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Information, Counselling, and Legal Assistance (ICLA) programme Legal Needs Assessment

March 2026



NRC NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

A.R.F.A.D.A

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Cover photo:

ICLA group information session conducted in north-west Syria. The session provided reliable information to displaced and conflict affected people on various legal issues, including housing, land and property rights

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Acronym and Abbreviation

CBO	Community-Based Organization
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FHH	Female-Headed Household
GoS	Government of Syria
HLP	Housing, Land and Property
HH	Household
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ICLA	Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KII	Key Informant Interview
LNA	Legal Needs Assessment
MHH	Male-Headed Household
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
UN	United Nations

Executive summary

Context and purpose

After more than a decade of conflict, displacement, and fragmented governance, legal protection in Syria remains severely weakened, particularly in civil documentation and legal identity, and housing, land and property (HLP). Registry disruption, informal property transactions, shifting authorities, and protracted displacement have left many households unable to prove identity, formalize tenure, or pursue legal remedies.

Following the December 2024 contextual shift and the lifting of earlier operational constraints on legal aid, people have increasingly attempted to address long-standing documentation gaps and unresolved HLP claims, particularly in areas experiencing renewed mobility and increased return movements.

In this context, NRC commissioned this Legal Needs Assessment to inform the 2026 ICLA programme by identifying priority legal needs, access-to-justice barriers, and groups facing the highest structural vulnerability.

Methodology and coverage

The assessment applied a mixed-methods design across nine governorates (Aleppo, Idleb, Al-Hasakeh, Ar-Raqqa, Daraa, Damascus, Rural Damascus, Hama, Homs), combining 1,200 household surveys with focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and institutional observations. Data were disaggregated by sex, displacement status, disability status, and geography. Findings were triangulated across quantitative and qualitative sources.

Core finding 1: Civil documentation gaps are widespread and structurally disabling

Civil documentation is the most pervasive legal constraint in the assessment. Overall, 62% of households reported that at least one member lacks key civil documentation, leaving only 38% fully documented. Gaps are particularly high among returnees from abroad (80%), but remain substantial across host communities (66%), returnees from internal displacement (58%), and IDPs (55%). In several governorates, documentation gaps exceeded 70%, deepening exclusion from services.

Among households missing documentation, 65% attempted replacement. Cost is the dominant barrier for those who did not attempt (44%), and a significant constraint for those who tried. Satisfaction with replacement processes is low. Civil documentation gaps directly constrain access to services and prevent people from resolving HLP and family law matters, functioning as a foundational barrier across multiple rights domains.

Core finding 2: Reported HLP access does not translate into secure gender-equitable enjoyment of property rights

While 70% of households report owning or renting property, 61% lack formal HLP documentation, undermining tenure security. Women are disproportionately affected: around seven in ten women lack formal documentation, compared to just over half of men.

Property-related disputes affect 19% of households overall, with higher exposure among IDPs and returnees from abroad. Reported ongoing HLP problems affect 42% of respondents. Awareness of alternative pathways to prove ownership is low (75% unaware), limiting people's ability to formalize tenure or resolve disputes.

HLP insecurity therefore reflects not the absence of physical housing access, but incomplete documentation, unresolved disputes, and limited pathways to formal registration and protection of HLP rights.

Core finding 3: Eviction risk and due process failures are widespread in informal tenure contexts

Perceived eviction risk is reported by 21% of households nationwide but is significantly higher in Ar-Raqqa (37%), followed by Homs (25%) and Rural Damascus (22%). The risk is also elevated among people with disabilities (31%) and returnees from internal displacement (31%), indicating compounded vulnerability in displacement-affected households.

Among households who feel at risk of eviction, 69% reported receiving no eviction notice at all, and only 2% reported receiving a written notice, while the remainder reported receiving verbal warnings from landlords. This indicates that eviction pressures are overwhelmingly informal, with written notices and formal procedures rarely used.

These patterns indicate that eviction risk is embedded in informal and weakly regulated rental arrangements, where written rental agreements and formal eviction notices are rare, and tenants have limited ability to challenge eviction or seek legal remedies.

Core finding 4: Missing persons are a major driver of women's legal limbo and inheritance exclusion

Among respondents reporting a missing husband or partner, 87% stated they are unable to benefit from the missing person's property or legal rights. The absence of official death registration emerges as a central bottleneck, effectively freezing inheritance and property claims. While majority of respondents attempted to obtain legal declaration, outcomes remain largely unresolved: only 24% achieved declaration, while 66% remain pending. Demand for legal support is high (73%), consistent with the near-total lack of awareness of procedures enabling wives to manage property in missing persons contexts (98% unaware). Missing persons cases illustrate the intersection of civil documentation, inheritance, and HLP exclusion, particularly affecting women and placing them in prolonged legal limbo.

Core finding 5: Access to legal assistance is limited and uneven, constrained by cost, structural barriers and geographical disparities

Access to legal assistance remains limited, with 30% of respondents seeking support for HLP or documentation issues. Engagement varies sharply across governorates, reaching 57% in Ar-Raqqa but dropping down to 12% in Hama and just 3% in Daraa, indicating pronounced geographic disparities in legal help-seeking patterns.

Among those who sought assistance, private lawyers were the dominant pathway (57%), indicating that legal navigation frequently occurs through formal legal representation.

Reported barriers affect 25% of respondents and include affordability constraints, incomplete documentation and procedural complexity and perceived gender-related barriers. Together, these findings indicate that access to legal assistance – and, by extension, access to justice - is shaped not only by the formal presence of institutions, but by cost, documentation status, awareness, and geographic and structural disparities, including procedural complexity and service visibility, that affects who is able to pursue and sustain legal actions.

Core Finding 6: Interconnected legal needs and intersecting layered vulnerabilities are concentrated across specific groups and locations

Civil documentation gaps, challenges in restoring or updating HLP records, unresolved inheritance claims and insecure housing arrangements do not arise in isolation. They frequently overlap within the same household, creating compound legal constraints that limit people's ability to assert property rights, secure housing and access services. In the Syrian context, eviction risk reflects not only informal rental relations but also gaps in documentation and unresolved legal status.

These layered constraints disproportionately affect certain groups. Women - particularly, female-headed households and wives of missing persons - face compounded barriers linked to the documentation status, inheritance exclusion and limited authority to represent the household in administrative procedures. People with disabilities, IDPs, returnees from abroad, residents of informal settlements and camps, families of missing or detained persons, and poor urban renters are similarly exposed to overlapping legal risks.

Across several governorates, these risks converge, combining documentation gaps, difficulties in property re-registration, eviction pressure, and limited engagement with legal assistance. The cumulative effect is not a single isolated legal problem, but a pattern of intersecting vulnerabilities that reinforce exclusion from rights, services, and HLP security.

Core Finding 7: Dispute resolution mechanisms can facilitate the resolution of HLP and inheritance disputes when combined with judicial processes and legal accompaniment

As highlighted in previous findings, property disputes, unresolved inheritance claims, and documentation gaps frequently require structured resolution before administrative action can proceed. In many cases, judicial confirmation is necessary prior to property re-registration or inheritance transfer, making court engagement structurally unavoidable.

At the same time, many conflicts — particularly intra-family inheritance disagreements, landlord–tenant disputes, and cases involving incomplete documentation — can benefit from

negotiated settlement, mediation, or structured legal accompaniment before or alongside judicial proceedings. These approaches can help clarify claims, organise evidence, and reduce escalation, particularly where documentation gaps complicate formal procedures.

When combined with judicial processes and supported by legal accompaniment, dispute resolution mechanisms can strengthen households' ability to navigate complex legal requirements and advance claims toward enforceable outcomes. In this context, dispute resolution operates not as a substitute for courts, but as a complementary mechanism within the broader legal system.

Programmatic implications for NRC ICLA (2026)

The findings support an integrated identity-to-rights approach linking documentation recovery, family law and missing persons-related support, and HLP case management. One-off counselling is insufficient where cases require court confirmation or multi-stage administrative follow-up.

Programmatic priorities should include scaling sustained case accompaniment and representation, expanding mobile and remote service delivery, and provision of targeted financial support for legal fees and transportation for high-vulnerability households.

Strengthening collaborative dispute resolution as a complementary pathway to judicial processes will be essential in addressing inheritance and HLP-related disputes if implemented with appropriate safeguards and referral linkages.

Institutional engagement should focus on improving procedural clarity, referral coordination and strengthening operational capacities of local administrative and legal service providers to ensure that documentation recovery translates into enforceable housing and property rights.

Conclusion

The assessment demonstrates that civil documentation gaps, insecure tenure, missing persons-related inheritance barriers, and uneven access to legal assistance do not occur in isolation. Rather, they intersect and accumulate across specific groups and locations, shaping patterns of exclusion from housing, property, and related rights. Addressing these constraints requires sustained, sequenced legal support that bridges documentation recovery, dispute resolution, and enforceable outcomes within the formal legal system.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Over more than a decade of conflict, displacement, and fragmented governance, Syrians have experienced widespread erosion of legal protection related to civil documentation, legal identity, and housing, land, and property (HLP) rights. Prolonged displacement, destruction or inaccessibility of registries, informal transactions, and shifting administrative control have left large segments of the population without the documentation required to prove identity, access basic services, secure tenure, or pursue legal remedies. Despite the scale of these challenges, systematic and up-to-date data on household-level legal needs remains extremely limited across much of the country.

Following the collapse of the former government in December 2024 and the lifting of the legal aid ban imposed on parts of Syria that were under the control of the former government in 2019, new operational space has emerged for the provision of legal counselling, legal assistance, court representation, and collaborative dispute resolution mechanisms. At the same time, return movements and increased mobility have intensified demand for civil documentation, HLP registration, and dispute resolution, placing additional pressure on already strained civil registries, Cadastre and Real Estate offices, courts, and local mediation mechanisms. In this rapidly changing context, existing data and analyses have, to date, been insufficient to guide effective legal aid programming or to reflect the current distribution and nature of legal needs.

Legal vulnerability is not evenly distributed across the population. Internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, residents of informal settlements, women, female-headed households and wives of missing or disappeared persons and persons with disabilities face compounded legal barriers. Gaps in civil documentation and HLP records intersect with poverty, displacement history, mobility constraints, insecurity, and social norms, resulting in reduced access to justice and heightened exposure to eviction, secondary occupation, inheritance exclusion, and administrative abuse.

Against this backdrop, and in light of the expanded scope of ICLA activities following the lifting of the legal aid ban, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), through its Information, Counselling, and Legal Assistance (ICLA) programme, commissioned ARFADA to conduct a Legal Needs Assessment, with data collection and analysis. The assessment aims to generate evidence-based, household-level insights into the scale, nature, and geographic distribution of legal needs across Syria, with particular attention to civil documentation and HLP rights. Its findings will directly inform the design of the 2026 ICLA programme, strengthen evidence-based prioritization, and guide targeted advocacy and institutional engagement to address persistent gaps in legal needs data.

1.2 Purpose of the Legal Needs Assessment

The assessment aims to systematically identify, analyse, and prioritise the legal needs, and access-to-justice barriers affecting conflict-affected populations in Syria. The assessment aims to provide robust quantitative and qualitative evidence to inform NRC ICLA programming, policy engagement, and coordination strategies related to civil documentation, legal identity, HLP rights, including inheritance and dispute resolution, and access to legal services.

Specifically, the assessment seeks to understand how the absence or loss of documentation and property records continues to affect individuals' ability to exercise basic rights, access services, secure housing, and pursue durable solutions in a complex and transitional legal environment.

1.3 Geographic Coverage

The Legal Needs Assessment was implemented across nine governorates representing Syria's major displacement, return, and host-community contexts: Aleppo, Idleb, Al-Hasakeh, Ar-Raqqa, Daraa, Damascus, Rural Damascus, Hama, and Homs. These locations were selected to reflect variation in governance arrangements, administrative practices, displacement density, return dynamics, and HLP-related challenges relevant to NRC operational priorities.



NRC holding an ICLA group information session in a displacement camp in north-east Syria. NRC/2024

2 Methodology

2.1 Assessment Approach

The assessment applied a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to analyse legal needs and barriers. The methodology was inclusive, and protection-sensitive, ensuring participation of vulnerable groups, including women, persons with disabilities, IDPs, and returnees.

Quantitative data were collected through a structured household survey, while qualitative data were collected through focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs), and on-site observations of legal and administrative institutions. This triangulated approach enabled the assessment to capture both the scale of legal needs and qualitative dimensions, including lived experiences, institutional practices, and contextual dynamics shaping access to justice.

The assessment targeted conflict-affected households and individuals across diverse displacement and residency profiles, including IDPs, returnees (internal and from abroad), host community members, and residents of informal settlements. Sampling design intentionally ensured inclusion of groups facing heightened legal vulnerability, including female-headed households, wives of missing or disappeared persons, persons with disabilities, and households experiencing tenure insecurity or unresolved legal disputes.

2.2 Sampling Framework

A multi-stage sampling framework applying quota-based selection within predefined strata (governorate, displacement status, and gender) was used to ensure balanced representation across key population groups. The quantitative component targeted 1,200 households (500 host community members and 700 IDPs), proportionally distributed across nine governorates (see Table A.4. *Household Survey Sample Achieved by Governorate and Displacement Status* in Annex IV for detailed sample distribution).

This approach enabled structured comparison across displacement profiles and geographic areas. Access constraints were encountered in Al-Hasakeh, Ar-Raqqa, and Daraa. Mitigation measures - including flexible scheduling and additional sampling within the same strata - enabled the team to reach the predefined quantitative targets while maintaining proportional representation.

Qualitative sampling was purposive, prioritising participants with direct experience of legal challenges or institutional knowledge of HLP procedures and administrative processes, ensuring depth of insight alongside the structured quantitative coverage.

2.3 Data Collection Tools

Four complementary data collection tools were used to capture legal needs at household, community, and institutional levels.

Household Survey

A household survey constituted the core quantitative component of the assessment. The survey was administered to 1,200 households across nine governorates using digital data collection through Kobo Toolbox.

The questionnaire captured data on civil documentation status, HLP challenges, access to legal assistance, dispute resolution mechanisms, service barriers, and coping strategies. The structured format allowed for disaggregation by governorate, gender, displacement status, and disability status to capture differentiated vulnerabilities.

Focus Group Discussions

A total of **28 FGDs** (n=163 participants; 76 male and 87 female) were conducted with IDPs and host community members Discussions explored perceptions of legal challenges and institutional accessibility, coping strategies, and gender-specific barriers to accessing justice.

Key Informant Interviews

A total of 36 KIIs were conducted with legal practitioners, Cadastre and Real Estate Officials, civil registry staff, community leaders, and civil society representatives. These interviews provided insight into institutional procedures, capacity constraints, coordination gaps, and evolving legal practices across different governorates.

