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A man walking down a street next to tall buildings in Syria.

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Researched and written by: Wassim Ben Romdhane

Reviewed by: Bram Frouws

Layout and design: Ren Oving

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About MMC: MMC is a knowledge centre engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programming on mixed migration. MMC has regional hubs in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America, with a global team headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, and based in several countries worldwide.

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About this document

This report examines the experiences of Syrians who returned after the fall of the Assad regime on 8 December 2024, drawing on original 4Mi data collected between 7 November and 14 December 2025 with **1,574 IDP returnees** and **2,229 returnees from abroad** across **Aleppo, Homs and Idleb**. It analyses return as a process rather than a single event, tracing the conditions that preceded return, the decisions and journeys that shaped it, and the realities respondents encountered after arrival.

The report presents findings on respondents' displacement and migration histories, return drivers, preparedness and support before return, the return journey itself, post-return living conditions, access to services, assistance, reintegration progress, and future plans. By comparing the experiences of IDP returnees and returnees from abroad, and by examining differences across governorates, this study provides grounded evidence on how return is unfolding in practice in Syria today. The findings are intended to inform policymakers, practitioners and researchers working on return, reintegration and protection in Syria.

Key findings

- **Return was often prompted by perceived improvements in Syria, but post-return conditions remained fragile.** Improved safety, security and freedom of movement were major drivers of return, yet many respondents returned to contexts marked by weak livelihoods, strained housing conditions, limited services and persistent needs.
- **Conditions in locations of displacement/host countries also shaped return decisions.** Among returnees from abroad, discrimination, lack of prospects and dissatisfaction with life in the host country were prominent pressures, with especially adverse patterns reported among respondents returning from Lebanon.
- **Return was generally described as self-directed, but not necessarily unconstrained.** Most respondents said return had been their own decision, yet limited support, weak information, legal insecurity and pressure in host or displacement contexts often narrowed the range of options available to them.
- **Economic reintegration emerged as the main post-return challenge.** Across the sample, many respondents reported difficulty securing an income, insufficient household income, food-related worry and extensive need for cash and livelihood support, pointing to economic insecurity as a major obstacle to sustainable return.
- **Social reintegration appeared stronger than material reintegration.** Many respondents reported strong family and community ties, a sense of belonging, and progress in reconnecting socially after return, even though emotional stress remained widespread and material conditions often remained precarious.
- **Post-return assistance reached very few respondents and often fell short of reported needs.** Only a small minority had received assistance after their return, while a large share continued to report the need for cash support, basic needs assistance, housing support, and livelihood-related support.
- **Return and reintegration conditions differed sharply across governorates.** Aleppo generally appeared more favourable across several indicators, while Homs and Idleb more often emerged as locations where respondents reported greater economic strain, more limited service access and weaker reintegration outcomes.
- **Most respondents were not planning to move again in the near term.** Despite the fragility of post-return conditions, the large majority said they intended to remain in their current location over the next 12 months, suggesting a pattern of cautious settlement rather than immediate further move within Syria or abroad.

Key terminology

- Returnee: [UNHCR](#) defines a returnee as a refugee or internally displaced person who has returned to their country or area of origin to remain there permanently.
- Internally displaced person (IDP): According to [OHCHR](#), IDPs are persons or groups forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular because of conflict, violence, human rights violations or disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised border.
- Assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR): As defined by [IOM](#), AVRR schemes are administrative, logistical or financial support, including reintegration assistance, provided to migrants unable or unwilling to remain in the host or transit country and who decide to return. IDP returnees may also receive support through formal return and reintegration programmes, but these are treated separately from AVRR.
- Reintegration: [IOM](#) describes reintegration as a multidimensional process enabling individuals to re-establish the economic, social and psychosocial relationships needed to maintain life, livelihoods and dignity in the context of return.
- Return/return migration: The act or process of going back or being taken back to the point of departure, or to the country or place of origin ([IOM](#)).

Specifically for this study, the following Syria-specific definitions were adopted:

- Returnee from abroad: For this report, a Syrian who returned to Syria after living in another country, regardless of whether they returned to their place of origin or elsewhere.
- IDP returnee: Defined as any Syrian who had been displaced within Syria and returned to their sub-district of origin.
- Area of return: The place in Syria where the respondent was living at the time of the interview after return.
- Country of migration/host country: The country in which a returnee from abroad had been living before returning to Syria.

Introduction

Return to Syria has drastically increased, but it is not yet stabilising. More than a decade after the onset of conflict, Syria remains one of the **largest and most protracted displacement crises globally**, with displacement still defining the lives of millions. As of early 2026, **over 12 million Syrians remain displaced**, including around 6 million refugees in neighbouring countries and more than 5.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Syria. At the same time, return is gaining momentum within a context still characterised by **structural fragility, protracted vulnerability, and uneven recovery**.¹

Following the fall of the Assad regime on 8 December 2024, Syria entered a pivotal phase marked by considerable internal and cross-border return movements. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of 5 March 2026, **1,488,667 individuals had returned to Syria from abroad since 8 December 2024, alongside more than 1.73 million IDP returns over a similar period**.² This represents a significant shift after years in which large-scale return remained limited. **These return movements do not, however, point to a straightforward transition towards stability.** Large-scale return is occurring alongside continued displacement, with millions still unable or unwilling to return, and localised insecurity, economic hardship, and environmental pressures continuing to drive new displacement. **Return and displacement are therefore unfolding simultaneously rather than sequentially.**

Conditions inside Syria continue to constrain the extent to which return can be considered safe, voluntary, or sustainable. Humanitarian needs remain extensive, with **an estimated 15.6 million people requiring assistance as of March 2026**.³ **More than 90% of the population is estimated to live below the poverty line**, reflecting the cumulative effects of prolonged conflict, economic collapse, and deteriorating public services.⁴ Infrastructure damage remains widespread, with reconstruction needs estimated at over USD 216 billion and real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) having contracted by more than 50% since 2010.⁵ Access to essential services such as healthcare, education, water, and electricity remains uneven and frequently limited, particularly in areas affected by repeated displacement or sustained hostilities.

These structural constraints are directly reflected in return experiences. Returnees often come back to damaged or destroyed housing, unresolved housing, land and property (HLP) issues, limited livelihood opportunities, and barriers to accessing documentation and public services.⁶ **Protection risks persist**, including exposure to unexploded ordnance, risks of detention, and restrictions on movement.⁷ **In this context, return does not necessarily mark the end of vulnerability.** For many, it represents a transition into new forms of precarity, where the ability to remain is contingent on navigating multiple, overlapping constraints.

At the same time, **return decisions are shaped not only by conditions inside Syria but also by pressures in host countries.** Legal uncertainty, economic hardship, reduced access to services, and shifting policy environments in countries of asylum continue to influence decision-making. For many Syrians, return reflects a constrained choice rather than a fully voluntary one, undertaken in the absence of viable alternatives.⁸ Understanding these dynamics is essential to interpreting current return trends and assessing their longer-term implications.

Against this backdrop, **this report examines return as a process rather than an endpoint.** Drawing on 4Mi data collected with Syrians who have returned from abroad and those returning from other areas in Syria after displacement, it traces the full return trajectory, from pre-return conditions and decision-making to the journey itself and post-return experiences. It examines key dimensions of reintegration, including access to housing, services, livelihoods, documentation, safety and social support, as well as returnees' perceptions of their current situation and future mobility intentions.

The analysis recognises return as a dynamic and often non-linear experience. By centring returnees' own perspectives, it offers insight into how return unfolds in practice and the extent to which it can be considered sustainable under current conditions.

In a context where return is increasingly central to policy and programming debates, this evidence helps ground discussion in the realities faced by those returning. At a time when return is often read as a sign of stabilisation, the report highlights the extent to which it remains shaped by structural constraints, uneven conditions and difficult trade-offs.

1 UNHCR (2026) [Syria situation: Regional Flash Update #67](#).

2 Ibid.

3 OCHA (2026) [Syrian Arab Republic: 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan](#).

4 Human Rights Watch (2025) [World Report 2025: Syria](#).

5 World Bank (2025) [Syria's Post-Conflict Reconstruction Costs Estimated at USD 216 billion](#).

6 Norwegian Refugee Council (2025) [The obstacles to sustainable return in Syria](#).

7 UNHCR (2026) [Syria situation: Regional Flash Update #66](#).

8 Human Rights Watch (2025) [World Report 2025: Syria](#).

Methodology

Methodological approach

Study design and approach

This report is based on quantitative data collected through MMC's global standardised 4Mi Returns survey, a module of its broader 4Mi data collection initiative. For this study, the tool was adapted to the specific return context in Syria through refinements to question wording and response options, as well as the inclusion of Syria-specific questions. Two tailored survey tools were used, one for returnees from abroad and one for IDP returnees.

For this study, and for the first time in MMC's research on returns, the 4Mi Returns methodology was extended to cover contexts of internal return through the development of a dedicated IDP returnee version of the survey. This was designed to ensure that questions remained relevant to respondents returning from displacement within Syria, while preserving as much comparability as possible with the tool used for returnees from abroad.

The research focused on four broad questions: the drivers and decision-making processes behind return; the journey and the conditions shaping return and reintegration; the protection, service-related and socio-economic challenges respondents faced after return; and their future mobility intentions and investment plans. Collectively, the study examines return not as a single moment of movement, but as a process shaped by pre-return conditions, the journey itself, and the realities of reintegration after arrival.

Survey coverage and sample

Fieldwork was conducted between 7 November and 14 December 2025 in Aleppo, Homs and Idlib governorates. These governorates were selected to provide coverage across key return locations while accounting for the size of IDP and returnee-from-abroad populations, geographic spread, diversity in local conditions, and operational feasibility.

Within each governorate, fieldwork was designed to ensure broad spatial coverage across sub-districts, while taking into account the relative size of returnee populations at the sub-district level. This approach helped ensure that data collection captured a range of return contexts rather than focusing too narrowly on only a limited number of locations across the assessed governorates.

In total, 3,803 respondents were surveyed, comprising 1,574 IDP returnees and 2,229 returnees from abroad. The achieved sample was also closely balanced across the three governorates, with 1,282 respondents in Aleppo, 1,268 in Homs, and 1,253 in Idlib. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the achieved sample by governorate and population group.

Table 1. Data collection breakdown, by governorate and population group

Governorate	IDP returnees	Returnees from abroad	Total
Aleppo	537	745	1,282
Homs	535	733	1,268
Idlib	502	751	1,253
Total	1,574	2,229	3,803

Data collection and respondent selection

The study targeted adult Syrians aged 18 years and above who had returned after 8 December 2024 and had been back in their area of return for at least three months at the time of the survey, in order to allow sufficient time for initial reintegration experiences to emerge. For IDP returnees, eligibility required return to the respondent's sub-district of origin. Returnees from abroad, by contrast, were eligible if they had returned to Syria, regardless of whether they had returned to their sub-district of origin.

Data collection followed a non-probabilistic sampling approach, combining purposive sampling with snowball/referral sampling. Purposive sampling was used to identify respondents who matched the required return profile, while referral-based sampling helped reach additional eligible participants, including respondents who may have been less visible or harder to identify directly. Referrals were screened against the study's selection criteria before inclusion. Surveys were conducted face to face by trained enumerators using Kobo Collect. Interviews took place in person and in settings intended to ensure privacy, safety and respondent comfort.

Ethical considerations

The research followed MMC's ethical standards and placed strong emphasis on safeguarding the safety, dignity and rights of all participants throughout the data collection process. Several principles guided implementation:

First, the research was conducted in line with a do-no-harm approach. Care was taken to minimise the risk of distress, stigma or other adverse consequences, including by conducting interviews in settings that were as safe, calm and private as possible.

Second, informed consent and confidentiality were central to the research process. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to decline to answer any question or to stop the interview at any point. Data were anonymised and handled confidentially.

Third, the study adopted a people-centred and inclusive approach by prioritising returnees' own perspectives and ensuring that data collection included both IDP returnees and returnees from abroad, across different governorates and respondent profiles.

Fourth, data collection was carried out by trained enumerators familiar with ethical research practice and with the careful handling of potentially sensitive topics; most were themselves returnees, which helped strengthen contextual understanding and rapport during interviews.

Finally, responsible data management procedures were followed throughout, with information stored securely and used solely for research purposes.

Data limitations

As with any non-probability survey, the findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than statistically representative of all Syrian returnees. The sample was designed to capture a broad range of return experiences across selected governorates and sub-districts, but the results cannot be generalised to all returnees in Syria or to areas not covered by the study.

Because the survey is cross-sectional, it captures conditions and perceptions at one point in time rather than tracing how reintegration evolves over a longer period. In addition, although the study sought broad geographic spread within each governorate, access, feasibility and the practical realities of fieldwork inevitably shaped where data collection could be carried out.

A further limitation concerns the size of some subgroups within the achieved sample. Returnees who came back through assisted voluntary return schemes or through forced return modalities, as well as respondents returning from countries other than the main neighbouring host countries (e.g. from European countries), were captured only in relatively small numbers. This reflects the broader dynamics of return during the study period, but it also means that the experiences of these groups, which may differ in important ways from those of other respondents, are only partially reflected in the research findings and should be explored through further research.

Potential for longitudinal follow-up

A distinctive feature of this study is that the 4Mi Returns tool can support potential longitudinal follow-up with respondents, including through indicators that can be revisited over time to assess changes in reintegration conditions, mobility intentions and return outcomes.

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked whether they consented to be recontacted for future surveys. In total, 1,732 of the 2,229 returnees from abroad and 1,174 of the 1,574 IDP returnees consented and provided contact details. This creates scope for future follow-up data collection that would examine whether initial intentions to remain hold, how livelihoods and service access change, and which factors most strongly shape longer-term reintegration outcomes and future intentions. In a context such as Syria, where return conditions remain fluid and uneven, this kind of longitudinal evidence would be particularly valuable.

For more information about MMC's prior longitudinal research with mobile populations, see studies conducted in [Libya](#), [Somalia](#), [Tunisia](#), [Kenya](#), and [Sudan](#), as well as a [methodological paper](#) providing insights into tracking individuals in fluid and complex environments.

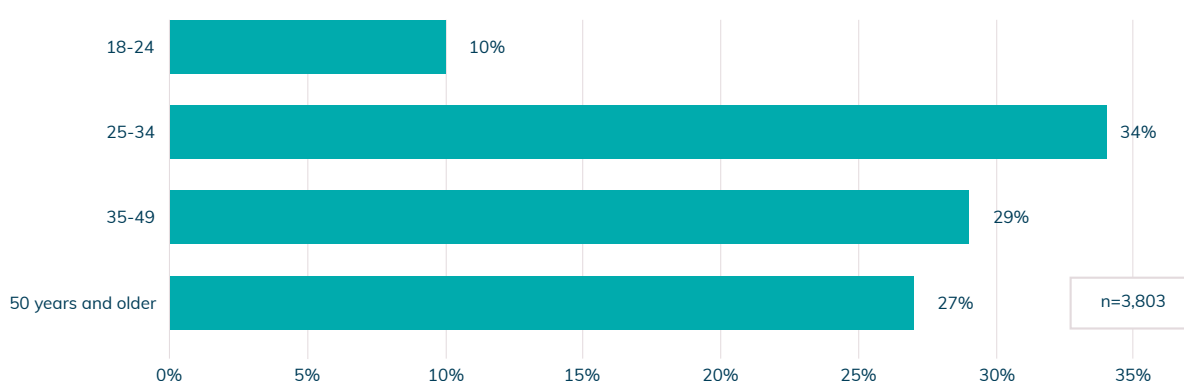
Respondent profiles

Overall profile of respondents

Of the 3,803 respondents, 59% were returnees from abroad, and 41% were IDP returnees. The overall sample was distributed almost evenly across Aleppo (34%), Homs (33%) and Idlib (33%), ensuring a balanced geographic base within the selected fieldwork areas.

The sample was also broadly balanced by sex, comprising 52% men and 48% women overall. Meanwhile, respondents were predominantly of working age. The median age across all respondents was approximately 37 years. Figure 1 shows respondents' age distribution by range.

Figure 1. Age distribution of respondents



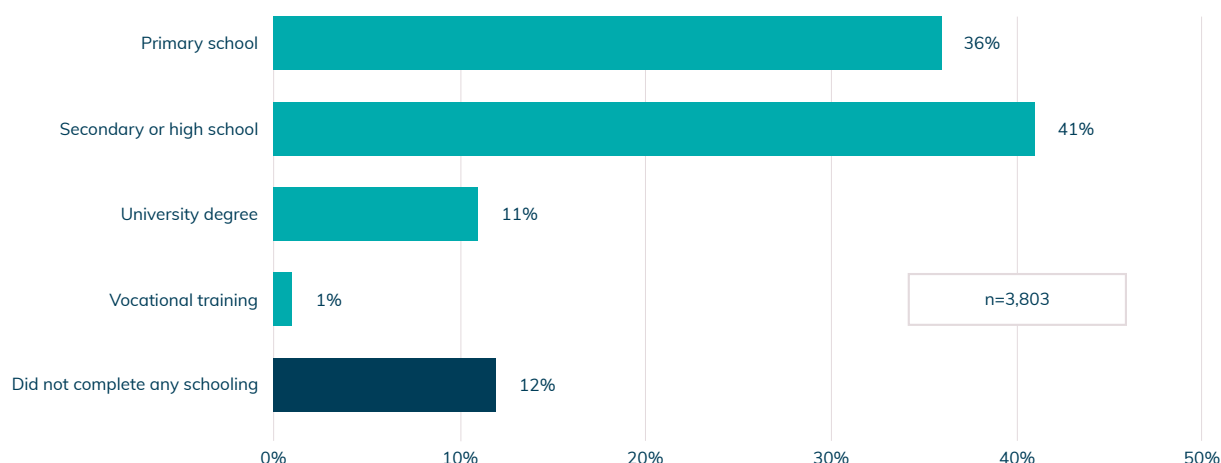
Presence of children in respondents' households

The presence of children was a prominent feature of respondents' profiles. Across all respondents, 71% reported having children, and 68% said they were currently living with children under the age of 18 in their care. Among those living with children in their care, the median number of children was three in both population groups. The prominence of caregiving responsibilities is particularly relevant for understanding post-return needs in relation to housing, education, livelihoods and access to services.

Education

Most respondents had completed at least some formal schooling. Across the full sample, 41% had completed secondary or high school, 36% primary school, and 11% a university degree. Around 12% reported not having completed any schooling, while vocational training was reported only rarely.

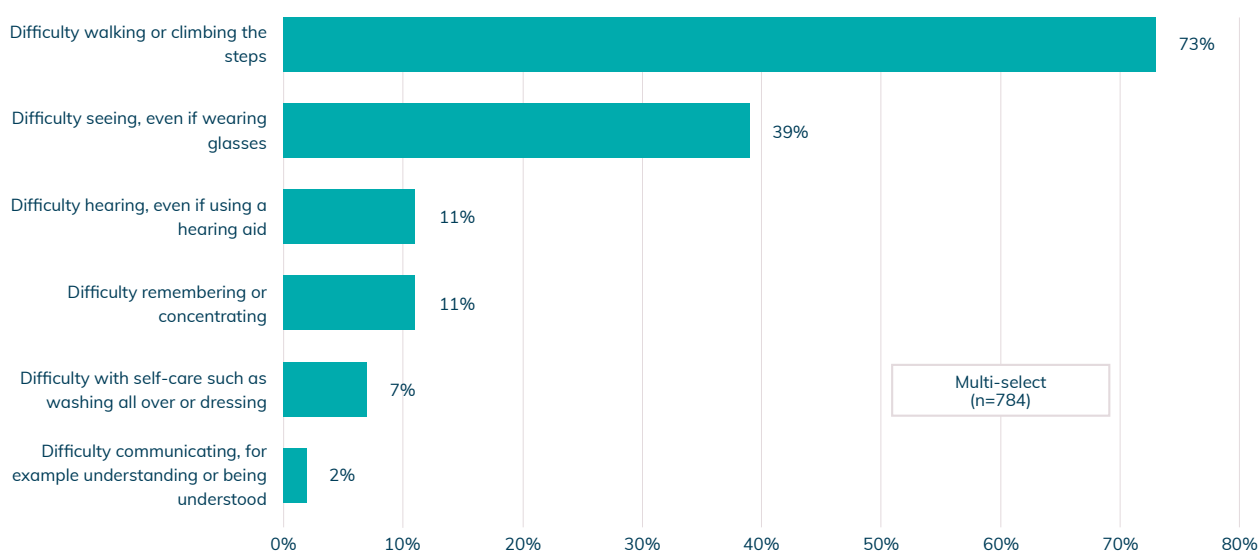
Figure 2. Reported educational attainment among respondents



Functional difficulties

Respondents were also asked an adapted version of the Washington Group short set of questions on functional difficulties.⁹ A sizeable minority reported serious difficulty in at least one functional domain (20%). Among this subgroup, the most commonly cited difficulties related to walking or climbing steps and seeing, pointing to a subgroup of returnees who may face particular needs or heightened vulnerability in accessing services and navigating reintegration after return.

