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Voluntary Returns of Syrian Refugees and IDPs

THREE-MONTH IMPACT REPORT

January - March 2025

Humanitarian context

The fall of the Assad regime in early December 2024 has prompted mass movements within much of Syria, with at least 1 million internally displaced people (IDPs) returning to their areas of origin. From neighbouring countries, nearly 400,000 Syrians have returned to Syria.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is currently not promoting returns to Syria given due to ongoing uncertainty and insecurity and is focused on facilitating voluntary returns for those who choose to return. This is based on actual and projected returns, intentions expressed by refugees in UNHCR's latest intention survey in neighbouring countries, and driven by requests from refugees seeking UNHCR's support to facilitate their return. As outlined in UNHCR's [Operational Framework for voluntary return of Syrian refugees and IDPs](#), the process will be gradual and phased, grounded on the voluntary character of return and refugees' well-informed and free choices. Up to 1.5 million

Syrians may return from Jordan, Lebanon, Türkiye, Iraq and Egypt in 2025, alongside 2 million IDPs.

The voluntary return of Syrian refugees, primarily from the neighbouring countries, and IDPs has been ongoing amid the recent displacement of 1 million people, following an offensive by armed opposition groups beginning in northwest Syria on 27 November. In addition, between late September and late November, Syria received more than half a million Syrians and Lebanese fleeing Israeli airstrikes in neighbouring Lebanon.

Nearly 14 years of conflict have devastated Syria's economy and infrastructure, leaving 90 per cent of the population reliant on aid. More than 16 million Syrians inside the country still need urgent help—food, shelter, healthcare, and more, and over 7.4 million Syrians remain displaced in the country.

The needs are immense, but there is now hope for a historic opportunity to rebuild.

“People here need lifesaving help - like shelter. But to rebuild their lives, they need much more: jobs, healthcare, schools, services...There is a real sense of hope here. To sustain it requires a global effort.”

[UN High Commissioner for refugees Filippo Grandi](#)

UNHCR Response

Throughout years of conflict, UNHCR and its partners have been on the ground in Syria, delivering life-saving assistance wherever possible, and continue to do so. Operating in a highly dynamic environment, UNHCR remains adaptable and responsive to the evolving reality. As refugees and IDPs begin to return, UNHCR and its partners are scaling up humanitarian aid to address their significant needs, ensuring that returns are safe, voluntary, and dignified. While not promoting returns, UNHCR remains

committed to supporting refugees who choose to return voluntarily. This support includes transportation, legal assistance, home repairs, as well as cash assistance and the provision of relief items such as mattresses, blankets, and winter clothing.

Millions of Syrian refugees who remain outside, including 1.2 million in EU Member States, have been trying to assess what the new reality means for them and their families. They must be given the space and time to make an informed decision

without any pressure. It is important to avoid any premature return to Syria and to prevent further displacement or pressure on Syria.

UNHCR strongly encourages host states to maintain a flexible approach to short-term visits to Syria – experience has shown these can help facilitate fully informed decisions and are key to ensure the sustainability of return.

UNHCR is ready and already supports Syrian refugees who, after being fully informed about the situation in their areas of origin or alternative destinations, as well as the **implications of their return on their legal status in their host state**, choose to return voluntarily.

Preparatory activities

Since 8 December, UNHCR has been closely coordinating preparedness efforts at the inter-agency level through established refugee return

coordination groups at the regional and the country level within the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) coordination framework. The 3RP remains the primary mechanism for coordinating ongoing assistance for refugees in neighbouring countries and refugee return movements in host countries.

UNHCR has developed an information portal, “[Syria is Home](#),” to provide accurate and up-to-date details in English and Arabic, supporting refugees who are willing to return to Syria.

The return process

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of return dynamics, UNHCR continually enhances its data collection efforts and leverages a variety of tools for regular, evidence-based analysis. These include daily border monitoring, refugee surveys, and the triangulation of information



UNHCR monitors returns at a bus station near the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing in rural Idlib, Syria. UNHCR and its partner are supporting returnees with free transportation upon arrival at the border, and are providing information about UNHCR-supported Community Centres across Syria. © UNHCR/Hameed Maarouf

with neighbouring countries. In addition, UNHCR draws on official data from host governments to refine its assessments and improve response planning.

UNHCR maintains a consistent presence at key locations in host countries, including critical border crossing points: Lebanon (Joussieh and Jdaidet Yabous), Jordan (Nassib), and Türkiye (13 Provinces from where returns are processed and 5 border crossing points: Cilvegözü / Bab al-Hawa, Yayladağı / Keseb, Öncüpınar / Bab al-Salama, Karkamış / Jarablus and Akçakale / Tel Abyad). This allows UNHCR to monitor return trends, assess needs, and provide crucial assistance. At these border points in Syria, returnees are provided with information on available services in their areas of return and receive counselling. In February alone, referral services were provided to approximately 11,000 returnees registered with UNHCR.

Provision of transportation services has been crucial in facilitating safe and dignified returns.

In Syria, UNHCR has continued to provide transportation assistance at border crossings, particularly for individuals crossing through Bab Al-Hawa, helping them to reach their final destinations.

UNHCR also facilitates transportation of IDP returns. For example, on 4 March, UNHCR supported the return of 403 individuals from Areesha camp in Syria's Hasakeh governorate to their areas of origin in Deir ez-Zor.