- The composition of key informants included:
- Cadastre / Real Estate officials (5 male & 2 female)
- Community leader / Local authority (8 male)
- CSO / CBO representative (8 female & 2 male)
- Legal practitioner / Lawyer (4 female & 11 male)

On-Site Observations

7 out of 9 planned observations of Cadastre and Real Estate Offices and related administrative entities were completed to assess accessibility, service delivery processes, procedural transparency, and client flow in a structured way. Observations in Al-Hasakeh and Ar-Raqqa could not be conducted due to office closures during the data collection period. Where direct observation was not possible, findings were triangulated through KIIs and FGDs.

2.4 Data Processing and Analysis

Quantitative data were cleaned and analysed using SPSS[1] and Excel. Results were disaggregated by governorate, gender, displacement status, and disability status. Qualitative data analysed and triangulated with quantitative findings to ensure consistency and contextual interpretation.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

The assessment adhered to strict ethical standards throughout all phases of implementation. Participation was voluntary, verbally informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and confidentiality was maintained. No personally identifiable information was recorded or reported.

Gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive approaches were applied to ensure safe and respectful participation. Enumerators and facilitators were trained on confidentiality, safeguarding, and the Do No Harm approach and other ethical research principles. Data was stored securely and accessed only by authorized members of the assessment team.

2.6 Limitations and Mitigation Measures

Limitation	Mitigation Measures
Seven out of nine planned on-site observations of Cadastre and Real Estate offices were completed. Observations in Al-Hasakeh and Ar-Raqqa could not be conducted as offices were closed during data collection.	Triangulated findings using KIIs with legal practitioners and civil society actors, complemented by FGDs and household survey data, to capture institutional procedures, barriers, and service access indirectly where direct on-site observation was not possible.
Length of the questionnaire, which led to potential respondent boredom or fatigue and risked affecting data quality or completion rates.	Participants were informed in advance about the expected interview duration, helping to manage expectations, improve cooperation, and reduce mid-survey dropouts. Incomplete surveys were discarded and other viable respondents taken.
Enumerator bias or misunderstanding of technical legal terminology and complex questions.	Conducted comprehensive enumerator training, including detailed explanations of legal concepts, mock interviews, and clarification sessions to

[1] Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) is a statistical software widely used for data management, descriptive and inferential analysis, and the production of tables and figures in social science and humanitarian research.

	ensure consistent understanding and administration of the questionnaire.
Social norms and cultural sensitivities limiting access to women, older persons, and persons with disabilities in certain communities.	Deployed gender-balanced data collection teams, recruited female enumerators, and ensured private, culturally appropriate interview settings to promote safe and inclusive participation.

Table 1: Limitations and mitigation measures.

3 Findings

3.1 Socioeconomic Characteristics

3.1.1 Respondent Profile

A total of 1,200 household surveys were completed across nine governorates in Syria, ensuring coverage of both urban and conflict-affected areas. Data collection included 160 surveys in Damascus, 160 in Rural Damascus, 150 in Aleppo, 150 in Idleb, 130 in Homs, 130 in Hama, 120 in Al-Hasakeh, 100 in Ar-Raqqa, and 100 in Daraa. Detailed disaggregated tables supporting this section are provided in Annex IV (Tables B5 & B6).

Across all governorates, the sample was nearly gender-balanced, comprising 51% women and 49% men, reflecting the intentional inclusion of women and men experiencing legal and administrative barriers.

By sex, the age distribution was broadly similar, with adults aged 30–49 forming the largest share for both groups. Females showed slightly higher representation in the 60+ age group at 10%, compared to 5% among males, while males had a higher proportion in the 50+ category at 30%, compared to 23% among females. Younger adults aged 18–29 accounted for 11% of females and 12% of males, indicating relatively balanced representation in the youngest age group.

Over half of respondents were married with a spouse present (52%), followed by widowed (23%), divorced/separated (10%), and single or married with a missing spouse (8% each). Widowhood was markedly higher among women (44%), while men were predominantly married with a spouse present (76%). By status, marriage was most common among returnees, while widowhood was more prevalent among IDPs and host community households.

Disability intersected strongly with marital status: widowhood was higher among persons with disabilities (41%) than those without (21%). Overall, 10% of respondents reported a disability, mainly visual (23%) or hearing difficulties (12%), with similar prevalence among women and men.

3.1.2 Displacement and Mobility

The sample primarily comprised IDPs (41%) and host community members (36%), followed by returnees from internal displacement (14%) and returnees from abroad (10%). Women were more represented among IDPs, while men were more prevalent among returnees.

Displacement was largely protracted, with 65% of IDPs and returnees displaced for over four years. Host community respondents predominantly reported no recent displacement. FGDs confirmed prolonged camp and urban displacement in Aleppo, Idleb, and Al-Hasakeh, with limited pathways to durable solutions.

Respondents mainly originated from Homs, Idleb, Aleppo, and Rural Damascus, while current residence was concentrated in Damascus/Rural Damascus, Aleppo/Idleb, Homs/Hama, and Al-Hasakeh. FGDs attributed these patterns to repeated displacement, insecurity, and economic pressure rather than durable return.

People's experiences differed sharply by displacement and mobility status, reflecting distinct displacement pathways (camp-based, urban, host, and return context) and varying degrees of mobility, ranging from prolonged immobility to partial or circular movements. Camp-based IDPs, often experiencing prolonged and immobile displacement, reported severe material deprivation, including insecure shelter arrangements, lack of property ownership, limited access to documentation, and restricted access to public services, alongside high humanitarian aid dependence. Urban displaced households described insecure housing arrangements and unstable livelihoods linked to informal and frequently changing accommodation. Host community respondents highlighted increasing pressure on services associated with prolonged displacement in urban areas. Returnees, particularly women, described return as partial and insecure, shaped by unresolved economic and family-related challenges rather than full integration.

3.1.3 Household Structure

Male-headed households accounted for 60% of the sample, while 40% were female-headed. Male-headed households were most prevalent among returnees from abroad (71%), while host community and IDP households were closer to parity but remained majority male-headed (56% and 57%, respectively). Households including persons with disability were slightly more likely to be male-headed (62%) than those without disability (59%).

Qualitative findings nuance these figures. FGDs across multiple locations (including Idleb, Al-Hasakeh, Aleppo, Daraa, and Hama) consistently described de facto female-led households driven by widowhood, disappearance, detention, or prolonged absence of male household members. In many such cases, women reported assuming full responsibility for household management despite formal records continuing listing men as household heads, creating gaps between reality and legal recognition.

Most households comprised three to six members (67%), while around one quarter (26%) had more than six members. Larger households were more commonly reported among male respondents (31% vs 17% among females) and host communities (27%vs 23% among IDPs). Male IDP FGDs in Daraa and Idleb indicated that larger household size often reflects extended family arrangements (including multiple children, extended relatives, and in some cases polygamous family arrangements). These households were frequently concentrated in tents, camps, or informal shelters, where overcrowding and lack of privacy intensified intra-household dependency and vulnerability.

Household composition patterns further reflected intersecting vulnerabilities related to disability and age. Households affected by disability were significantly less likely to include very young children (aged 0–4) and more likely to include older dependents, indicating a high care burden and constrained caregiving capacity. FGDs in camp-based IDP settings in Idleb, Al-Hasakeh, and Aleppo highlighted how disability, widowhood, and economic strain constrained caregiving capacity, reshaped household composition and, in some cases, increased reliance on school-aged children to contribute to the household labour or income.

FGDs with IDP and returnee women in Ar-Raqqa, Homs, Damascus, and Aleppo further described split household arrangements, in which adult men remained displaced, abroad, detained, or absent for work, while women resided with children or extended family members. These arrangements were described as resulting in de facto female-led households without formal legal recognition, limiting women's ability to represent the household in administrative procedures related to documentation, housing, or inheritance.

Host community FGDs in Damascus and Rural Damascus described household structures typically composed of parents and their children only). However, FGDs also noted increasing hosting of displaced relatives or informal rental or cohabitation arrangements as coping strategies in response to economic constraint and displacement. These mixed households were often undocumented, complicating proof of residency, household registration and limited access to services.

Across FGDs and KIIs, increased legal vulnerability was notable among:

- female-headed or de-facto female-led households;
- households residing in camps or informal shelters;
- households organised around extended or polygamous family arrangements
- households accommodating displaced relatives or informal cohabitation arrangements;
- households including unregistered children, older dependents, or persons with disabilities.

Legal practitioners and Cadastre officials noted that widows and families who had lost male breadwinners were often structurally excluded, as their household arrangements do not align with prevailing institutional expectations and traditional family structure.

These household configurations translate directly into civil documentation risks—particularly birth registration and family book continuity for unregistered children, and women's ability to act on behalf of dependents making legal identity a primary entry point for restoring access to rights and services.

3.2 Civil Documentation & Legal Identity

Civil documentation and legal identity gaps constitute one of the most widespread and structurally disabling legal challenges identified in the assessment. Overall, 62% of respondents reported that at least one household member lacks legal civil documentation, while only 38% confirmed full documentation coverage. FGDs and KIIs consistently underscored that documentation loss is not episodic but cumulative result of the prolonged displacement, registry destruction or inaccessibility, fragmented authority, and repeated administrative disruption rather than individual non-compliance.

Scale and geography

Documentation gaps were evident across all population groups with variations in intensity by displacement status and geography. Returnees from abroad were the most affected group with 80% reported undocumented household members reflecting difficulties related to non-recognition of documents issued outside Syria and the absence of systematic civil re-registration upon return. Survey findings indicate that documentation gaps were primarily attributed to the inaccessibility of issuance or replacement centres, lack of accessible issuing facilities, high costs,

and distance to administrative offices. Among respondents who attempted to obtain documents, the most frequently reported challenges included cost and fees, proof requirements, court complexity, closure of offices and courts, lost records, security risks, and, in some cases, hostile treatment by officials. These structural and procedural barriers appear to disproportionately affect returnees, particularly those whose prior documentation may have been issued outside their current area of residence. Host community households (58%) and (55%) IDPs also reported substantial documentation gaps, underscoring that legal identity challenges extend beyond displacement status alone.

Female returnee FGDs in Homs, Ar-Raqqa, and Aleppo (urban/returnee groups) consistently described **non-recognition of documents issued abroad,**[2] particularly birth and marriage certificates leaving families physically returned but legally invisible. Participants reported being required to initiate new registration procedures or obtain judicial authentication, increasing costs and procedural complexity. While the assessment did not systematically evaluate the legal framework governing recognition of foreign-issued documents, qualitative findings suggest that clearer administrative guidance and more consistent re-registration procedures could reduce barriers faced by returnees. KIIs with legal practitioners in Homs and Ar-Raqqa confirmed that reintegration processes rarely include systematic civil re-registration, particularly for children born outside Syria.



NRC providing civil documentation support to residents in a displacement camp in Al-Hasakeh. NRC/2024

2 Syria Arab Republic is not a party to the Hague Apostille Convention, and foreign public documents are therefore not automatically recognised. Their use in Syria requires consular legalisation and, where relevant, registration in the national civil registry system. In practice, when foreign issued civil documents such as birth certificates cannot be used through administrative procedures, for example because they were not issued by a competent authority, are incomplete, or cannot be authenticated through Syrian diplomatic missions, individuals may need to pursue judicial procedures to establish civil status before the competent courts.

Geographic disparities were pronounced across governorates. Higher levels of documentation gaps were reported in Al-Hasakeh and Hama, followed by Damascus, Daraa, and Homs, reflecting a combination of fragmented authority, procedural inconsistency, and limited administrative reach.

Notably, FGDs and KIIs indicated that even in governorates with functioning civil registry offices, such as Damascus and parts of Aleppo, physical proximity did not reliably translate into access for people. Respondents described procedural complexity, high costs, evidentiary requirements, and inconsistent recognition practices as persistent barriers, indicating that documentation exclusion is driven as much by institutional and procedural constraints as by service availability.

Unregistered children and intergenerational exclusion

As highlighted above in Household Structure section, unregistered children represent a critical and compounding legal vulnerability. FGDs across camp-based and urban displacement settings described children born during displacement, informal or unregistered marriages, or periods when parents lacked documentation as remaining outside the civil registry system. These children face restricted access to education, health services, freedom of movement, and later legal recognition, creating intergenerational exclusion.[3]

Women acting as primary caregivers—often in de facto female-led households—reported particular difficulty initiating registration procedures without recognised spousal documentation or family book continuity. KIIs confirmed that birth registration, lineage verification, and family book reconstruction now constitute dominant civil documentation caseloads, with unresolved cases accumulating over time rather than resolving naturally.

Documentation outcomes, barriers, and legal implications

Among households with missing documentation, 65% reported attempting replacement, while 35% reported no attempt. As reflected in Table *9 (See Table C9 Obtaining or Replacing Missing Documents in Annex IV)*, non-attempt was the most common among returnees from abroad, Attempts were highest among host communities (71%) and IDPs (69%). FGDs indicated that non-attempt reflects **rational disengagement** driven by repeated failed attempts, high financial costs, insecurity and perceived futility of the efforts rather than incidental. This pattern was particularly pronounced in Daraa, where 94% of respondents reported no attempt to pursue documentation, male IDP FGDs described documentation pursuit as unsafe, inaccessible or unlikely to result in resolution.

Among households that attempted to obtain or replace civil documentation, outcomes were frequently perceived as ineffective or incomplete, as reflected in low satisfaction levels. As shown in Table 2, only 26% of respondents who attempted documentation procedures reported a high level of satisfaction, while 43% reported dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction was particularly pronounced in north-west Syria and the north-east, whereas comparatively higher satisfaction

3 Fletcher School International Law Practicum and Norwegian Refugee Council, Children on the Margins: The Impacts of Depriving Children of Their Right to Nationality and Legal Identity in Northwest Syria (Medford, MA: Tufts University, 2023) // https://bpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/sites.tufts.edu/dist/d/7649/files/2023/07/Children-on-the-Margins_Nationality-and-Legal-Identity-in-Northwest-Syria_Report.pdf

levels in south-central areas reflected procedural accessibility rather than consistent resolution of cases.

Geographic area	n (tried)	High extent	Some extent	Not satisfied	Prefer not to answer
Northwest Syria (NWS) (Aleppo + Idleb)	119	22% (26)	13% (15)	61% (73)	4% (5)
Northeast Syria (NES) (Al-Hasakeh + Ar-Raqqa)	119	33% (39)	15% (18)	50% (59)	3% (3)
Central (Hama + Homs)	80	14% (11)	33% (26)	49% (39)	5% (4)
South Central (Damascus + Rural Damascus + Daraa)	168	38% (61)	46% (77)	28% (47)	10% (16)
Total	486	26% (127)	26% (124)	43% (211)	5% (24)

Table 2: Respondents satisfied with process while obtaining documents (among those who tried, by geographic area).

While the assessment does not systematically capture resolution status across all types of civil documentation replacement, qualitative findings consistently indicate prolonged and unresolved outcomes for specific civil status procedures.

FGDs and KIIs repeatedly described death registration, missing person declarations, and related civil status cases as remaining pending for extended periods, often following multiple visits and procedural referrals and dead ends. Legal practitioners confirmed that such cases frequently stall due to evidentiary requirements, absence of confirmation mechanisms, and reliance on court-based determinations, resulting in prolonged waiting periods rather than formal resolution.

