments and analysis and joint programming. UNHCR's programming and resource allocation are directed towards the greatest needs and risks while taking into account relevant inter-agency arrangements.

Key characteristics of area-based programming

- Implemented within a **defined geographic area**
- Developed to **target communities rather than specific population groups**
- Conceived in a **community-driven and participatory** manner
- Based on inter-agency **needs assessments, joint analysis** and joint programming
- Involves interventions across **multiple sectors**
- Brings on board **multiple stakeholders** with **comparative advantages**

Area-based programming in Syria

UNHCR Syria's strategic directions are aligned with the overall priorities of the UN in Syria and with the [UN Strategic Framework for the Syrian Arab Republic 2022-2025](#). UNHCR identifies areas of interventions based on joint inter-agency needs assessments, for example, the Multi-Sector Needs Assessment, which informs the [Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview](#) and Humanitarian Response Plan.

One of UNHCR's strategic directions for 2023-2025 is to foster an environment for voluntary, dignified, safe and sustainable return of IDPs focusing on supporting those who have returned spontaneously and their communities. This objective is pursued both through UNHCR's interventions as well as through various inter-agency area-based efforts. Refugees who have exercised their right to return – either voluntarily or otherwise – may also benefit from these interventions.

In Syria, UNHCR leads the Protection and Community Services, and Shelter and Non-Food Item sectors and participates in joint multi-sector needs assessments with UN agencies and other international and national partners. Needs are assessed for each sector based on specific criteria and defined priorities. Such criteria may include availability of basic services, local markets and accessibility, among others. Area Humanitarian Country Teams help define the most vulnerable geographic areas across all the sectors, in consultation with sector focal points in Damascus, to inform planning and response.

At the inter-agency level, UNHCR actively steers and informs efforts to strengthen support for communities with high needs that are experiencing higher levels of return, through its roles as a co-convenor of Pillar III of the UN Strategic Framework “Enabling environment for a resilient return” together with UNRWA; as the secretariat for the Syria Return and Reintegration Working Group (RRWG) that is chaired by the UN Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator; and, together with UNDP, as co-chair of the RRWG’s Technical Working Group.

Community-based protection

In line with UNHCR’s [community-based](#) and area-based approach, UNHCR supports 117 community and 116 mobile units in all 14 governorates in Syria and engages over 2,500 outreach volunteers to strengthen its protection activities. For more information on protection services offered at UNHCR-supported community centres, please refer to the [UNHCR Syria Factsheet](#).

Community centres offer protection services based on identified needs in underserved or remote locations. The latter respond flexibly to population movements and increase outreach to the most vulnerable populations who do not have easy access to the community centres. Community centres are supported by a network of outreach volunteers who are selected from the IDP and affected communities. They are the first responders and assist those in need in a timely manner. They inform communities of the services available, identify needs, provide initial support and refer cases to community centres for further assistance.

UNHCR’s community-based approach adheres to the accountability towards the affected populations frameworks which places people at the centre of programme development, for example during assessments, in the design of projects/activities and during feedback/monitoring of these projects/activities. Participation is also enabled through outreach volunteers who not only identify common problems in communities but also facilitate conversations on how to address these. The information provided by outreach volunteers is analysed and helps define UNHCR’s response.

