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Seventh Regional Survey on

SYRIAN REFUGEES' PERCEPTIONS & INTENTIONS ON RETURN TO SYRIA

Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan

Executive Summary

This report presents the key findings of UNHCR's seventh Return Perceptions and Intentions Survey (RPIS) among Syrian refugees. UNHCR conducted this survey in Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq between January and February 2022. Due to the operational context, Türkiye did not take part in the RPIS exercise. The findings of this report represent an aggregation of country survey findings. Country variations are highlighted in the report where relevant.

Pursuing durable solutions to displacement is integral to UNHCR's work and mandate, including through voluntary return in safety and dignity, which is the fundamental right of every refugee. UNHCR has been carrying out the RPIS in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq among Syrian refugees since 2017 to ensure the centrality of refugee voices in discussions

about their future. The data gathered also facilitates a better understanding of past, current, and future dynamics related to return, and informs planning and programming.

Over 2,800 Syrian refugees were reached in this round of the RPIS. The survey was conducted in a challenging context amidst a range of political, security, humanitarian, economic, and social challenges in Syria and across the region. As in the sixth RPIS undertaken in 2021, the deteriorating socio-economic conditions in the region were also reflected in the survey. For example, nine out of ten respondents stressed that they were not able to meet their basic daily needs in their host country notwithstanding the generous support afforded by host governments, communities, and the international community.

Profile of respondents

2,860 respondents

65% male and 35% female

85% of respondents are Principal Applicants¹

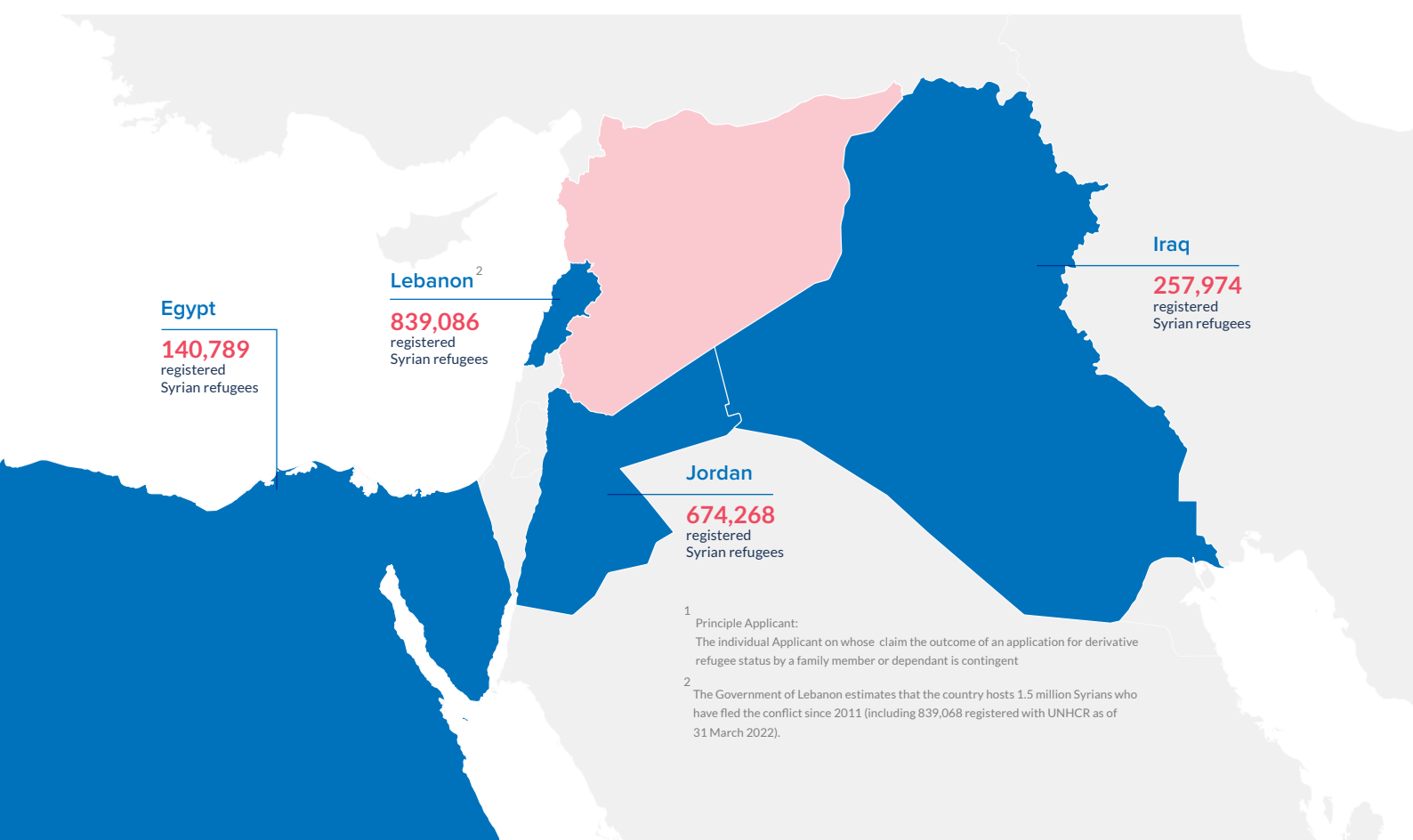
14% of respondents are other adults from the same household

1% of respondents are adolescents aged 15-17

87% possess at least one valid document showing Syrian origin

Number of registered Syrian refugees as of 31 March 2022

These figures refer to refugees registered by UNHCR.
Latest and official figures are available here: [UNHCR data portal](#)



Key findings of this survey included:

- ▶ **Most Syrian refugees still hope to return one day despite the current challenges inside Syria.**
- ▶ **A sizeable number of Syrian refugees expressed a hope to return in the next five years.**
- ▶ **As in the sixth RPIS undertaken in 2021, a small fraction of Syrian refugees expressed an intention to return in the next 12 months.**
- ▶ **A range of safety and security issues continue to significantly impact decision-making, including active conflict, a lack of law and order, military service, and the presence of armed actors.**
- ▶ **While COVID-19 had a limited impact on decision-making, other key issues for refugees included livelihoods opportunities, access to basic services and housing.**

Since 2017, over 19,000 Syrian refugees have been reached through perception and intention surveys, including 2,860 in this seventh round.