Barriers to documentation and legal identity access were cumulative and mutually reinforcing, rather than isolated. Respondents identified cost, proof requirements, distance to offices, destroyed or inaccessible records, and reliance on intermediaries. Women, persons with disabilities, and households caring for older dependents reported additional constraints related to mobility and safety, which further increased dependence on intermediaries and exposure to exploitation.

Knowledge of civil registration procedures was uneven. Overall, 57% of respondents reported full knowledge of documentation processes, though women were significantly less informed than men (48% compared to 62%). Knowledge levels were highest in Idleb and Damascus; however, FGDs consistently stressed that procedural awareness rarely translated into access where documentation processes were costly, unsafe, or institutionally blocked. Daraa showed near-total disengagement.

Across population groups, respondents prioritized legal consultation and lawyer support, especially among displaced households and persons with disabilities. Women and girls were consistently identified as most affected by documentation gaps, followed by IDPs and persons with disabilities. FGDs highlighted how missing documents block child registration, inheritance, housing, and institutional access, leaving women in prolonged legal limbo.

"It's Like We Don't Exist" – A Woman's Story of Legal Limbo

A 36-year-old woman and mother of three, was displaced twice before returning to a damaged apartment in Daraa. Her husband has been missing for six years. She has no death certificate for him, no registration of their marriage, and no updated family book.

When her youngest daughter turned six, she tried to enrol her in school. The principal requested their family book as well as a birth certificate. She only had photocopies and an unregistered marriage paper. She was told to return once her documentation was complete.

Without a death certificate, she could not finalize inheritance procedures for her husband's share of family land. Without inheritance settlement, she could not legally access, sell or protect her rights over the property. Without recognised property documentation, she cannot apply for housing repair support.

At the same time, without proper marriage registration, she was unable to update her children's civil records or formally prove household status, which is also required for humanitarian assistance registration.

When she tried to begin the documentation process, she was referred from one office to another. Each authority requested documents issued elsewhere that she does not have, putting her into legal limbo. Fees and transport further obstructed her way. She was also questioned about her husband and why she presented herself alone, reopening the unhealed wounds.

Meanwhile, her brother-in-law informally occupies the families' land, and she cannot legally challenge without completing the inheritance procedures.

"I feel like I am living in a grey zone," she explains. "Not a widow, not a wife. Not an owner, not a tenant. It's like we don't exist."

Source: Female IDPs, January 2026.

KIIs further confirmed that missing IDs, family books, unregistered marriages and births, death confirmation, and lineage verification are the most common civil documentation and legal identity-related legal needs. Officials noted that inconsistent recognition of documents across authorities deepens legal exclusion and contributes to disputes, particularly in the context of displacement and fragmented and transitional governance.

Death registration and missing persons

Procedures related to death registration and the legal status of missing persons emerged as some of the most complex and protracted civil documentation challenges identified in the assessment. While the survey did not capture resolution status across all civil documentation types, procedure-specific quantitative data and qualitative findings consistently indicate prolonged and unresolved outcomes in cases involving death or disappearance.

Among households reporting a missing or deceased family member, only a minority of those who attempted declaration achieved formal recognition, while the majority reported that cases remained pending. In particular, the data on declaration attempts indicate that approximately two-thirds of cases remained unresolved at the time of data collection, reflecting the absence of administrative pathways for confirmation outside court-based procedures.

FGDs across IDP, returnee, and host community settings repeatedly described death declaration processes as lengthy, uncertain, and frequently inconclusive, particularly where death occurred during conflict, outside formal medical facilities, or in areas no longer accessible. Male and female FGDs in Aleppo, Homs, Daraa, and Ar-Raqqa consistently characterised these processes as involving multiple referrals, repeated evidentiary demands, and extended waiting periods without clear timelines for resolution.

KIIs with legal practitioners in Damascus, Rural Damascus, Homs, Idleb, and Ar-Raqqa confirmed that death registration and missing person cases constitute a disproportionate share of complex civil documentation caseloads and are among those most likely to remain pending. Practitioners highlighted stringent proof requirements, reliance on court decisions, and the absence of interim administrative mechanisms as primary drivers of delay. Several KIIs noted that files may remain open for years, with no procedural option to advance cases in the absence of new evidence.

Women were disproportionately affected by unresolved death and missing persons. Female respondents in FGDs repeatedly described occupying an indeterminate legal status—unable to be formally recognised as widows, heads of household, or legal guardians, while simultaneously bearing full caregiving and economic responsibility. This condition was described in multiple FGDs as being “neither wife nor widow,” reflecting the lack of legal recognition and authority to act on behalf of children or dependents in administrative, property, or inheritance-related procedures.

KIIs further emphasised that the civil documentation framework remains effectively death-dependent, offering limited procedural alternatives for managing civil status, household representation, or property rights in cases of prolonged disappearance. As a result, unresolved death and missing person cases function as a structural documentation bottleneck, compounding other documentation gaps and reinforcing long-term legal exclusion across housing, inheritance, and access to services.

Barriers to accessing civil documentation

Barriers to accessing civil documentation differed notably between households that did not attempt to obtain or replace documents and those that made at least one attempt, indicating both perceived and experienced constraints.

Among households that did not attempt documentation procedures, cost was the dominant deterrent (44%), followed by the lack or inaccessibility of issuing centres (26%). FGDs suggest

that these barriers were often anticipatory rather than procedural, with respondents describing documentation pursuit as unaffordable, unsafe, or unlikely to succeed, particularly in contexts of insecurity or limited institutional presence.

Among households that attempted to obtain or replace documentation, reported barriers reflected procedural and administrative obstacles encountered during the process. The most frequently cited challenges included cost (26%), proof and evidentiary requirements (18%), distance to civil registry offices (15%), and lost or destroyed records (11%). FGDs in Aleppo, Idleb, and Ar-Raqqa highlighted proof gaps and destroyed registries as key impediments, while respondents in the north-east emphasised high costs and travel distance. Households including persons with disabilities, further reported administrative complexity and reliance on intermediaries, reflecting accessibility constraints within documentation systems.

Taken together, these findings show that civil documentation gaps function not only as an administrative problem, but as a foundational barrier shaping access to other rights. Missing identity documents, family books, birth and death registration, and unresolved legal status, particularly in cases involving missing people, directly constrain households' ability to claim, register, inherit, or defend their housing, land, and property rights. As the following section demonstrates, HLP insecurity in Syria is therefore inseparable from documentation loss, with civil documentation acting as the primary gateway or blockage through which tenure security, dispute resolution, and inheritance rights are pursued or denied.

On-site observations of Civil Registration Offices

Detailed findings from on-site observations are presented in Annex II.

Across the observed offices, service delivery was generally operational, and client demand consistently high, with marked variation in the degree of systematization. Higher-capacity directorates such as Damascus and Homs demonstrated more structured service flows, including ticketing or electronic queue systems and dual paper–digital record management, which supported procedural order under heavy caseloads. In Daraa and Homs, higher female staff presence and "one client per window" practices contributed to improved privacy and client management.

However, even in more structured environments, congestion and high daily footfall created bottlenecks that limited client guidance and constrained privacy. In practice, this often increased reliance on informal problem-solving through staff discretion or escalation to senior officials rather than standardised client support channels.

In lower-capacity or space-constrained settings, including Idleb Ariha and the Hama service point, limited staffing, unclear public information on documentation requirements, and inconsistent connectivity or power shortages contributed to delays and reduced transparency. These constraints affected predictability of service delivery and procedures rather than outright functionality.

Accessibility barriers were uneven and had different impact across groups. Physical access limitations, including stairs, non-functioning or absent elevators, and constrained entry points, were observed in Damascus and Rural Damascus (particularly Douma), limiting independent access for people with disabilities and older individuals. Overcrowded service points in Hama further constrained mobility and reduced privacy, particularly for those requiring assistance or extended time in the service counters.

Gender-related arrangements also varied. While some offices demonstrated practices that enhanced privacy, such as “one client per window” (Daraa) and higher female staff presence (Daraa and Homs), others lacked gender-sensitive spaces and, in Idleb Ariha, the absence of female staff reduced comfort and confidentiality for women, particularly in civil-status-related procedures. Such contexts may be a contributing to situations where women may rely more heavily on intermediaries or family members to navigate processes.

Although vulnerable people were observed across locations, most offices did not maintain formalised priority pathways or adapted service arrangements. As a result, the needs of people with disabilities, older individuals, and women were often addressed through ad hoc or discretionary practices than through standardised procedures and predictable. This reliance on informal accommodation increases the risk of unequal access and inconsistent treatment across the locations.

3.3 Housing, Land & Property (HLP) Rights

This section analyses access to housing, land, and property (HLP) rights across assessed governorates, with a focus on documentation loss, tenure insecurity, forced eviction, secondary occupation, and the specific barriers faced by female-headed and de-facto women-led households and wives of missing or disappeared persons and other vulnerable groups. Findings are based on triangulated household survey data, FGDs, KIIs, and on-site observations. Detailed disaggregated tables supporting this section are provided in Annex IV (Tables D11-D31).



3 NRC Secretary General Jan Egeland inspects a destroyed home near the city of Idleb, Syria. Tareq Mnadili/NRC

Access to housing and assets and tenure arrangements

Overall, 70% of surveyed households reported owning or renting a dwelling at the time of the data collection, however, access to housing does not equate to tenure security. While the household survey captured reported housing access and ownership patterns, qualitative findings from FGDs and KIIs across multiple governorates including Idleb, Al-Hasakeh, Homs, Ar-Raqqa, and Aleppo indicate that reported access is frequently informal, undocumented, or dependent on unstable arrangements. Legal practitioners and local authorities interviewed during KIIs confirmed that verbal rental agreements, secondary occupation, unresolved property disputes, and incomplete documentation remain common, particularly among IDPs and returnees.

While reported access was similar for women and men, asset ownership were gendered. Men account for the majority of reported property holders (63%) and are more likely to control productive assets such as agricultural land (16% - males vs 7% - females) or commercial premises (6% - males vs 1% - females). Women's access is largely confined to residential housing.

By residency status, access was highest among returnees from internal displacement (82%) and host communities (77%), lower among IDPs (65%), and lowest among returnees from abroad (48%). Female returnee FGDs in Homs and Ar-Raqqa stressed that return rarely restores HLP rights due to damage, occupation, and missing documentation.

Tenure security and disputes

Formal tenure security remained limited and gendered. Only 27% of women reported formal ownership compared to 40% of men, while women were more likely to report informal occupation or complex arrangements. Disputes affected 20% of women and 17% of men, with the highest prevalence among IDPs and returnees from abroad. FGDs in Aleppo and Idleb (male and female IDPs) described disputes emerging precisely because ownership proof was missing, leaving properties vulnerable to contestation. KIIs with lawyers in Aleppo and Damascus emphasized that *"most disputes we see are not about land itself, but about missing papers and broken ownership chains."*

Documentation gaps and HLP insecurity

Documentation gaps were central to HLP insecurity. Sixty-nine percent of women and 55% of men reported lacking formal ownership documents, and only 31% of women held formal documents compared to 45% of men. Physical possession was even weaker: 61% of women reported having no physical copies at all. Female IDP FGDs in Idleb, Al-Hasakeh, and Rural Damascus repeatedly described documents lost during flight or trapped in destroyed homes, with one woman stating, *"The papers burned with the house... without them, the property does not exist."* KIIs across Damascus, Homs, and Idleb confirmed that lack of physical proof effectively removes households from the legal system.

Loss of documentation and limited re-registration

Despite widespread gaps, only 37% of respondents attempted to replace or re-register documents, with outcomes largely unresolved. Seventy percent of cases remained pending, and only 8% were successful. Women were more likely to approach courts, while men approached registries, yet women were far more likely to be told the process was impossible. Female displaced FGDs in Rural Damascus described these processes as exhausting and financially draining, with one participant explaining, *"For one paper, we need five or six cases... every step*

costs money, and nothing finishes." Lawyers corroborated this, noting that systems absorb cases without resolving them.

Barriers to accessing remedies

Barriers clustered around procedural complexity and cost, followed by lack of proof or witnesses. FGDs revealed gendered dimensions: women emphasized fear, mobility restrictions, and exposure to exploitation, while men focused on fees and bureaucratic steps. Participants with disabilities highlighted inaccessible buildings and dependence on intermediaries. A woman with a disability in Aleppo stated, "I cannot even reach the office without paying someone to take me."

Intra-household vulnerability and differential impact

Across the sample, 29% of households stated that some members face greater HLP-related difficulties, with women reporting this more frequently (39% of women vs. 22% of men). Disability status showed a sharper contrast: 53% of households with disabilities reported intra-household differential difficulties compared to 26% of households without disabilities.

Awareness of alternatives and dispute mechanisms

Awareness of alternative legal means to prove ownership was low, with 75% of respondents reporting no awareness, and a clear gender gap, as 80% of women were unaware compared to 71% of men. Among the minority who reported awareness, alternatives were largely limited to informal proof such as witness testimony and utility bills, rather than recognized or standardized mechanisms. This aligns with findings from female and male FGDs, where participants across governorates repeatedly stated that they *"do not know what can replace a title deed"* and described reliance on verbal agreements or community recognition as fragile and easily contested. KIIs with lawyers and community leaders further confirmed that most households lack knowledge of legally acceptable substitute evidence and often approach institutions without understanding what proof may be accepted, leading to repeated rejection or abandonment of cases.

Awareness of local land committees or dispute mechanisms was similarly limited and gendered, with only 13% of women reporting their existence compared to 24% of men. FGDs indicated that women, in particular, are often excluded from information networks through which such mechanisms are communicated, while KIIs noted that even where committees exist, they are inconsistently mandated and rarely perceived as legitimate pathways for formal ownership recognition. Together, the quantitative and qualitative findings show that low awareness directly constrains households' ability to pursue ownership claims, reinforces reliance on informal arrangements, and disproportionately limits women's access to viable HLP solutions.

Ongoing problems, occupation patterns, and eviction-related vulnerability

Ongoing HLP problems were reported by 42% of respondents, rising to 46% among women. Where occupation by others occurred, family members were most common, followed by private individuals and local authorities. FGDs across southcentral and north-east parts of Syria described widespread uncertainty about property status, with women frequently stating, *"We don't know who lives there now, or if it even still exists."* Eviction vulnerability was extreme, with 95% reporting no alternatives if evicted. Female-headed households, persons with disabilities, and older persons were consistently identified as most at risk.

Qualitative evidence across all governorates shows that HLP insecurity is experienced as a daily condition rather than a discrete legal issue. Camp-based IDPs framed HLP through total dispossession and non-durable shelter, while urban displaced and returnees described exploitative rental markets, informal tenure, inheritance paralysis, and inability to act due to missing or absent male relatives. A female displaced participant in Rural Damascus summarized this convergence by stating, "We are inside a house, but we are not secure… everything can be taken from us at any moment."