Figure 3. Reported functional difficulties, among those who reported experiencing them

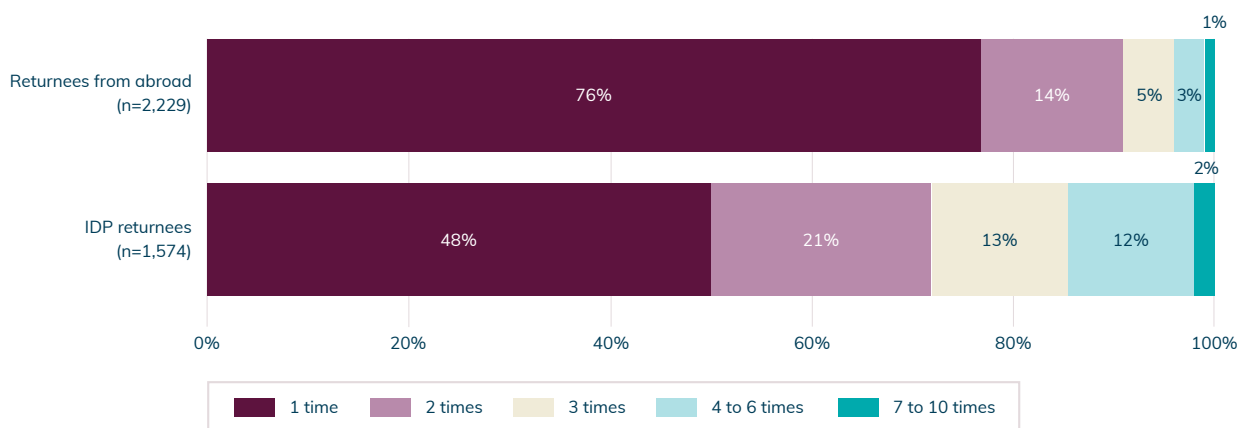


⁹ The Washington Group Short Set is a standardised set of six questions used in censuses and surveys to identify people at risk of restricted participation because of difficulties across basic functional domains. It covers seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, remembering or concentrating, self-care, and communication, and was developed by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics using the WHO International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health as its conceptual framework. In this study, rather than asking the standard six questions separately, respondents were first asked a general screening question about serious difficulties across the six functional areas, followed by a question to identify the relevant domain(s). For further details, see "[WG Short Set on Functioning \(WG-SS\)](#)".

Displacement and migration histories

Prior movement histories were often marked by repeated episodes rather than a single trajectory. Among IDP returnees, only 48% said they had been displaced once from their sub-district of origin, meaning that a majority had experienced repeated displacement. Around 18% reported having been displaced four times or more. Among returnees from abroad, repeated migration was less common: 76% said they had migrated from Syria once, while around 5% reported having migrated four or more times.

Figure 4. In total, how many times have you been displaced/migrated? (By return profile)



Among IDP returnees, the type of place lived in before return was also varied. Around 24% had been living in a formal camp, 16% in an informal settlement, and 60% in another type of setting.

Governorates of residence prior to leaving Syria, for returnees from abroad

For returnees from abroad, return was in most cases to the same governorate in which respondents had been living before leaving. This was especially the case among those surveyed in Aleppo and Idlib, where 98% and 92%, respectively, said they had been living in the same governorate before leaving Syria. Among respondents surveyed in Homs, 83% had been residing in the governorate before leaving, while smaller shares had previously been living in Rural Damascus (7%) or Idlib (4%).

Research findings

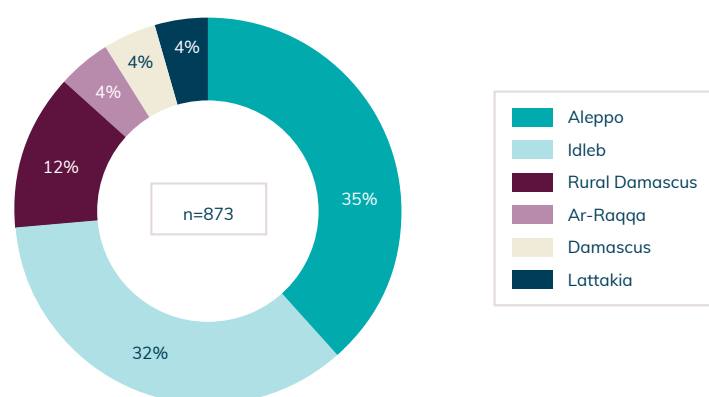
1. Background to outward movement and life before return

1.1 Places of last displacement/migration prior to return

Return was typically preceded not by brief movement, but by prolonged periods spent elsewhere, whether in internal displacement or abroad. The places respondents were returning from also reflected the broader geography of Syria's displacement and migration over the past decade.

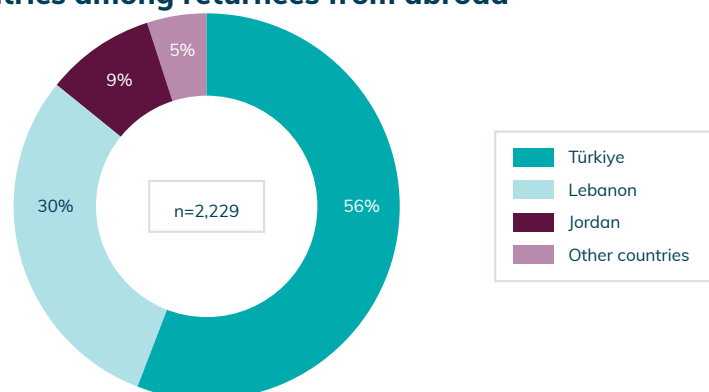
Among IDP returnees, displacement within the same governorate emerged as the dominant pattern before return, although cross-governorate displacement was also common. Those surveyed in Aleppo had most often been displaced within Aleppo itself (61%), while those surveyed in Idleb had overwhelmingly returned from other sub-districts in Idleb (67%). At the same time, respondents returning to Homs had a more mixed displacement history, including sizeable shares displaced from Aleppo (41%), Idleb (30%) and Rural Damascus (16%), which points to a more geographically diverse pattern of prior movement. Among surveyed IDP returnees, the largest shares reported having been displaced from Aleppo (40%) and Idleb (39%) before return, with much smaller proportions coming from Rural Damascus (7%) or Homs (4%).

Figure 5. Most common displacement governorates, among cross-governorate IDP returnees¹⁰



Among returnees from abroad, neighbouring countries had been the most common host countries. More than half had returned from Türkiye (56%), followed by Lebanon (30%) and Jordan (9%). Here, too, the pattern varied clearly by governorate of return. Respondents returning to Aleppo had overwhelmingly come from Türkiye (81%), whereas those returning to Homs were much more likely to have returned from Lebanon (42%) or Jordan (26%). Among those returning to Idleb, Türkiye was the most commonly reported host country (58%), though Lebanon also accounted for a sizeable share (36%).

Figure 6. Host countries among returnees from abroad¹¹



¹⁰ Other reported governorates included Hama (3%), Tartous (2%), Homs (2%), Al-Hasakeh (2%), and Deir-ez-Zor (1%).

¹¹ "Other countries" refers to all reported host countries other than Türkiye, Lebanon and Jordan. These included Germany (n=12), Libya (n=12), Saudi Arabia (n=17), Egypt (n=18), Iraq (n=24), Algeria (n=6), the United Arab Emirates (n=5), Sweden (n=4), Cyprus (n=3), France (n=3), Brazil (n=1), Denmark (n=1), the Russian Federation (n=1), Canada (n=1), the Netherlands (n=1), the United Kingdom (n=1), Kuwait (n=1), the United States (n=1) and Belgium (n=1). These countries were grouped together under one category because the sample size for each was too small to allow for meaningful separate presentation.

1.2 Reasons for outward movement

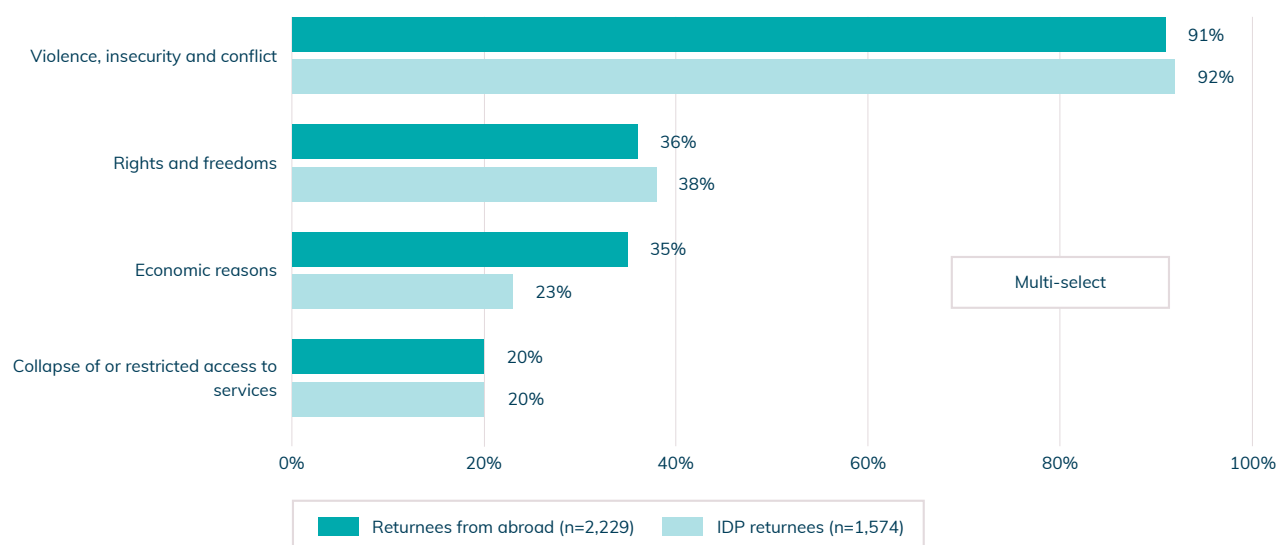
Outward movement appears to have been driven above all by insecurity, but the findings point to layered pressures rather than a single trigger. Conflict-related threats were nearly universal, yet restrictions on rights, economic strain and weakened access to services also formed part of the picture.

Violence, insecurity and conflict were cited by 92% of IDP returnees and 91% of returnees from abroad as reasons for leaving their homes. Restrictions on rights and freedoms were mentioned by 38% of IDP returnees and 36% of returnees from abroad, while 20% in each group referred to the collapse of or restricted access to services. The similarity across the two populations suggests that both internal and cross-border movement were rooted in a common landscape of conflict, insecurity, persecution and constraint. Economic reasons were more salient among returnees from abroad than among IDP returnees (35% versus 23%), suggesting that although protection-related pressures remained central across both groups, cross-border movements were also more often shaped by the search for viable livelihoods.

Mobility drivers also differed across governorates. Among the combined sample, respondents returning to Homs stood out for citing restrictions on rights and freedoms (73%) and collapse of services (30%) far more often than economic reasons (3%) as reasons for leaving home. By contrast, respondents returning to Aleppo and Idlib were much more likely to mention economic reasons (42% and 45%, respectively).

"I left the country to avoid compulsory military service and because I was afraid of war, but I had to leave behind my education and studies because of that."
20-year-old man, returnee from abroad, living in Homs

Figure 7. Most reported mobility drivers, by return profile¹²



1.3 Outward journeys and intended destinations

1.3.1 Risk and irregularity during outward journeys

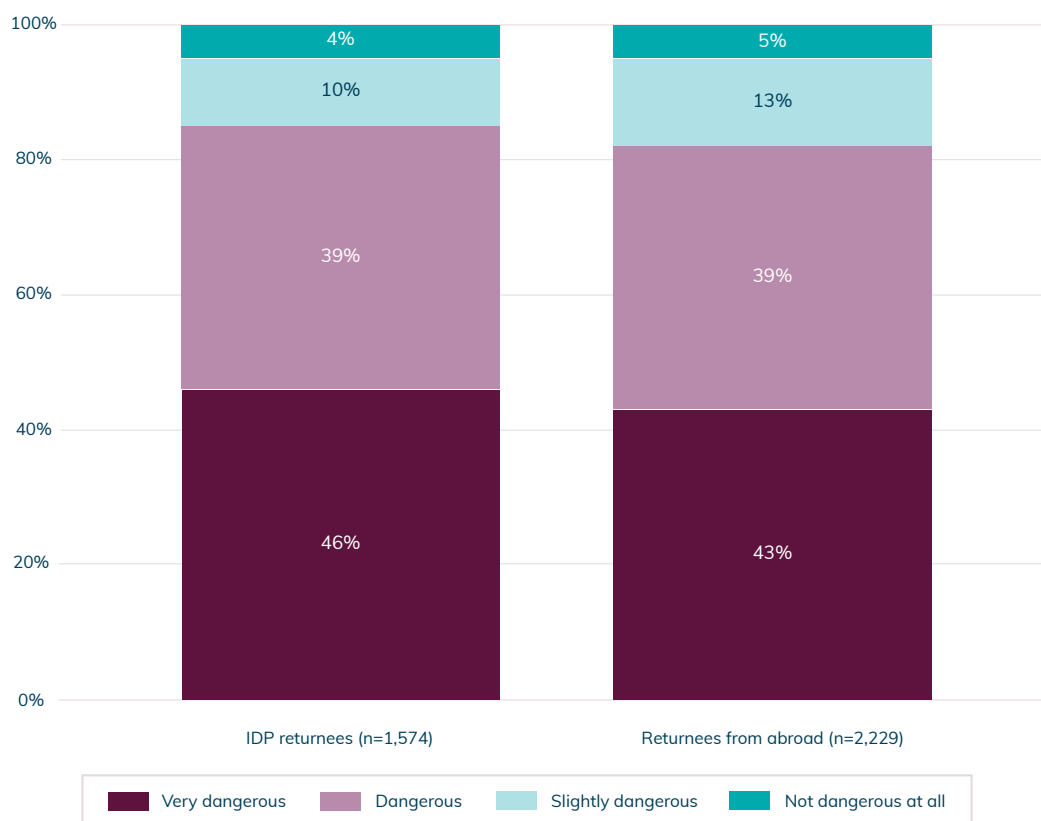
Respondents' earlier journeys were widely experienced as dangerous, and often acutely so, underscoring the level of risk embedded in their movement trajectories.

Across the combined sample, 84% described their outward journey as either dangerous (39%) or very dangerous (45%). The pattern was strikingly similar across population groups, with 85% of IDP returnees and 82% of returnees from abroad describing the journey in these terms. Respondents returning to Homs were especially likely to characterise

¹² The remaining responses were specific to the survey for returnees from abroad, as they are not applicable to internal displacement contexts (see IDMC's [definition of internal displacement and its drivers](#)). These included personal or family reasons (7%) and culture of migration (1%).

their initial outward journey as very dangerous: 57% did so, compared with 31% of those returning to Aleppo and 46% of those returning to Idlib.

Figure 8. How would you describe your displacement/migration journey? (By return profile)



1.3.2 Preparedness and access to information before leaving

Many respondents appear to have left with a sense of the dangers involved, but with much less clarity about what awaited them in the place or country where they would settle.

Sixty-nine per cent of IDP returnees and 61% of returnees from abroad agreed or strongly agreed that, before leaving, they had been aware of the difficulties and risks they might face during the journey. Awareness of life in the eventual destination was notably weaker. Only 27% of IDP returnees and 25% of returnees from abroad agreed or strongly agreed that they knew what life would be like where they would settle, while 36% and 43%, respectively, disagreed or strongly disagreed. A further 18% of IDP returnees and 10% of returnees from abroad said they had not known where they would settle at all. These findings suggest that respondents often embarked on movement with some anticipation of danger, but with far less certainty about the practical realities of life afterwards.

1.3.3 Duration away and reaching the intended destination

Many respondents returned after lengthy periods of relative settlement elsewhere rather than after brief episodes of movement. Three quarters of IDP returnees (75%) had spent at least five years in their place of displacement, including 62% who had spent between five and ten years there. Among returnees from abroad, time away was even longer: 91% had spent at least five years in their host country, and half (50%) had remained there for 10 to 20 years. These figures indicate that many respondents were returning after lengthy periods of relative settlement elsewhere rather than after brief episodes of movement.

Most respondents had ultimately ended up in the place they had intended to reach, but this was considerably more common among returnees from abroad than among IDP returnees. Eighty-seven per cent of returnees from abroad said their host country had been the one they had intended to reach, compared with 70% of IDP returnees who said the same of their location of displacement. The gap was especially pronounced among respondents returning to Homs, where only 63% reported that they had reached their intended destination, compared with 87% in Aleppo and 90% in Idlib.

Among respondents who did not make it to their intended destination, social networks were the most frequently cited explanation in both groups, with 40% of IDP returnees (n=287) and 44% of returnees from abroad (n=245) reporting they instead relocated or remained where friends, relatives or members of their community were present. Beyond that shared pattern, other divergent reasons were reported. Among IDP returnees (n=287), road closures, checkpoints or movement restrictions were cited by 26%, and 20% said they had run out of money or resources to continue. Among returnees from abroad (n=245), insecurity in the intended area was cited by 31%, denied permission or inability to obtain authorisation by 18%, and poor health by 12%. This suggests that failed attempts to reach a destination are shaped both by the pull of social ties and by the practical or legal constraints specific to internal and cross-border movement.

1.4 Life while away from home

1.4.1 Family presence while away

For most respondents, life away from home unfolded in a family setting rather than in isolation.

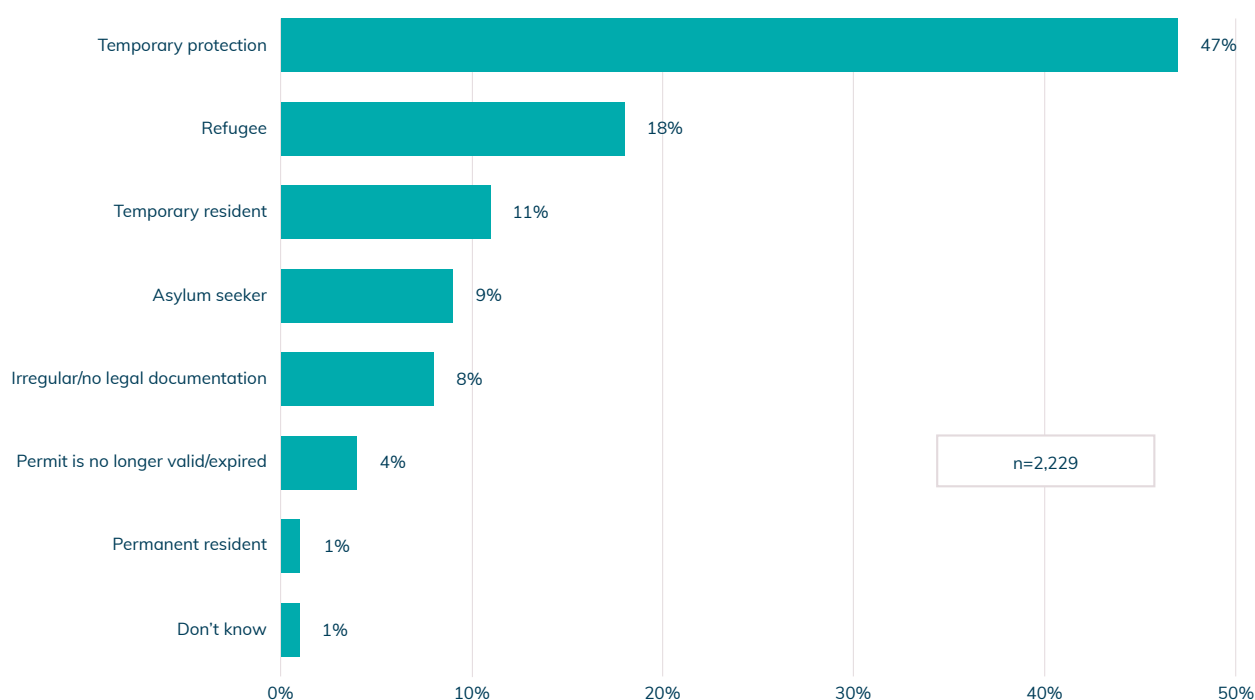
The majority of respondents moved together with family members and were living with them while away. Ninety-six per cent of IDP returnees and 93% of returnees from abroad reported that family members had been with them in the place or country where they had been living before return.

1.4.2 Legal status in the host country

Among returnees from abroad, pre-return legal status varied markedly by host country, pointing to quite different migration governance and protection frameworks across contexts.