While the overall results are broadly comparable with previous surveys, there are some notable trends. The intention to return in the short-term remains at a low level and has slightly declined compared to last year's survey, although still in line with actual return trends monitored by UNHCR. A question was added in this round to measure medium-term intentions. Nearly one-third of all respondents indicated a hope to return in the next five years. A majority of Syrians continue to hope to return to Syria one day, but the percentage is lower than in last year's round of the survey. The survey continues to highlight that, at the current time, conditions inside Syria tend to be the primary driver in terms of decision-making around return rather than the situation in host countries.

In light of the findings of this survey, UNHCR stresses the continued importance of the international community maintaining a comprehensive protection and solutions approach to the Syria crisis. This includes supporting host countries and communities to maintain a favourable asylum and protection environment and enhancing medium-term support to bolster host country resilience and further enabling refugee self-reliance; as well as expanding access to resettlement and other safe pathways to third countries.

As outlined in [UNHCR's Protection Thresholds and Parameters for Refugee Return to Syria \(2018\)](#), while UNHCR is not currently facilitating or promoting refugee return to Syria, all refugees have the fundamental human right to return to their country of origin at a time of their own choosing. The decision to return must be made on a voluntary basis by refugees, based on up-to-date and reliable information, and not coerced either overtly through forced return, or indirectly through changes of policies that restrict refugee rights or by limiting assistance to refugees in the host country. At the same time, some Syrian refugees are already taking steps to return; that is their right and support to them must be enhanced.

Given that a majority of Syrian refugees maintain hope to return one day and many within a five-year horizon, it is also vital that collective efforts remain focused on addressing the factors that refugees say are inhibiting their return in a systematic and comprehensive manner. This survey outlines the range of factors which refugees are saying are barriers to their return. Addressing barriers to return is also increasingly important in the context of the large Syrian refugee youth population, many of whom have spent the majority of their lives in the host country.

UNHCR calls on all stakeholders to support the ability of Syrian refugees to make free and informed decisions about their future. As the Syria crisis continues well beyond a decade, the need to sharpen the focus on all possible durable solutions for Syrian refugees is vital to bring an end to their displacement and enable them to start rebuilding their lives in safety and with dignity.

Note on methodology:

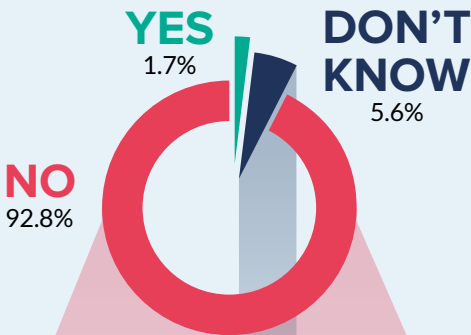
While intention surveys can provide valuable insights into refugees' hopes, intentions and concerns and are a useful tool, they have limitations including the fact that the reflection of refugees' intentions represents a given point in time only and may subsequently change depending on a wide range of factors.

Most respondents interviewed were Principal Applicants who are often the Heads of Household and primary decision makers around return. Only 1 per cent of respondents were between the ages 15-17. Intention among the youth cohort, who represent up to half of the Syrian refugee population and who have spent most of their life in displacement, may differ from those interviewed for the report. UNHCR is actively seeking the views of Syrian refugee youth on their future.

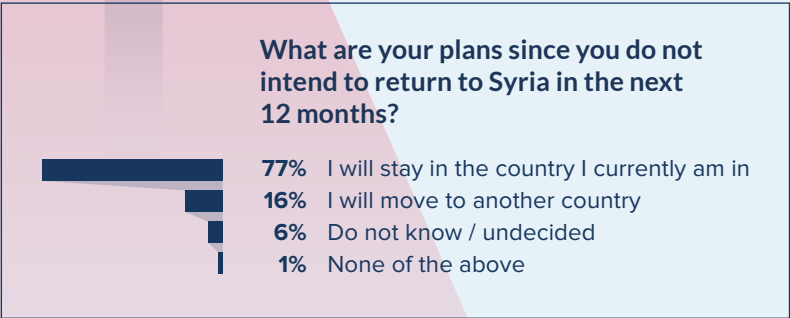
Meanwhile, slight differences in survey methodology and questionnaire between surveys, as well as considering the margin of error, means undue reliance should not be placed on trends over time.

At a Glance

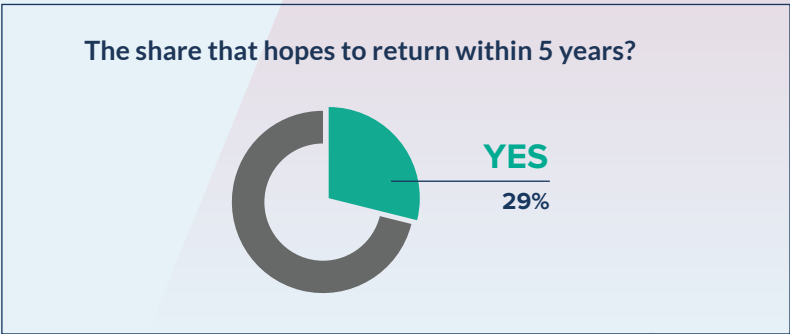
Do you intend to return to Syria within the next 12 months?



