Lebanon

Community Dialogue on Return and "Go and See" Visits

May 2025

Background

With the shift in the political and humanitarian situation in Syria and the region since 8 December 2024, many refugees expressed a renewed sense of hope but are adopting a "wait and see" approach to return.

By 15 May 2025, around 156,000 Syrians returned to Syria from or via Lebanon. Given the significant changes in the Syria context, UNHCR, in close collaboration with the authorities, began designing programmes to support refugees who express an interest in returning, including "Go and See" visits.

To better understand trends, intentions, barriers, initiatives and capacities linked to return, UNHCR and partners: Al Hadatha, Al Ribat, Amel, Caritas, Himaya, IOCC, INTERSOS, Makhzoumi Foundation, Nabad and SHEILD conducted a Community Dialogue with refugees and key informants covering all governorates in Lebanon.

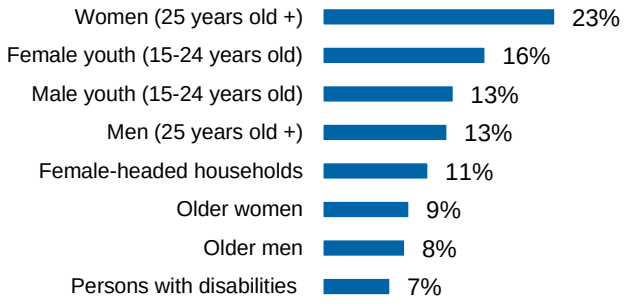
Methodology and demographics

Period: 4 March – 9 April 2025

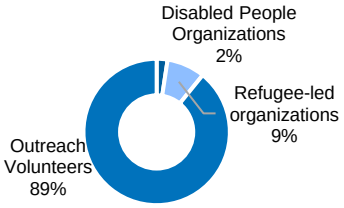
Target population: 561 refugees + key informants

Method: 51 focus group discussions + 11 interviews with 83 key informants

Profiles consulted through FGDs



Key Informants



Gender

Return practices

- **Temporary visits:** Many refugees, often one family member, returned to assess the situation
- **Permanent returns:** Persons who do not face particular security risks, persons with intact homes and financial means, out-of-school children and persons unable to cope in Lebanon
- **Mixed return:** Family returns to Syria, while breadwinner remains in Lebanon
- **Family decision-making:** Head of household, often male, makes the final decision; sometimes decisions are made between spouses and extended family members.

Children's safety, education and prospects influence return. Their reluctance has little impact on the family's final decision.

Return intentions and plans

All profiles consulted expressed uncertainty about their return plans given the evolving situation in Syria and lack of clarity around services.

Profile-specific insights:

Youth
- Hesitant due to lack of community ties, concerns about limited education and work opportunities, fears of reliving trauma

Women
- Influenced by children's safety and education, available services and extent of women rights

Men
- Willing to return once situation stabilizes + access to services is ensured + reconstruction is underway

Older persons
- Return contingent on access to services and family support, despite strong emotional ties

Persons with disability
- Face considerable barriers, require access to services + family, community and institutional support systems

Drivers influencing return

In Syria

- **Safety and security risks** including instability, fear of reprisals and violence, as well as weak law enforcement and limited legal protection
- **Traditional practices affecting women rights** such as decreased female empowerment and decision-making role in both individual and family affairs, as well as GBV risks especially for female-headed households
- **Housing, land and property situation**
  - Inability to afford rehabilitation and reconstruction of damaged houses or renting
  - Disputes related to property (unlawful selling and land transfer during the war) and challenges to show proof of ownership
- **Access to livelihood opportunities** that can cover the high cost of living in Syria
- **Access to basic services is limited** such as education, health, water, electricity and internet, including disability access and mobility challenges in rural areas
- **Community and family support networks are limited** for youth, older persons and persons with disabilities, with reintegration worries

"The decision to return is not made overnight. It is a journey filled with deep reflection, filled with fears, hopes and harsh realities."

– female-headed household explaining the complexity and emotional toll of returning as the sole carer of her children

In Lebanon

- **Documentation**: Lack of legal papers, expired residency permits and confiscated documents
- **Financial:** Inability to afford transportation to return
- **Services and support systems:** Worries among vulnerable groups of losing vital support in Lebanon such as education, healthcare, cash assistance and community ties

"Is there even a life or community left in Syria? I do not know anyone there. It is a totally new community for me."