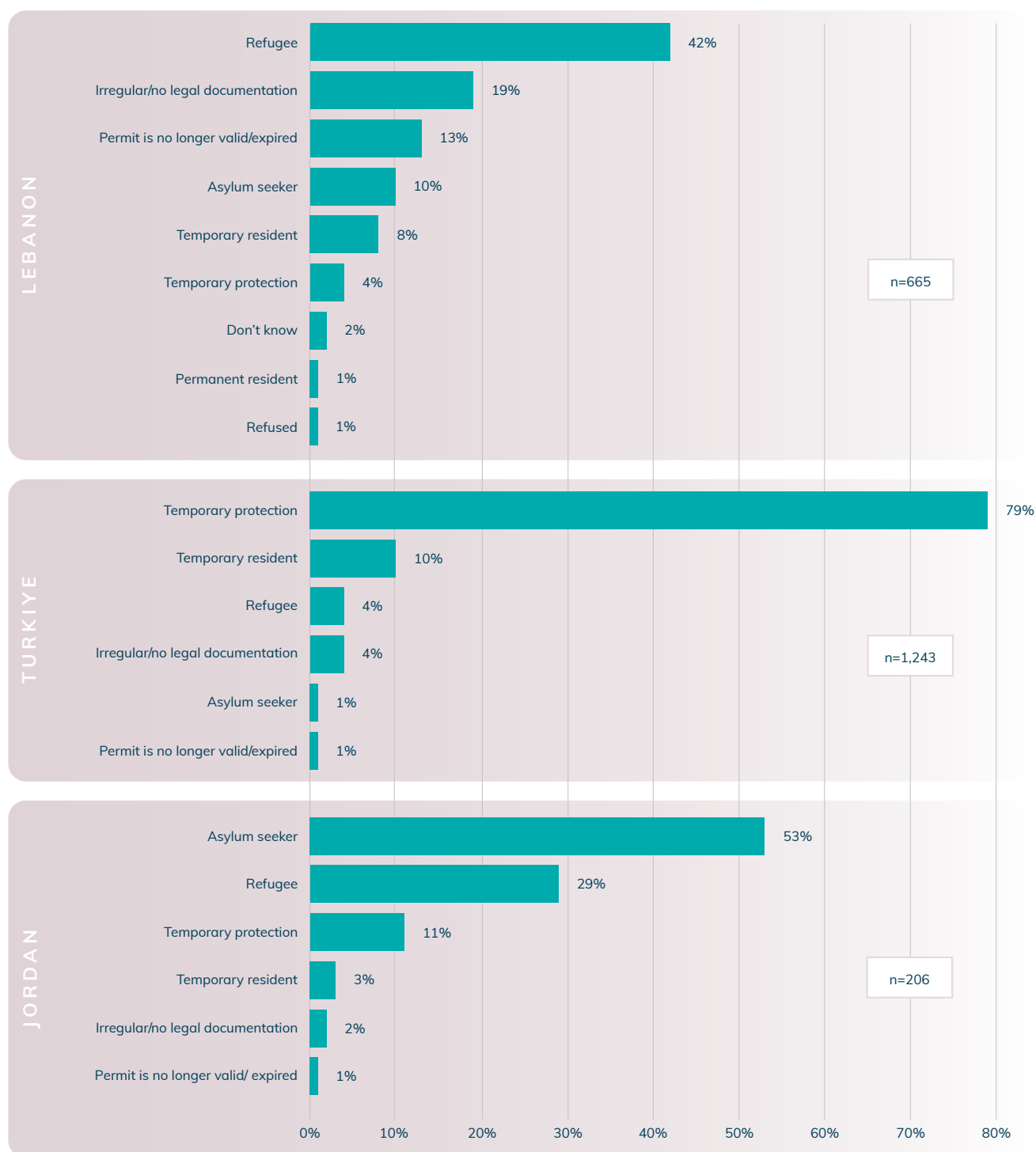
Overall, the largest share reported having held temporary protection (47%), followed by refugee status (18%), temporary residence permits or visas (11%) and asylum seeker status (9%). A further 8% reported being irregular or having no legal documents to stay in the country, while 4% said their permit was no longer valid.

Figure 9. Legal status in the host country, among returnees from abroad



The pattern also differed clearly by host country. Among respondents returning from Türkiye, temporary protection overwhelmingly dominated (79%), followed at a distance by temporary residence permits (10%). Among those returning from Lebanon, refugee status was the most commonly reported category (42%), but legal precarity appears to have been more pronounced there than in the other main host countries: 19% reported irregular stay or no legal documentation, and a further 13% said their permit was no longer valid. Among respondents returning from Jordan, asylum-seeker status was most common (53%), followed by refugee status (29%) and temporary protection (11%).

Figure 10. Legal status in the host country, among returnees those returning from Lebanon, Jordan, and Türkiye, by country.



Gender differences suggest some variation in how these statuses were experienced overall. Men were more likely than women to report temporary protection (52% versus 40%), whereas women more often reported refugee status (21% versus 15%) or asylum seeker status (11% versus 6%).

1.4.3 Schooling and economic activity while away

Experiences while away were marked by uneven access to education and work, and livelihoods in particular appear to have been shaped by precarity and strong gender divisions.

Only a minority of respondents had been of school age while displaced or abroad: 16% of IDP returnees and 24% of returnees from abroad. Among those who had been of school age, access to formal schooling appears to have been limited. Just 35% of IDP returnees (n=254) and 28% of returnees from abroad (n=539) who reported being school-age

stated that they had had formal schooling in the place or country where they were living. Overall, across both groups, this amounted to 30% among respondents who had been of school age while away.

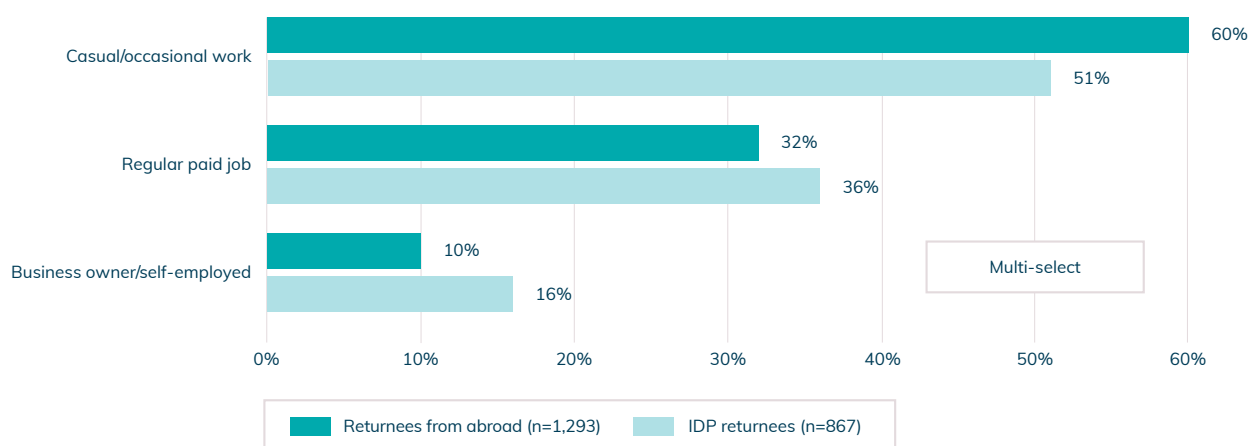
A modest majority reported having worked or engaged in income-generating activity while displaced or abroad, though this conceals a pronounced gender divide. Among all respondents, 55% of IDP returnees and 58% of returnees from abroad said they had undertaken paid work or other income-generating activity. Yet across the combined sample, 84% of men reported doing so compared with only 27% of women.

1.4.4 Work arrangements and sectors of employment

Where respondents did work, that work was often insecure, and the labour market experiences reported by men and women were sharply differentiated.

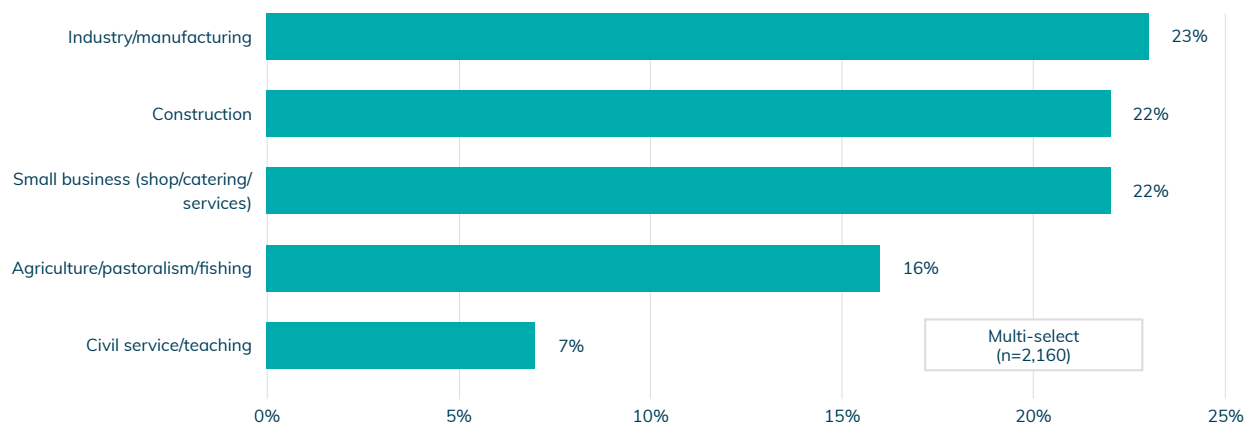
Among those who had worked, casual or occasional work was the most commonly reported arrangement among both IDP returnees (51%, n=867) and returnees from abroad (60%, n=1293), while regular paid jobs accounted for 36% and 32%, respectively. Self-employment was less common, particularly among returnees from abroad (10%, compared with 16% among IDP returnees).

Figure 11. Type of work arrangement among those who worked (By return profile)



Across the combined sample of respondents who had worked while away (n=2,160), the most commonly reported sectors were industry and manufacturing (23%), small business and services (22%), and construction (22%), followed by agriculture, pastoralism or fishing (16%). Patterns also varied by gender. Men were far more likely than women to report work in construction (28% versus 1%), while women were more likely to report agriculture, pastoralism or fishing (26% versus 13%), civil service or teaching (17% versus 3%), domestic work (13% versus 0%), and health work (8% versus 1%).

Figure 12. Most common work sectors among those who worked¹³



¹³ Less commonly reported work sectors included police/military (5%), driving/transportation (5%), domestic work (4%), health services (3%), security sectors (1%), and other sectors (1%).

1.4.5 Skills and qualifications acquired while away

Skills acquisition appears to have been limited for many respondents, particularly among IDP returnees, which may constrain the extent to which time away translated into stronger livelihood prospects upon return.

Seventy-six per cent of IDP returnees and 59% of returnees from abroad said they had not acquired any skills or qualifications while away that they thought would improve their economic opportunities in Syria. Among those who did report acquiring something, the most commonly cited categories among returnees from abroad were languages (23%), vocational qualifications (14%) and practical or manual skills without formal qualification (13%). For IDP returnees, the reported gains were more modest, with vocational qualifications (10%) and practical or manual skills (8%) most commonly mentioned.

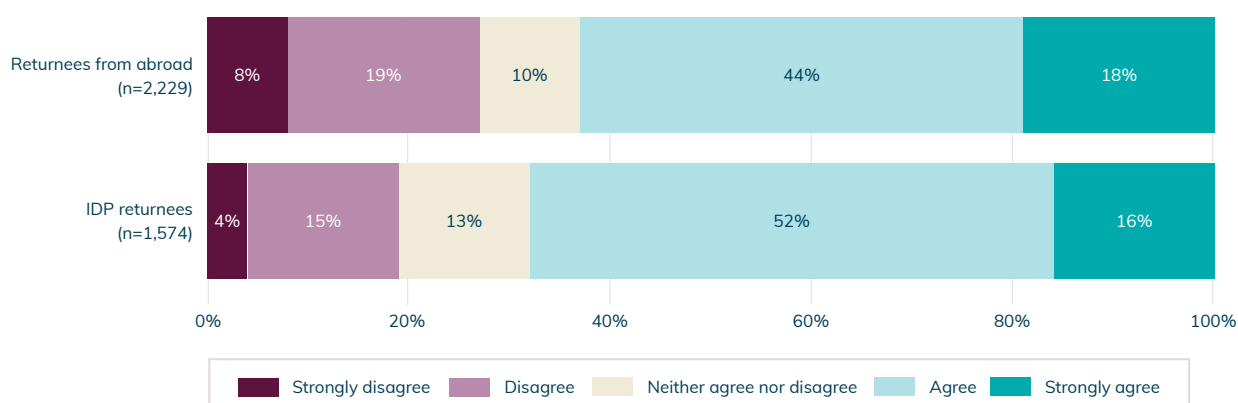
1.5 Perceptions of life before return

Life before return was not described in uniformly negative terms. Many respondents reported feeling safe and did not express regret about the place or country where they had settled, yet experiences also appear to have been uneven and, in some cases, disappointing.

1.5.1 Safety, security at destination

Even so, many respondents reported having felt safe where they were living before return. Sixty-eight per cent of IDP returnees and 62% of returnees from abroad agreed or strongly agreed that they and their families had felt safe and secure in the place or country where they had been living before return. The relative closeness of these two figures suggests that perceived safety did not differ markedly between the two populations overall.

Figure 13. To what extent do you agree with this statement: “I (and my family) felt safe and secure”?



Among returnees from abroad, perceptions of safety also differed sharply by host country. Respondents returning from Jordan were by far the most likely to report having felt safe and secure there, with 92% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. The equivalent share was 77% among those returning from Türkiye and 73% among those returning from other countries. Lebanon stood apart much more negatively: only 25% of respondents returning from Lebanon agreed or strongly agreed that they had felt safe and secure there, while 56% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

“We felt danger and constant fear when we were in the host country [Lebanon] because we were suffering from discrimination.”

28-year-old woman, returnee from abroad, living in Idlib

Escalation of hostilities in Lebanon: mass displacement and return-as-flight dynamics

The escalation of hostilities in Lebanon beginning in early March 2026 rapidly transformed displacement dynamics, generating large-scale population movements within a matter of days. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), by mid-March, 1,049,328 people were affected by displacement, with 968 killed (including 116 children) and 2,432 injured (including 356 children) as of 18 March.¹⁴ Additionally, airstrikes, shelling, recurrent evacuation warnings and ground operations have expanded in both scale and geographic reach, driving widespread displacement and causing extensive damage to homes, healthcare facilities, roads, water networks and public services.¹⁵

For Syrians in Lebanon, the escalation accelerated cross-border movement towards Syria in ways that complicate standard understandings of return. Humanitarian reporting in March indicated that tens of thousands of Syrians had crossed into Syria within days of the escalation, alongside smaller numbers of Lebanese nationals.¹⁶ These movements are analytically complex. Some households may have already been considering return, but others appear to have moved in response to immediate insecurity, evacuation pressures or the loss of shelter and services. In practice, cross-border movements during this period are therefore likely to include a mix of planned return, short-term protective movement and conflict-induced flight, underscoring the need to interpret return figures in light of the conditions under which mobility occurred.¹⁷

1.5.2 Regret about the location/country of settlement

Regret about having moved was also relatively limited overall. Most respondents did not report regretting the place or country where they had settled before returning: 61% of IDP returnees and 60% of returnees from abroad disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that they regretted having relocated there. At the aggregate level, this suggests that return was not necessarily preceded by a wholesale rejection of life elsewhere.

Host country differences among returnees from abroad again point to markedly uneven experiences. Respondents returning from Türkiye and Jordan were the least likely to express regret, with 72% and 71%, respectively, disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that they regretted having gone there. The equivalent share was also relatively high among those returning from other countries (66%). Lebanon again stood out more negatively. Only 35% of respondents returning from Lebanon disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, while 53% agreed or strongly agreed that they regretted having been there.

"We really went through hell in Lebanon. We lived under harsh conditions there... May those days never come back."

23-year-old man, returnee from abroad, living in Homs

1.5.3 Expectations Vs reality in the host country

Among returnees from abroad, 45% said that life in the host country had not met their expectations, while only 28% said it had met them and 1% said it had exceeded them. A further 25% said they had not had any initial expectations. **This points to a broadly ambivalent picture in which disappointment was common, but not universal.**

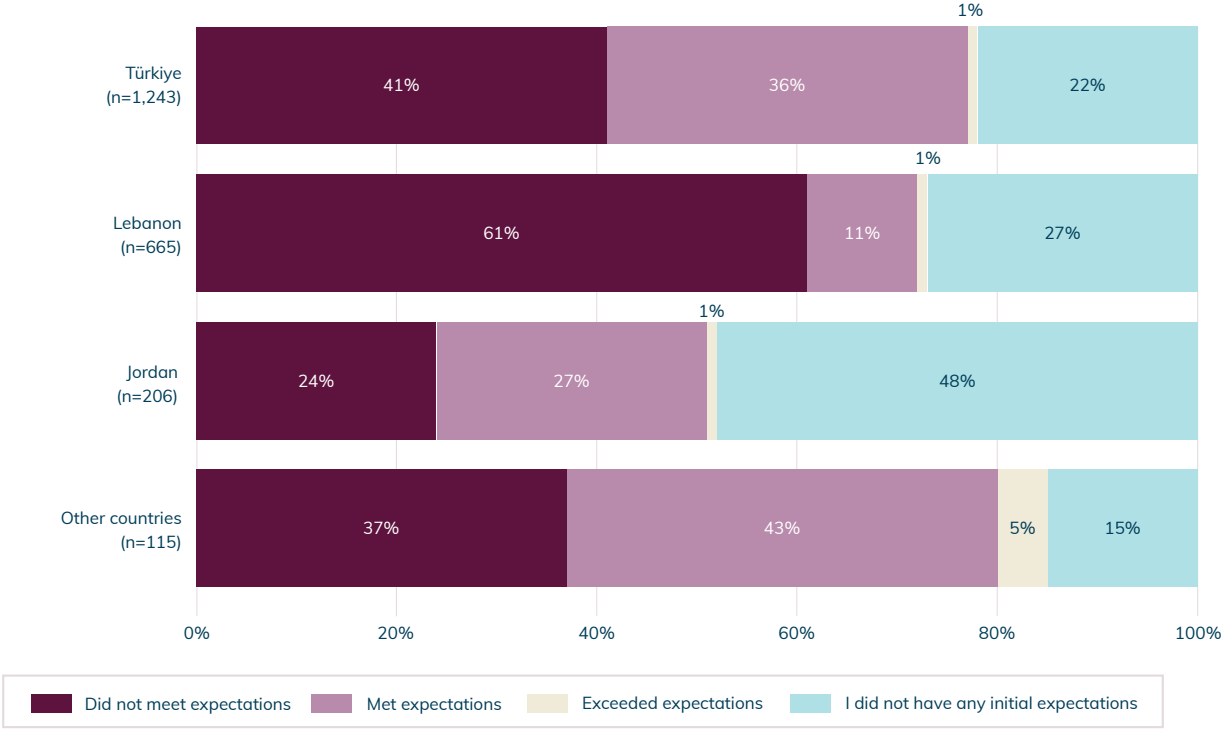
14 UNICEF (2026) [Lebanon Humanitarian Situation Report No. 1 \(Escalation of Hostilities\)](#), 19 March 2026.

15 WHO (2026) [Lebanon Health Emergency Sitrep #12, 20 March 2026](#); UNHCR (2026) [EU support brings urgent aid to families forced to flee their homes in Lebanon](#).

16 OCHA (2026) Lebanon: [Flash Update #7 - Escalation of hostilities in Lebanon, 11 March 2026](#); UNHCR (2026) [Lebanon Flash Update #2, 9-15 March 2026](#).

17 UNHCR (2026) [UNHCR responds to rising displacement in Middle East emergency](#).

Figure 14. In general, to what extent would you say that your life at destination met your expectations? (Among returnees from abroad, by host country)



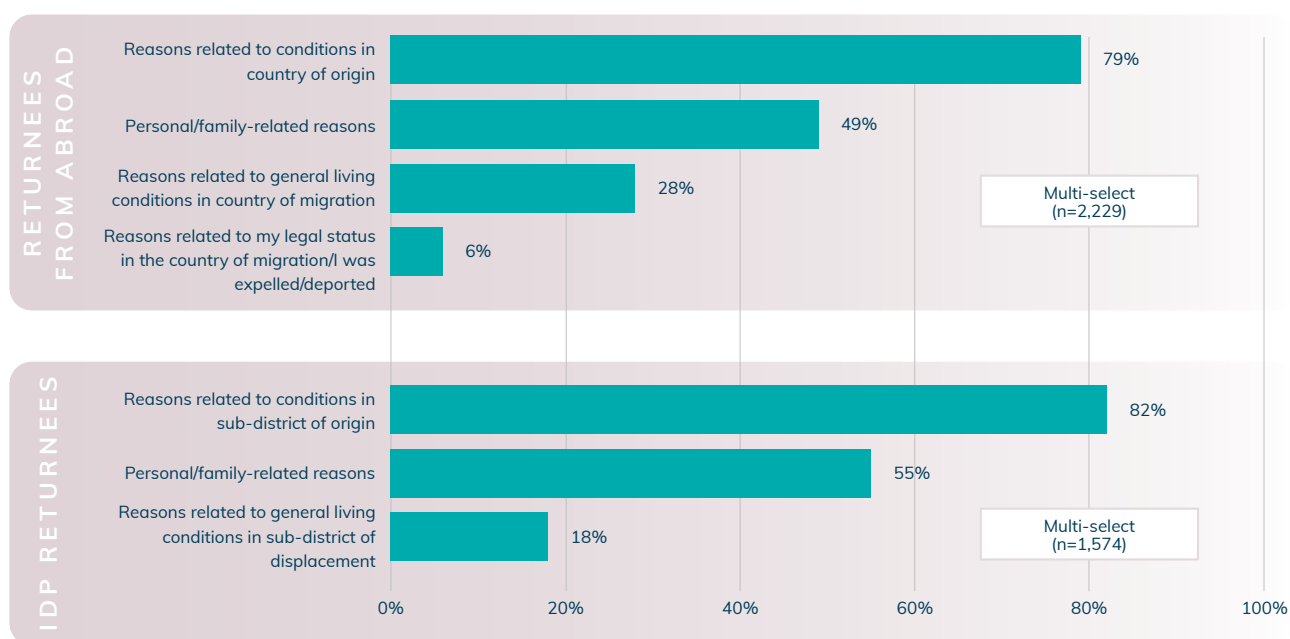
2. Decision-making, preparedness and the return journey

2.1 Drivers of return

Return was driven above all by changes or perceived improvements in conditions in Syria and in respondents' areas of origin, with family considerations providing a second major pull. Conditions in the place or country where respondents had been living also mattered, but more as an additional pressure than as the principal explanation for return.