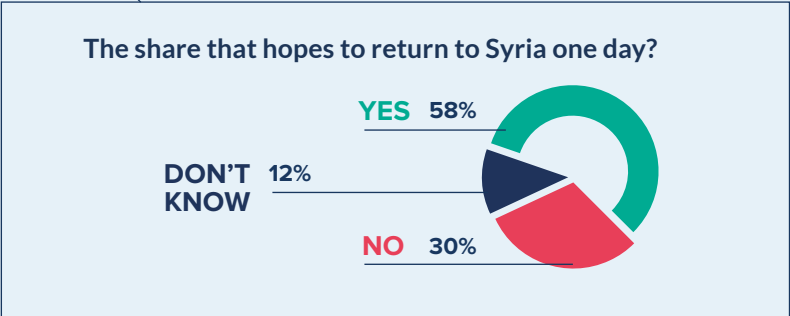
Respondents who did not answer yes were asked the following:



Among those asked:



Among those asked:



Context

The survey was conducted in a challenging context amidst a range of political, security, humanitarian, economic, and social challenges in Syria and across the region. As in the 2021 survey, Syrian refugees were asked questions as to their ability to meet basic needs in their host country, as well as the main challenges they face.

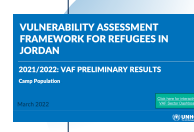
The findings from the survey depict an extremely difficult situation for the vast majority of refugees, in line with the more comprehensive vulnerability or multi-sectoral needs assessments that take place at the country level each year. The share of Syrian refugees that indicated they do currently not have a source of income covering the basic needs of their families remains at around 90 per cent, as last year. The share was highest among refugees in Egypt (92 per cent), Jordan and Lebanon (both 90 per cent).

Respondents said they struggled to meet the costs related to food, housing, basic commodities, and health. In Iraq and Egypt, housing was the most mentioned basic need that refugees struggle with, while in Jordan and Lebanon it was food. According to the survey findings, humanitarian assistance is an increasingly important source of income for refugees, ahead of work, highlighting a high level of vulnerability.

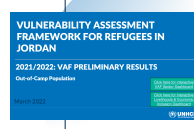
The main challenges of life in the host countries were related to access to livelihood opportunities, financial assistance, and health services, as well as the ability to meet basic needs.



LEBANON
2021
Vulnerability
Assessment of
Syrian Refugees
in Lebanon
(VASyR)



JORDAN
2022
Vulnerability
Assessment
Framework
for Refugees
(in camp)



JORDAN
2022
Vulnerability
Assessment
Framework
for Refugees
(out-of-camp)



IRAQ
2022
MSNA VI of
Syrian Refugees
and Host
Communities
in Iraq

What are the main challenges you and your family are facing in the host country in your daily life?



Snapshot of Findings

▶ Most Syrian refugees still hope to return one day despite the current challenges inside Syria.

- 57 per cent of refugees surveyed expressed a hope to return to Syria one day, which is a lower percentage compared to previous surveys.
- Nearly 80 per cent of refugees in Egypt hope to return to Syria one day, the highest share, followed by Lebanon and Jordan.
- Around 30 per cent of refugees indicated they have no hope to return to Syria while some 13 per cent remain unsure about their longer-term intentions.

▶ A sizeable number of Syrian refugees expressed a hope to return in the next five years.

- Nearly one third (29 per cent) of the total number of refugees surveyed indicated they hoped to return within the next 5 years.
- The percentage of those hoping to return within five years was highest in Egypt (50 per cent).
- Jordan had the second highest percentage of those hoping to return within five years (36 per cent), followed by Lebanon (26 per cent), and Iraq (12 per cent).

▶ A small number of Syrian refugees expressed an intention to return in the next 12 months.

- Some 1.7 per cent of Syrian refugees surveyed expressed an intention to return in the next twelve months, as compared to 2.4 per cent in the previous survey.
- The biggest change in intention compared to last year's survey was in Iraq where the intention to return in the next 12 months decreased from 4.4 per cent to 0.3 per cent.
- The share of refugees answering the question about their intention for the coming 12 months with 'I don't know' continues to show a downward trend.

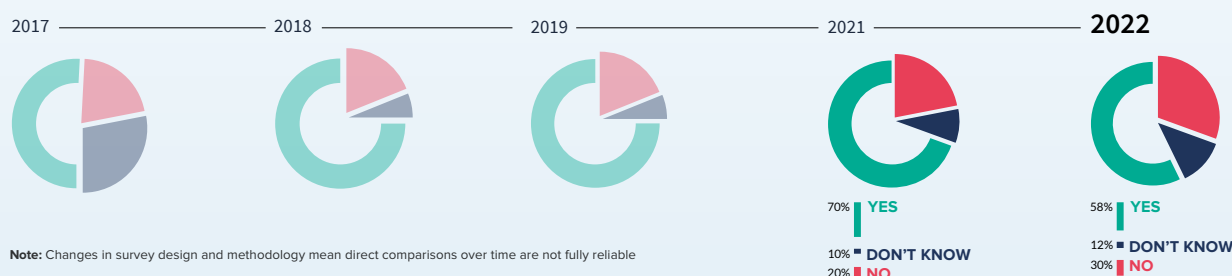
▶ While COVID-19 had a limited impact on decision-making, other key issues for refugees included livelihood opportunities, access to basic services and housing.

- The percentage of refugees who indicated COVID-19 impacted their decision-making on return was low (6 per cent or less) in all countries but Iraq.
- Lack of access to livelihood opportunities inside Syria remains the second most cited barrier to return after safety and security issues.
- Lack of access to basic services increased in importance as a barrier to return, also compared to concerns about housing.

▶ A range of safety and security issues continue to heavily impact decision-making, including active conflict, a lack of law and order, military service, and the presence of armed actors.