KIIs with lawyers and Cadastre officials reinforced these findings, describing HLP as time-sensitive and structurally blocked. In Al-Hasakeh, Cadastre officials described near-total institutional paralysis, while in Damascus and Rural Damascus lawyers emphasized fraudulent transactions and secondary occupation during absence. Across KIIs, delayed action was repeatedly described as leading to irreversible loss.

3.3.1 Forced Evictions and Due processes

This section examines forced eviction risks, due process protections, and secondary occupation patterns as key dimensions of housing insecurity. It assesses not only the prevalence of eviction threats, but also the extent to which households are able to contest decisions or access formal legal remedies.

Perceived risk of eviction

21% of respondents reported feeling at risk of eviction, while 80% did not. Perceived risk was similar by sex (20% of females and 21% of males), but markedly higher among respondents with disabilities (31%) compared to those without (19%). By residency status, returnees displaced within Syria reported the highest perceived risk (31%), followed by IDPs (21%), returnees from abroad (20%), and host community members (16%). Geographically, eviction anxiety was most pronounced in Ar-Raqqa (37%), followed by Homs (25%), Rural Damascus (22%), and Damascus and Idleb (each 21%), with lower levels in Hama (12%) and Al-Hasakeh (14%).

These patterns were echoed in female IDP FGDs in Rural Damascus, Hama, Damascus, Ar-Raqqa, and Aleppo (urban settings), where women consistently described living under "constant fear of eviction," even after years in the same accommodation. One female IDP in Rural Damascus stated, *"You can stay for years, but at any moment the owner can ask you to leave… nothing protects us."* KIIs with lawyers in Ar-Raqqa and Homs confirmed that eviction risk is rarely formalized but widely experienced through informal pressure rather than court orders.

Drivers of risk

Among the households reporting risk of eviction, quantitative responses show that eviction risk is driven primarily by documentation gaps (24%) and rent arrears (24%), followed by owner threats (21%) and verbal notice (12%). Threats by armed actors and informal land use were less frequently reported (each 6%). IDPs accounted for the largest share of reported drivers (40%), with rent arrears and owner threats prominently.

FGDs consistently reinforced the "economic and tenure-insecurity " profile. Female IDPs in Hama and Damascus described rent as the main lever of control, with one woman explaining, *"If you delay the rent, even one week, they threaten you immediately."* Female IDPs in Rural Damascus explicitly linked eviction pressure to social blame, stating that displaced families are accused of driving up rents and are therefore treated as expendable. KIIs with community

leaders in Hama emphasized that rent inflation, rather than legal disputes, is now a primary trigger of eviction.

Receipt of eviction notice

Among those who felt at risk, 69% reported receiving no eviction notice, 29% reported verbal notice, and only 2% reported written notice. Patterns were similar by sex. IDPs were more likely to report verbal notice (34%) than host community members (23%) or returnees. Respondents with disabilities were more likely to report no notice (84%), suggesting eviction pressure may be conveyed indirectly.

Female IDP FGDs across urban governorates repeatedly emphasized that eviction threats are "spoken, not written." One participant in Damascus noted, "They never give papers… they just come and say, 'leave by the end of the month.'" Lawyers in Aleppo and Ar-Raqqa confirmed that the absence of written notices reflects both informality and exclusion from tenant protections.

Notice timing and issuer

Where notices were reported, they were predominantly attributed to landlords and described as repeated informal communications, sometimes delivered through intermediaries or local figures. This aligns with the very low reporting of written notices and suggests eviction pressure manifests through persistence rather than formal procedure.

FGDs illustrated this pattern clearly. A female IDP in Rural Damascus explained, *"The owner tells a neighbour, then sends someone else… every month there is a new message."* KIIs with lawyers confirmed that intermediate pressure is common where contracts are verbal or unregistered.

History of eviction and circumstances

Among those at risk, 16% reported having been evicted in the past, with higher levels among respondents with disabilities (32%) and IDPs (22%). Reported eviction histories reflected both conflict-related displacement and market-driven eviction linked to rent increases, property sale, or contract termination.

Male IDP FGDs in Daraa and Idleb described repeated displacement cycles, with one participant stating, "We were displaced by the war, then displaced again because we could not pay rent." Lawyers emphasized that past eviction often increases future vulnerability, as households exhaust savings and accept weaker tenure arrangements.

Secondary occupation after eviction/displacement

More than half of respondents (54%) reported not knowing whether their property was secondarily occupied, while 14% reported that it was. High "don't know" responses were consistent across residency groups, indicating limited visibility into property status after displacement.

Female IDP FGDs in Al-Hasakeh, Ar-Raqqa, and Rural Damascus frequently described homes in areas of origin as "occupied, seized, or unknown." One woman stated, "We don't know who lives there now… and we cannot go to see." Male IDP FGDs in Idleb and Daraa warned that prolonged occupation erodes future claims, even if ownership existed before displacement. Lawyers confirmed that secondary occupation is a major dispute driver but rarely challenged due to cost, insecurity, and missing proof.

Missing person status of husband/partner

Among respondents (n=88), those affected by a missing person was nearly universal at 93% (n=82), higher among women (95%) than men (82%). Prevalence was highest among host community households (96%) and reached 100% among returnees from abroad, while IDP returnees showed the lowest prevalence (82%). Those affected by a missing person remained consistently high regardless of disability status and reached 100% in several governorates, including Rural Damascus, Daraa, Ar-Raqqa, and Al-Hasakeh.

FGDs confirmed missing persons as a widespread household condition rather than an isolated event. Female IDP FGDs across Rural Damascus, Idleb, Al-Hasakeh, Ar-Raqqa, and Hama repeatedly described disappearance as the point at which *"everything stopped,"* while KIIs with lawyers emphasized that missing-person cases now dominate inheritance, property, and guardianship caseloads.

The issue of missing persons is largely protracted throughout the course of the conflict, spanning 2011–2023 and concentrated between 2012–2018. Women's reporting covered the full-time range, indicating long-term management of unresolved cases. IDP cases clustered in peak conflict years, while some more recent cases appeared among returnees from internal displacement.

FGDs consistently described having a missing person in the household as "years of waiting," and KIIs confirmed that cases rarely resolve without legal action, which many households avoid due to cost, proof requirements, and fear.

Ability to benefit from property or legal rights

Among respondents with a missing husband/partner (n=82), 87% reported being unable to benefit from the missing person's property or legal rights. Exclusion was higher among women (88%) than men (78%) and most severe among IDPs (95%) and returnees from abroad (100%). Limited access was reported in Aleppo and Hama, while exclusion exceeded 90% in Dara, Damascus, and Idleb.

FGDs explained this exclusion through proof barriers and lack of legal standing. Women repeatedly stated they were told to *"bring your husband or a death paper,"* while KIIs confirmed that institutions often challenge women's authority when the husband's status is unresolved.

The dominant barrier in claiming property or inheritance was absence of a death certificate (32%), followed by family pressure (16%), lack of legal awareness (15%), and costs (15%). Court complexity and safety concerns were also reported, with strong concentration of death-certificate barriers in Rural Damascus and Daraa.

Female FGDs consistently described death certification as the main bottleneck, freezing inheritance and housing claims, while KIIs confirmed that most missing persons cases are pursued solely to unlock inheritance or guardianship.

Attempt to declare legal death or obtain a death notice

Among respondents with a missing husband/partner, attempts were evenly split (50% attempted, 50% not). IDPs were most likely to attempt declaration (73%), while all returnees from abroad reported no attempts. Attempts were highest in Idleb, Aleppo, and Rural Damascus, and entirely absent in Daraa and Al-Hasakeh. FGDs mirrored these patterns: women in Idleb

described attempts as necessary for children's rights, while participants in Daraa described avoidance driven by fear, cost, and distrust. KIIs confirmed disengagement where courts are perceived as risky or inaccessible.

Among those who attempted (n=41), only 24% achieved declaration, while 66% remained pending. IDPs recorded the highest success rate (50%), while host community cases were overwhelmingly pending. Aleppo showed the highest success among larger attempt groups.

FGDs described these processes as exhausting and indefinite, summarized as "*we are still waiting,*" while lawyers confirmed prolonged pending outcomes as the norm.

Barriers preventing declaration attempts

Among those who did not attempt to attain a declaration, proof requirements (38%) and court fees (25%) dominated, followed by family disagreement and fear/stigma (each 13%). These barriers were most concentrated in Daraa and Hama. FGDs and KIIs aligned closely, with women describing proof requirements as impossible to meet and fear as both social and protection related.

Need for support or referral to legal services

Among respondents reporting a missing spouse or partner, demand for legal assistance was high at 73%, peaking in Rural Damascus, Daraa, Homs, and Ar-Raqqa. Idleb showed mixed responses. FGDs emphasized that legal support is essential because procedures are unclear and cannot be navigated alone, while KIIs stressed that accompaniment often determines whether cases proceed or collapse.

Help-seeking from authorities, NGOs, or community leaders

Despite high demand, 54% reported not seeking help. Women were less likely to seek help than men, while IDPs were the most likely. Daraa showed complete non-help-seeking.

FGDs described help-seeking as socially constrained and risky, while KIIs noted that most pathways lead to registration and waiting rather than resolution.

Awareness of procedures allowing wives of missing persons to manage property

Awareness was almost entirely absent: 98% reported no knowledge of such procedures. The few "yes" responses (Idleb only) referenced inheritance after death declaration rather than interim management.

FGDs strongly corroborated this gap, with women describing themselves as "between a wife and a widow," and KIIs confirming that the system remains effectively death-based, offering no practical interim solutions—directly aligning with death certification as the dominant barrier and the high demand for legal assistance.

3.3.2 Institutional Access and Constraints (Cadastre & Real Estate Offices)

The functioning of Cadastre and Real Estate offices shapes households' ability to secure tenure, resolve disputes, and formalise property rights. While many offices are technically operational,

the assessment shows that procedural bottlenecks, uneven accessibility, and documentation dependencies significantly affect effective access to HLP remedies.

Reported household attempts to Cadastre and Real Estate Offices

Among surveyed households, only 15% report attempting to access Cadastre or Real Estate offices for HLP-related matters since 8 December, while 81% reported no attempt (see Tables D16 and D17 in Annex IV).

No substantial variation in reported attempts was observed by sex or disability status. While men reported slightly higher engagement (16%) than women (13%), and respondents with disabilities (18%) showed marginally higher engagement than those without (15%).

By contrast, clearer variation emerged by displacement status. Attempts were lowest among IDPs (12%), higher among internally displaced returnees (16%) and host community members (18%) and highest among returnees from abroad (20%). This gradient suggests that relative residential stability and continuation of documentation may influence the likelihood of institutional engagement.

However, non-contact remained consistently high across all groups. FGDs across multiple locations described non-engagement as associated with perceived procedural infeasibility, including documentation gaps, repeated referrals, unclear requirements, as factors contributing to difficulties in initiating or progressing procedures. Participants characterized Cadastre and Real Estate Offices as formally operational but functionally inaccessible, citing unsuccessful visits and uncertainty regarding documentary thresholds required to initiate procedures.

Camp-based FGDs in Idleb and Al-Hasakeh emphasized that insecurity and loss or fragmentation of documentation as compounding barriers to approaching institutions.

"Even If We Go, Nothing Moves"

She has lived in a tent in the camp for five years. When she fled, she left behind almost everything including her documents. What remains are fragments: a photocopy of an old ID, a damaged page from a family book, papers with stamps that are no longer recognised. Her youngest child, born in displacement, has no birth certificate.

She thought about traveling to the city to replace the documents. But doing so would require crossing checkpoints, paying transport costs and fees she cannot afford, and navigating offices in areas she does not feel safe accessing. Others in the camp attempted this. They returned exhausted and without progress, referred from one office to another and asked to present original documents that were lost during flight.

She explains that many women in the camp face the same reality: IDs suspended, civil registries located in distant governorates, records possibly destroyed, and documents issued under one authority not recognized by another.

Without a complete documentation chain, approaching institutions feels pointless. Assistance registration becomes conditional on proof of status that cannot be produced. Movement itself carries risks. Legal consultations often begin with the same instruction: "Bring the original document." – a requirement that does not enable people to address their legal issues where records are missing or fragmented.

"Insecurity is not only fear of violence," she explains. "It's not knowing whether your records still exist."

Source: Focus Group Discussion, Female IDPs living in Washokani Camp, Al-Hasakeh Governorate, January 2026.

KIIs with legal practitioners further indicates that households often refrain from approaching offices when full documentation chain cannot be presented at the onset of the visit. Practitioners noted that file opening itself may require complete documentary, creating immediate entry barrier for households with missing or fragmented records.

While lack of need cannot be fully excluded as a contributing factor to non-engagement, the convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings suggests that barriers to engagement are largely structural in nature rather than confined to specific demographic categories.

Institutional navigation and gendered reliance on intermediaries

Among households that sought institutional remedies, the majority relied on mediated or indirect pathways rather than direct engagement with Cadastre or courts (see Table 28 *Offices Contacted by Sex, Residency Status, and Disability Status* in Annex IV).

KIIs and FGD findings suggest that households rarely approach formal HLP institutions directly. Instead, people engage with cadastral offices or courts in a mediated manner through lawyers or other actors who assist households in navigating administrative and legal procedures. Direct institutional engagement was reported less frequently across most governorates, with Al-Hasakeh appearing as an exception where respondents described more direct interaction with cadastral offices. Reliance on intermediaries also showed a clear gender pattern – it was markedly higher for women (81%) than men (56%). This difference indicates that institutional navigation is not gender neutral and that women may face additional barriers to engaging directly with formal systems.

However, institutional navigation patterns also vary by type of HLP case. More straightforward cases were more likely to involve direct engagement with Cadastre offices. In contrast, cases involving inheritance, missing persons, secondary occupation, seizure, or disputed ownership more frequently require combined Cadastre–court engagement or reliance on legal intermediaries.

Female FGDs, particularly among returnees and IDPs, described inheritance and missing-person-related claims as requiring court confirmation or legal accompaniment to proceed.

"Until the Court Confirms It"

Her husband has been missing for eight years. Since then, the family land has remained registered in his name. The inheritance cannot be divided. Her children cannot be officially registered as heirs. Every time she asks how to proceed, the answer is the same: "You need a court decision."

To confirm death or legal status, she must file a case. When she attempted to inquire on her own, she was told to return with a lawyer. To file a case, she must present documents—some lost during displacement, others still tied to a missing person. Each step requires various procedural fees, legal representation, and repeated hearings.

Without court confirmation, Cadastre procedures cannot proceed to officially change the title owners. Brothers-in-law informally manage the property "until things are resolved," but no formal resolution appeared after years of uncertainty. She cannot sell, rebuild, or secure her children's share.

"It feels like our lives are suspended," she says. "Until the court confirms it, we remain in between."

For women navigating inheritance and missing-person cases, administrative engagement or informal arrangements alone are not sufficient. Without judicial confirmation and legal accompaniment, property rights remain effectively frozen.

Source: Focus Group Discussion, Female Displaced Participants (IDPs/Returnees), Aleppo Governorate, January 2026.