Across the combined sample, 81% cited reasons related to conditions in Syria or their area of origin, 51% personal or family-related reasons, and 24% living conditions in the place or country where they had been living before return. Legal-status-related reasons were far less widespread overall (3%), though they were more relevant among returnees from abroad, 6% of whom cited them. Reasons related to conditions in Syria or the place of origin were reported at similarly high levels among IDP returnees and returnees from abroad (82% and 79%, respectively), while pressures linked to living conditions where respondents had been staying were more common among returnees from abroad than among IDP returnees (28% versus 18%).

Figure 15. Reported drivers of return, by return profile

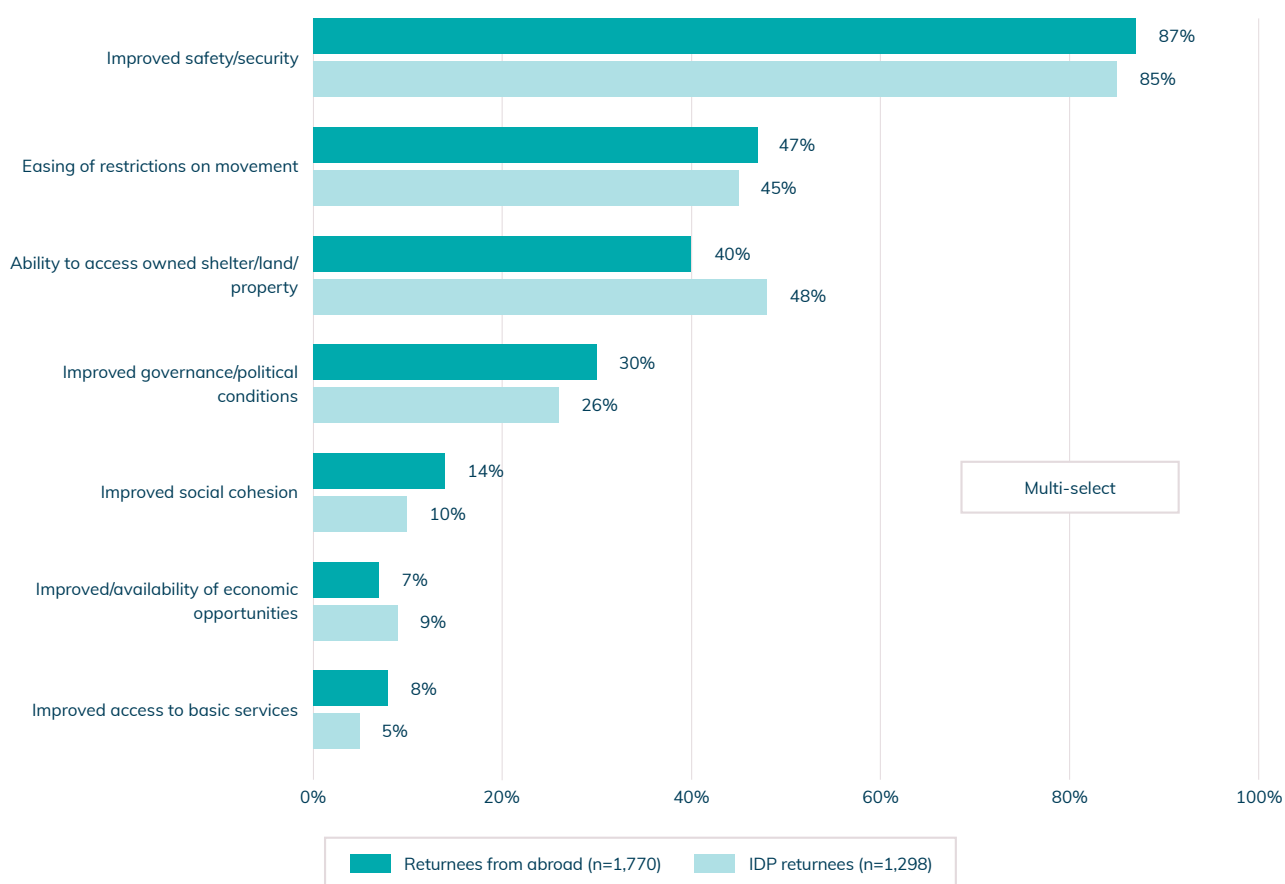


2.1.1 Conditions in Syria and the place of origin

Among the reported origin-related drivers of return, perceived improved perceived safety and security stood out overwhelmingly, followed at some distance by freer movement and the possibility of recovering access to housing, land or property.

Within the subset who cited conditions in Syria or their area of origin as a reason for return (n=3,068), 86% mentioned improved perceived safety and security, followed by the easing of restrictions on movement (46%) and the ability to access owned shelter, land or property (43%). Homs stood out most clearly on the first two points: 95% of respondents returning there cited improved perceived safety and security, and 56% cited the removal of movement restrictions. Access to property was especially prominent among respondents returning to Idlib (53%) and Homs (49%), suggesting that return was often tied not simply to a general sense of improvement, but to more concrete prospects of re-establishing everyday life.

Figure 16. Most commonly reported origin-related drivers, among those citing such factors, by return profile¹⁸



2.1.2 Personal and family considerations

Family ties were nearly as central, and in many cases appear to have anchored return more strongly than economic calculations.

Within the group citing personal or family-related reasons for return (n=1,946), 83% said they returned to reunite with family or friends, while 72% cited nostalgia or homesickness. Reunification was especially prominent among respondents returning to Homs (93%), whereas nostalgia was particularly high among those returning to Idlib (90%). Other personal reasons were far more marginal.

“My children could not speak Arabic, and this was one of the main reasons for my return, because I wanted them to integrate with their relatives.”

29-year-old man, returnee from abroad, living in Aleppo

2.1.3 Pressures in the host country/place of displacement

Pressures in the place or country where respondents had been living before their return were more varied and, in some respects, more adverse.

For respondents who pointed to living conditions in displacement or abroad as a reason for return (n=898), 47% mentioned discrimination, 43% said they did not like life where they were living, 42% said they saw no prospects there,

¹⁸ Among IDP returnees, less frequently reported origin-related drivers included improved/availability of economic opportunities (9%), improved access to basic services (5%), and an improved economic situation (3%). For returnees from abroad, other answers encompassed improved access to basic services (8%), improved/availability of economic opportunities (7%), an improved economic situation (3%), and availability of improved access to humanitarian assistance (1%).

and 39% said they had not managed to make a living. The balance of reasons differed across the two populations. Among IDP returnees in this subset (n=277), the most frequently cited reasons were not seeing prospects in the place of displacement (47%), not managing to make a living (44%) and, similarly, not liking life there (44%). Among returnees from abroad in this subset (n=621), discrimination was especially prominent, cited by 60%, followed by not liking life in the host country (42%) and not seeing prospects there (40%). They were also much more likely than IDP returnees to report having experienced other forms of violation or abuse (23% versus 1%). The picture for returnees from abroad, therefore, appears more closely bound up with exclusion, mistreatment and unequal treatment, whereas among IDP returnees, the absence of prospects and livelihood strain featured more strongly.

"I was subjected to abuse and humiliation in Lebanon because I could not secure work and residency papers, and I was also economically unstable."

25-year-old man, returnee from abroad, living in Homs

Lebanon: structural precarity and a narrowing protection space

Lebanon's environment for Syrians was widely assessed as dire even before the December 2024 political transition, and key drivers of precarity persist. A large share of Syrian refugees have been reported to live in extreme poverty, often in informal settlements with poor services, while legal insecurity remains pervasive: a significant proportion lack valid residency, constraining movement and access to work, services and justice.¹⁹ These structural constraints are compounded by reduced humanitarian assistance, rising living costs and limited livelihood opportunities, reinforcing dependence on negative coping strategies and deepening household vulnerability.²⁰

This situation reflects a longer-term pattern in which Syrian refugees in Lebanon have faced overlapping economic, legal and protection pressures. Previous MMC analysis highlighted how deteriorating economic conditions, restrictions on legal stay, and limited access to formal labour markets had already left many Syrians in highly precarious situations, with constrained mobility and increasing exposure to exploitation and insecurity.²¹ These conditions form an important backdrop to current return dynamics, as they shape both the feasibility of remaining and the pressures influencing decision-making.

At the same time, Lebanon's policy and enforcement context has tightened. Measures introduced in 2024 to curb "irregular" stay and work have had knock-on effects on livelihoods and housing access, contributing to a broader contraction of protection space. These dynamics have been accompanied by increased exposure to arrest, eviction and deportation risks, as well as heightened perceptions of insecurity among Syrian communities.²² These structural pressures interact with coercive risk perceptions. Evidence points to an accumulation of "push" factors, amounting to a pattern of indirect coercion that can undermine the voluntariness of return decisions. Within this context, return is, in many cases, shaped not by a perceived improvement in conditions in Syria but by a gradual narrowing of viable alternatives in Lebanon.²³

Return policy has also evolved in ways that can blur "voluntary return" with constrained choice. Administrative facilitation measures, including the waiving of exit-related penalties and the expansion of organised and self-organised return support, have created more structured pathways for return.²⁴ At the same time, these mechanisms operate within a context of shrinking protection space and mounting socio-economic pressure, raising questions about the extent to which return decisions can be considered fully voluntary in practice.

19 UNHCR (2020) [Nine out of ten Syrian refugee families in Lebanon are now living in extreme poverty](#), UN study says.; UNHCR (2026) [Lebanon at a glance](#).

20 UNHCR (2026) [Protection Lebanon](#).

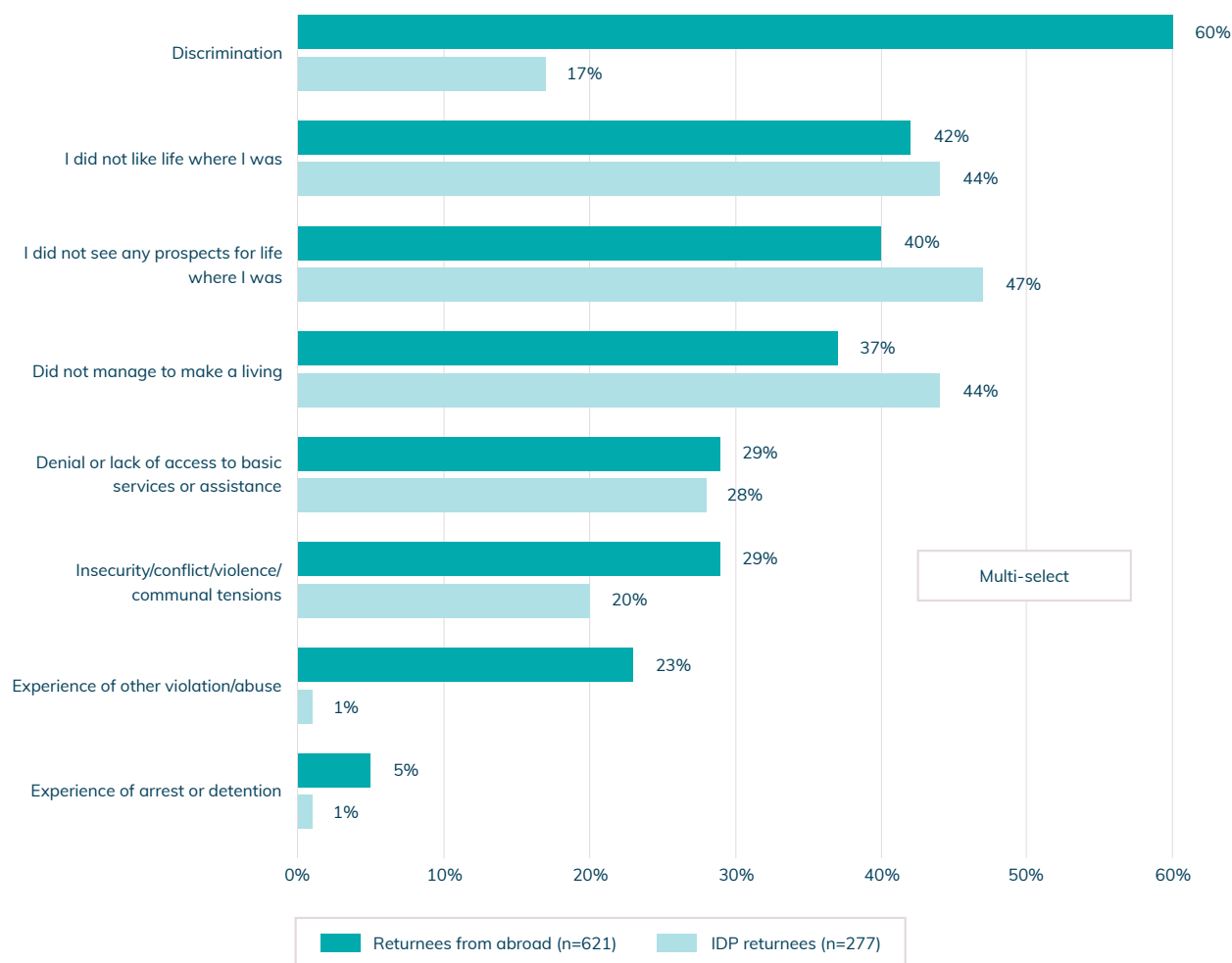
21 Mixed Migration Centre (2024) [Lebanon's escalating conflict: what are the displacement and migration consequences?](#)

22 EUAA (2025) [Lebanon: Return procedures](#); Refugee Protection Watch / CLDH (2025) [Refugee Protection Watch Report 2025](#).

23 Refugee Protection Watch (2025) [Fleeing and returning amid insecurity](#).

24 UNHCR (2025) [UNHCR and IOM launch organized voluntary return programme for Syrian refugees in Lebanon](#); UNHCR (2026) [UNHCR/IOM supported organized voluntary return programme](#); UNHCR (2026) [UNHCR self-organized voluntary return programme](#).

Figure 17. Reported destination-related drivers, among those citing such reasons



Destination-related drivers cited by returnees from abroad varied drastically by host country. Among respondents returning from Lebanon (n=305), discrimination was particularly prominent, cited by 71%, while half said they generally did not like life there and 45% pointed to rising insecurity, conflict or inter-communal tensions. Returnees from Türkiye (n=254) also frequently cited discrimination (51%), though other pressures were somewhat less acute, including 37% who said they had not managed to make a living and 37% who saw no prospects there. Among respondents returning from Jordan (n=37), economic and service-related pressures featured more strongly than insecurity, with 46% saying they had not managed to make a living and 43% citing both lack of access to services or assistance and general dissatisfaction with life there. Respondents returning from other countries (n=25) most often cited not managing to make a living (48%) and not seeing prospects there (44%), though this subgroup is small and should be read more cautiously.

For a smaller subset of returnees from abroad, legal-status-related insecurity was not a background condition but a direct trigger for return. Within this smaller subgroup (6% of returnees from abroad, n=126), 53% said they had not been allowed to stay, including through deportation or expulsion, and 51% cited a lack of opportunities to regularise their status. Forty per cent of this subgroup reported having been detained before leaving the host country, and among those detained (n=51), 39% said they had been held for more than a week. Although this was a minority experience within the wider sample, it points to a distinct return pathway shaped by coercive legal and administrative pressures.

"I was working in Türkiye as a labourer, and even though I had a Kimlik (temporary protection ID card), they deported me without any reason. In Syria I have not been able to find work, and my family depends on me, as there is no one else to support them."

22-year-old man, returnee from abroad, living in Aleppo

2.2 Agency, influence and return modalities

2.2.1 Perceived choice and external influence

Most respondents described return as a decision they had made themselves, and only a very small minority said they had been directly influenced by others. This broad pattern should not be read as evidence of unconstrained choice so much as a reflection of return decisions taken within circumstances that had already narrowed.

Overall, 96% said that no one had influenced their return. Among the small minority who did report external influence (4%, n=152), friends or family in Syria or the location of origin were overwhelmingly the main reference point: 82% among IDP returnees in this subset (n=38) and 79% among returnees from abroad (n=114). Other sources of influence were far less frequently mentioned, though other returned migrants or refugees played some role for returnees from abroad (20%).

This emphasis on personal decision-making is echoed in respondents' own assessment of choice. Overall, 92% said return had been completely a free choice. The proportion was higher among IDP returnees (97%) than among returnees from abroad (89%), while 7% of returnees from abroad said they had had very little or no choice, compared with around 1% of IDP returnees.

Figure 18. To what extent do you feel you had a choice in returning? (By return profile)



2.2.2 Return modalities

Return was, in procedural terms, overwhelmingly spontaneous rather than formally organised by external actors.

Nearly all IDP returnees (99%) reported returning independently or spontaneously, and this was also the dominant pattern among returnees from abroad (88%). Formal assisted voluntary return schemes accounted for 10% of returns from abroad, while deportation or expulsion accounted for 3% combined. The modal picture, in other words, was one of largely self-organised return, even where respondents' choices had been shaped by constraint.

Syrian return debates and policy shifts after the fall of the the Assad-led government

Debates and policy decisions on Syrian return have moved at different speeds across host regions. In neighbouring host countries, the discussion is already operational rather than hypothetical. Lebanon's policy responses combined administrative facilitation with continued enforcement pressure. Reported measures included ongoing deportations, temporary waivers of certain exit-related penalties for returning Syrians and the introduction of more structured support for both organised and self-organised return.²⁵ In Jordan, policy adjustments focused more on facilitating logistics, including exemptions linked to transporting personal

²⁵ EUAA (2025) [Lebanon: Return procedures](#).

belongings and broader operational support for voluntary return, alongside steadily rising return numbers during 2025.²⁶ As for Türkiye, short-term ‘go-and-see’ mechanisms were introduced to allow limited exploratory visits to Syria, but these developments coexisted with continued concerns around registration barriers, mobility controls and the voluntariness of return under enforcement-heavy conditions.²⁷ Beyond “go-and-see” visits, the policy direction in Türkiye appears to have become more explicitly geared towards return. New health-payment rules for Syrians under temporary protection took effect on 1 January 2026, and government-aligned reporting in late 2025 indicated that officials were also debating the eventual removal of temporary protection status, although UNHCR continued to state in March 2026 that no formal decision to lift the regime had yet been announced.²⁸ Across the region, return is therefore increasingly being facilitated in practice, but often from contexts where legal insecurity, shrinking assistance and limited prospects in the country of stay may also be narrowing the alternatives to return.²⁹

In Europe, by contrast, the debate has been more legal and political than operational. After the fall of Assad, most EU+ countries temporarily paused Syrian asylum decisions; European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) data show that this contributed to the Syrian first-instance recognition rate falling to 17% in the first half of 2025 and 29% in 2025 overall, largely for procedural reasons rather than because Syria was deemed safe.³⁰ By late 2025, most EU+ countries had resumed examining Syrian claims under updated EUAA guidance.³¹ A small number of states have introduced or expanded voluntary return support — the Netherlands, for example, currently offers financial and reintegration assistance for permanent return — and Frontex reported having supported more than 1,000 voluntary returns to Syria from 14 Member States by May 2025.³² Even so, Europe still lacks a broad common architecture for large-scale Syrian return. UNHCR and the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), among others, continue to stress that protection safeguards remain necessary, that returns must remain voluntary, and that refugees should be able to undertake “go-and-see” visits without losing status.³³

Return also usually involved the family as a whole. Across the combined sample, 90% said all family members had returned together. This was especially common among IDP returnees (97%), but also characterised the large majority of returnees from abroad (86%). Partial family return was more common among returnees from abroad: 12% said they had returned with only some family members, compared with 3% of IDP returnees.

Where return split families, reasons for the separation differed across the two populations and pointed to different forms of constraint. Among IDP returnees whose relatives had not returned (n=52), the most common explanation was that they had preferred to remain in the place of displacement (60%), followed by concern or fear regarding conditions in the area of origin (21%). Among returnees from abroad with relatives who stayed behind (n=293), 52% said those family members preferred to remain in the host country because they had, or expected soon to have, regular status there. A further 25% said relatives did not want to return because of concern or fear regarding conditions in Syria, 18% cited lack of money for travel, and 14% said relatives preferred to remain in the host country even with an irregular status. These responses suggest that, for many households, return decisions were not made uniformly across all members but were shaped by divergent risk calculations and legal opportunities. This pattern may also reflect a degree of household-level risk management, whereby some members remain abroad to retain legal status or income sources, while others return, allowing families to maintain flexibility in the event of further deterioration in conditions.

26 Petra (2025) [JCD announces new measures to facilitate return of Syrians](#); UNHCR (2026) Jordan: [Year-End Analysis on Returns to Syria](#) (08 December 2024 – 31 December 2025).