- The safety and security situation inside Syria was the most cited factor affecting return decision-making, with over 50 per cent of refugees citing it as the primary barrier to return.
- Among those that do not intend to return within the next 12 months, the share of respondents who highlighted these specific concerns nearly doubled compared to the previous year.
- Active conflict and concerns over the rule of law were the primary safety and security concerns cited by those not intending to return in the next 12 months, followed by the presence of armed actors and military service.

Do you hope to return to Syria one day?



Country Spotlight

While trends related to return intentions are largely consistent across the four countries, some context specific variations were identified as part of the data analysis.

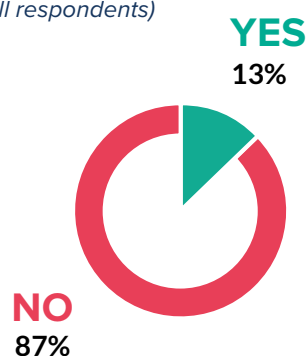
Overall, the intention to return remained at low levels across the region. The most dramatic shift in intentions was noted in Iraq, where only 0.3 per cent of Syrian refugees indicated they wanted to return within the next 12 months, compared to 4.4 per cent the previous year. The hope to return to Iraq one day also declined from 59 to 35 per cent.

The hope to return one day also decreased in Jordan and Lebanon, while there was a slight increase in Egypt. Overall, the five year and long-term hope to return remain highest in Jordan and Egypt, but only marginally higher than the regional average.

Intention to remain in the host country for the next 12 months was highest in Egypt (95 per cent) and Iraq (80 per cent). In Jordan and Lebanon, while a majority of respondents indicated an intention to remain in the host countries, around 18 per cent suggested they hope to move to third countries, mainly for studies or work. An important share of these refugees indicated a hope to move to a third country through resettlement.

Since first fleeing Syria have you (or your family) visited or temporarily travelled to Syria for any length of time?

(all respondents)

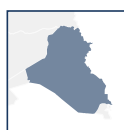
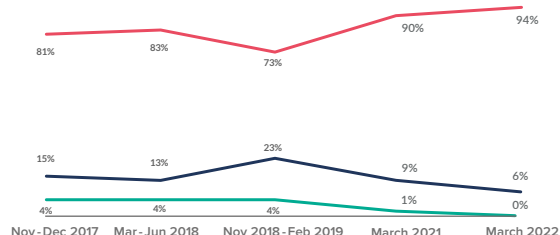


Do you intend to return to Syria in the next year?

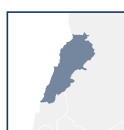
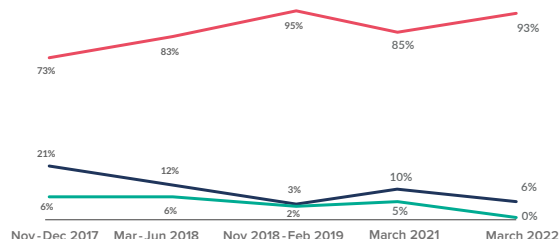
■ No
■ Don't know
■ Yes



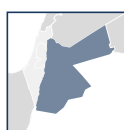
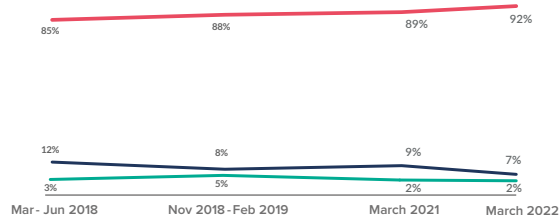
Respondents in Egypt



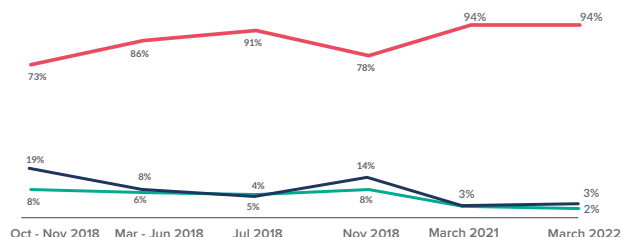
Respondents in Iraq



Respondents in Lebanon



Respondents in Jordan



Access to Information and Knowledge

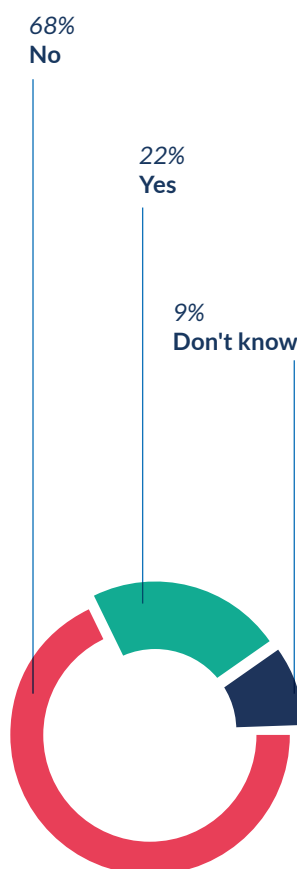
Access to information remains an important component in terms of ensuring return is safe, voluntary, and dignified.

The number of refugees who felt they have sufficient information to decide on whether to return amounted to 53 per cent as compared to 73 per cent in 2021. However, this lower figure is in line with what was recorded in previous surveys.

An interesting trend over recent surveys has also been the increasing number of refugees who expressly state that they do not have sufficient information to decide compared to merely being unsure. While this needs to be explored further, one possible explanation is that refugees increasingly have a better understanding of the information they require in terms of decision-making.