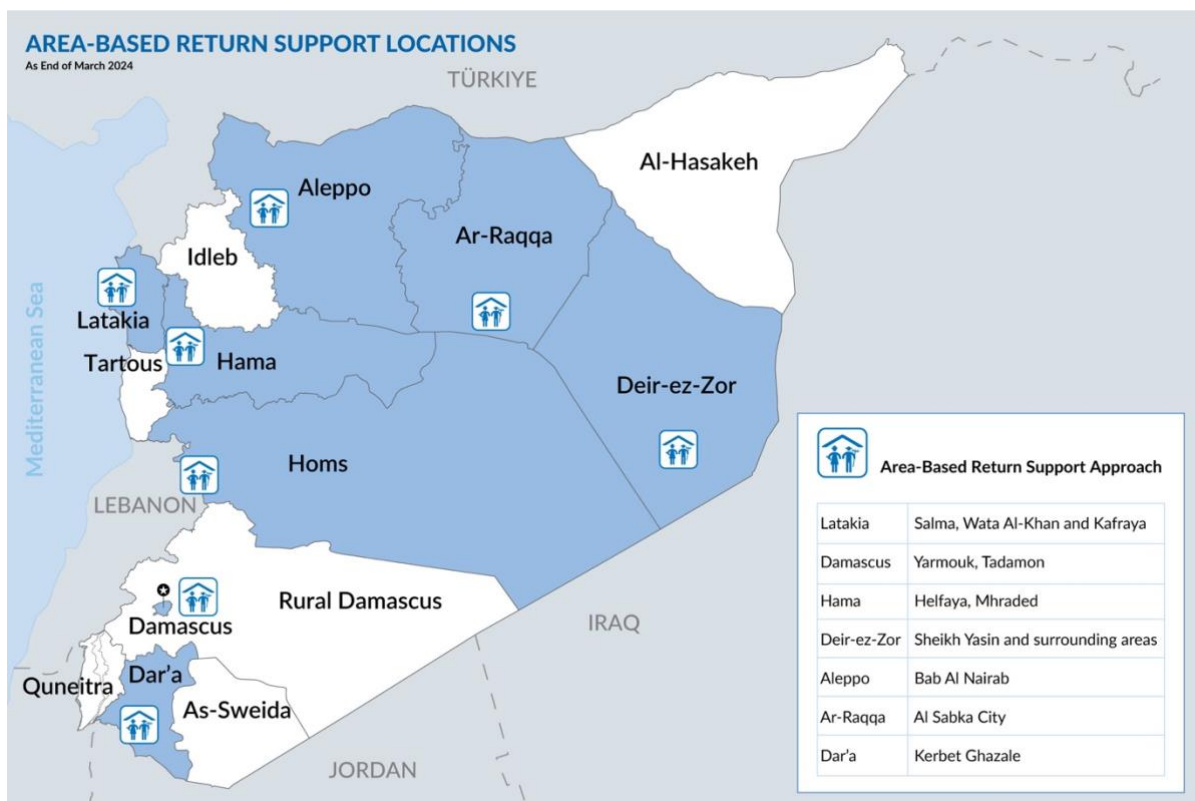
Area-based return support

In late 2021, the RRWG endorsed the “**area-based return support**” approach: an organizing framework in which UN agencies, INGOs and their partners seek to align, systematize and strengthen coordination in multi-sectoral interventions aimed at addressing **the immediate needs of communities** receiving returnees **in a particular geographical area** while promoting humanitarian early recovery and resilience, and accordingly the sustainability of return and reintegration. Context sensitivity and protection risk analysis are at the core of the approach, aiming to avoid exacerbating local conflict dynamics and mitigating risks while strengthening opportunities, capacities, and linkages.

The area-based return approach is “**context-specific**”, and “**people-driven**” in that it “follows” returnees who have already exercised their right to return to the communities that are receiving them, reaffirming the principles of high-level UN initiatives such as the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and employing **bottom-up community-level**

participation and inclusive approach to agree on priorities for collective outcomes identified by the same affected communities. This is crucial for the delivery of effective and accountable support since no single agency, organization or sector can on their own address the challenges facing communities experiencing returns with high levels of need. Moreover, after fourteen years of humanitarian crisis, communities are demanding to be involved in defining their own priorities and mapping out local solutions for a more sustainable and self-reliant path to early recovery.

Driven by Area Humanitarian Country Teams across Syria, humanitarian activities under the area-based return support approach have been advanced in seven different governorates thus far:



Humanitarian Early Recovery

Humanitarian early recovery is a form of humanitarian assistance that aims to reduce immediate and protracted humanitarian needs by strengthening the self-reliance of affected populations, primarily focused at the household level.

UNHCR's support for humanitarian early recovery efforts in Syria includes interventions related to cash-based interventions, shelter and re-establishing lifesaving services, livelihoods, technical capacity building and community resilience.

- **Cash-based interventions (CBIs):** These are interventions in which cash or vouchers for goods or services are provided to forcibly displaced persons on an individual or community basis. Most forcibly displaced populations have access to markets and services and can thereby benefit from CBI. UNHCR's CBI programme for refugees in Syria has been in place since 2007. UNHCR has been expanding this programme to include IDPs and returnees

since 2021, monetizing the existing in-kind assistance on a limited scale. The earthquakes in February 2023 accelerated UNHCR's efforts to provide CBI to vulnerable Syrians, through different CBI modalities, such as multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) and cash for minor repairs.

- **Shelter & basic services:** Shelter and support to basic services projects focus on areas with the highest needs, including where spontaneous returns of IDPs are taking place. UNHCR adopts a multi-sectoral area-based approach to support access to shelter and basic services in areas where needs are the highest to enable dignified returns. Minor shelter repairs target the most vulnerable families to ensure basic conditions and safety. Activities include the installation of doors, windows, toilets and kitchens. The repair of household-level water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services focuses on neighbourhoods where minor shelter repairs are also being implemented to ensure homes are habitable. Minor repairs to schools, primary health care centres, markets, and individual farmer irrigation channels also support people who have spontaneously returned to settle down. Support for civil registries is a key protection intervention to facilitate access to civil documentation – a crucial means for vulnerable Syrians to have freedom of movement and access to services.
- **Livelihoods:** UNHCR livelihoods support focuses on providing assistance to vulnerable people who are demonstrably skilled and wish to become engaged in particular key economic sectors. The start-up support for small businesses provides entrepreneurship training to selected beneficiaries followed by an in-kind contribution to their businesses. In addition, agricultural assets support provides agricultural-related inputs and services to farming households such as small livestock (including poultry, bees and sheep) and other ancillary inputs and supplies (including coops, hives, fodder and veterinary drugs).
- **Capacity building:** Capacity building aims to support institutions to resume the provision of basic humanitarian services depending on the most urgent needs. For instance, following the COVID-19 pandemic, many of UNHCR's capacity-building activities were related to health care and the provision of essential medical equipment. UNHCR also provides protection training to government counterparts and lawyers regularly in order to improve access to persons in need of [protection services](#).
- **Community resilience:** These activities aim to empower communities to build resilience in the face of shocks and adverse effects of the ongoing 14-year crisis, as well as from the shocks from the February 2023 earthquakes. Community health volunteers help increase health awareness and in turn, reduce health risks in communities. The support for community-led initiatives, youth-led initiatives, and community-based organizations helps build up community leadership. These initiatives can include for example organizing knitting skills trainings for internally displaced women, installing solar streetlights, providing [mental health and psychosocial support services](#) to older people and organizing skills development activities for children, amongst others. Efforts to support community resilience after the earthquakes included supporting households to cope with adverse economic shocks by providing [cash support](#) for multi-purpose needs, shelter solutions comprising cash for minor repair and cash for rent, and the rehabilitation of key infrastructure works for facilities that are used by the community.

Further information

[UNHCR Syria Global Focus page](#) | [UNHCR Syria website](#) | [UNHCR Syria Data Portal](#) | [UNHCR Syria Factsheet](#)

Contact

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