27 AIDA / ECRE (2025) [Türkiye: overview of main changes since the previous report update](#).

28 Daily Sabah (2025) [Türkiye takes new steps to encourage returns to Syria](#); UNHCR Türkiye (2026) [Access to Health Services](#); UNHCR Türkiye (2026) [Temporary protection related matters](#).

29 3RP (2025) [Syria Situation: Regional Interagency Preparedness Plan for Refugee Returns](#) (IAPPR).

30 EUAA (2025) [Recognition Rates, January–June 2025](#); EUAA (2026) [Recognition Rates, annual analysis 2025](#).

31 EUAA (2025) [Asylum Report 2025, 4.1.4. Managing caseloads and assessing applications for international protection](#); EUAA (2025) [Syria: Updated EUAA Country Guidance outlines changing international protection needs](#).

32 Netherlands Repatriation and Departure Service (2026) [Return support to Syria](#); Frontex (2025) [Frontex supports over 1000 voluntary returns to Syria](#).

33 UNHCR (2025) [High Commissioner’s statement at the Brussels Syria Conference](#); ECRE (2025) Policy Note: [Maintaining International Protection in Europe during Syria’s Transition](#).

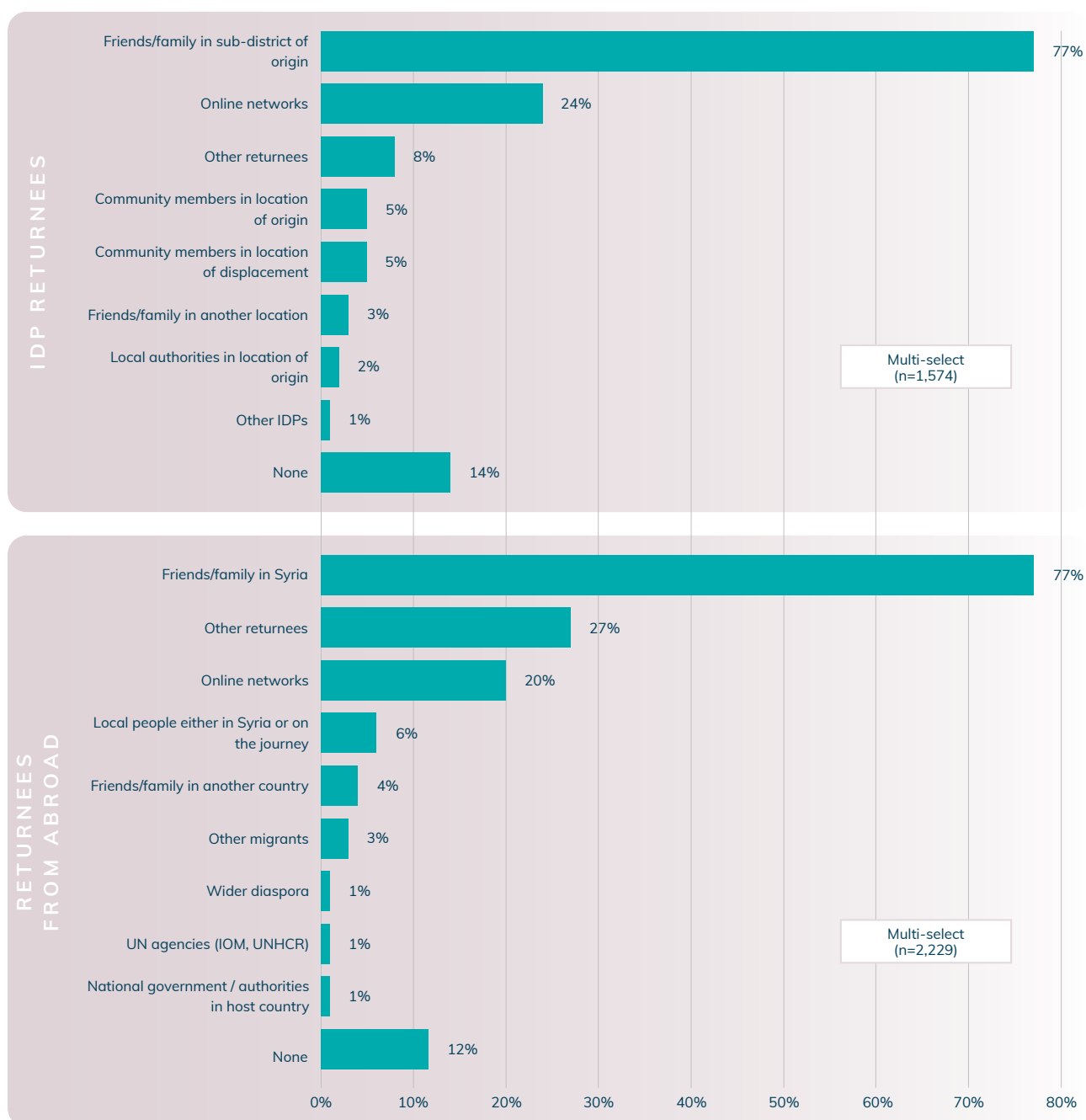
2.3 Information, preparedness and support before return

2.3.1 Sources of information

Information about return appears to have circulated overwhelmingly through personal networks rather than through formal channels. Friends and relatives in Syria or in the location of origin were by far the most important source for both groups, while official or humanitarian actors were almost absent from respondents' accounts.

Before return, 77% of both IDP returnees and returnees from abroad said they relied on friends or family in Syria or in their area of origin for information on the return journey, administrative procedures and life after return. Online communities or social media were the second most common source, cited by 24% of IDP returnees and 20% of returnees from abroad. Returned migrants or returned IDPs also featured, particularly among returnees from abroad (27%, compared with 8% among IDP returnees). By contrast, virtually no respondents identified governments, embassies, UN agencies or NGOs as information sources. A non-trivial minority also said they had had no source of information at all: 14% of IDP returnees and 12% of returnees from abroad.

Figure 19. Before your return, what were your sources of information about the return journey, administrative process, and life after returning? (By return profile)



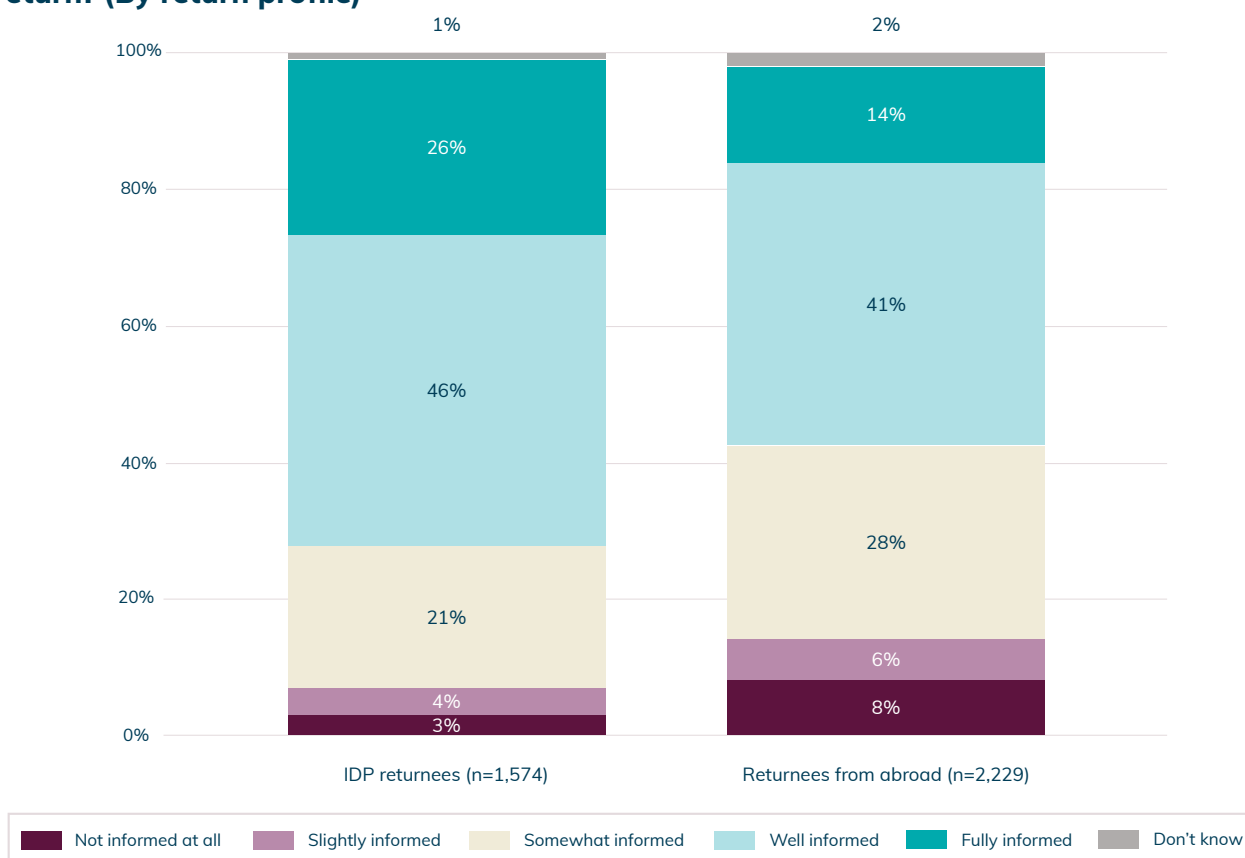
2.3.2 How informed and prepared respondents felt

Despite this reliance on informal information channels, many respondents nevertheless felt reasonably well informed and prepared before setting out. Confidence was, however, more muted among returnees from abroad.

Overall, 62% described themselves as well-informed or fully informed about the return journey and life after return. IDP returnees were more likely to say so than returnees from abroad (72% versus 55%), while 14% of returnees from abroad said they had not been informed at all or only slightly informed, compared with 7% of IDP returnees. Preparedness followed a similar pattern. Sixty per cent of respondents overall said they had felt well prepared or fully prepared before the return journey, including 66% of IDP returnees and 56% of returnees from abroad. Returnees from abroad were more than twice as likely as IDP returnees to say they had felt not prepared at all (10% versus 4%). The difference in the levels of preparation could be explained by the fact that IDP returnees were already in Syria and therefore likely to have had more direct knowledge of conditions on the ground, whereas returnees from abroad were often making decisions from a greater informational distance, in many cases after having spent years outside the country, while also often navigating a more logistically complex return process.

"I rushed my return to Syria. I needed more time to assess the situation properly."
30-year-old woman, returnee from abroad, living in Aleppo

Figure 20. How well informed do you feel you were about the return journey and life after return? (By return profile)



2.3.3 What preparation consisted of

Preparation, where it took place, was centred above all on information gathering rather than on institutional assistance.

Overall, 49% said they had gathered information on conditions in Syria or in their area of origin, and 32% had gathered information on the return journey. Saving money for return was reported by 24%, and 20% said they had tried to organise a job or accommodation before arrival. At the same time, 27% said they had done nothing to prepare.

The emphasis of this preparation differed somewhat by population group. Returnees from abroad were more likely than IDP returnees to report saving money for return (31% versus 15%), while IDP returnees were more likely to report organising a job or accommodation in advance (25% versus 16%).

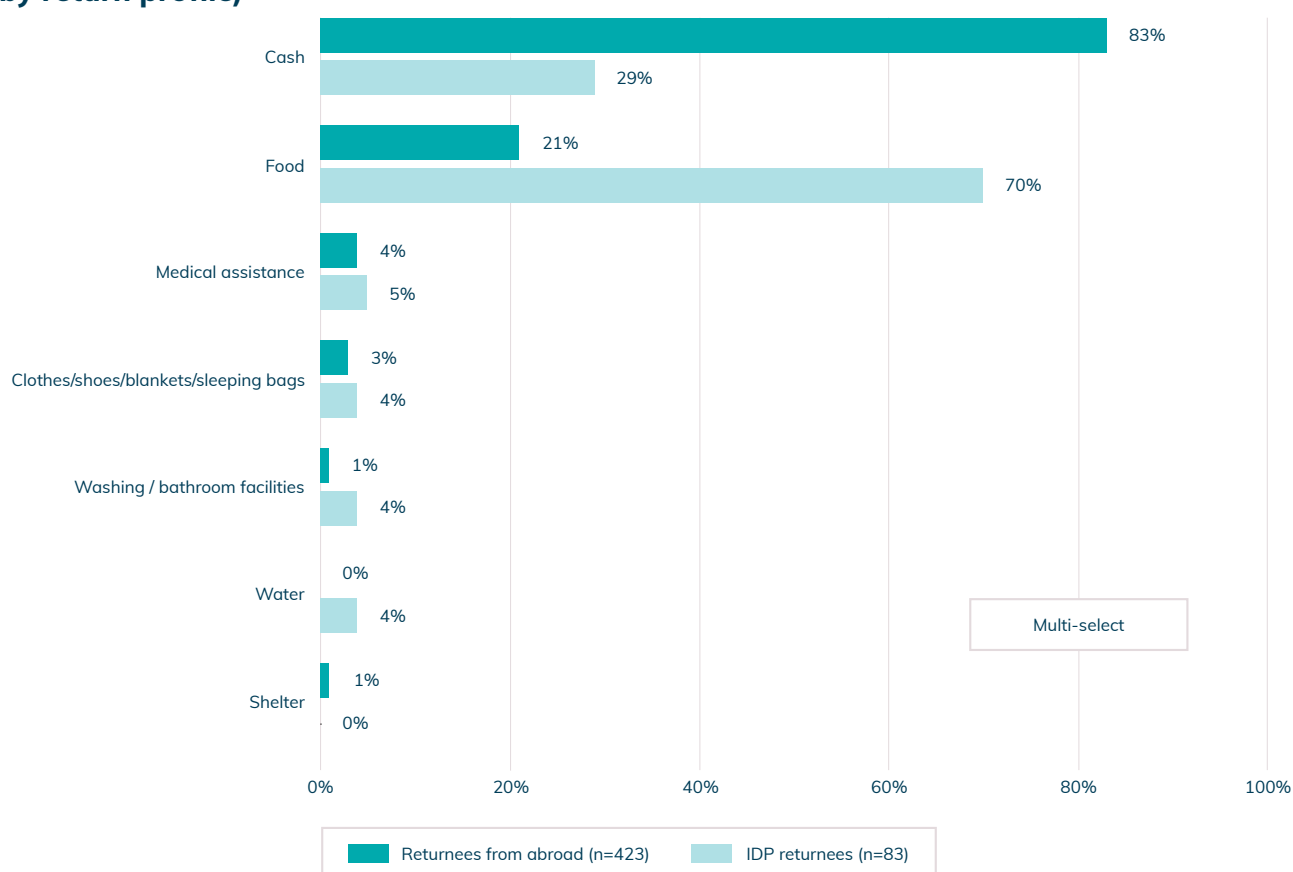
2.3.4 Assistance and procedural support

Direct support before return was relatively limited, particularly for IDP returnees, and where assistance was available, it was usually practical rather than procedural.

Only 13% of respondents overall said they had received any assistance in the three months before departure. The share was much lower among IDP returnees (5%) than among returnees from abroad (19%).

For those who had received assistance (n=506), cash was by far the most common form, cited by 74% overall. This was driven above all by returnees from abroad, 83% of whom reported cash assistance. Among IDP returnees who had received assistance (n=83), food was more common than cash (70% versus 29%). Assistance providers also differed between the two groups. Among IDP returnees, NGOs were by far the providers most often cited, with 64% referring to NGO support received outside formal return and reintegration programmes and only 5% to NGO support delivered through such programmes. As for returnees from abroad, UN agencies and NGOs were cited equally often as providers (39% each), again predominantly for support received outside assisted voluntary return schemes; only 3% identified UN support delivered through such schemes. The government of the host country was mentioned by 17% of assisted returnees from abroad.

Figure 21. What kind of assistance did you receive? (Among those who received assistance, by return profile)

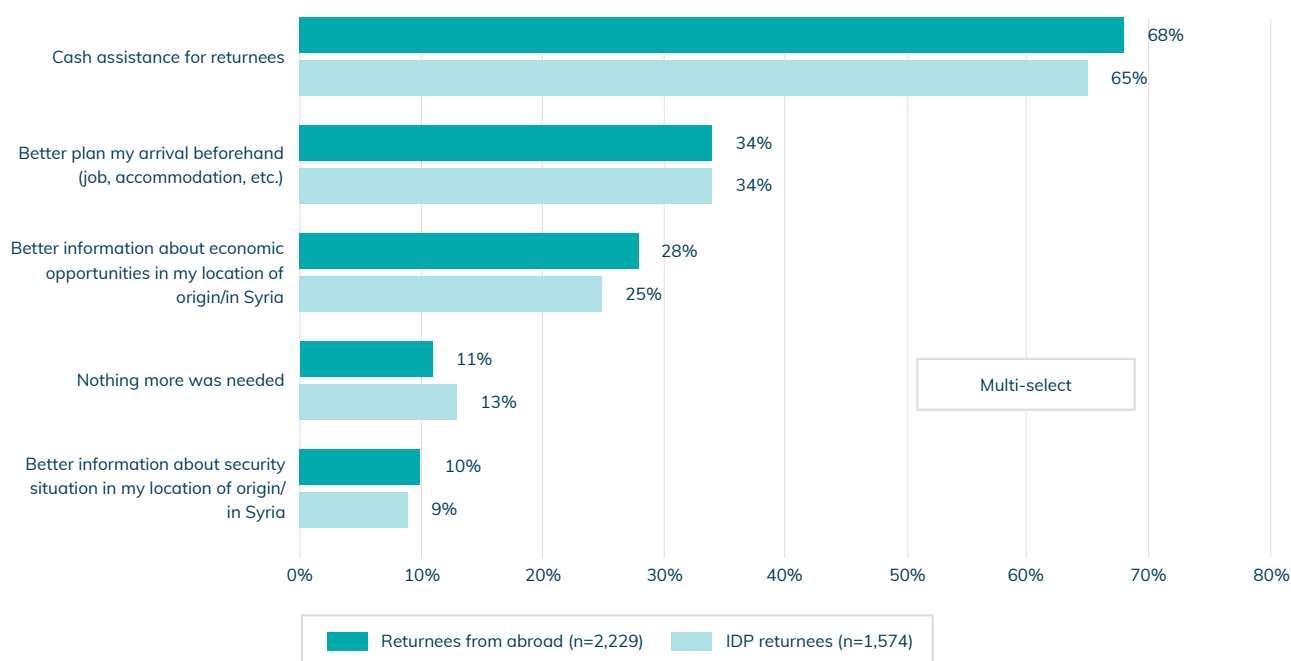


Respondents' reflections on what would have improved their preparedness further underscore the narrowness of the support they received. Two thirds of the combined sample (67%) said cash assistance would have made them better prepared to return, 34% said better planning of arrival arrangements, such as jobs or accommodation, and 27% better information about economic opportunities in Syria or the area of origin. Only 12% said nothing more had been needed.

"I advise most people to secure a house to live in and also secure a source of income or open a business, because work is currently weak and does not cover the household's basic needs."

50-year-old man, returnee from abroad, living in Aleppo

Figure 22. What would have made you better prepared to return? (By return profile)



For returnees from abroad, the data also point to limited procedural safeguards among the subset asked these questions (n=269). Among them, 91% said they had not been assisted by legal representation in preparing return-related processes. Within the same subset, 64% said that before their return, no official or organisation had asked them about their situation or the risks they could face after return, while 27% said they had been asked about both. Even where return engaged formal administrative processes, respondents often did not appear to experience these as settings in which their circumstances or prospective risks were meaningfully assessed.

2.4 The return journey

2.4.1 Route patterns and incidents en route

Most returns appear to have involved relatively direct journeys, with very few respondents reporting prolonged stays elsewhere on the way back.

Across both populations, 98% said they had not spent more than one month in another location or country on the way back.

Incidents during the return journey were also rarely reported. Among IDP returnees, virtually all respondents said that none of the listed incidents had happened to them. Among returnees from abroad, 98% likewise said none had occurred, though 2% reported a pushback at a border. Protection incidents were also uncommon in the wider sample: 98% overall said they or their family had not experienced any human rights violation or protection incident during the journey. Among returnees from abroad, the small share reporting incidents most often cited non-physical violence such as harassment, stigma or xenophobia (2%), with bribery/extortion and harm from harsh conditions each reported by around 1%.

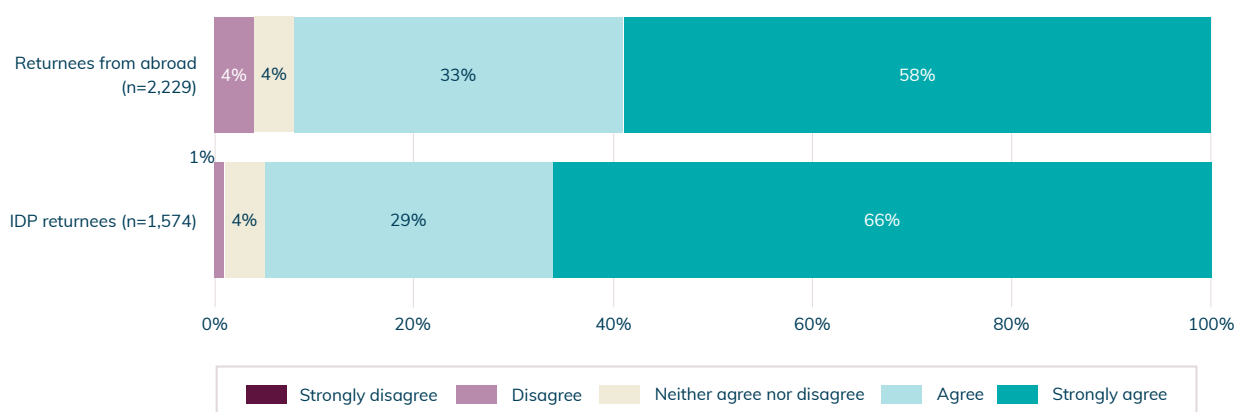
Within the small subset of returnees from abroad who had been deported and were asked a follow-up question on the return trip (n=55), 25% reported expulsion in addition to deportation. This points to a narrower but distinct pathway in which return was not only unassisted but also accompanied by further coercive treatment during the journey itself.