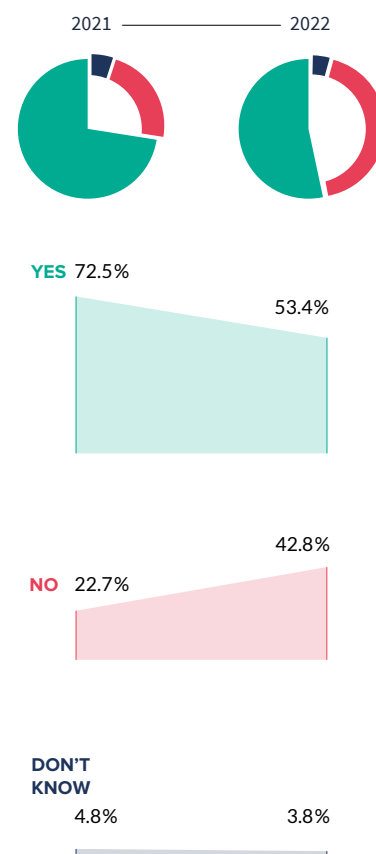
While currently no official 'go and see visit' programme is in place for refugees to temporarily return to Syria, a sizeable number of refugees feel that it is important to first visit Syria prior to deciding on return.

Would it be important to visit Syria before deciding on return?



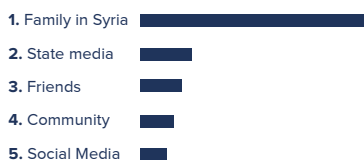
Disclaimer: percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Do you feel you have sufficient information to decide on whether or not to return to Syria?

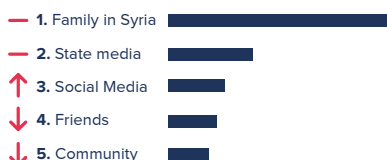


Main sources of information over time?

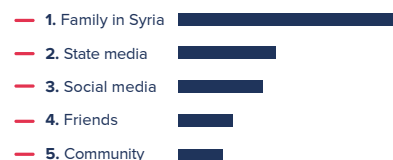
2019



2021



2022



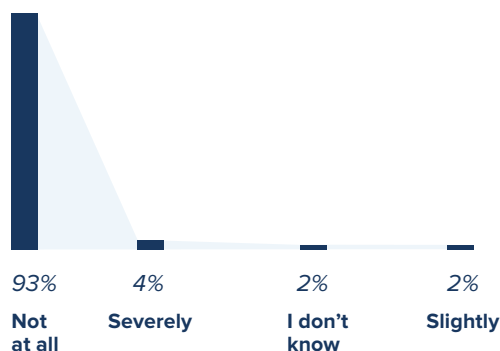
Return Decision-Making

This section explores the reasons and motivations for return. It is presented according to three broad groups to facilitate analysis.

These are **1)** those who intend to return in the next 12 months; **2)** those who do not intend to return in the next 12 months; **3)** those who are undecided.

How much do you feel recent COVID-19 related developments have affected your intention to return? (all respondents)

Disclaimer: percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding



Refugees intending to return in the next 12 months

Of all those surveyed, some 1.7 per cent expressed an intention to return in the next 12 months. This finding is slightly lower than in last year's survey, when some 2.4 per cent of refugees expressed an intention to return.

The most pronounced change in intentions since the last round of the survey in 2021 was seen among Syrian refugees in Iraq, where previously 4.4 per cent indicated an immediate intention to return as compared to 0.3 per cent in this round. While it is not possible to infer the reasons for the decline, the worsening conditions in northeast Syria, where most of the refugees originate from are likely to be a primary factor.

In terms of country comparison, refugees in Jordan during this round of the survey showed the highest short-term intention to return with 2.4 per cent intending to do so in the next 12 months. Nonetheless, the figures for Jordan have remained largely stable over time.

Among the small number expressing an intention to return over the next 12 months, the wish to reunite with family has become a key motivator overtaking other factors linked to perceived improvements in the security situation inside Syria. Similarly, another cited factor was that refugees were missing home. Those with an intention to return had various concerns, including related to safety and security, livelihood opportunities and access to basic services.

Overall, the intention to return within the next 12 months was slightly higher among males (1.8 per cent) compared to females (1.4 per cent). The intention to return in the next 12 months was also slightly below average among female headed households.

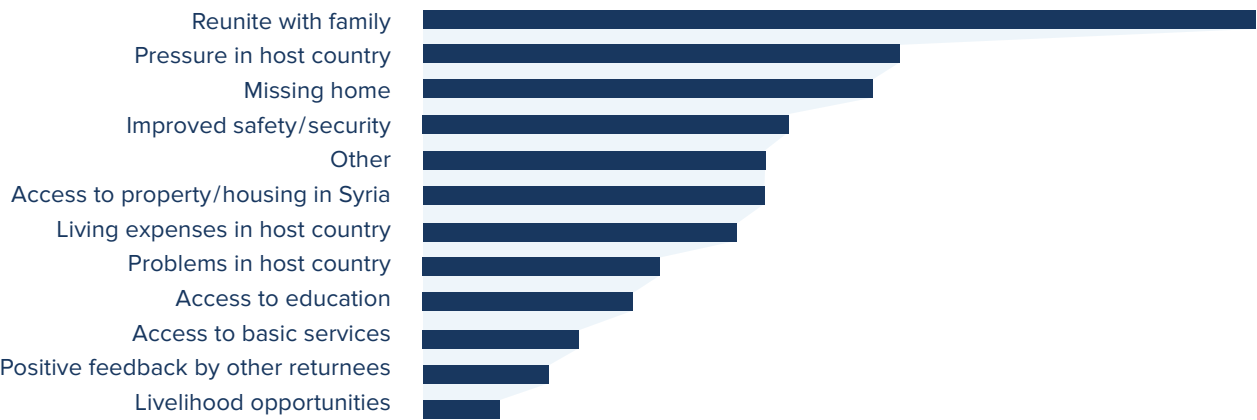
The main inhibiting factors for people to return in the near term are the same factors they indicated would affect their decision in the future.