FGDs and KIIs clarify these patterns. Female returnee FGDs in Homs described being directed to courts before Cadastre due to seizure, occupation, or inheritance issues. Female IDP FGDs in Rural Damascus highlighted reliance on intermediaries, noting that they "cannot follow every step" of multi-stage procedure. KIIs with lawyers confirmed that inheritance and missing-person-related property claims typically require court confirmation before Cadastre action can proceed, increasing reliance on legal representation. These accounts illustrate how complex or court-linked HLP cases frequently require accompaniment rather than direct administrative navigation.

Taken together, these findings suggest that reliance on intermediaries is structurally linked to case complexity and evidentiary requirements. Women are disproportionately affected in such case types, where civil documentation barriers intersect with property registration procedures.

In this context, legal accompaniment functions not merely as supportive assistance but as a structural enabler of access to HLP remedies.

Operational status, accessibility and procedural constraints

Among respondents who reported engaging directly with Cadastre and Real Estate offices, 76% indicated that offices were functioning, 19% described partial or slow operation, and 5%

reported non-functioning. However, operational status did not consistently translate into effective access to institutional remedies.

Functionality was especially high in Idleb (98%) and Damascus (88%), and relatively high in Ar-Raqqa (80%). Aleppo reflected the weakest confidence (50% functioning; 28% non-functioning), while Homs and Hama were more frequently described as partially or slowly functioning. Rural Damascus was characterised by elevated uncertainty regarding office status.

Respondents with disabilities reported higher functioning (91%), likely reflecting that those who overcome access barriers encounter operational services. However, this should be interpreted alongside physical and procedural access limitations identified in both survey and observational data.

Despite reported functioning, accessibility remained constrained or uneven. Overall, 12% described offices as not accessible, with significantly higher inaccessibility reported by persons with disabilities (27% compared to 10% among respondents without disabilities). Women were less likely than men to describe offices as "very accessible." Regional access disparities were pronounced, with Ar-Raqqa and Al-Hasakeh showing severe access constraints, while Damascus and Idleb reported higher perceived accessibility, albeit often accompanied by congestion.

Reported obstacles were dominated by long waiting times (35%), high fees (22%), requests for documentation that could not be provided (16%), and lost or incomplete records (15%) In several locations, respondents described referral cycles between Cadastre and courts, increasing both time and cost burdens. Discrimination against IDPs and returnees was reported by 5% of respondents, with such reports clustering in Rural Damascus and Ar-Raqqa.

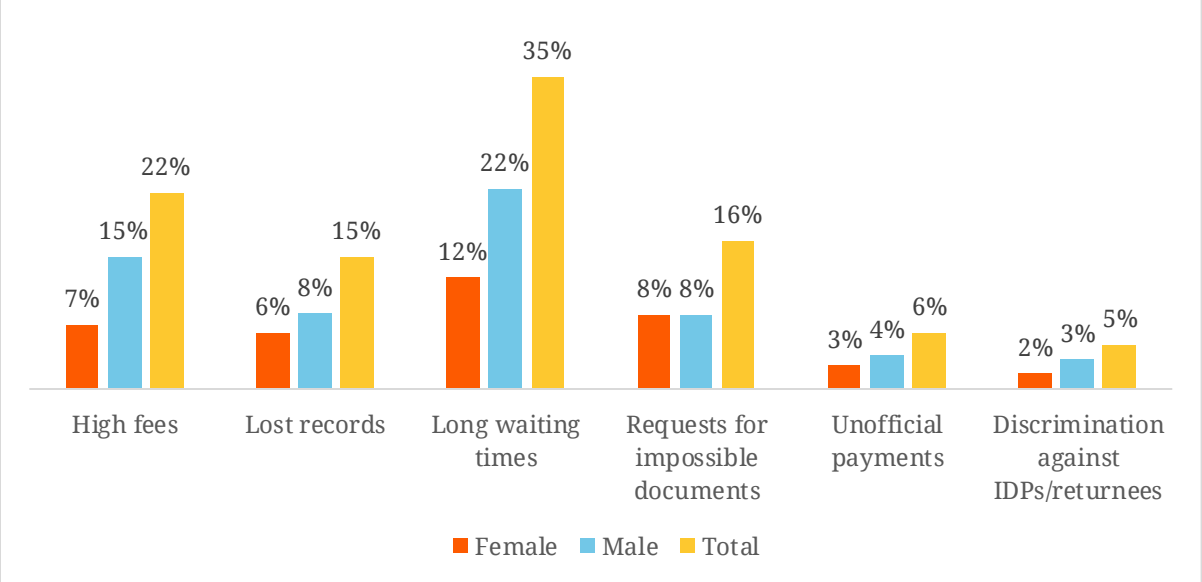


Figure 1: Reported obstacles

Patterns of obstacles also varied by gender. Women more frequently cited documentation barriers, including missing records and evidentiary requirements, while men more frequently emphasised fees and waiting times.

FGDs and KIIs consistently indicate that "functioning" offices may still be procedurally immobilising. Qualitative findings repeated document requests, referral cycles between Cadastre and courts, archive inconsistencies, and evidentiary rigidity as core constraints to proceed with legal cases. Missing records and incomplete documentation chains frequently

prevent progression, even where offices are open and processing cases. Where documentation chains are incomplete, cases often shift toward judicial confirmation procedures, further extending duration and expense.

Overall, the assessment shows that institutional limitation stems primarily from procedural blockage and documentation dependency rather than simple non-functionality of the institutions. Offices may be operational in formal terms, yet effective access depends on individuals' ability to provide complete documentation, absorb financial and mobility costs, and navigate multi-step administrative and judicial processes. Where these conditions are not met, functioning offices do not translate into meaningful access to HLP remedies.

Institutional capacity and priority needs

Capacity constraints were consistently described as structural rather than temporary. Across survey responses and qualitative discussions, reasons converged around staffing shortages, limited experience of new personnel, missing or damaged records, procedural complexity, and overwhelming caseloads. In several locations, corruption and fragmented authority were also cited as compounding factors.

Respondent's views on the capacity of Cadastre and Real Estate Offices to manage increased HLP demand were largely negative or uncertain. 45% believed offices would not be able absorb increased caseload, 31% were unsure, and 24% believed offices could cope.

These perceptions varied across groups. Men expressed higher pessimism than women. Women more frequently indicated that they did not know whether offices could manage increased demand, which may reflect lower levels of direct institutional engagement and greater reliance on intermediaries described earlier. The strongest pessimism was reported among returnees from abroad and returnees from internal displacement, likely reflecting greater exposure to documentation gaps and court-linked procedures. Respondents with disabilities also showed elevated pessimism, suggesting concerns related to both workload and effective access.

Capacity of Cadastre and Real Estate Offices	Damascus	Aleppo	Rural Damascus	Homs	Hama	Idleb	Al-Hasakeh	Ar-Raqqa	Total
Don't know	16%	17%	77%	0%	50%	23%	14%	50%	31%
No	36%	22%	23%	78%	50%	65%	14%	20%	45%
Yes	48%	61%	0%	22%	0%	13%	71%	30%	24%

Table 3: Capacity of Cadastre and Real Estate Offices

Regional variation was pronounced as well. Pessimism was highest in Homs and Idleb, where respondents frequently described congestion and case backlogs. Aleppo and Damascus reflected comparatively higher confidence in institutional capacity. In Rural Damascus, many respondents reported that they did not know whether offices had sufficient staffing or

procedural capacity to handle increased caseloads, indicating limited visibility into institutional performance. Al-Hasakeh reported relatively higher confidence despite the access constraints identified elsewhere in this section.

Qualitative findings indicate that concerns about capacity relate less to office closure and more to systemic constraints. FGDs described prolonged waiting periods and case stagnation.

KIIs with legal practitioners described staffing shortages, capacity constraints linked to limited staff experience, archive damage, procedural rigidity, and fragmented authority as the main drivers of pessimism. Practitioners noted that increased demand, without procedural adjustments, would likely expand pending caseloads rather than accelerate resolution.

Access constraints were particularly acute for IDPs, returnees, and persons with disabilities, especially where travel between areas of control, transport costs, or cross-governorate coordination were required. Women more frequently linked institutional strain to inheritance disputes and documentation gaps, while men more often emphasised congestion and staffing shortages. These differences reflect variation in case types rather than differences in perceived service quality. FGDs repeatedly described a pattern of procedural dead-ends. As one participant summarised: "Even if you reach the office, you cannot proceed without the papers." Inheritance cases, missing-person-related claims, and disputed ownership frequently require court confirmation before Cadastre action can proceed, creating multi-stage processes that are difficult to navigate without legal support. KIIs reinforced that fragmented administrative authority and damaged registries mean that institutional performance is shaped as much by evidentiary and administrative fragmentation across areas as by staffing levels.

Against this backdrop, priority needs emerging from the assessment are directly linked to the barriers identified. Simplified procedures and clearer documentation requirements address procedural bottlenecks that disproportionately affect inheritance, missing-person-related, and documentation-dependent cases — case types more frequently navigated by women. Fee waivers and cost reductions respond to financial burdens and repeated travel requirements, barriers more commonly emphasised by men and by displaced households facing cross-governorate claims. Mobile registration mechanisms mitigate geographic and physical access constraints, which are particularly significant for persons with disabilities and returnees. Legal aid support remains critical where cases require court confirmation, documentation of reconstruction, or navigation between judicial and administrative institutions.

Taken together, the findings indicate that institutional capacity challenges are experienced not only as workload pressure but as a combination of procedural rigidity, documentation dependency, jurisdictional fragmentation, and uneven access conditions. These dynamics are particularly relevant in contexts of increased returns or documentation reconstruction, where demand for HLP services may rise and existing bottlenecks become more visible.

"The File Just Stays There"

She thought the hardest part would be reaching the office. It wasn't closed. The court was functioning. The registry was open. The real difficulty began after she submitted her file.

Her case - an inheritance confirmation linked to her missing husband—was accepted, stamped, and added to the growing stack of files, one among dozens awaiting review. Weeks passed. Then months. Every time she returned to follow up with the office, she received the same response: *"It's under review."* She stopped counting how many times she paid for transport just to ask about progress.

The waiting room was always crowded. Lawyers moved quickly between the offices. Families sat on plastic chairs, holding folders thick with documents. "They are crowded," she says. "And the file stays there for months."

The barrier was not entry to a building, but the pace of the process. Hearings were postponed. Judges were overloaded. Administrative steps required multiple signatures that took weeks to obtain. Each delay meant another month of uncertainty - renewed argument with relatives over shares and use of the property, continued economic strain as she remains unable to settle ownership or make decisions about the property, and ongoing ambiguity over what her children are legally entitled to.

"You feel like you are moving," she says, "but nothing actually moves…'

Even where institutions are open and functioning, congestion and institutional overload can become practical barriers to formal recognition of rights, delaying the resolution families are waiting for. In that waiting, life remains suspended.

Source: Focus Group Discussion, Female Displaced Participants (IDPs/returnees), Rural Damascus Governorate, January 2026.

3.4 Access to Justice & Legal Assistance

This section examines household engagement with legal assistance and justice pathways for HLP and documentation-related issues, focusing on who seeks support, through which entry points, and with what outcomes. Unlike the previous section, which assessed institutional functionality and administrative bottlenecks within Cadastre and Real Estate Offices, this section analyses how households navigate legal support systems when administrative channels alone are insufficient, particularly in complex, court-linked, or documentation-dependent cases. Detailed disaggregated tables supporting this section are provided in Annex IV (Tables E32-E36).

Engagement with legal assistance for HLP and documentation issues

Overall, 30% of respondents reported seeking legal support, while 70% did not without any significant disparity observed among genders (29% female; 31% male). Engagement varied sharply by geography with the highest figures reported in Ar-Raqqa (57%), Rural Damascus

(49%), and Damascus (41%), and lowest in Hama (12%) and Daraa (3%), indicating pronounced regional inequities in engaging with legal assistance.

Persons with disabilities reported higher engagement (42%), reflecting necessity-driven interaction rather than ease of access. IDPs (25%) and returnees from abroad (22%) were less likely to seek legal assistance than host communities (37%) and internally displaced returnees (33%). FGDs consistently indicate that legal support is typically pursued only when cases become urgent or procedurally "stuck," due to cost, mobility constraints, and low perceived feasibility of success.

Where people actually go for help and how legal support is accessed

Lawyers were the dominant entry point (57%), far exceeding direct court engagement (7%) or NGOs (6%). Reliance on paid intermediaries was strongest among IDPs and returnees from abroad. Women were also more likely to approach lawyers and local committees, while men were more likely to directly engage with systems and institutions such as courts.

FGDs repeatedly described lawyers as procedurally necessary but financially burdensome, sometimes leading households to delay action until crises emerge. When asked what they would do first to address their legal issues today, almost half (47%) indicated they would go to a lawyer whereas much smaller segments indicated engaging with a court (17%) and an NGO (13%). Similar to the above findings, women were more likely to choose lawyers (51%), while men leaned more toward courts (20%).

Legal assistance most often resulted in orientation and file preparation rather than resolution, with many cases remaining pending. Women's cases were more likely to remain unresolved for civil status and inheritance, while men more often reported procedural progress. IDPs and persons with disabilities reported the highest levels of stalled or no benefit, aligning with FGDs describing repeated visits, missing documents, and unaffordable costs.

First point of contact when a legal issue emerges today

Nearly half of respondents (47%) reported that they would first approach a lawyer, followed by courts (17%) and NGOs (13%). Women were more likely than men to choose lawyers and local committees, while men were more inclined to approach courts or NGOs directly. Lawyer-first preferences were highest among IDPs (55%) and returnees from abroad (52%), whereas IDP-returnees showed relatively greater reliance on courts (23%). Lawyers were primarily chosen for their perceived expertise and ability to simplify procedures, although cost was consistently cited as a major drawback. Women more often emphasized reassurance, clear explanation, and reduced movement burden, while men focused on procedural correctness and enforcement through formal judicial channels.

Perceived confidence in approaching courts and authorities

Overall, 61% reported confidence in approaching courts or authorities, while 27% were uncertain and 12% reported no confidence. Women reported slightly higher confidence than men, though hesitation remained notable across both groups. Confidence was highest among returnees from abroad (84%) and lowest among IDPs (54%), who also recorded the highest proportion reporting no confidence. Respondents with disabilities reported higher confidence than those without disabilities, likely reflecting familiarity driven by necessity rather than fewer access constraints.

Practical and perceived barriers that deter approaching authorities

Barriers to approaching courts and authorities were described as cumulative rather than singular, centering on procedural complexity, cost, distance, and fear. Men more frequently emphasized combined cost–complexity constraints, while women more often highlighted fear of unfair treatment, retaliation, or the burden of movement. IDPs and IDP-returnees stressed financial and procedural strain, whereas returnees from abroad pointed to difficulties re-entering domestic legal systems. Respondents with disabilities described layered constraints and greater reliance on intermediaries for sustained follow-up. Governorate patterns varied, with some areas characterized by compounded delay and cost pressures and others by heightened concerns related to trust and fairness. FGDs reinforced that multi-step procedures and the financial demands of repeated engagement often deter households before formal action begins.