2.4.2 Safety during the journey and protective strategies

Respondents generally described the return journey as safe, even though many reported taking few specific measures to protect themselves.

Overall, 92% agreed or completely agreed that they and their families had felt safe and secure during the return journey. The figure was slightly higher among IDP returnees (95%) than among returnees from abroad (91%).

Figure 23. To what extent do you agree with this statement: “I (and my family) felt safe and secure during the return journey”? (By return profile)



Even so, many respondents said they had taken no special steps to protect themselves from abuse or crime during the journey. This was reported by 53% of IDP returnees and 46% of returnees from abroad. Where respondents did describe protective measures, they were generally basic and self-organised: 26% of IDP returnees and 28% of returnees from abroad said they travelled in a group, while 23% and 27%, respectively, said they kept in regular contact with family. More deliberate planning was less common, cited by 8% in each group. Overall, the return journey appears to have been navigated largely through ordinary coping practices rather than through formal protection arrangements.

“We returned together with a group of other returnees, and the journey went smoothly. We were not exposed to any danger.”

25-year-old woman, returnee from abroad, living in Homs

3. Post-return conditions, assistance and reintegration

Across the post-return findings, reintegration appears considerably more advanced in social and relational terms than in economic or material ones. Many respondents described feeling safe, socially anchored and reconnected to family and community, yet livelihoods, housing, access to services and assistance needs point to return conditions that remain highly fragile.

3.1 Early return challenges and perceived security

3.1.1 Challenges upon arrival

The first phase after return was marked above all by material strain. Livelihood recovery emerged as the most immediate difficulty, closely followed by problems linked to utilities, debt, humanitarian assistance and housing.

Overall, the most commonly reported challenge upon return was securing an income or livelihood (64%), followed by access to key utilities such as electricity or heating (44%), debt (38%), access to humanitarian assistance (38%), and finding housing (38%). Returnees from abroad were somewhat more likely than IDP returnees to cite livelihood-related difficulties (67% versus 60%), while IDP returnees more often reported debt (44% versus 34%).

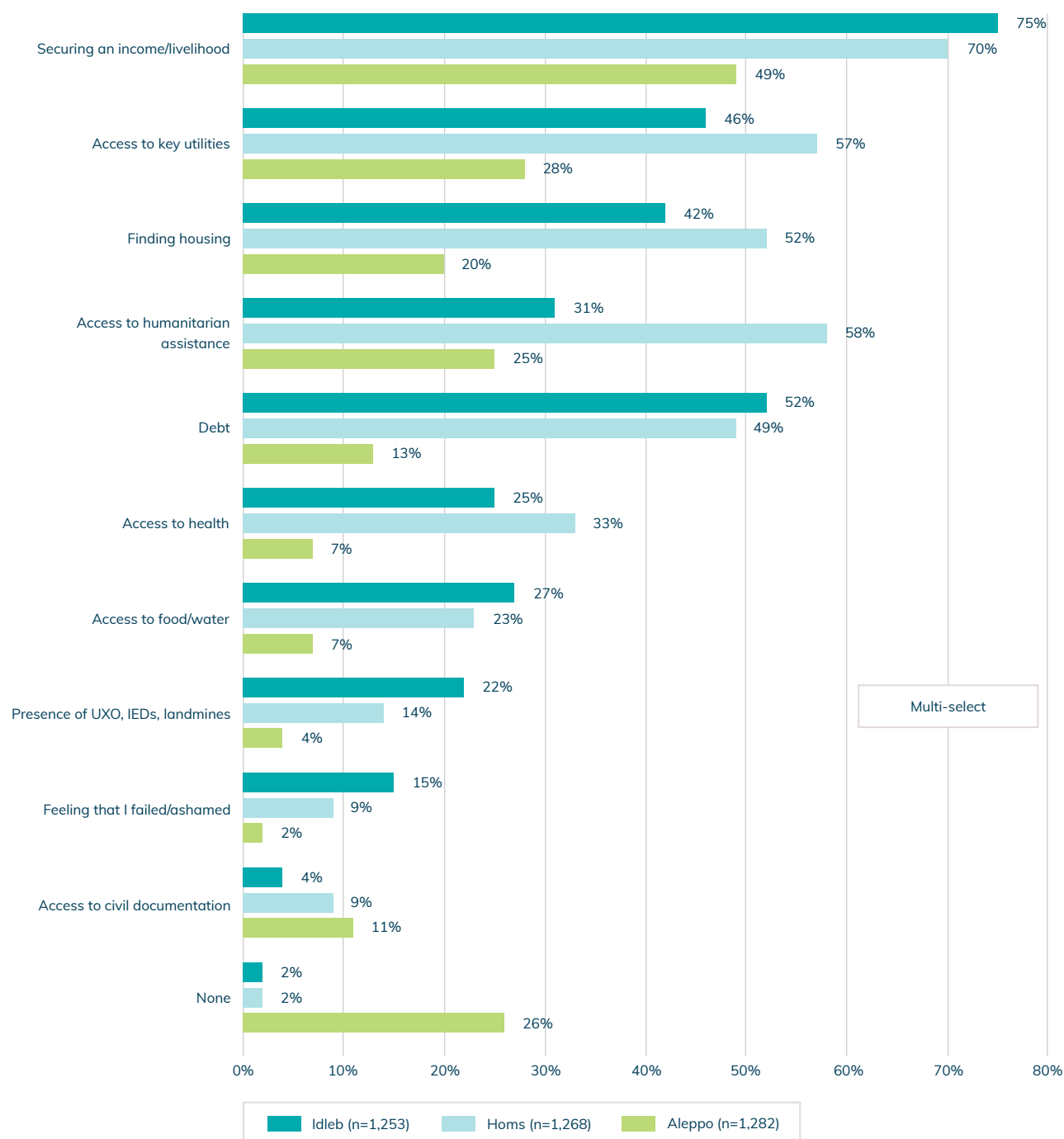
Differences by governorate were more pronounced than those between the two populations. Respondents returning to Homs and Idlib consistently reported more acute difficulties than those returning to Aleppo. Securing an income or livelihood was cited by 70% of respondents in Homs and 75% in Idlib, compared with 49% in Aleppo. Debt was reported by around half in Homs (49%) and Idlib (52%), but by only 13% in Aleppo. Similar disparities are visible in relation to housing, access to utilities and humanitarian assistance. Aleppo was also the only governorate where a sizeable minority reported no challenges at all (26%, compared with 2% in both Homs and Idlib), which suggests that the immediate conditions of return were appreciably less onerous there. This may partly reflect variation in local conditions. In Homs, renewed violence in March 2025 blocked major routes, disrupted humanitarian operations, and rendered several hospitals and ambulances inoperable,³⁴ while subsequent reporting continued to describe a volatile security environment in the governorate. In and around Idlib, return continued amid large-scale camp-based displacement in the north-west and persistent shortages of housing, work and services.³⁵ Aleppo also continued to face major service and infrastructure gaps, but reporting from 2025 suggests that some return areas may have offered slightly better short-term livelihood prospects, with strong demand for reconstruction labour and continuing factory activity in labour-intensive sectors.³⁶

34 UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria (2025) [Joint Statement on the recent hostilities in Syria](#); EUAA (2025) [5.8.6. Homs governorate, in COI Report – Syria: Country Focus](#).

35 NRC (2025) Syria: Destruction, lack of services delay safe returns within country.

36 Reuters (2025) [Lacking aid, Syrians do what they can to rebuild devastated Aleppo](#); ILO (2025) [Rapid Skills Gap Assessment of selected industrial sectors – Syria](#).

Figure 24. Most commonly reported challenges upon return, by governorate³⁷



Women's responses also point to slightly sharper exposure to basic-needs-related pressures. They were more likely than men to report challenges related to debt (41% versus 34%), access to food and water (23% versus 14%), and explosive hazards (16% versus 10%).

"The situation here is unstable, people are not as they used to be, services are limited, job opportunities are scarce, and the overall atmosphere is stressful. I advise anyone thinking of returning to take their time before deciding, because the experience is harder than it looks from afar."

22-year-old woman, returnee from abroad, living in Idleb

³⁷ Less commonly reported challenges included access to civil documentation (Aleppo 11%, Homs 9%, Idleb 4%), access to owned housing, land and property (Aleppo 7%, Homs 6%, Idleb 6%), feeling that one had failed or felt ashamed (Aleppo 2%, Homs 9%, Idleb 15%), access to justice (Aleppo 2%, Homs 12%, Idleb 0%), acceptance by the community/discrimination (Aleppo 3%, Homs 11%, Idleb 0%), reuniting with family (Aleppo 5%, Homs 4%, Idleb 2%), violence and insecurity (Aleppo 3%, Homs 0%, Idleb 0%), and human rights violations and abuses (Aleppo 0%, Homs 1%, Idleb 0%).

3.1.2 Safety and insecurity after return

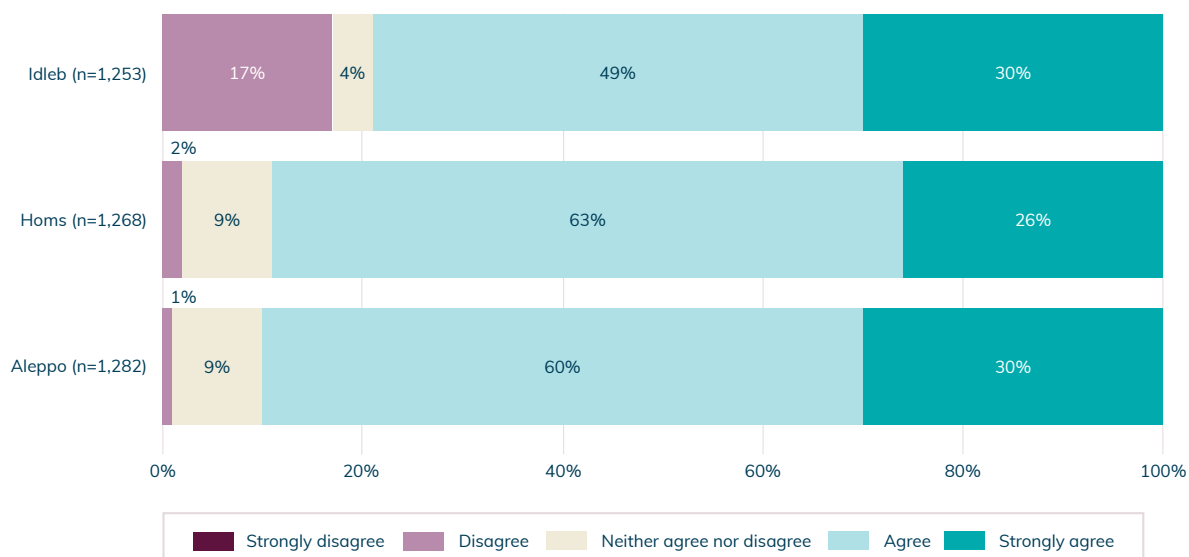
Despite the scale of these early challenges, most respondents nevertheless said they felt safe in their current location. The data therefore point to return environments that are experienced as broadly secure, but not uniformly free of risk.

Overall, 86% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt safe and secure where they were currently living. This pattern was almost identical across the two populations: 86% of both IDP returnees and returnees from abroad expressed agreement. At governorate level, however, the picture was less even. Respondents returning to Aleppo³⁸ and Homs were more likely to report feeling safe and secure (90% and 89%, respectively) than those returning to Idlib (79%).

"Life here is much better for me, because the security situation is very good... I used to suffer from great fear because of the lack of security in the place of displacement"

47-year-old woman, IDP returnee, living in Aleppo

Figure 25. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "I feel safe and secure in my current location"?



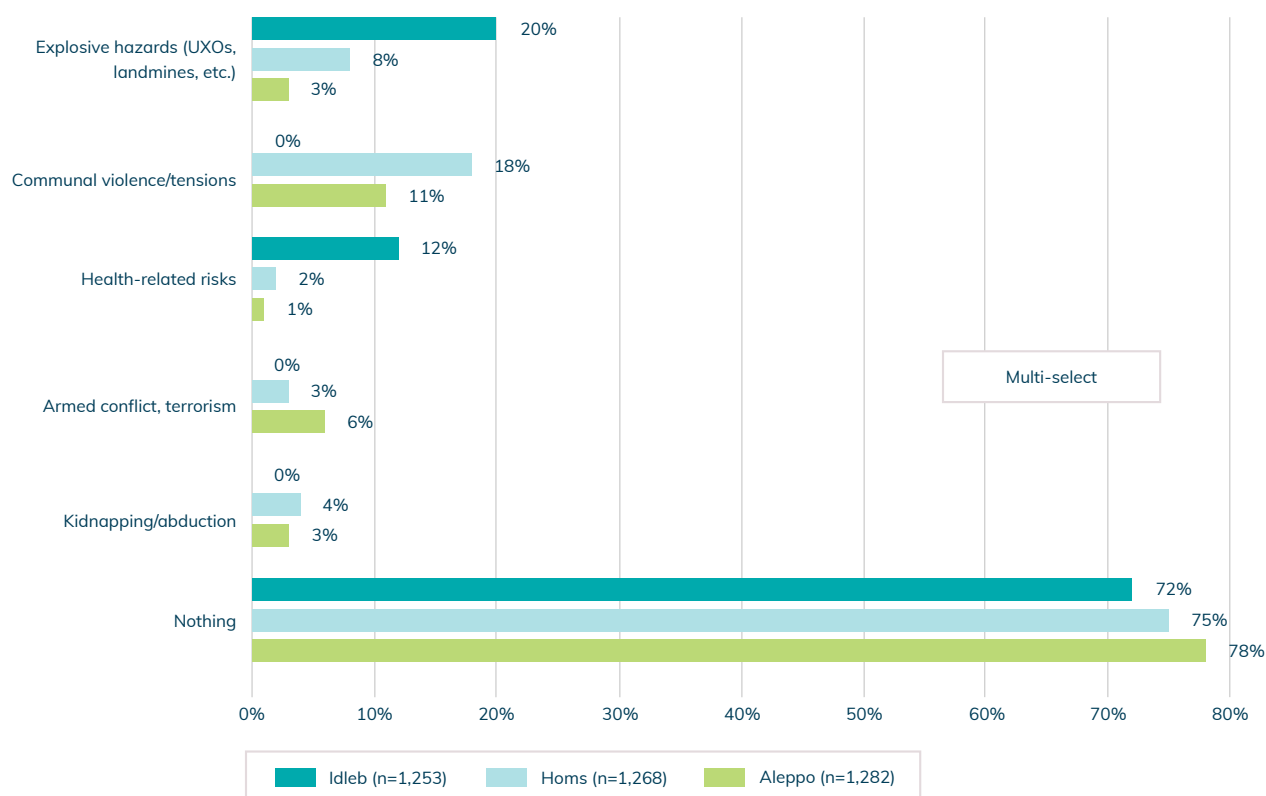
The follow-up question on what currently makes respondents feel unsafe or insecure adds important texture to this result. Three quarters of the combined sample (75%) said that nothing made them feel unsafe or insecure, yet the remaining responses reveal distinct localised concerns. Communal violence or tensions were mentioned by 10% overall and were particularly prominent in Homs (18%). Explosive hazards such as UXOs and landmines were also reported by 10% overall, but by 20% of respondents in Idlib. Health-related risks were relatively limited overall (5%), yet reached 12% in Idlib. Women were less likely than men to say that nothing made them feel unsafe or insecure (70% versus 78%), and more likely to cite explosive hazards (12% versus 7%) and communal tensions (11% versus 7%). **Safety after return, therefore, appears relative rather than absolute: broad reassurance coexists with persistent, place-specific sources of insecurity.**

"We still fear for our children because of landmines and unexploded ordnance..."

35-year-old woman, IDP returnee, living in Idlib

³⁸ Data collection took place between 7 November and 14 December 2025. Conditions in Aleppo shifted again in early 2026 following renewed hostilities (see box below), and the findings reported here should be interpreted in that context.

Figure 26. Is there anything that makes you feel unsafe or insecure? (Most reported, by governorate)³⁹



Aleppo escalation (January-February 2026): disruption, displacement and implications for return

Renewed hostilities in Aleppo in early 2026 highlight the persistent volatility of the security environment in Syria and the extent to which localised conflict can interrupt return trajectories and weaken reintegration prospects. Fighting that resumed between Syrian Government Forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces in early January in densely populated neighbourhoods⁴⁰ resulted in civilian casualties, damage to homes and infrastructure, disruption to health services and widespread restrictions on movement.⁴¹ Tens of thousands of civilians fled affected areas in the initial phase of the escalation, many of them women, children and older persons, while humanitarian access and service provision were simultaneously constrained.⁴²

According to reporting from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reporting across Aleppo and north-east, as of late January, ~173,000 individuals were displaced across multiple governorates, and an estimated ~900,000 people needed urgent aid.⁴³ Several reports indicate that women and children consistently accounted for the majority of those displaced, while reports also highlighted heightened risks linked to shelter overcrowding, service disruption, reduced access to healthcare and constraints on protection services, including sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence response.⁴⁴ For returnees and prospective returnees alike, such conditions make return less predictable and less sustainable, increasing the risk of interrupted return plans, renewed displacement and prolonged precarity after arrival.⁴⁵

³⁹ Less commonly reported responses not shown in the graph included unresolved housing, land and property disputes, expropriation, forced evictions, occupation or dispossession (5% in Aleppo, 1% in Homs, 0% in Idleb), crime (2%, 2%, 0%), non-physical violence such as harassment (2%, 0%, 0%), sexual and gender-based violence (2%, 0%, 0%), bribery/extortion (1%, 1%, 0%), "other" (0%, 1%, 0%), and "don't know" (1%, 0%, 0%).

⁴⁰ UNFPA (2026) [Situation Report on Aleppo and North-East Syria \(6 January - 12 February 2026\)](#).

⁴¹ UNICEF (2026) [Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Flash Update No. 1 \(Escalation of Violence in Aleppo\), 08 January 2026](#).

⁴² UN Geneva (2026) [Syria: Aleppo fighting leaves civilians dead, displaces thousands](#).

⁴³ UNFPA (2026) [Situation Report on Aleppo and North-East Syria \(6 January - 12 February 2026\)](#).

⁴⁴ UNFPA (2026) [Situation Report on Aleppo and North-East Syria \(6 January - 12 February 2026\)](#).

⁴⁵ UNICEF (2026) [Humanitarian flash updates: Escalation of violence in Aleppo 2026](#); UNFPA (2026) [Situation Report on Aleppo and North-East Syria \(6 January - 12 February 2026\)](#).

3.1.3 Economic and social security after return

Respondents drew a striking distinction between social security and economic security after return. While most felt socially secure, far fewer felt economically secure, which points to reintegration that is socially anchored but materially precarious.

Across respondents overall, 95% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt socially secure, with almost no difference between IDP returnees and returnees from abroad (94% in both groups). Economic security was far weaker. Only 29% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt economically secure, while 48% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

This divergence was especially sharp across governorates. Aleppo stood apart as the only governorate where positive assessments of economic security outweighed negative ones: 51% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt economically secure there, compared with just 11% in Homs and 25% in Idlib. In Homs, nearly two thirds (63%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they felt economically secure, while the equivalent share in Idlib was 56%. Women were also somewhat more likely than men to report economic insecurity (51% versus 44% disagreed or strongly disagreed), despite broadly similar levels of perceived social security.

“There is psychological comfort in returning, but the income is not enough. Prices in Homs are higher than in Türkiye, and there is no sufficient income. As for those who have money to invest, they can live comfortably.”
60-year-old woman, returnee from abroad, living in Homs

3.2 Livelihoods, basic needs and access to services

3.2.1 Employment and barriers to earning a living

Paid work was not the norm after return, and the labour market respondents described was uneven, insecure and heavily gendered.