Abo Mohamad (63)

has recently returned
with his family members
to Syria to re-plant their land



Why do you intend to return to Syria?



Living conditions in host countries and intention to return

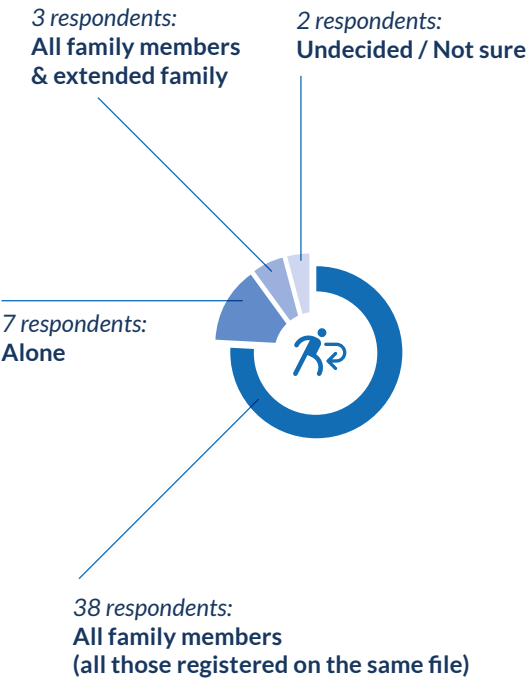
It will be important to explore further the relationship between the ability to meet basic needs and an intention to return. Push factors related to conditions in host countries were mentioned as the second most common consideration by those few refugees intending to return in the next 12 months. However, the overall intention to return in the short term remained extremely low despite some 90 per cent of Syrian refugees interviewed said they and their families were unable to meet their basic needs in host countries. Though further examination is needed,

this would imply that the on-going challenging conditions in host countries, do not seem to affect decision-making for most refugees.

Interestingly, the short-term intention to return to Syria was more than twice as high among Syrian refugees who indicated they can meet their basic needs compared to those who are unable to. This was also observed in the previous survey. While the sample size is not large enough to draw a robust overall conclusion, it is a line of enquiry worthy of further exploration.

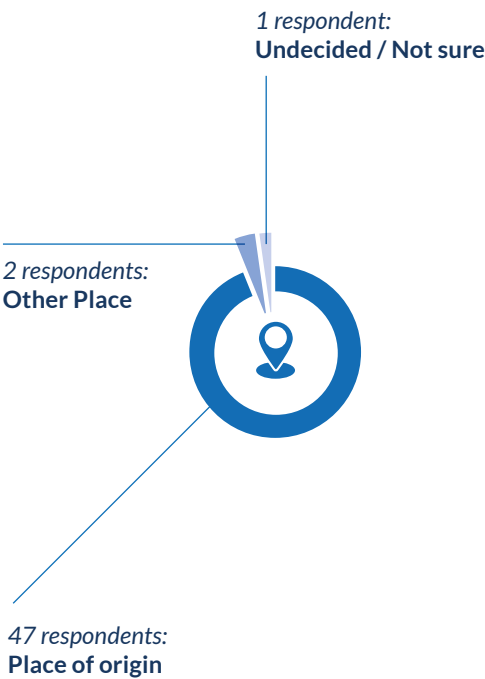
Returning with family?

Shares based on 50 responses



Where do you intend to return to?

Shares based on 50 responses



Ahmad (54)

and his family returned home to Tall Ed-daman in rural Aleppo. "We are waiting for the hens to lay eggs so we can sell them. This will help us get some money to buy basic things."



Refugees not intending to return in the next 12 months

As in previous surveys, most respondents – 95 per cent – are not intending to return to Syria in the next 12 months. Among this group, some 57 per cent expressed a hope to return to Syria one day. While direct comparisons over time must be treated carefully given changes in surveying and methodology, this does represent a downward trend compared to the last couple of years, though still higher than initial surveys.

A sizeable number of refugees in this group expressed a hope to return to Syria within the next five years, a question that was asked for the first time. More information on this cohort is included in the box below.

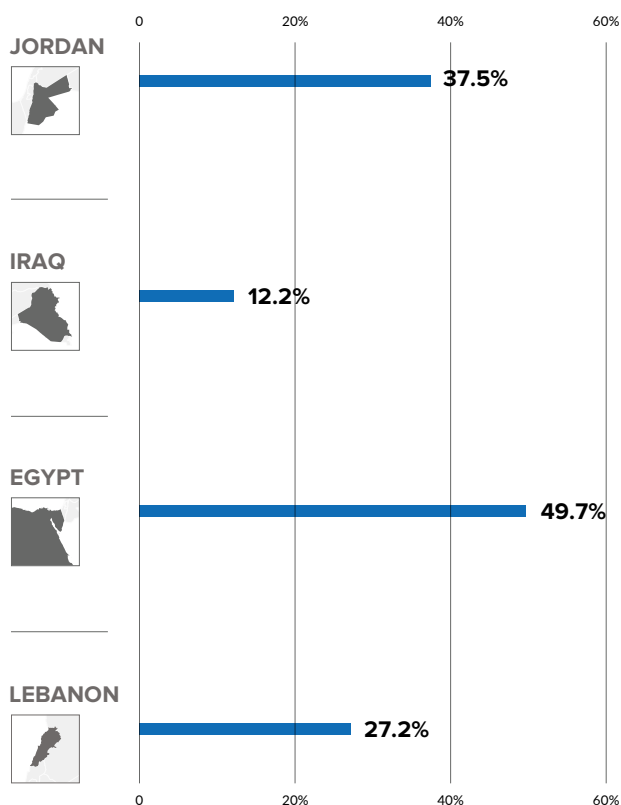
The main reasons cited by respondents in this group for having no immediate intention to return have remained largely consistent over the last five years, including a lack of safety and security in Syria, limited access to livelihood opportunities, basic services and limited or no access to adequate housing.

