Syrian Arab Republic

April-May 2024

The Syria crisis entered its fourteenth year in March 2024. The UN estimates that 16.7 million people need humanitarian assistance across the country – a 9 per cent increase from 2023.

The security situation in the country is unpredictable due to the current regional tension impacting relatively stable areas. The economic situation is increasingly dire. Economic deterioration is a major driver of needs.

UNHCR continues to provide protection and assistance to refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, stateless people, and host communities based on identified needs and vulnerabilities.

HIGHLIGHTS

2,900

school desks repaired by UNHCR were distributed to 10 public schools in Latakia and Aleppo Governorates

3,400

refugees and asylum-seekers were provided with primary health care in Damascus, Rural Damascus, and Al Hasakeh Governorates in April and May

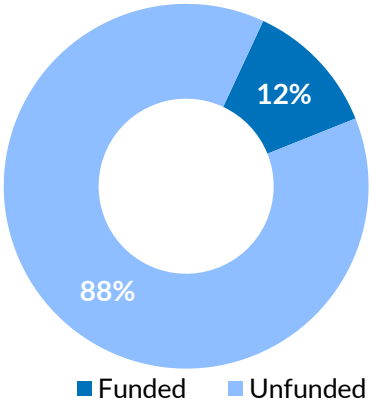
20,460

earthquake-affected families received cash assistance since February 2023

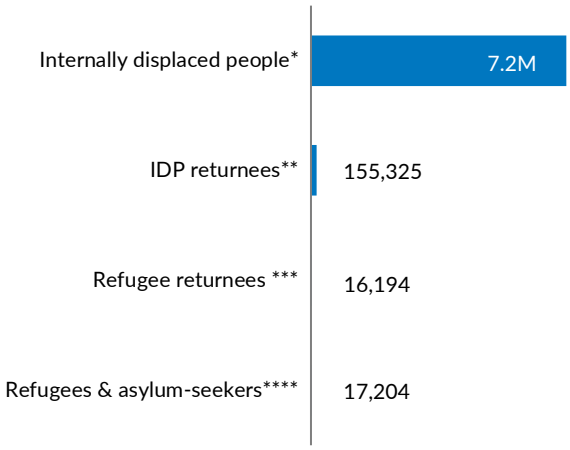
FUNDING (AS OF 31 MAY 2024)

USD 466.6 million

requested for the Syria Operation in 2024



PEOPLE AFFECTED BY DISPLACEMENT IN THE WHOLE OF SYRIA



** Source: 2024 HNO*
*** Source: OCHA, January-July 2023*
****Source: UNHCR verified returns in 2024*
***** Source: UNHCR, May 2024*

Najah, an internally displaced young woman established her shoe and bag repair workshop with UNHCR's start-up business support. "The support enabled me to enrol my younger siblings back in school, cover their transportation costs, and enhance our family's income. I am also considering sitting the 9th grade exams next year" Najah said proudly. ©UNHCR

More information on UNHCR's operations in the Syrian Arab Republic, including north-west Syria, is available on Global Focus.

Operational Context

The 2024 Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) estimates that over 16.7 million people need humanitarian assistance in Syria. This is the highest number of people in need since the beginning of the crisis. Syria also has one of the largest numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the world (7.2 million). The 2024 HNO states that humanitarian and economic indicators in the country continue to deteriorate, and many basic services have collapsed. The February 2023 earthquakes have further compounded existing needs in a country that has experienced over 13 years of crisis.

UNHCR supports refugees, asylum-seekers, IDPs, host community members, and returnees (refugees and IDPs who have returned to their home areas) by providing assistance to those most in need using *area-based* and *community-based approaches*. UNHCR's *community-based approach* focuses on community mobilization and building self-reliance. It aims to reduce vulnerabilities and protection risks by providing services through community-based structures and networks. UNHCR's *area-based approach* entails working with partners to enhance support in geographic areas where the needs are greatest.

In 2024, UNHCR is working with 28 partners including international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and national NGOs in all 14 governorates.

Operational Updates

Protection

- In line with its community-based protection approach, in May, UNHCR supported 116 community/satellite centres and 117 mobile units across the country. UNHCR is also engaging over 2,470 community outreach volunteers in all 14 governorates.
- In May, UNHCR, in collaboration with its partners, started the relocation process of two community centres in Tartous and Latakia Governorates to respond more effectively to the needs of vulnerable people. An additional community centre in Al-Waer (Homs Governorate) was closed to reallocate resources to areas where needs are higher. UNHCR informed the communities of the changes and the services mapping, while handing over case management to the nearest community centre supported by UNHCR.
- In May, UNHCR approved the project proposals of 12 community-based organizations in Hama Governorate which had already undergone training by UNHCR. The projects included the creation of safe spaces for children, support for individuals with special needs, older people care initiatives, specialized vocational training courses for young people, , and support of agricultural projects.

Shelter

- Since January till end of May, 743 families (3,251 individuals) received emergency shelter support in six camps in north-east Syria which included the provision and installation of 761 tents.

Core Relief Items

- In April and May, 269 families (970 individuals) in Ar-Raqqa and Al-Hasakeh Governorates were assisted with relief items following their displacement due to hostilities in eastern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.
- UNHCR also provided core relief items to 281 forcibly displaced families (877 individuals) who are residing in camps in Qamishli (Al-Hasakeh Governorate) during the reporting period.