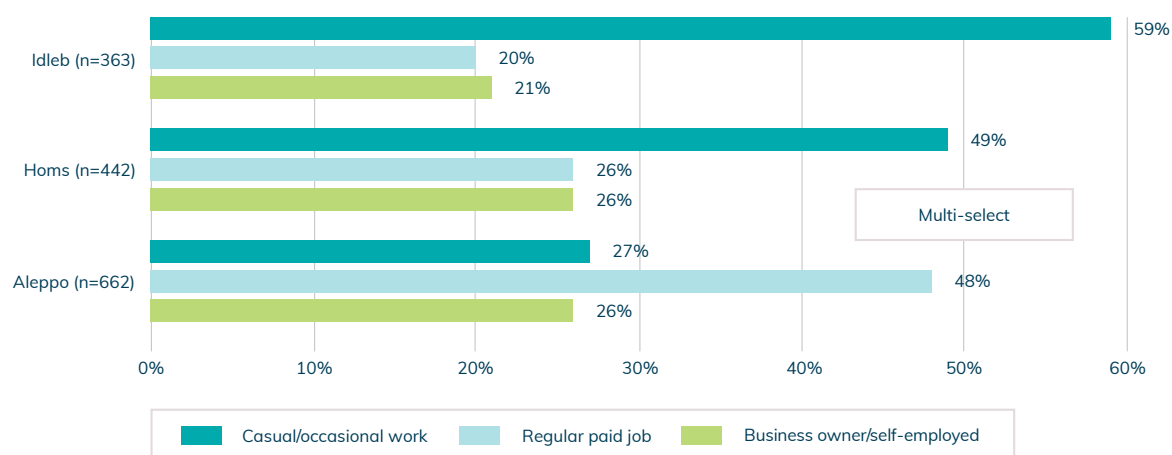
In the full sample, 39% reported being engaged in paid work or another income-generating activity, while 61% said they were not. IDP returnees were slightly more likely than returnees from abroad to be working (43% versus 36%). This slight difference could be partly attributed to the fact that IDP returnees were more likely to have tried to organise a job or accommodation before their return, as highlighted previously in the report. Geographical differences were more pronounced: 52% of respondents in Aleppo reported being engaged in work or income generation, compared with 35% in Homs and 29% in Idlib. Gender disparities were stark. Nearly two thirds of men (62%) reported working, compared with only 13% of women. This is broadly consistent with wider labour market patterns in Syria, with ILO statistics indicating that women's labour force participation remains below 15%, constrained by discriminatory norms, care burdens and insecurity.⁴⁶

“I wish there were job opportunities for women so that we could live like human beings.”
40-year-old woman, IDP returnee, living in Homs

Among respondents who were working (n=1,467), casual or occasional work was the most common form of employment overall (42%), followed by regular paid jobs (35%) and self-employment or business ownership (25%). Differences between the two populations were again visible. IDP returnees who were working were much more likely than returnees from abroad to report holding a regular paid job (45% versus 26%), whereas returnees from abroad were more likely to report casual or occasional work (49% versus 33%). Aleppo stood out for its relatively higher share in regular paid employment (48% of working respondents there), while casual work was especially dominant in Idlib (59%).

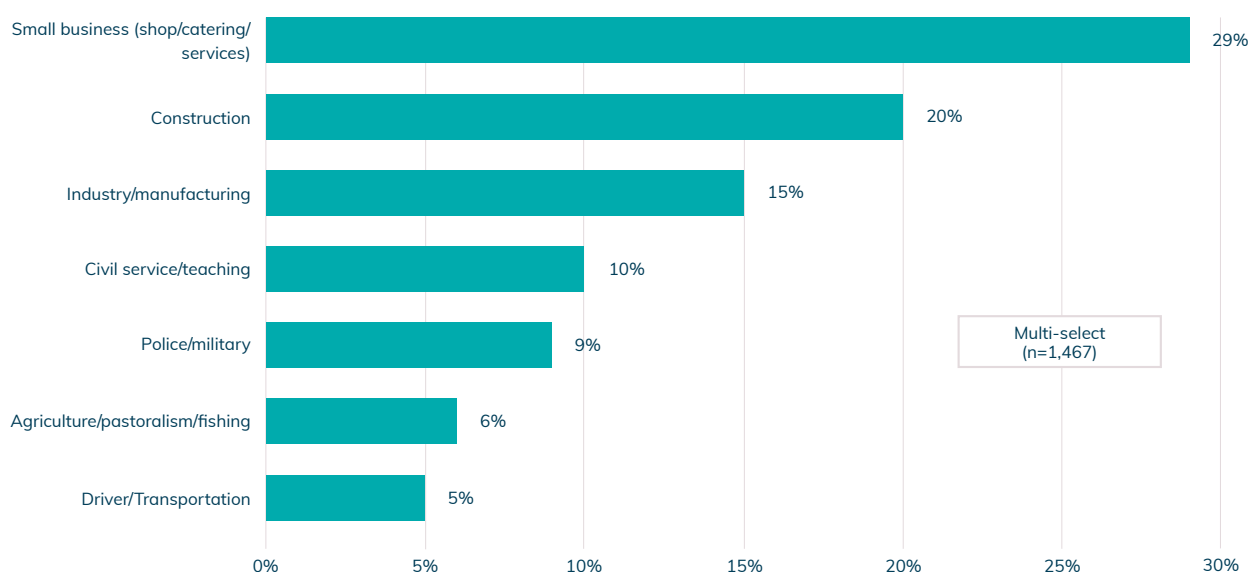
46 ILO (2025) [Syria Promoting decent work in time of transition ILO's programme of Support \(POS\)](#).

Figure 27. Type of work arrangement, among those who reported working, by governorate



The sectors in which respondents were earning an income also reveal a segmented labour market. Among respondents engaged in paid work or income generation (n=1,467), small business and services were most common overall (29%), followed by construction (20%) and industry/manufacturing (15%). Yet the profile differed sharply by gender. Men were much more likely than women to report construction work (23% versus 1%), while women were more likely to report civil service or teaching (28% versus 5%), health work (10% versus 1%), and domestic work (8% versus 0%).

Figure 28. Most common work sectors among those who reported working⁴⁷



Among those who were not working (n=2,336), the reasons given reflect both structural labour market weakness and the unequal distribution of care responsibilities. Nearly half (49%) said they were taking care of the home, children or older people, and 31% said they were unable to find work. A further 17% cited illness or disability. The gendered split behind these aggregate figures was particularly pronounced: among non-working women, 69% said they were occupied with care responsibilities, compared with only 2% of non-working men, while 64% of non-working men said they were unable to find work, compared with 16% of non-working women.

3.2.2 Household income, food security and housing

The weakness of labour market reintegration translated directly into strained household economies. For most respondents, income remained insufficient, and material conditions varied sharply by governorate.

Overall, 60% said their household income did not meet their needs, while a further 16% said their household had no income at all. Only 22% said their income met their needs. Aleppo again differed clearly from the other two

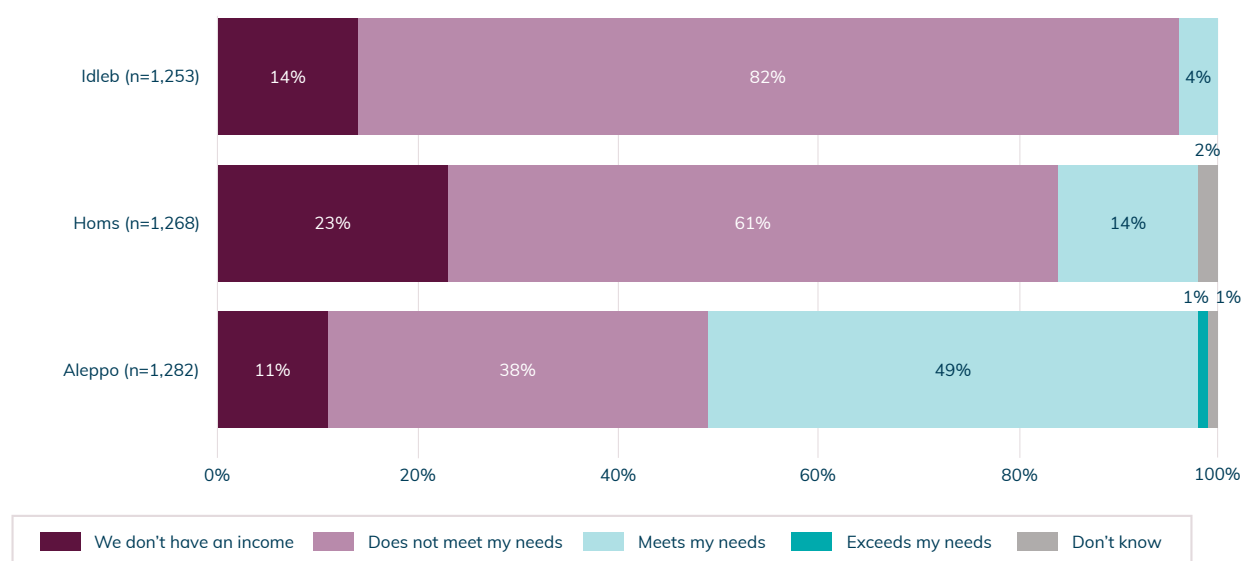
⁴⁷ Other reported sectors included security services (3%), health services (3%), domestic work (2%), and other industries (1%).

governorates. There, 49% said their income met their needs and 38% said it did not. In Homs, by contrast, 61% said their income did not meet their needs, and in Idleb the share rose to 82%. Women were slightly more likely than men to report having no income at all (18% versus 14%).

“Outside the country there is at least income that matches expenses, but here income does not meet people’s needs. Even when people work several jobs, it still does not cover basic needs, especially housing, food, clothing, and so on.”

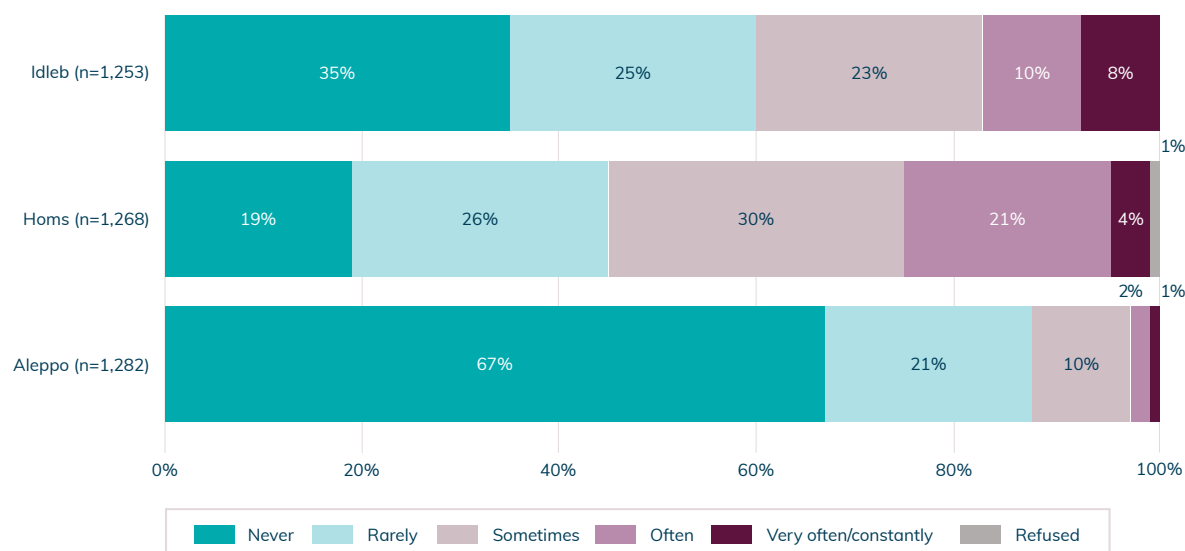
25-year-old woman, IDP returnee, living in Homs

Figure 29. To what extent does your household income meet your needs? (By governorate)



Food-related concern was also widespread, though less uniformly acute than income inadequacy. Across respondents overall, 40% said they had never worried in the past four weeks about not having enough food, but 36% reported worrying sometimes, often or very often/constantly, including 15% who reported such worry often or very often. Food-related worry was considerably more frequent in Homs: only 19% said they had never worried, while 55% reported worrying sometimes or more often. In Aleppo, by contrast, two thirds (67%) said they had never worried about not having enough food. Women were also somewhat more likely than men to report more frequent worry about food.

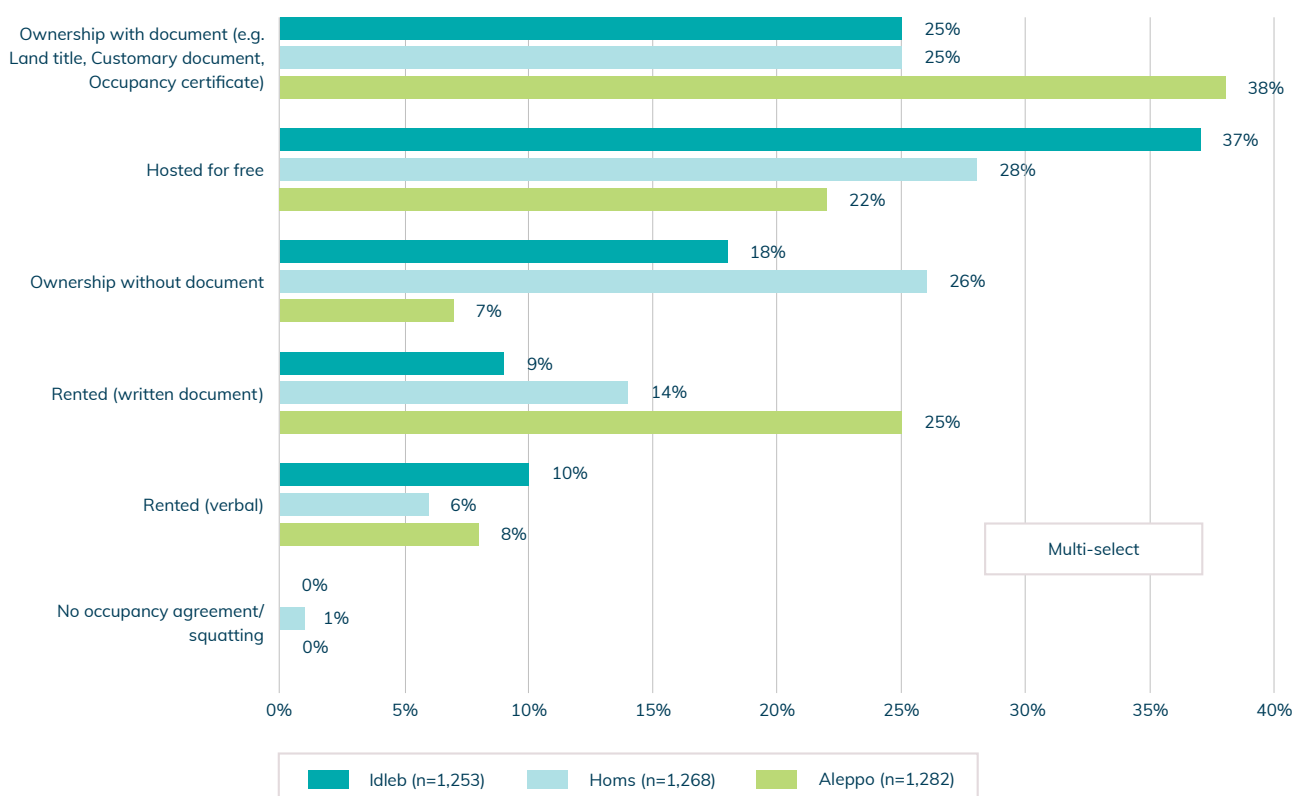
Figure 30. In the past four weeks, did you worry that your household would not have enough food? (By governorate)



Housing conditions were mixed. Overall, 57% were living in a completed private house or apartment occupied by a single household, while 30% were living in a completed house or apartment shared among households. A further 12% were living in unfinished or abandoned buildings. The type of housing was markedly worse in Idleb, where nearly a quarter (24%) reported living in unfinished or abandoned buildings, compared with 11% in Homs and just 1% in Aleppo.

Occupancy arrangements also suggest uneven levels of tenure security and dependence. Overall, 29% reported ownership with documentation and a further 17% ownership without documentation, while 29% said they were being hosted for free. Another 16% reported renting with written documentation and 8% renting verbally. Aleppo had a higher share of documented ownership (38%) and written rental arrangements (25%), whereas hosting for free was especially common in Idleb (37%), and ownership without documentation was more common in Homs (26%).

Figure 31. What is the occupancy arrangement for your current shelter? (By governorate)

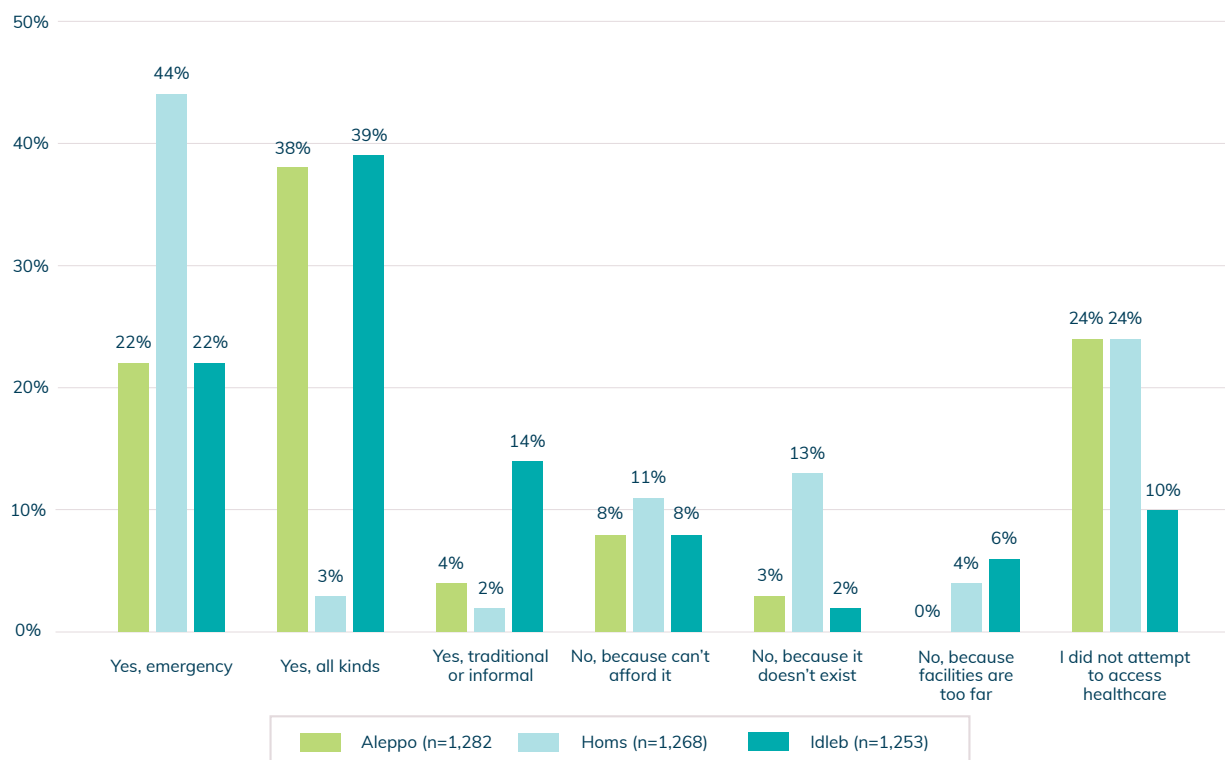


3.2.3 Access to healthcare and education

Access to essential services was neither wholly absent nor fully secure. Instead, respondents described a service environment in which access was possible for many, but incomplete, uneven and often contingent on cost, availability or need.

In relation to healthcare, 56% of the combined sample reported that they had access either to all kinds of healthcare (27%) or at least to emergency care (29%). At the same time, 19% said they had not attempted to access healthcare, and sizeable minorities reported barriers linked to affordability, distance, or the non-existence of appropriate services. The governorate pattern was particularly uneven. In Homs, 44% reported access to emergency care, but only 3% said they had access to all kinds of healthcare, while 13% said the care they needed did not exist. In Idleb, by contrast, 39% said they had access to all kinds of healthcare, but 14% relied on traditional or informal care and 6% said facilities were too far away.

Figure 32. Do you have access to health care? (By governorate)



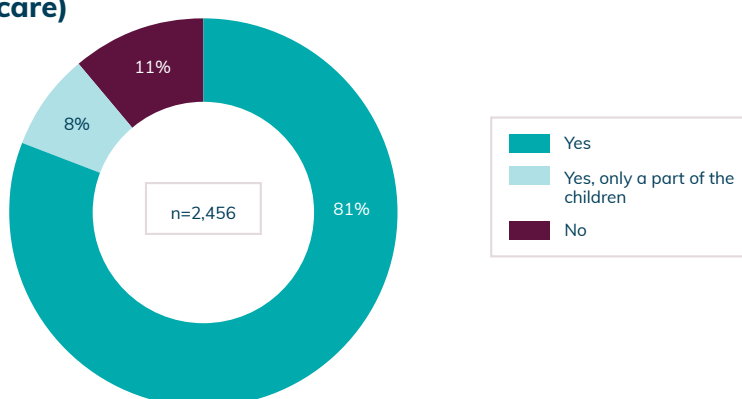
School attendance appears more positive on the surface, though important constraints remain. At headline level, 65% of respondents said that they had school-aged children in their household at the time of data collection. Among those (n=2,456), 81% said all children were attending school, 8% said only some were attending, and 11% said none were attending.

"Here I was able to continue my education, as were my siblings, after it had been interrupted for a period because of the poor security situation."