Of those not intending to return over the next 12 months, the percentage of those that intend to continue staying in the host country for now has increased slightly to 77 per cent (previously 69 per cent), while there was a slight decline in the intention to move to third countries, from 19 to 16 per cent compared to the previous year. Of those that indicated they wanted to move to third countries, over 68 per cent hope to do so through resettlement and they hope to work or study (30 and 22 per cent).

For the first time, respondents were asked about their medium-term hope to return to Syria, namely within the next five years. Of all those not intending to return in the next 12 months or undecided, 30.2 per cent expressed a hope to return in the next five years.

Based on past surveys and additional analysis, this finding would suggest that though there is no intention to return imminently, a sizeable number of refugees is actively considering return and may be ready to return in the coming years if progress is made in removing obstacles to return.

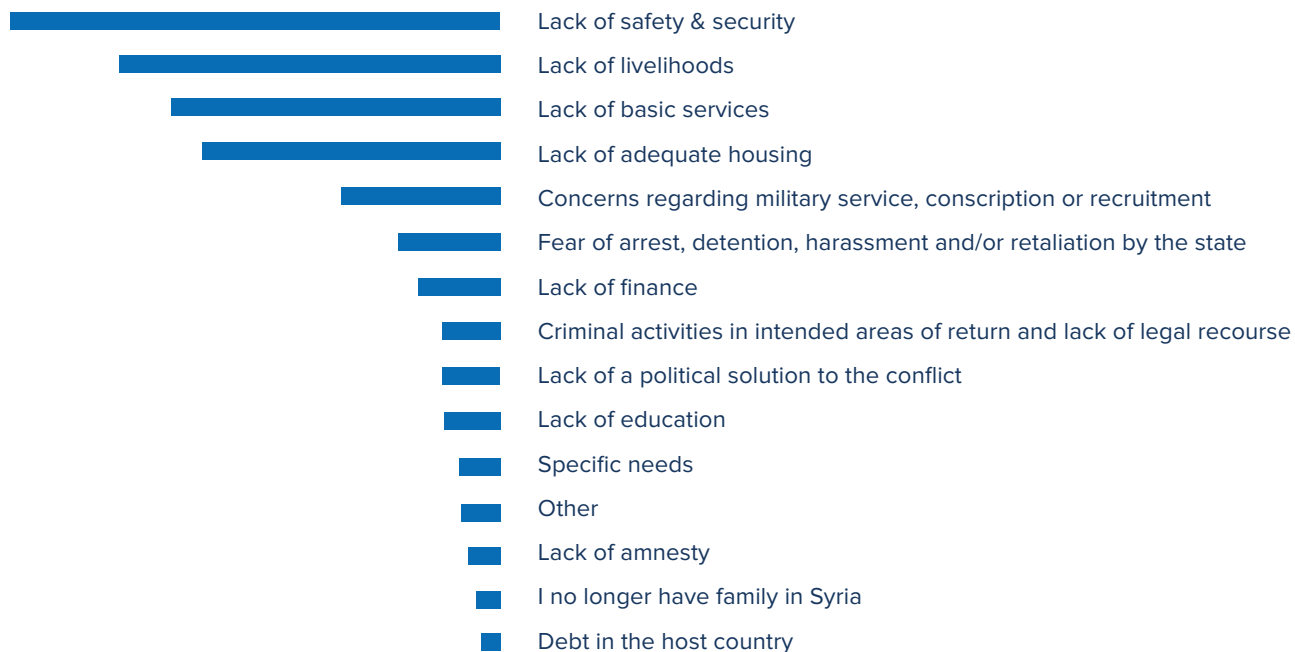
Breakdown: Hope to return within the next five years³



³ This includes individuals who intend to return within 12 months

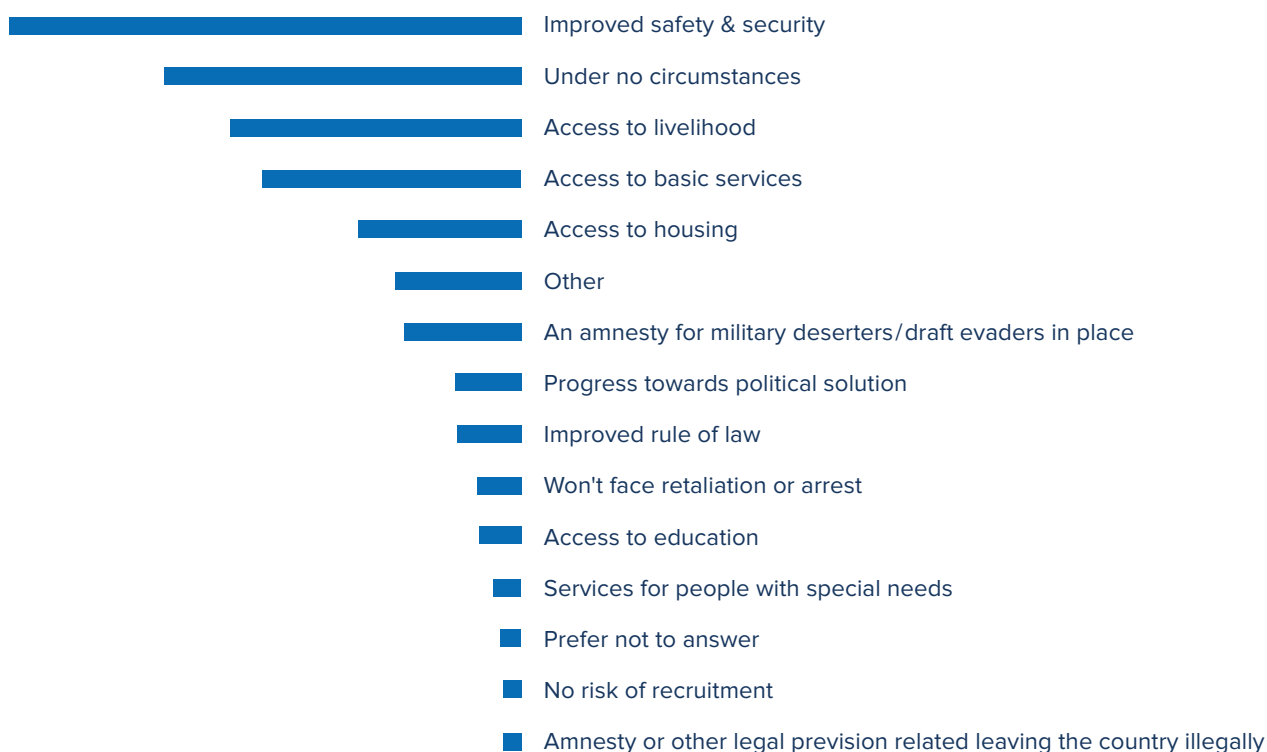
Question asked if no intention to return in the next 12 months