Priority legal assistance needs and service preferences

Respondents prioritized assistance that reduces financial and procedural strain, particularly fee support, legal counselling, and document replacement, followed by court representation and mobile legal clinics. IDP returnees more frequently emphasized counselling and representation linked to restitution and ownership disputes. Persons with disabilities highlighted affordability, mobility, and sustained navigation support, with mobile services seen as especially important. Across discussions, the central demand was not information alone but accompaniment that can carry cases through complex processes rather than leaving households to manage procedures independently.

Awareness landscape of legal aid providers

Awareness of legal aid providers was extremely low, with 87% reporting no awareness and only 13% aware of available services, with no meaningful difference by sex. Lack of awareness was highest among IDPs and remained substantial across all residency groups. Persons with disabilities reported slightly higher awareness, likely reflecting necessity-driven exposure. Damascus was a clear outlier with significantly higher awareness, while most other governorates reported minimal or no awareness. FGDs confirm that legal aid remains largely invisible outside major urban centres and is typically accessed through informal networks or crisis-driven referrals rather than structured outreach.

Reported exclusion, discrimination, and sensitive disclosure patterns

One quarter of respondents reported discrimination or barriers in accessing legal or justice pathways, while a notable proportion preferred not to answer, suggesting sensitivity around disclosure. Men reported higher levels of discrimination, whereas women were more likely to withhold responses. IDPs reported the highest levels of perceived discrimination. Governorate variation was pronounced, with certain areas emerging as strong outliers for reported exclusion. Qualitative accounts reinforce these findings, describing bias, intimidation, and unequal treatment, as well as reluctance to escalate complaints due to fear of repercussions.

What drives discrimination and exclusion in the access pathway

Reported drivers were multidimensional: gender (21%) and lack of legal documentation (21%) were most cited, followed by economic status (20%) and ethnicity/religion (19%), with displacement status (13%) and disability (4%) also contributing. In high-reporting locations, exclusion appeared layered rather than singular, combining documentation barriers with social and economic stratification. FGDs consistently describe exclusion as both procedural and

relational, shaped not only by formal requirements but by who is believed, prioritized, or repeatedly deferred.



A family who recently returned to their village in Idleb, lives in a tent nearby while NRC supports them to rehabilitate their home and ensure adequate documentation. NRC/2025

3.5 Coping Strategies & Recommendations

Coping strategies following loss of property or documentation

Households relied on a mix of inaction and harmful coping. Overall, 23% reported taking no action, while common strategies included reduced consumption (21%), borrowing (15%), renting shelter (13%), relocation (11%), selling assets (10%), and child labour (6%). Men more frequently reported economic coping (borrowing, asset sales, relocation), while women were more likely to report no action, reflecting constrained agency and protection risks. Child labour affected both genders equally, indicating household-level distress.

FGDs confirm that coping is framed as endurance rather than resolution. In camp-based IDP FGDs (Idleb, Al-Hasakeh, Daraa, Aleppo), households described waiting or abandoning legal efforts due to cost and futility. In urban and peri-urban FGDs (Rural Damascus, Damascus, Hama, Ar-Raqqa, Aleppo), coping centred on austerity, debt, and repeated housing moves. Child labour was explicitly reported in Idleb and Rural Damascus as a last resort.

IDPs showed the highest reliance on harmful coping, followed by IDP returnees, while returnees from abroad reported the lowest levels, though renting and relocation remained common. Disability constrained coping options rather than reducing need.

Gendered priority legal and documentation needs

Women prioritized civil status documentation, family law, inheritance, death certification, recognition of missing spouses, child documentation, and enforcement of alimony or inheritance. These needs were directly linked to housing security, access to services, and protection from family pressure.

Men prioritized ownership proof, cadastral registration, and validation of transactions, framing documentation as a gateway to courts and registries. Men also emphasized systemic issues such as fees, delays, and weak record systems.

Urgent needs, barriers, and coping responses

Overall, civil documentation gaps constitute a structural form of legal exclusion in Syria, rooted in displacement and governance fragmentation, with gender, disability, and residency status shaping severity of impact.

Civil documentation is the central need across groups, but its meaning differs: women link it to family protection and housing stability, while men link it to transactions and claims. Property and inheritance show the sharpest gender divide, with women describing exclusion and intimidation, and men describing administrative completion.

Reported "no challenges" often reflected disengagement rather than resolution. FGDs converged on the same barriers: cost, complexity, mobility limits, discrimination, and reliance on intermediaries. Women, older persons, and persons with disabilities faced compounded barriers, leading households to prioritise survival over legal pursuit.

Demand for legal awareness and preferred support modalities

Interest in legal awareness sessions was high overall (65%), with strong governorate variation: Ar-Raqqa (100%) and Daraa (98%) were near-universal, followed by Damascus (78%) and Aleppo (75%). Homs was lowest (33%), while Al-Hasakeh (48%) and Idleb (51%) were also comparatively low, suggesting that session-based models need clear linkage to tangible case progress to drive uptake.

FGDs stressed that awareness is valued as a practical tool to avoid wasted visits and exploitation, but information without legal accompaniment increases frustration. Detailed disaggregated table supporting this section is provided in Annex IV (Table E36 *Interest in Attending Community Legal Awareness Sessions*).

3.6 Priority Legal Needs Across the Population

3.6.1 Most Urgent Reported Needs

The assessment indicates that civil documentation gaps constitute a cross-cutting foundational barrier affecting multiple sectors. Incomplete or missing IDs, family books, and birth, marriage, death, or disappearance certificates limit access to education, health services, mobility, assistance, and formal legal processes. Documentation gaps also directly constrain the ability to initiate or complete HLP procedures, including registration, inheritance settlement, and property transactions.

Housing, land, and property needs are closely intertwined with housing security. Many households lack formal ownership, inheritance documentation, or tenancy contracts, exposing them to eviction, rental instability, or inability to repair, transfer, or reclaim property. Tenure insecurity is therefore not separate from HLP registration issues but a direct consequence of incomplete documentation, unresolved inheritance, and stalled administrative or judicial processes.

Inheritance and missing-person–related claims represent a critical subset of HLP needs, particularly for women and families of the disappeared. Absence of death certification, unresolved legal status, and lack of interim management mechanisms prevent property transfer, inheritance settlement, and recognition of legal rights. These cases frequently require court confirmation and sustained legal accompaniment, making them structurally more complex than routine registration matters.

Dispute resolution emerges not as a separate priority but as a necessary pathway for resolving HLP and housing insecurity. Unresolved ownership disputes, secondary occupation, rental conflicts, and eviction cases often require mediation or judicial processes before administrative regularization can proceed. However, weak due process protections, cost barriers, and limited confidence in formal channels push many households toward informal or community-based mechanisms, which may not provide durable outcomes.

Legal awareness and access to reliable legal assistance cut across all categories. Low awareness of procedures and legal aid providers contributes to delayed action, case stagnation, and escalation of preventable disputes. There is strong demand for clear, step-by-step guidance and sustained accompaniment rather than one-off consultations, particularly where documentation chains are incomplete or court confirmation is required.

3.6.2 Groups with Highest Legal Vulnerabilities

1. **Women**, female-headed households and wives of missing persons
2. **Persons with disabilities**
3. **Internally displaced persons (IDPs)**
4. **Returnees**, especially returnees from abroad
5. **Residents of informal settlements and tent-based settings**
6. **Families of missing, detained, or forcibly disappeared persons**
7. **Older persons**, especially older women
8. **Poor urban renters and informal tenants**

3.6.3 Geographic Differences

1. **Northwest (Aleppo, Idleb)** High civil and HLP documentation gaps alongside relatively higher procedural engagement, with Idleb showing high Cadastre contact and document replacement activity.
2. **Northeast (Al-Hasakeh, Ar-Raqqa)** High documentation exclusion, access constraints, elevated eviction risk, and pronounced experiences of discrimination, especially in Ar-Raqqa.

3. **Damascus / Rural Damascus (South-Central)** High documentation and HLP gaps despite institutional proximity, with strong demand for legal assistance and concentrated missing persons- and inheritance-related needs.
4. **South (Daraa)** Very low engagement with formal institutions, minimal legal assistance-seeking, and high reliance on informal mechanisms.
5. **Central (Hama, Homs)** High civil documentation exclusion combined with low procedural follow-through, indicating risk of prolonged, unresolved legal needs.

Across governorates and population groups, the reported priorities are best understood as interdependent rather than sequential. Civil documentation consistently emerged as a foundational legal need because it enables access to services and also underpins progression on other legal tracks, particularly HLP tenure formalisation, inheritance, and dispute resolution.

In practice, households rarely face a single isolated legal issue; instead, needs compound when documentation gaps intersect with insecure housing arrangements, informal tenure, or unresolved family status events, creating layered barriers to legal resolution and elevating protection risks. This means that the same "priority" need can present very differently depending on whether it is a standalone administrative request (e.g., replacing a lost document) or part of a broader case pathway that requires multiple steps, multiple institutions, and often judicial involvement.

Patterns of vulnerability and case complexity varied substantially across groups and geographies. Situational risks such as eviction, rental instability, and camp closure pressures were most acute among IDPs and informal tenants, especially in settings where displacement is prolonged and tenure is largely undocumented, while complexity-driven needs particularly missing persons- and inheritance-related cases were concentrated among women, female-headed households, and families of missing, detained, or forcibly disappeared persons, where the absence of recognised documentation and death certification often blocked access to property and legal rights.

Returnees, and especially returnees from abroad, frequently faced compounded documentation and HLP constraints that limited their ability to restore housing and property rights even when physical return had occurred. In this sense, "legal vulnerability" is shaped not only by the type of need reported, but by the degree to which multiple needs overlap and whether resolution requires navigating contested procedures, incomplete records, or discretionary institutional practices.

The category of "IDPs" also encompasses distinct legal profiles that warrant further nuance. Camp-based IDPs, informal settlement residents, and urban renters often faced different combinations of tenure insecurity, documentation loss, and barriers to institutional access, resulting in varying degrees of risk and case complexity. Similarly, host community households generally reported higher institutional proximity, but qualitative findings indicate that overcrowding, informal cohabitation arrangements, and affordability pressures increasingly contributed to tenure insecurity and dispute exposure, particularly for poor urban renters.

To help translate these intersecting priorities into differentiated support needs, this section should be read alongside the **Legal Vulnerability and Case Complexity Matrix (Annex 1)**, which synthesises how foundational documentation gaps, situational housing risks, and complexity-driven inheritance/missing persons pathways combine to shape the intensity and type of legal assistance required across groups and regions.

4 Recommendations

To Donors:

1. **Sustain and expand support for legal counselling as well as assistance particularly restoration of civil documentation to meet scale and severity of gaps:** to the scale and severity levels needed, given a significant disproportionate share of the population remains under-documented or completely undocumented, directly affecting access to essential goods and services.
2. **Ensure that sustained legal services systematically integrated into return and reintegration programming.** The assessment highlights that documentation gaps, unresolved civil status issues, including recognition of civil status events that occurred while in displacement, verification of their next of kins, HLP disputes and housing insecurity remains significant barriers for households attempting to re-establish their lives and access essential administrative and social services following displacement and return. Integrating legal services within return and reintegration programmes is critical to enabling returnees to navigate complex procedures, resolve outstanding legal issues and reach durable solutions, and support safer and more sustainable reintegration.
3. **Increase support to legal aid interventions addressing complex or high-barrier procedures, including civil documentation restoration, civil status registration, inheritance registration and HLP dispute resolution.** These procedures often involve multiple institutions and service providers, variety of administrative steps, and associated costs that exceed capacity of the vulnerable households. Flexible donor support for these types of cases will allow legal protection actors to support people in addressing these barriers through targeted legal counselling, representation, and legal fee and transportation support mechanisms.

To Humanitarian, Development, Operational Actors Across Syria:

1. **Adopt a tiered "identity-to-rights" response framework linking civil documentation, family status and HLP issues while distinguishing between counselling-based legal aid and legal assistance services** including legal accompaniment and representation. Priority should be given to providing legal representation before courts and sustained case accompaniment for project participants facing severe legal protection risks or legally actionable cases, including inheritance, missing persons-related procedures, and complex HLP disputes. Legal assistance should be complemented by counselling support and

targeted awareness-raising, ensuring that legal assistance is reserved for cases where procedural follow-up is both necessary and achievable.

2. **Expand mobile and remote service delivery as core modalities in line with regional access and context conditions:** Given that 87% of surveyed households reported no awareness of available legal aid services, and that cost, distance, and inaccessibility of issuing centres were consistently cited as primary barriers to accessing documentation and HLP procedures, response actors should scale a blended model combining phone counselling, scheduled mobile legal clinics, and fixed-site appointments, adapted to regional engagement patterns.
3. **Establish a dedicated inheritance and missing persons legal support track for women, integrating specialised casework, protection-sensitive referrals, and measures to support safe participation in legal procedures.** 87% of missing persons-affected respondents cannot benefit from property or legal rights and 73% request legal support, formalised and specialised assistance pathways that address both procedural and protection-related barriers should be created.
4. **Refine and prioritise the structured use of targeted legal fee-support mechanisms for high-barrier procedures and high-vulnerability profiles,** building on existing organizational frameworks, including NRC's Standard Operational Procedure (SOP) and legal fee coverage modality. Apply partial fee coverage or transport support selectively in cases where financial constraints directly impede access to legally actionable remedies, including for IDPs, female-headed and de facto women-led households, households affected by disability, and families pursuing inheritance, missing persons-related claims, or contested HLP disputes.
5. **Strengthen community legal awareness as an action-oriented pathway linking knowledge of rights with access to legal aid and essential services.** Awareness activities should increase people's understanding of their rights and available procedures while enabling immediate eligibility screening, appointment booking, and referrals to legal protection providers or relevant administrative or social service institutions. This should help to ensure that people who need support addressing their legal issue following awareness activities can access legal counselling, legal assistance, or appropriate referral support.
6. **Establish predictable referral pathways linking community entry points, NRC ICLA, and relevant institutions.** Clear referral maps and feedback loops should be operationalized to track cases from advice to outcome.
7. **Harmonize legal information messages across actors to reduce misinformation and procedural churn.** Standardized messaging on requirements, steps, and timelines of the administrative and procedural steps people are required to take to address a certain legal issue should be regularly updated and disseminated.
8. **Strengthen coordination with community leaders and informal mediators for referral and outreach purposes, while safeguarding rights-based outcomes and mitigating risks of unequal and discriminatory practices.** Informal mechanisms should be leveraged for referral while mitigating risks of unequal outcomes for women and other vulnerable groups.