- 24-year-old male youth who fled to Lebanon with his family when he was nine years old

Community capacities

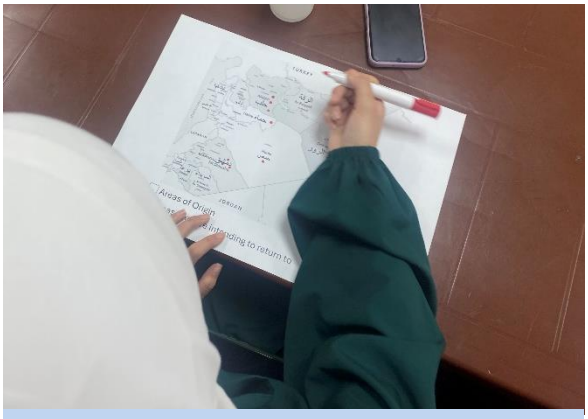
- Sharing information related to return from trusted sources
- Linking up with people who visited Syria to learn about their firsthand experience
- Organizing joint return and collecting funds to reduce transport costs
- Escorting persons who need accompaniment to support their return journey and help link them with services in Syria

"Go and See" visits

Refugees showed a solid understanding of what a "Go and See" visit entails. Though most found it useful, they prefer to wait for more stability in Syria.

Community reflections

- One month is a short duration, according to some.
- Higher likelihood of men to undertake the visits for safety, practical and logistical reasons
- High costs incurred during visits such as transportation, accommodation and other expenses
- Concerns with consistency in implementing guarantees such as fee waiver, travel ban and maintaining an active UNHCR file
- Worries about retaining jobs in Lebanon while undertaking the visits



Focus group discussion with female youth during which a participant explains the situation in certain areas in Syria

Return information

Trusted sources

To inform return decision-making, refugees consider relatives in Syria as the most trusted source, followed by friends who visited Syria, UNHCR, social media, government and new outlets.

Information needs

- Security and political situation inside Syria
- Economic conditions and livelihood opportunities such job openings and wage levels
- Availability of basic services, especially education, health care, water and electricity
- Property status, shelter assistance and restitution mechanisms
- List of organizations assisting return, including transportation support
- Social environment, including tensions and freedoms

Preferred information channels

WhatsApp and dedicated return info sessions to allow more exchange, as well as HELP website combined with other channels

For more information

Help.unhcr.org/Lebanon | unhcr.org/lb

ialebanon.unhcr.org

Key informant interviews with Outreach Volunteer women at a community center in Saida.

Refugee recommendations

- Ensure **return programming is informed by refugee feedback,** disaggregated by age, gender and diversity to reflect the range of needs, concerns and capacities
- Acknowledge the **non-linear nature of return and emphasize the importance of investing in Syria's recovery and reconstruction** to enable dignified and sustainable reintegration
- Reinforce refugee **trust in "Go and See" visits** and advocate with the authorities to allow temporary visits e.g. for refugees who entered Lebanon after 2015, remove overstay fees, and return confiscated document
- On "**Go and See" visits**, explore extending the one-month period and providing financial support, help in issuing documents, and set up refugee feedback sessions in follow up to the visits
- Promote **access to legal services by providing information and legal counseling** to support voluntary return plans
- **Facilitate targeted support for specific groups expressing interest in return**, such as connecting them with services in Syria and preparing tailored reintegration support
- **Improve access to reliable return-related information** including services and humanitarian actors contacts in Syria, work opportunities, and reconstruction support, and channels such as Syria is Home website
- **Capacitate the community to share return information**; set up **return-related info sessions** as a preferred communication channel especially among youth and female-headed households

"The idea of returning to Syria is both a dream and a nightmare. We long for the warmth of our land, but we fear the uncertainty that waits for us there."

– Refugee woman in the Bekaa

Contributing partners

Al Hadatha, Al Ribat, Amel Association, Caritas, Himaya, International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), INTERSOS, Makhzoumi Foundation, Nabad, and SHEILD