What are the main reasons why you are not intending to return to Syria in the next 12 months?



Question asked if respondent answered having no intend to return in the next 12 months

Under what circumstances would you consider changing your current decision and return to Syria?



Question asked if respondent answered having no intention to return in the next 12 months

What are the main reasons why you are not intending to return to Syria?

2019	2021	2022
1. Lack of safety and security	1. Lack of livelihood/work opportunities	1. Lack of safety and security
2. Limited access to livelihood	2. Lack of safety and security	2. Lack of livelihood/work opportunities
3. Limited access to shelter	3. Lack of adequate housing and or concerns over my property/housing	3. Inadequate basic services
4. Concerns regarding military service	4. Concerns regarding military service	4. Lack of adequate housing and or concerns over my property/housing
5. Limited access to basic services	5. Inadequate basic services	5. Concerns regarding military service

Main safety and security issues



Undecided on return

Some 5.6 per cent of respondents indicated they are currently undecided about their return intentions. This rate was lowest in Jordan (3.4 per cent) but otherwise similar across the other countries. When asked what factors could help them decide, improved safety and security and access to livelihood opportunities and basic services were highlighted as key considerations.

The share of refugees answering ‘I don’t know’ has for the seventh time in a row decreased - from 18 per cent in 2017 to 5.6 per cent in this round, likely indicating that refugees are getting a clearer idea of their intention. This finding could also

be linked to the increased access to information, including through digital and social media about conditions in Syria noted during the last two rounds of the survey.

While about half of the respondents from this group stated during the 2019 survey that it would be important for them or a member of their community to first visit Syria prior to deciding to return, this percentage has continually decreased since and stood at 22.3 per cent during this round. This is perhaps in part linked to the overall better access to information as reported by refugees compared to 2019.

Annex 1 - Methodology

During the seventh round of the RPIS, conducted between January and February 2022, a total of 4,155 Syrian refugees residing in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan were contacted. Out of these, 2,860 were successfully reached and consented to being interviewed.

Sampling strategy and data analysis

The RPIS is conducted through a common questionnaire which is used by all participating country operations. The sampling approach adopted for this survey was to generate a representative sample of the overall population of Syrian refugees known to UNHCR in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon. A random sample was drawn from UNHCR's databases in the four participating countries, with the sample size per country proportionate to their share of the Syrian refugee population known to UNHCR. A 40 per cent non-response rate was considered when setting the sample size.

Who answered the survey?

The majority (85 per cent) of the respondents reached were Principal Applicants of the case, most of whom were male. The remaining 15 per cent were either the spouses, other adult household members or children aged 15 years or above. About 27 per cent of the respondents were female and Principal Applicants.

Limitations

Survey findings reflect refugees' intentions at a given point in time only and may subsequently change. Due to the reliance on phone interviews, it was more difficult to reach refugees with specific needs.

Of those contacted for the survey, 68 per cent could be reached. Data from a sample, in comparison to a census, will add some uncertainty about the point estimates, which is explained below. Given the sample size of 2,860 respondents, the uncertainty around the estimates for the main variables of interest is rather low.

Although data collected through previous surveys provides an interesting perspective of trends over time, the survey methodology and questionnaire varied slightly across the different rounds of the survey. Therefore, the analysis focussed on the current data, comparing only the most reliable indicators over time.

Use of the Survey Data

UNHCR will continue to use the data generated from the survey and associated analysis to generate insights and inform its operational response, programming, and policy and advocacy efforts in the region, in line with its Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy.

Profile of Respondents

2,860 respondents

65% male and 35% female

85% of respondents are PA

14% of respondents are other adults from the household

1% are children aged 15 years or above

87% possess at least one valid document showing Syrian origin

Methodology: Margin of Error and Confident Interval Calculation

The margin of error (half the width of a confidence interval) for a proportion under simple random sampling has been calculated using the formula:

$$e = \sqrt{\frac{z^2 \frac{a}{1-a} \hat{p}(1-\hat{p})}{n}}$$

This expression formalises the fact that with sampling theory, it is possible to statistically generalise findings from a sample to a population, although taken a degree of uncertainty must be taken into account due to the fact that not everyone in the population group was interviewed.

$$z^2 \frac{a}{1-a}$$

in this formula is the critical value of the standard normal distribution reflecting the confidence interval desired, 1.96 for 95 per cent in this case.

$$\hat{p}$$

is the proportion of the sample for which the outcome indicator is true, and n is the sample size. For the intention to return in the next 12 months, this results in a margin of error, on the regional level, of 0.0047. The 95 per cent confidence interval therefore is 1.2 to 2.2 per cent. For the questions related to the overall hope to return, the 95 per cent confidence interval, using the same formula, ranges from 55,7 to 59,3 per cent.



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