Health

- Through eight partners, around 3,400 refugees and asylum-seekers received primary health care in Damascus, Rural Damascus, and Al-Hasakeh Governorates. The provided services included medical consultations and checkups.
- In collaboration with UNICEF and the Directorate of Health, UNHCR conducted four training courses in Qamishli and Al-Hasakeh for 90 health outreach volunteers from 13 to 22 May. The first two courses covered screening and measuring techniques to identify malnutrition among vulnerable populations, while the other two addressed community health behavior change and messaging.

Livelihoods

- UNHCR provided 97 families in As-Sweida, Dar'a and Quneitra Governorates with cash assistance to start-up or expand their small businesses. The agriculture and start-up small business support will be expanded in 2024 to cover 3,000 families across Syria.
- A total of 84 IDPs, returnees, and host community members successfully completed vocational training courses in carpentry and metalwork supported by UNHCR and UNDP. The most skilled trainees contributed to the maintenance and production of over 2,900 school desks which were distributed to 10 public schools repaired by UNHCR in 2023 and 2024 in Latakia and Aleppo Governorates.

Cash Assistance

- In April, UNHCR completed the provision of cash assistance to people affected by the 2023 February earthquakes including multi-purpose cash assistance, and cash for minor house repair. Since January, 7,787 families in Aleppo, Latakia, Tartous and Hama Governorates benefited from this support (20,460 families since the February 2023 earthquakes).
- UNHCR also finalized its pilot projects of cash assistance replacing the distribution for medical in-kind assistance and non-food items.

Refugee Response

- **Registration:** As of end May, some 17,200 refugees and asylum-seekers were registered with UNHCR. The majority of the registered refugees are from Iraq and reside primarily in urban areas in Damascus, Al-Hasakeh, Aleppo, Homs, Tartous, and Latakia Governorates. In April and May, UNHCR renewed identification cards for over 1,900 refugees. The identification cards protect them against *refoulement*, ensure access to basic rights and services, and facilitate freedom of movement.
- **Refugee Status Determination (RSD):** In April and May, 10 families (24 individuals) were recognized as refugees, helping to ensure their protection from *refoulement* and detention due to irregular stay, and their access to basic services.
- **Durable solutions:** In April and May, UNHCR, in close coordination with IOM Lebanon, facilitated the repatriation of one woman to Ethiopia as well as the departure of one family (seven individuals) to the UK under private sponsorship complementary pathway arrangements[1].
- **Cash Assistance:** UNHCR continues to provide regular multi-purpose cash assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers. UNHCR advocated with the Central Bank of Syria to extend the waiver for refugees and asylum-seekers to receive cash assistance without valid residency permits. The waiver expired end of February, and the extension approval was received on 1 May. To avoid any interruption in the provision of service, UNHCR has distributed meanwhile ATM cards to 4,790 refugee and asylum-seeker families in all locations (88% of the target) as of the end of May. The ATM cards allow them to withdraw their cash assistance with reduced Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements[2] as per an agreement reached between the Central Bank of Syria and UNHCR.
- A total of 89 refugee students received registration fees and pocket money in April and May.
- **Legal Assistance:** In April and May, UNHCR's legal teams and lawyers provided legal assistance to over 1,300 refugees and asylum-seekers. This included legal counselling, assistance related to residency and exit visa, and legal response to gender-based violence, child protection issues as well as interventions to obtain personal documents (civil record extracts) on behalf of Iraqi refugees in light of the latest instructions of the Iraqi Government to receive civil record extracts exclusively from Iraq.

Return

- Since January till the end of May 2024, UNHCR verified or monitored the return to Syria of 16,194 refugees from Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt[3]. In total, between 2016 and May 2024, UNHCR has verified or monitored the return to Syria of 408,387 individual refugees[3]. On 8 May, the Nassib Protection-Health Border Post (at the Syria-Jordan border) supported by UNHCR and its partners became fully operational, the second post after Jdaidet Yabous border post (at the Syria-Lebanon border) which has been operational since August 2023. Returnee families who approached the post were registered for health and protection referrals and were provided with information about the available services in the areas of return.
- UNHCR and its partners assessed the needs of the families who returned from Lebanon to their areas of origin in Rural Damascus and Homs Governorates, whose return was organized by the Lebanese General Security Office (GSO). The overall identified needs included house repairs, medical assistance, documentation, in-kind assistance, education support, and psychosocial support. The returnees were directed to the closest community centre, shelter partner, and legal assistance partner to receive suitable services.

[1] *Complementary pathways are safe and regulated avenues for persons in need of international protection that provide for a lawful stay in a third country where international protection needs are met.*
[2] *Know Your Customer (KYC) procedures are a function to assess customer risk and a legal requirement to comply with Anti-Money Laundering (AML) laws. Effective KYC involves knowing a customer's identity, their financial activities and the risk they pose.*
[3] *Provisional figures pending further verification*

RECENTLY PUBLISHED:

- UNHCR Syria: Area-based Programming and Humanitarian Early Recovery Fact Sheet (April 2024)
- UNHCR Syria- 2024 Needs Overview (February 2024)
- UNHCR Syria: 2024 Implications of Underfunding in Syria
- UNHCR Syria Factsheet (January 2024)
- UNHCR Syria: Community-Led and Youth-Led Initiatives (Q4 2023)
- UNHCR Syria: 2023 Key Achievements
- UNHCR Syria: Achievement Dashboard (December 2023)

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