In Jordan, since the start of a transportation pilot project on 20 January, UNHCR has supported nearly 1,300 refugees to return to Syria. Before departure, in-person interviews are conducted to ensure that returns are voluntary and well-informed, with counselling and information provided on available services inside Syria.

UNHCR also continues to engage with IDP returnees from Idlib and refugee returnees from Lebanon, Türkiye and Jordan, identifying their needs through home visits and follow-up referrals



Omar Askar, a 15-year-old Syrian refugee, prepares to return to Syria from Jordan with his mother and siblings at Amman bus station, in March 2025. UNHCR Jordan has initiated a bus transport project to support their return, with around 1,500 refugees having used this service so far. © UNHCR/Houssam Hariri

to UNHCR-supported community centres, mobile teams and outreach volunteer. This includes the registration of refugee returnee families to

ensure they receive the necessary support upon their return.

“The challenges here are many. We are in a community with huge needs ... there is a lot of destruction. People are returning to live in [homes] without roofs, without kitchens, without proper services, without proper infrastructure. We are here to respond and to provide services. We are trying to prioritize with the community what to respond to first.”

Hiba Shannan, UNHCR Assistant Protection Officer in Dar’a.

Protection and reintegration inside Syria

Through an extensive network of community-based services, UNHCR is providing key support to returning refugees and IDPs in areas including civil documentation (such as identity cards, marriage authentication and property ownership documents), distribution of core relief items, hygiene kits, cash assistance, and livelihood opportunities.

UNHCR-supported community centres remain at the heart of protection services, with 107 out of 122 centres operational and 114 mobile units providing critical assistance. They offer legal aid, agricultural support, medical assistance, mental health and psychosocial services, gender-based violence prevention, and child protection case management, among other services. These community centres also provide a meeting space for returnees and community members to gather, discuss common challenges and launch grassroots initiatives for mutual support. In addition, UNHCR has engaged 2,240 community outreach volunteers in all 14 governorates to scale up the response.

In February, over 25,700 individuals in Aleppo, Dar’a, Deir-ez-Zor, Hama, Homs, Rural Damascus, Al-Hasakeh and Ar-Raqqa governorates, including recent returnees from Lebanon and other governorates, received core relief and winter

items. These included jackets, rubber boots, carpets, heaters and solar devices.

UNHCR and partners are also helping rehabilitate damaged homes, including restoring broken doors and windows. These are particularly important in winter months so that returnees can be safe and warm in their homes and start rebuilding their lives. Despite challenges such as shortage of construction materials and fuel, UNHCR supported approximately 11,900 people in need of shelter assistance. Between December 2024 and February 2025, UNHCR provided emergency shelter support to 113,209 refugees and IDPs. This included providing and installing tents, repairing collective shelters, maintaining and expanding camps for IDPs as well as provision of emergency shelter response at the borders. As part of UNHCR’s overall shelter activities, UNHCR also worked to restore basic public infrastructure, such as repairing boreholes, rehabilitating sewage systems, and installing solar streetlights.

UNHCR is promoting sustainable solutions through livelihood opportunities that empower Syrians to achieve self-sufficiency and reduce their dependence on aid. In February alone, UNHCR supported over 5,000 individuals (1,100 families) across 10 governorates through various inclusion initiatives. These efforts included

providing agricultural inputs and assets for farming and livestock rearing, offering trainings and grants to help establish small businesses. In Damascus, Rural Damascus and Quneitra governorates, UNHCR provided multi-purpose

cash assistance to 2,205 individuals (470 families) who had returned, helping them to meet their basic needs – while also contributing to the local economy.

“We returned with nothing. We left all our belongings behind. [The house] had no doors or windows. Now, we feel warm, and for the first time in years, we feel safe. The doors used to be open, leaving us exposed, now we finally have a sense of security.”

Abdel Hamid Al-Hashimi, Syrian returnee, imam and farmer on the renovations received to their house in Barneh, southern Aleppo, thanks to UNHCR and partners.

Ongoing needs

Returning refugees and IDPs face immense challenges with livelihood and reintegration, and will require long-term assistance to regain access to essential services, housing, and rebuilding livelihoods.

It is critical that support mechanisms, including delivering cash assistance and setting up income-generating activities, are put in place so that returnees have more stability in the long term. Longer-term psychosocial support is also

essential, as more than a decade of conflict and displacement has taken a heavy mental toll on all Syrians.

While the path to recovery remains long, continued support and a coordinated approach are essential to achieving a better future for Syria and its people. UNHCR is committed to supporting Syrians in rebuilding their lives with safety, dignity, and resilience.

Donor acknowledgement

UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors for the Syria situation. Donors that contributed \$100,000 or above to the Syria situation:

Denmark | European Union | Germany | Iceland | Ireland | Kingdom of the Netherlands | Luxembourg | Monaco | Norway | Qatar | Spain | Sweden | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | United States of America

UNHCR extends its gratitude to donors for the critical support provided for the Syria refugees return situation. Donors that contributed \$100,000 or above to the Syria refugees return situation:

Austria | European Union | France | Japan | Poland | Central Emergency Response Fund

Flexible funding

Flexible, multi-year funding is essential to adapt to evolving return dynamics and provide sustained reintegration support in Syria. It also ensures ongoing protection and stability for refugees who remain in host countries. By investing in flexible funding, donors enhance efficiency, predictability, and long-term solutions for millions affected by displacement.

Cover photo: A sister tightly embraces her brother after seeing him for the first time in 10 years at a bus stop near the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing with Türkiye, in rural Idlib, Syria. © UNHCR/Hameed Maarouf