Recommendations To Government of Syria and National Counterparts:

1. **Simplify and standardize civil documentation procedures** with predictable requirements, including clearer procedural guidance and reduced discretionary variation across geographic areas and offices. Harmonized guidance and streamlined steps are essential to reduce procedural churn and exclusion for displaced and returnee households.
2. **Promote affordability measures for essential legal and administrative procedures, prioritise reduced fees where feasible**, including clearer fee schedules, and safeguards against informal charges.
3. **Support administrative and procedural pathways that enable women and families of missing persons to progress inheritance and property-related rights with greater clarity, consistency, and safeguards**. Where feasible, promote procedural accommodations within civil registry, Cadastre and Real Estate offices, and court services, including the availability of female staff at key service points, adjusted service hours, and private spaces for sensitive case processing.
4. **Accelerate accessibility for persons with disabilities and older persons.** Minimum accessibility standards should be promoted to ensure that legal access is not determined by physical endurance or informal influence. Mainstream accessibility in governmental institutions buildings and relevant governmental facilities within institutional service delivery. Basic accessibility adaptations should be integrated into routine service delivery to prevent systematic exclusion.
5. **Support practical and low-burden workflow and file-management improvements in high-demand civil registry and HLP-facing offices**. Practical measures such as appointment systems and standardized intake checklists can reduce bottlenecks and unpredictability.
6. **Expedite and scale up archive protection and digitization investments for property and civil records:** Align record preservation and incremental digital indexing with existing institutional capacity and infrastructure realities to ease verification constraints and dispute resolution delays.
7. **Undertake a targeted institutional learning and capacity needs assessment for high-pressure civil registry and HLP-facing service points where on-site observations identified procedural bottlenecks, accessibility barriers, and record-management constraints.** Provide targeted technical capacity building for staff handling complex post-displacement caseloads. Offer practical guidance on exceptional documentation, inheritance, and contested HLP files to reduce discretionary inconsistencies and improve procedural predictability.
8. **Support the introduction of practical, low-burden procedural adjustments in civil registry and HLP-facing service points, informed by the findings of the targeted institutional learning and capacity needs assessment.** Such adjustments may include strengthening intake and client-flow arrangements to improve predictability, enhancing transparency around documentation requirements, reinforcing complaints and feedback channels, and applying simple measures to improve file organisation, accessibility, and privacy in the handling of sensitive cases.

Additional Procedural Reform Recommendations

1. Clarify procedural standing for wives of missing persons. Advocate for clearer administrative guidance within civil registry, Cadastre, and court services regarding the procedural standing of women whose husbands are missing. Where feasible, promote procedural accommodations that allow women to initiate or progress inheritance and property-related procedures without facing repeated procedural barriers linked to their husband's unresolved status.
2. Strengthen procedural transparency through basic case management mechanisms. Encourage the introduction of low-burden case intake and tracking systems within civil registry and HLP-facing offices, including unique case numbers, clearly defined processing stages and expected timelines, and simple status-update mechanisms. Even simple tracking tools can reduce repeated in-person visits, lower transport costs, and improve predictability in high-demand offices.
3. Promote minimum due process safeguards in rental and eviction contexts. Encourage the development or clarification of standardised notice practices and basic mediation or referral pathways prior to eviction, particularly in informal rental arrangements. Even in the absence of formal contracts, predictable notice formats and notice practices can reduce disputes and enhance procedural clarity in eviction situations, improving predictability for both landlords and tenants.

Annexes

Annex I: Legal Vulnerability and Case Complexity Matrix

Case Profile	Primarily Legal Bottlenecks	Typical Institutional Exposure	Relative Legal Complexity	Protection Risks	Indicative NRC ICLA response modality	Justification
Women with missing or forcibly disappeared spouses (presumed dead)	Missing persons-related legal ambiguity, death registration, inheritance freeze	Civil registry, Courts (dominated court-based procedure), Cadastre and Real Estate offices	Very high	Very high	Legal assistance, including representation and accompaniment	Court-dependent procedures, absence of interim legal status, inheritance paralysis, and high exposure to coercion and rights loss
De-facto women-led households (spouse alive but absent / non-functional)	Representation ambiguity, civil documentation	Civil registry, courts, Cadastre and Real Estate offices	Medium-High	High	Legal counselling, with legal assistance for selected cases	While legal status exists de facto women-led arrangements limit women's ability to represent the household in documentation, HLP and related procedures; some cases could be resolved via counselling

						while others require active procedural support depending on the complexity of the cases; the complexity varies by the need for court steps or institutional discretion where reliance on intermediaries and informal pressure is high
Formally female-headed households (widowed or divorced)	Documentation gaps, HLP rights, their claims and formalisation	Civil registry, Cadastre and Real Estate offices	Medium	Medium	Legal counselling, with legal assistance for selected cases	Women's legal status is recognised, but vulnerability arises from documentation gaps, economic barriers, and institutional practices that may not accommodate women acting as household representative
IDPs lacking civil documentation	Civil documentation replacement	Civil Registry	Medium	Medium	Legal information and counselling, with legal assistance for complex or stalled cases	High prevalence; most cases resolvable with guidance, but cost, distance, and procedural confusion justify assistance in some cases
Returnees with unregistered birth/-s or family event/-s	Civil Documentation, Access to Essential Services, Family Law and associated HLP rights	Civil registry, courts	Medium-High	Medium	Legal assistance, including representation and accompaniment	Late registration frequently requires court procedures and repeated institutional engagement

Informal urban tenants / secondary occupants	HLP risks (tenure insecurity and eviction)	Landlords (lessors), local authorities, courts	Medium	High	Legal counselling, with legal assistance for eviction prevention or disputes	Acute protection risk despite relatively moderate legal complexity. Weak due process necessitates targeted advanced legal intervention
Camp- or tent-based households facing relocation or closure	HLP risks (eviction and relocation without safeguards)	Camp authorities, local authorities	Medium	High	Legal information and counselling, with referrals and advocacy	Limited formal remedies; legal support focuses on risk mitigation and access to safeguards.
Households affected by disability (people with disability in household) with documentation loss	Civil documentation replacement, assisted access to procedures	Civil registry (where relevant), service providers, courts (selected cases)	Medium-High	High	Information and counselling, legal assistance for selected cases, including accompaniment and representation	Findings of the assessment highlight mobility barriers, inaccessible offices, higher dependence on intermediaries and higher exposure to exploitation; targeted accompaniment or procedural support may be required to prevent exclusion

How to Read the Legal Vulnerability and Case Complexity Matrix:

This matrix synthesises findings from the household survey, FGDs, KIIs, and on-site institutional observations to support analytical prioritisation and proportional response planning within NRC's ICLA programme. It is intended as a diagnostic and programming tool, not as an eligibility or targeting instrument.

"Case profiles" reflect recurrent legal situations identified across the assessment rather than mutually exclusive population categories. Households may fall under more than one profile over time, and vulnerability is shaped by the interaction of legal status, household composition, displacement history, and access constraints.

“Relative legal complexity” reflects the procedural difficulty of advancing a case under the current legal and administrative framework, taking into account the number of procedural steps required, reliance on court-based decisions, evidentiary burden and documentation thresholds, number of institutions involved, and likelihood of repeated submissions, or prolonged pending status. Higher complexity does not imply rarity; rather, it reflects the probability that a case will stall or remain unresolved without active legal assistance, as demonstrated in findings related to death registration, missing persons, late civil registration, and inheritance-linked HLP claims.

“Protection risk” reflects the likely consequences for individuals or households if the legal issue is not resolved, including exposure to eviction, secondary occupation, forced relocation, inability to access services, assistance or civil registration due to exclusion, heightened exposure to coercion, exploitation, or reliance on intermediaries, or rights loss, prolonged legal and social limbo, particularly for women and caregivers. Protection risk may be high even where legal complexity is moderate, as evidenced by informal tenancy, eviction exposure, and camp or tent-based living arrangements.

“Typical institutional exposure” describes the institutions that project participants most commonly interact with in pursuing a given legal pathway. It does not imply uniform institutional practice or assign responsibility, but helps explain procedural burden and access constraints, including distance, costs, accessibility, and discretionary practices.

“Indicative NRC ICLA response modality” uses the NRC ICLA typology of legal protection services as follows:

- Information (general step-by-step guidance, awareness and procedural information, increasing legal awareness of project participants),
- Counselling (tailored legal advice and file review based on individual legal circumstances)
- Legal assistance (active support to pursue a legal procedure, which may include drafting legal documents, accompaniment, representation where appropriate and legally permissible).
- The matrix illustrates graduation across modalities based on assessed complexity and risk; it does not prescribe automatic service provision.

Across all case profiles, certain cross-cutting modifiers and risk amplifiers consistently increase legal complexity, protection risk, or the intensity of support required. These factors include:

- Incomplete, fragmented or ambiguously recognised civil documentation, including expired documents, partial records, or documents recognised by some authorities but not others, which increases discretionary decision-making (e.g. expired or partially recognised family books, lineage records and other documents).
- Gender-related barriers, including limited decision-making authority, dependence on male relatives or intermediaries for institutional engagement, and heightened exposure to coercion and exploitation.
- Older age and caregiving burden, particularly for older women.
- Disability-related access constraints, including mobility, communication, and reliance on caregivers or intermediaries.

- Displacement-related household fragmentation and de-facto household arrangements, separation of family members, or absence of recognised household representatives, which complicates representation and proof requirements
- Residence in camps, tents, or informal settlements, which amplifies eviction risks, limits procedural recourse, and increases dependence on external actors for access to services and institutions
- Economic fragility and cost sensitivity, including inability to absorb legal fee or transport costs, and the burden of repeated travels, contributing to non-attempts, early abandonment of procedures, or reliance on intermediaries.
- Exposure to discretionary or informal practices, including pressure to use intermediaries, informal mediation, or facilitation payments, which increases unpredictability of outcomes and protection risks.
- These modifiers may shift a case from information or counselling towards legal assistance or increase the duration and intensity of support required.

The matrix is designed to support programmatic prioritisation and tiered response planning, explain why certain cases require legal assistance rather than counselling alone, inform realistic caseload planning and resource allocation; and ensure coherence between assessment findings, programme design, and recommendations. It should be read in conjunction with the Findings and Recommendations sections and applied flexibly, recognising that individual case assessment and protection considerations remain paramount.

Important contextual note: Given the fluidity of the operational and institutional context in Syria and implementation of transitional legal framework and procedural arrangements, this matrix should be reviewed periodically and may serve as a basis for area-specific or governorate-level vulnerability matrices, adapted to local legal pathways, institutional access, and displacement dynamics.

For operational application, the matrix should be used as a guiding framework alongside case-by-case assessment and professional judgment; where needed, programme teams may seek technical guidance from ICLA specialists to ensure appropriate and context-sensitive use.

Annex II: On-site Observations of Civil Registration Offices

Location & Office	Operational Status & Capacity	Accessibility & Gender Considerations	Service Delivery & Records	Complaints & Coordination	Key Gaps & Priority Recommendations
Damascus – General Directorate of Civil Affairs (Yalbougha / Al-Thawra St.)	Fully operational; high-capacity facility with electronic ticketing, ~41 service windows, ~115 seats; ~50 staff and ~500 clients observed, indicating extreme daily pressure	No elevator or disability-access route; escalator not functioning; difficult access for older persons and persons with disabilities; no gender-sensitive spaces; high noise and crowding	Largely automated service flow (computer extraction, verification, stamping); clear ticket-based flow; records managed in paper and digital formats with role-based access	No formal complaints desk or suggestion box; feedback handled informally via office director	Install elevator/accessible route; introduce priority arrangements for older persons and persons with disabilities; create gender-sensitive service options; establish a formal complaints mechanism
Daraa – Civil Status Department (Daraa Centre)	Fully operational; well organised; ~50 staff (≈85% female); ~90 clients observed, indicating high but manageable demand	Strong accessibility with ramps; staff actively support persons with disabilities; "one client per window" practice enhances privacy and women's comfort	Comprehensive services (civil documents and life events); strong dual paper–digital records with controlled access	Active coordination with courts, municipalities, finance and health authorities; responsive complaints via director's open-door approach; limited humanitarian coordination	Restore elevators; improve heating; renew furniture; strengthen electricity protection; provide staff transport to maintain punctuality
Idleb – Civil Status Department (Ariha)	Fully operational; fair infrastructure; severe space constraints; ~15	Weak accessibility (raised step, no accessible entry); no gender-	Services include civil extracts, family statements, birth and death	No formal complaints mechanism; coordination with courts/municipalities is	Create accessible entry; secure backup power and stable internet; deploy female staff; introduce

	staff; congestion varies by day	sensitive waiting areas; absence of female staff limits privacy	registration; effective ticketing system; records stored digitally and physically with restricted access	manual; limited informal humanitarian coordination	formal complaints and basic safety measures
Aleppo – Civil Registry Office (Aleppo City)	Fully operational; fair infrastructure; ground-level facility; ~25 staff; >50 clients observed	Good physical accessibility for persons with disabilities; mixed-gender arrangements; limited private spaces	Numbered queue with automated calling; information desk available; records well organised in paper and digital formats	Visible phone-based complaints channel; coordination with government departments functional	Upgrade equipment and digital systems; strengthen staff training; improve public information on required documentation
Rural Damascus – General Civil Registry Directorate (Douma)	Partially operational due to conflict damage; one functional floor; very high demand (~300–600 clients); limited staffing (~8 observed)	No disability-access route; stairs difficult for wheelchair users; limited gender-sensitive arrangements; women observed in large numbers	Basic paper-based queue; heavily paper-dependent records; evidence of archive loss (burned/damaged documents); password-based access controls	Relatively robust complaints system (box, hotline, designated staff); coordination mainly with courts; limited humanitarian coordination	Increase staffing; provide modern equipment; rehabilitate damaged infrastructure; support archive recovery; consider decentralised service points
Homs – Civil Status Directorate (Homs City)	Fully operational; fair infrastructure; ~75 staff (≈90% female); ~160 clients observed	Good accessibility (ramps, wide doors); women access services independently; dedicated service	Electronic queue; structured service flow; strong digital–paper archiving; integrated national electronic network	Active coordination with courts, governorate and finance authorities; coordination with humanitarian actors observed	Expand service points/add centres to reduce overcrowding and pressure

		windows support privacy			
Hama – Civil Registry Service Point (Post Office)	Fully operational but extremely overcrowded; limited space; ~14 staff; ~200 clients observed	Poor accessibility (stairs, high windows, no wheelchair adaptations); no gender-sensitive spaces; privacy severely constrained	Services limited mainly to civil extracts and family statements; ticketing system present; procedures not clearly displayed	Complaints mechanism not clearly integrated; records reportedly paper and electronic but not verifiable due to congestion	Upgrade service environment; improve accessibility; increase guidance capacity; strengthen transparency on procedures; address informal broker presence

Annex III: Detailed Tables

Methodology Tables

Governorate	Host Community	IDPs	Planned (n=1200)	Achieved (n=1200)
Aleppo	50	100	150	150
Idleb	50	100	150	150
Al-Hasakeh	40	80	120	120
Ar-Raqqa	40	60	100	100
Daraa	60	40	100	100
Damascus	50	110	160	160
Rural Damascus	50	110	160	160
Hama	80	50	130	130
Homs	80	50	130	130
Total	500	700	1,200	1,200

Table 4: Household Survey Sample Achieved By Governorate And Displacement StatusRespondent Profile Tables

Age	Residency Status				Total	Disability status		Sex	
	Host community	Internally Displaced Person (IDP)	Returnee (from abroad)	Returnee (from displacement within Syria)		There is disability	There is No disability	Female	Male
18-29	10%	14%	19%	7%	12%	6%	13%	11%	12%
30-39	22%	32%	26%	25%	27%	10%	29%	28%	26%

40-49	26%	27%	21%	30%	26%	15%	28%	27%	26%
50+	32%	23%	23%	32%	28%	61%	24%	23%	30%
60+	10%	4%	10%	6%	7%	8%	7%	10%	5%[4]

Table 5: Age Per Residency Status, Sex, And Disability

Displacement Status	Female	Male	People with Disability	People without Disability	Total
Host community	39%	33%	39%	35%	36%
Internally Displaced Person (IDP)	44%	38%	36%	41%	41%
Returnee (from abroad)	7%	11%	9%	10%	10%
Returnee (from displacement within Syria)	11%	17%	16%	14%	14%

Table 6: Displacement Status

Civil Documentation

Disaggregation Category	Group	No Legal Civil Documents	All HH Members Have Identity Documents
Gender	Female	59% (283)	41% (200)
	Male	64% (459)	36% (258)
Residency status	Host community	66% (284)	34% (144)
	Internally Displaced Person (IDP)	55% (267)	45% (219)

4 Percentages in this and other tables are calculated within each column category (residency status, disability status, and sex). Percentages across columns should not be summed.

	Returnee (from abroad)	80% (92)	20% (23)
	Returnee (from displacement within Syria)	58% (99)	42% (72)
Disability status	There is disability	55% (65)	45% (54)
	There is no disability	63% (677)	37% (404)
Overall total	All households	62% (742)	38% (458)

Table 7: All Household Members Have Legal Civil Documentation

Geographic Area	No Legal Civil Documents	All HH Members Have Legal Documents
Northwest Syria (NWS) (Aleppo + Idleb)	53% (158)	47% (142)
Northeast Syria (NES) (Al-Hasakeh + Ar-Raqqa)	64% (141)	36% (79)
Central (Hama + Homs)	67% (173)	33% (87)
South Central (Damascus + Rural Damascus + Daraa)	64% (270)	36% (150)
Total	62% (742)	38% (458)

Table 8: Household Members Have Legal Civil Documentation (By Geographic Area)

Geographic Area	(HHs)	Yes	No
Northwest Syria (NWS) (Aleppo + Idleb)	158	75% (119)	25% (39)
Northeast Syria (NES) (Al-Hasakeh + Ar-Raqqa)	141	84% (119)	16% (22)
Central (Hama + Homs)	173	46% (80)	54% (93)

South Central (Damascus + Rural Damascus + Daraa)	270	62% (168)	38% (102)
Total	742	65% (486)	35% (256)

Table 9: Obtaining Or Replacing Missing Documents (Among HHs Missing Docs, By Geographic Area)

Geographic Area	n (tried)	High Extent	Some Extent	Not Satisfied	Prefer Not To Answer
Northwest Syria (NWS) (Aleppo + Idleb)	119	22% (26)	13% (15)	61% (73)	4% (5)
Northeast Syria (NES) (Al-Hasakeh + Ar-Raqqa)	119	33% (39)	15% (18)	50% (59)	3% (3)
Central (Hama + Homs)	80	14% (11)	33% (26)	49% (39)	5% (4)
South Central (Damascus + Rural Damascus + Daraa)	168	38% (61)	46% (77)	28% (47)	10% (16)
Total	486	26% (127)	26% (124)	43% (211)	5% (24)

Table 10: Satisfied With Process While Obtaining Documents (Among Those Who Tried, By Geographic Area)

Housing, Land & Property (HLP) Rights

Disaggregation Category	Group	Own or Rent Property	No Property Access
Gender	Female	70%	30%
	Male	70%	30%

Residency status	Host community	77%	23%
	IDP	65%	35%
	Returnee (abroad)	48%	52%
	Returnee (internal)	82%	18%
Disability status	HH with disability	76%	24%
	HH without disability	69%	31%
Overall	All households	70%	30%

Table 11: Property Ownership and Tenure Patterns

Disaggregation Category	Group	Property Under Dispute	Not Under Dispute
Sex	Female	20%	80%
	Male	17%	83%
Residency status	Host community	17%	83%
	IDP	23%	77%
	Returnee (abroad)	23%	77%
	Returnee (internal)	19%	81%
Disability status	HH with disability	20%	80%
	HH without disability	18%	82%
Overall	All households	19%	81%

Table 12: Property Under Dispute by Sex, Residency, and Disability

Geographic Area	Under Dispute	Not Under Dispute

Northwest Syria (NWS) (Aleppo + Idleb)	23%	77%
Northeast Syria (NES) (Al-Hasakeh + Ar-Raqqa)	19%	81%
Central (Hama + Homs)	26%	74%
South Central (Damascus + Rural Damascus + Daraa)	21%	79%
Total	19%	81%

Table 13: Property Under Dispute by Geographic Area

Disaggregation category	Group	No Formal Documents	Has Formal Documents
Sex	Female	69%	31%
	Male	55%	45%
Residency status	Host community	56%	44%
	IDP	64%	36%
	Returnee (abroad)	51%	49%
	Returnee (internal)	68%	32%
Disability status	HH with disability	58%	42%
	HH without disability	61%	39%
Overall	All households	61%	39%

Table 14: Documentation Gaps And Physical Possession.

Geographic area	No Formal Documents	Has Formal Documents
Northwest Syria (NWS) (Aleppo + Idleb)	67%	33%
Northeast Syria (NES) (Al-Hasakeh + Ar-Raqqa)	57%	43%

Central (Hama + Homs)	60%	40%
South Central (Damascus + Rural Damascus + Daraa)	64%	36%
Total	61%	39%

Table 15: Documentation Gaps And Physical Possession By Geographical Context.

Disaggregation category	Group	No Attempt	Attempted
Sex	Female	63%	37%
	Male	63%	37%
Residency status	Host community	57%	43%
	IDP	67%	33%
	Returnee (abroad)	58%	42%
	Returnee (internal)	72%	28%
Disability status	HH with disability	62%	38%
	HH without disability	63%	37%
Overall	All households	63%	37%

Table 16: No Attempt to Replace or Re-Register Documents

Geographic area	No Attempt	Attempted
Northwest Syria (NWS) (Aleppo + Idleb)	55%	45%
Northeast Syria (NES) (Al-Hasakeh + Ar-Raqqa)	61%	39%
Central (Hama + Homs)	89%	11%
South Central (Damascus + Rural Damascus + Daraa)	68%	32%

Total	63%	37%

Table 17: No Attempt To Replace Or Re-Register Documents By Geographical Context.

Disaggregation category	Group	Not at Risk	At Risk
Sex	Female-headed HH	78%	22%
	Male-headed HH	81%	19%
Disability status	HH with disability	74%	26%
	HH without disability	80%	20%
Residency status	Host community	84%	16%
	IDP	77%	23%
	Returnee	79%	21%
Overall	All households	80%	21%

Table 18: Perceived Risk of Eviction

Geographic area	Not at Risk	At Risk
Damascus	79%	21%
Aleppo	82%	18%
Rural Damascus	78%	22%
Homs	75%	25%
Hama	88%	12%
Idleb	79%	21%
Al-Hasakeh	86%	14%

Ar-Raqqa	63%	37%
Daraa	83%	17%
Total	80%	21%

Table 19: Risk of Eviction (by Geographic Area)

Disaggregation category	Group	No Notice	Verbal Notice	Written Notice
Sex	Female-headed HH	67%	30%	3%
	Male-headed HH	71%	26%	3%
Disability status	HH with disability	63%	34%	3%
	HH without disability	70%	27%	3%
Residency status	Host community	73%	25%	2%
	IDP	66%	31%	3%
	Returnee	69%	29%	2%
Overall	All households	69%	29%	2%

Table 20: Receipt of Eviction Notice

Disaggregation category	Group	Never Evicted	Previously Evicted
Sex	Female-headed HH	82%	18%
	Male-headed HH	85%	15%
Disability status	HH with disability	79%	21%
	HH without disability	85%	15%
Residency status	Host community	88%	12%
	IDP	81%	19%
	Returnee	83%	17%
Overall	All households	84%	16%

Table 21: History Of Eviction and Circumstances

Geographic area	Never Evicted	Previously Evicted
Damascus	74%	26%
Aleppo	89%	11%
Rural Damascus	83%	17%
Homs	100%	0%
Hama	93%	7%
Idleb	81%	19%
Al-Hasakeh	82%	18%
Ar-Raqqa	78%	22%

Daraa	82%	18%
Total	84%	16%

Table 22: History of Eviction (by Geographic Area)

Geographic area	No Opportunity	Opportunity Provided
Damascus	88%	12%
Aleppo	89%	11%
Rural Damascus	91%	9%
Homs	94%	6%
Hama	80%	20%
Idleb	94%	6%
Al-Hasakeh	88%	12%
Ar-Raqqa	100%	0%
Daraa	100%	0%
Total	92%	8%

Table 23: Opportunity to Contest Eviction (by Geographic Area)

Disaggregation category	Group	Yes	No	Don't Know
Sex	Female-headed HH	15%	31%	54%
	Male-headed HH	13%	35%	52%
Disability status	HH with disability	18%	29%	53%

	HH without disability	13%	34%	53%
Residency status	Host community	10%	42%	48%
	IDP	17%	30%	53%
	Returnee	15%	33%	52%
Overall	All households	14%	33%	54%

Table 24: Property Occupation After Displacement (by Key Disaggregation)

Geographic area	Yes	No	Don't Know
Damascus	18%	59%	24%
Aleppo	30%	33%	37%
Rural Damascus	11%	51%	37%
Homs	9%	36%	55%
Hama	7%	13%	80%
Idleb	19%	23%	58%
Al-Hasakeh	0%	41%	59%
Ar-Raqqa	14%	11%	76%
Daraa	6%	6%	88%
Total	14%	33%	54%

Table 25: Property Occupation After Displacement (by Geographic Area)

Disaggregation	Contact	No Contact	Don't know
Overall	15%	81%	4%
Sex			

Women	13%	83%	4%
Men	16%	79%	5%
Residency Status			
IDPs	12%	87%	1%
Returnees (internal displacement)	16%	82%	2%
Returnees (abroad)	20%	78%	2%
Host community	18%	80%	2%
Disability Status			
With disabilities	18%	80%	2%
Without disabilities	15%	81%	4%

Table 26: Contact with Cadastre / Real Estate Offices by Sex, Residency Status, and Disability Status

Governorate	Contact	No Contact	Don't know
Damascus	16%	82%	3%
Rural Damascus	22%	76%	2%
Aleppo	12%	87%	1%
Homs	14%	66%	20%
Hama	5%	92%	3%
Idleb	41%	59%	0%
Ar-Raqqa	10%	84%	6%
Al-Hasakeh	6%	93%	2%
Daraa	0%	99%	1%

Table 27: Contact with Cadastre / Real Estate Offices by Governorate

Disaggregation	Cadastre only	Cadastre + Court	Court only	Other pathways
Overall	21%	10%	4%	65%
Sex				
Women	12%	3%	4%	81%
Men	26%	14%	4%	56%
Residency Status				
IDPs	32%	8%	3%	57%
Returnees (internal displacement)	18%	19%	4%	59%
Returnees (abroad)	14%	22%	6%	58%
Host community	19%	11%	4%	66%
Disability Status				
With disabilities	5%	9%	3%	83%
Without disabilities	23%	11%	4%	62%

Table 28: Offices Contacted by Sex, Residency Status, and Disability Status

Disaggregation	Functioning	Not functioning	Partially / slowly functioning
Women	78%	4%	18%
Men	75%	6%	19%
With disabilities	91%	0%	9%
Without disabilities	74%	6%	20%
Overall	76%	5%	19%

Table 29: Office Functionality at Time of Contact

Disaggregation	Very accessible	Somewhat accessible	Not accessible
Women	17%	69%	14%
Men	34%	54%	12%
With disabilities	23%	50%	27%
Without disabilities	30%	60%	10%
Overall	28%	60%	12%

Table 30: Accessibility of Cadastre / Real Estate Offices

Disaggregation Dimension	Category	Sought Legal Assistance (%)	Did Not Seek Legal Assistance (%)
Overall	Total sample	30%	70%
Sex	Women	29%	71%
	Men	31%	69%
Residency Status	Host community	37%	63%
	IDPs	25%	75%
	Returnees (internal)	33%	67%
	Returnees (abroad)	22%	78%
Disability Status	With disabilities	42%	58%
	Without disabilities	29%	71%
Governorate	Ar-Raqqa	57%	43%
	Rural Damascus	49%	51%
	Damascus	41%	59%
	Idleb	34%	66%
	Aleppo	25%	75%

Al-Hasakeh	25%	75%
Homs	18%	82%
Hama	12%	88%
Daraa	3%	97%

Table 31: Engagement with Legal Assistance for HLP and Documentation Issues

Miscellaneous

Pathway / Source	Overall (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	IDPs (%)	Disability (%)
Lawyer	57%	61%	54%	68%	52%
Court (direct)	7%	4%	9%	7%	8%
Local committees	5%	4%	5%	2%	10%
NGOs / CSOs	6%	4%	8%	9%	6%
Mixed / informal pathways	25%	27%	24%	14%	24%

Table 32: Primary Pathways Used to Access Legal Assistance

Entry Point	Overall (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	IDPs (%)	Disability (%)
Lawyer	47%	51%	45%	55%	50%
Court	17%	11%	20%	12%	18%
NGO	13%	7%	17%	14%	12%
Local committee	6%	9%	3%	2%	8%
Police	8%	10%	7%	6%	4%
Would do nothing	2%	2%	2%	3%	2%

Table 33: First Point of Contact for Resolving a Legal Problem Today

Group	Yes (%)	Maybe (%)	No (%)
Women	59%	27%	13%
Men	63%	27%	10%
IDPs	54%	27%	19%
Returnees (abroad)	84%	12%	4%
PwD	70%	22%	8%
Without disabilities	60%	28%	13%
Overall	61%	27%	12%

Table 34: Confidence in Approaching Courts or Authorities

Type of Assistance	Overall (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	Disability
Financial support for fees	24%	10%	14%	3%
Legal counselling	20%	8%	13%	3%
Replacing lost/destroyed documents	19%	7%	12%	2%
Court representation	12%	4%	8%	1%
Awareness sessions	10%	4%	6%	1%
Mobile legal clinics	9%	4%	5%	2%

Table 35: Priority Legal Assistance Needs

Governorate	Interested %	Not Interested %
Damascus	78%	23%
Aleppo	75%	25%
Rural Damascus	61%	39%

Homs	33%	67%
Hama	57%	43%
Idleb	51%	49%
Al-Hasakeh	48%	53%
Ar-Raqqa	100%	0%
Daraa	98%	2%
Total	65%	35%

Table 36: Interest In Attending Community Legal Awareness Sessions



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