22-year-old man, IDP returnee, living in Idlib

Among respondents whose school-aged children were not fully attending school (n=457), the most commonly cited reason was that children had to work (34%). Financial barriers were also prominent, with 21% citing school fees or related charges. Personal or family responsibilities were reported by 17%, and 13% cited missing documentation. The pattern differed somewhat across the two populations. Returnees from abroad (n=288) in this subset were more likely than IDP returnees (n=169) to cite missing documents (17% versus 6%) and language barriers (15% versus 1%),⁴⁸ which suggests that school reintegration could involve additional administrative and linguistic obstacles for those returning from outside Syria.

Figure 33. Are all school-aged children attending school? (Among those with school-aged children in their care)



⁴⁸ Almost all of the returnees from abroad who cited language barriers (42) were in Türkiye (33). The remaining respondents returned from Lebanon (4), other countries (3), and Jordan (2).

3.3 Social reintegration and psychosocial wellbeing

3.3.1 Support networks and social ties

The social dimensions of reintegration appear appreciably stronger than the economic ones. Respondents often described close family ties and strong relationships after return, even though support networks were not evenly available to all.

Close family was the most frequently cited source within respondents' current support networks overall (63%). At the same time, 36% said they had no support network, which points to a more uneven and fragile social landscape than the prominence of family alone might suggest. This pattern was again geographically uneven. Respondents in Aleppo were more likely to cite close family (71%) and much less likely to say they had no support network (26%) than those in Idlib, where 56% cited close family and 44% said they had no support network. Women were more likely than men to identify close family as central to their support network (66% versus 59%), while men were more likely to say they had no support network (38% versus 32%).

Assessments of ties with family and friends were, however, overwhelmingly positive. Across the combined sample, 89% described those ties as strong or very strong, with only 1% describing them as weak. Differences between IDP returnees and returnees from abroad were minimal, which suggests a broad pattern of restored or sustained close relationships after return.

"I felt that life here in my place of origin is better because I am now among my family, who provide me with all kinds of help as a person with a disability."

32-year-old man, IDP returnee, living in Idlib

3.3.2 Belonging, contribution and openness after return

Respondents overwhelmingly described themselves as socially embedded in their current communities. Belonging and openness were strong, although the sense of contributing positively to the community was more tentative.

Overall, 94% agreed or strongly agreed that they belonged to the community where they were now living, and 96% agreed or strongly agreed that they could openly talk about their displacement or migration and return experiences with friends and family. These two indicators were strikingly consistent across both population groups and across governorates, which suggests that social acceptance and openness were among the stronger dimensions of return.

"Despite how people have changed, we took part in youth initiatives and even in simple conversations, we would say: come back, do not be afraid; let us rebuild Aleppo."

33-year-old woman, returnee from abroad, living in Aleppo

Perceptions of making a positive contribution to the community were more qualified. Overall, 52% agreed or strongly agreed that they were contributing positively thanks to what they had learned or gained while away, while 31% neither agreed nor disagreed and 13% disagreed or strongly disagreed. This more qualified response suggests that although respondents often felt socially accepted, they were less certain that return had enabled them to translate past experience into a clear social role or contribution. No notable difference emerged between IDP returnees and returnees from abroad on this point.

Progress since return towards becoming part of the local community was also generally positive. Across the combined sample, 80% said things had improved either a little or a lot in this area. The pattern was similar across the two populations, reinforcing the broader picture of relatively strong social reintegration.

"When I left my town, I was very young, and now that I have returned, I am very happy, even though I do not remember the place well. Syrians abroad should return so they can feel the same joy we felt, support one another in rebuilding the country, and realise that we are all children of one land, even if our ideas and beliefs differ."

20-year-old man, IDP returnee, living in Homs

3.3.3 Emotional wellbeing after return

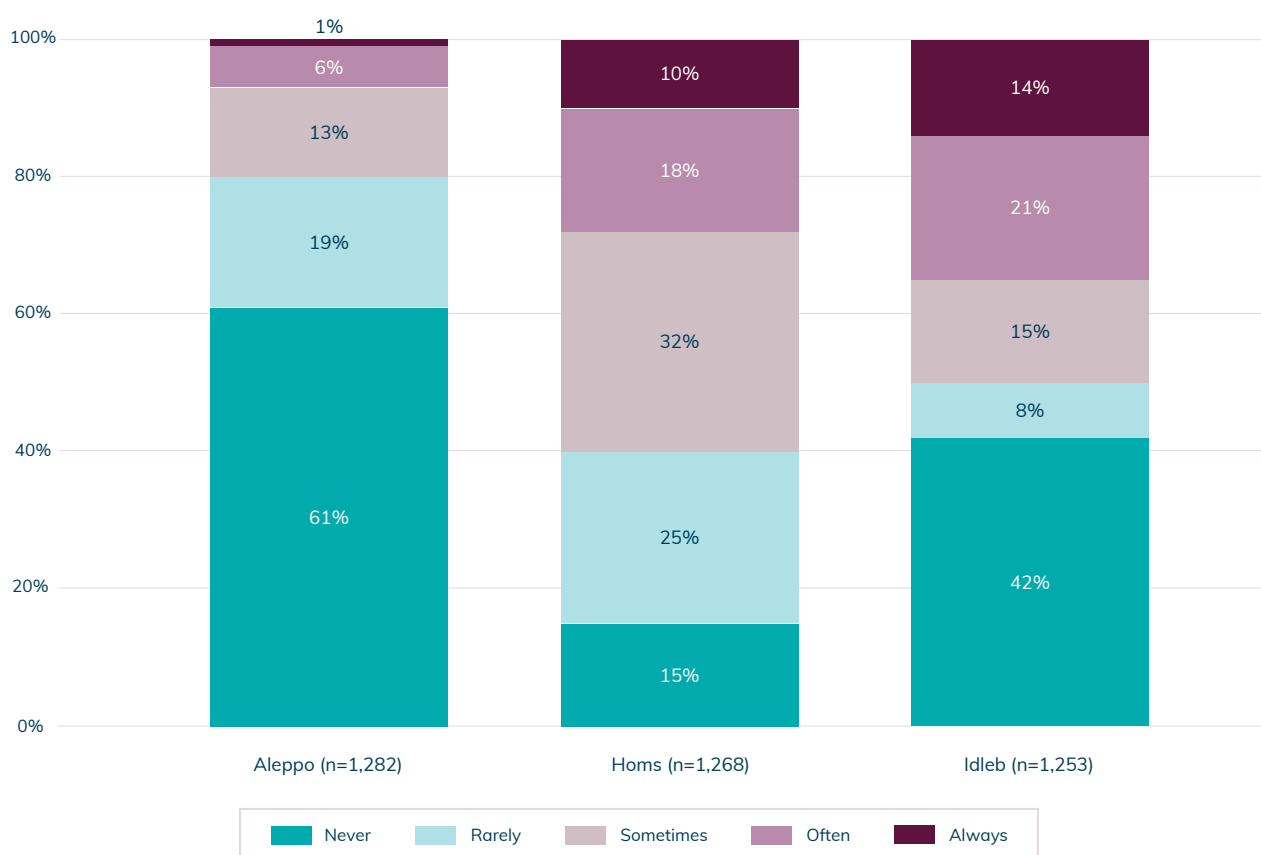
Psychological strain remained a substantial part of the post-return experience, even where social ties were strong.

Overall, 39% said they had never experienced emotional or psychological stress linked to displacement, migration or return since coming back. This means that 61% had experienced such stress at least rarely, including 23% who said it occurred often or always. The overall difference between IDP returnees and returnees from abroad was modest, but the variation by governorate was pronounced. In Aleppo, only 7% reported stress often or always. In Homs, the share rose to 28%, and in Idlib to 35%.

Women also appeared to be carrying a heavier psychosocial burden. They were less likely than men to say they had never experienced stress since return (34% versus 44%), and more likely to report it often or always (26% versus 19%). This suggests that the apparent strength of social reintegration does not eliminate the emotional residue of return, particularly in contexts where everyday conditions remain difficult.

"The beginning may be from zero, but reintegration has been very good... Still, we cannot escape the pain of memory... every place brings back the difficult days and the conditions we lived through during the war."
20-year-old woman, IDP returnee, living in Idlib

Figure 34. Since returning, have you experienced emotional or psychological stress linked to your experience of displacement/migration or return? (By governorate)



3.4 Assistance after return and remaining needs

3.4.1 Assistance received and how it was assessed

Post-return assistance reached only a small minority of respondents. Where support was received, it was usually limited to basic needs assistance and was more often seen as only slightly useful than genuinely transformative.

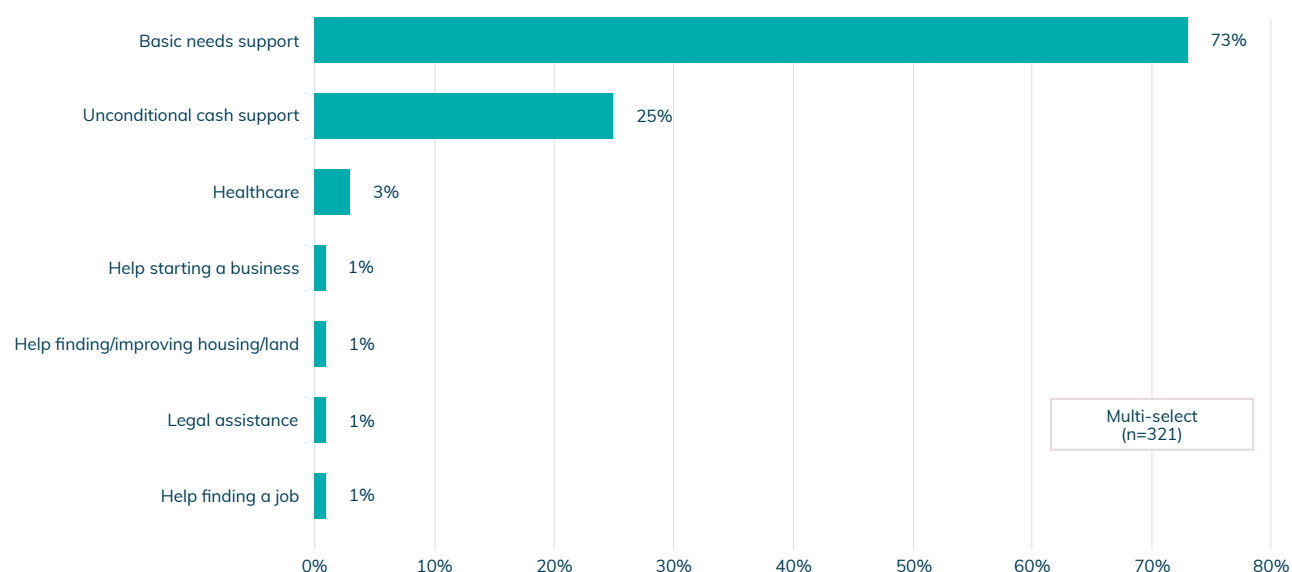
Only 8% of respondents overall said they had received any assistance or support free of charge since returning. IDP returnees were somewhat more likely than returnees from abroad to report receiving support (10% versus 7%). Post-return assistance was most likely to have been reported in Homs (15%, compared with 4% in Aleppo and 6% in Idleb).

"Life in Syria is difficult. We did not receive any assistance after returning, and that has made our lives very difficult."

21-year-old woman, returnee from abroad, living in Homs

Among respondents who had received assistance (n=321), the support reported was dominated by immediate relief rather than longer-term reintegration measures. Basic needs support was the most common type by far, cited by 73%, followed by unconditional cash support (25%). Other forms of support, such as help with housing, legal issues, job-finding or healthcare, were mentioned only by very small minorities.

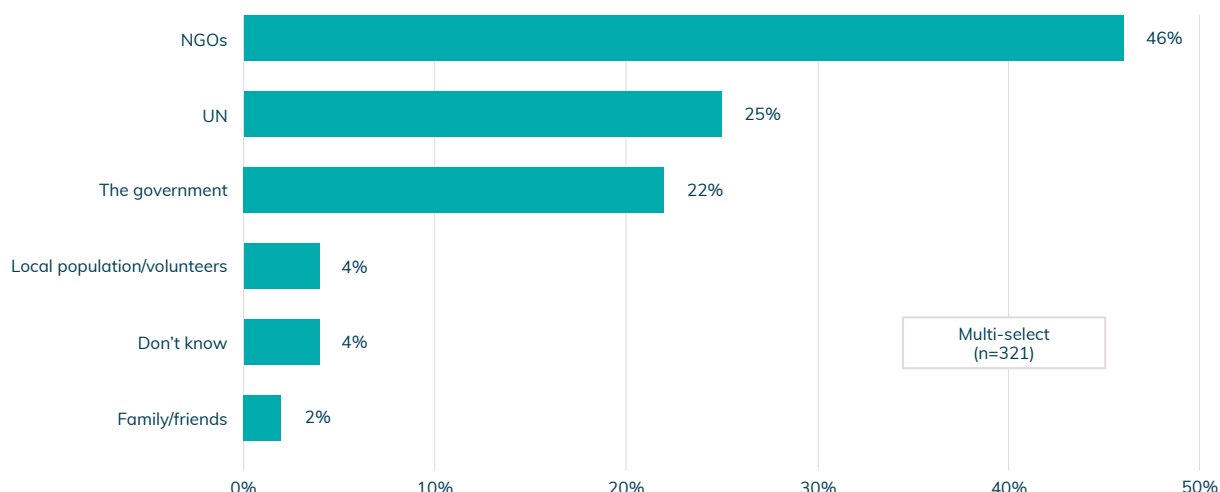
Figure 35. What kind of assistance did you receive? (Among those who reported receiving it)



The actors providing support varied between the two populations. Among IDP returnees who had received assistance (n=164), NGOs were the dominant provider (62%), followed by the UN (20%) and the government (17%). Among returnees from abroad who had received assistance (n=157), the picture was more mixed: 31% cited the UN, 30% NGOs and 27% the government.

Assistance was also more often reported as falling outside formal return programming than within it. Among respondents who had received support (n=321), 59% said it had not been part of a voluntary return programme, while 31% said it had been and 10% did not know. The support itself was not generally seen as highly effective. Nearly three quarters (74%) said it had been only slightly useful, while 11% said it had not been useful at all. Just 15% described it as quite or very useful.

Figure 36. Who did you receive this assistance from? (Among those who reported receiving it)



3.4.2 Assistance still needed

The narrow reach and modest perceived usefulness of post-return support stand in sharp contrast to the breadth of assistance respondents still say they need.

Current assistance needs were widespread and strikingly similar across the two population groups. Across the combined sample, 79% said they currently needed unconditional cash support, 61% basic needs support, 48% help with housing or land, 40% help starting a business, and 29% help finding a job. Health support (22%), tools or materials for income-generating activity (16%), and legal assistance related to documentation or housing, land and property (11%) were also widely cited.

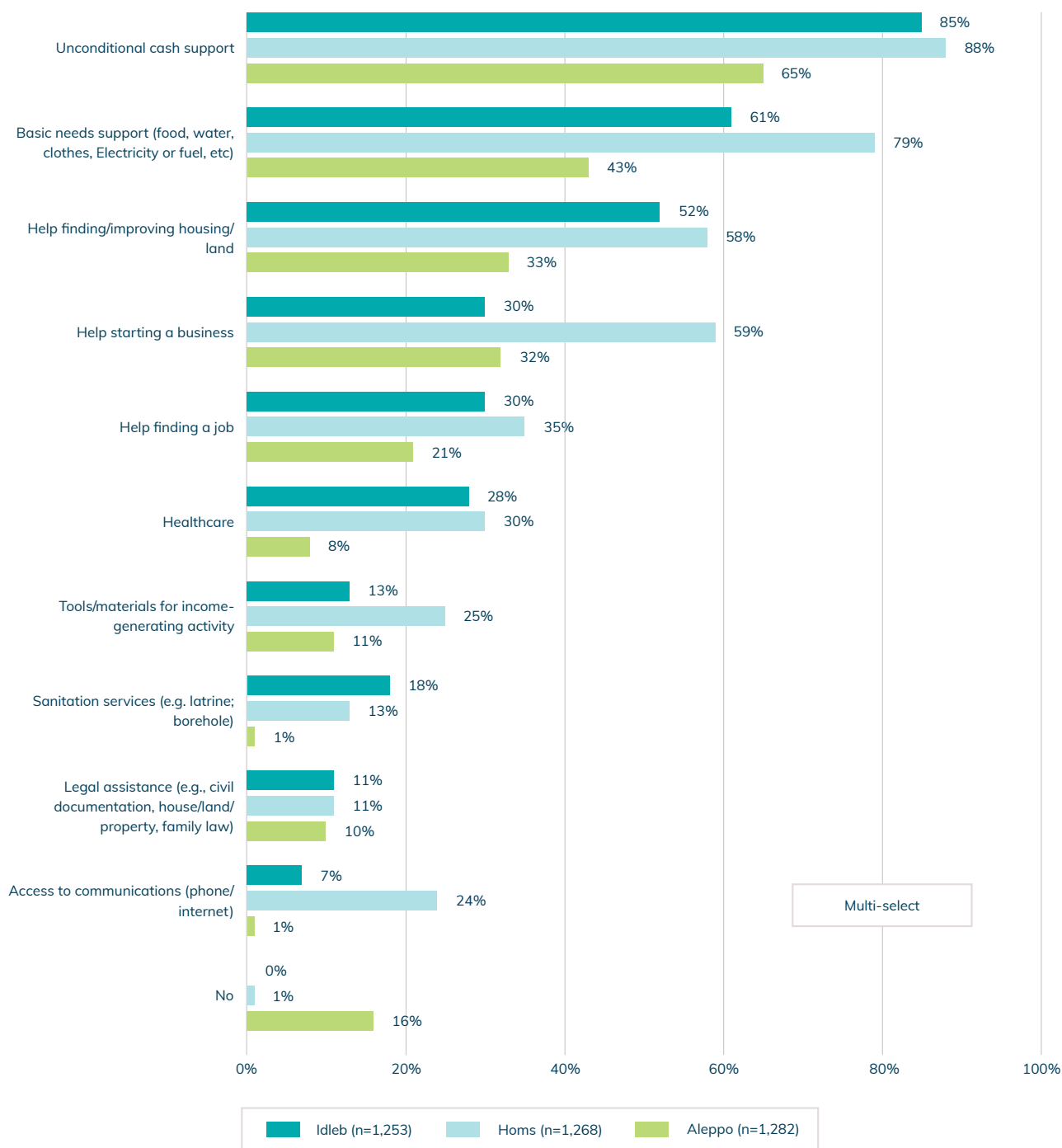
The geographical differences were especially marked. Reported needs were most acute in Homs across multiple categories: 88% said they needed cash support, 79% basic needs support, 58% help with housing or land, 59% help starting a business, 35% help finding a job, and 30% healthcare support. Aleppo, by contrast, was consistently lower across these categories and was the only governorate where a notable minority said they did not currently need assistance.

"The situation in my area of origin is very difficult because there are no work opportunities, and most of the houses were destroyed by the war. My house is completely destroyed, and until now we have not received assistance to rebuild our homes."

45-year-old man, IDP returnee, living in Homs

Gender differences in assistance needs were present but more modest than those seen in the labour market data. Women were somewhat more likely than men to cite basic needs support (63% versus 58%), housing or land support (49% versus 46%), and legal assistance (12% versus 9%). Men were more likely to cite support related to livelihoods, including starting a business (45% versus 34%) and finding a job (31% versus 26%).

Figure 37. Top ten reported assistance needs, by governorate⁴⁹



⁴⁹ Additional, less frequently reported needs not shown in the figure included psychosocial support (14% in Aleppo, 8% in Homs, 4% in Idleb), education or assistance for children (9%, 13% and 8%, respectively), protection and safety support, including child protection, GBV and mine action (4%, 5% and 15%), access to transport (0%, 9% and 5%), and adult education or training (2%, 0% and 1%).

3.5 Perceived reintegration progress since return

3.5.1 Areas where progress was more visible

Respondents most often perceived progress in the relational aspects of reintegration.

Overall, 81% said that reconnecting with family and friends had improved a little or a lot since return, including 53% who said it had improved a lot. Progress on becoming part of the local community was similarly positive, with 80% reporting some degree of improvement. These were among the most encouraging indicators in the post-return section, and the pattern was strikingly similar across IDP returnees and returnees from abroad.

Education-related progress for family or children was more mixed at headline level because a large share said the question was not applicable to them. Yet among respondents for whom it was relevant, the pattern was more positive than many of the other material indicators. Excluding those who did not seek education or training, 55% reported that things had improved in access to education for family or children since return, 32% said there had been no change, and 14% said things had worsened.

"Today, after long displacement, I live a decent life and can build my future and the future of my children. Living conditions may be somewhat difficult, but with time and work, they become better."

29-year-old man, IDP returnee, living in Homs

3.5.2 Areas where progress remained limited

Material reintegration appears to have advanced much more slowly than social reintegration. Housing, healthcare, livelihoods, learning and broader life goals were more often described as static, uneven or deteriorating than clearly improving.

Housing illustrates this slower pace clearly. Across the combined sample, 45% said their housing situation had seen no change since return, while 40% said it had improved and 15% said it had worsened. The pattern was especially unfavourable in Homs and Idlib, where around one fifth reported deterioration in housing conditions.

Livelihood progress was even more constrained. Overall, 26% said the question was not applicable because they had not sought employment or income generation. Among those who had sought employment or ways to make a living, 34% reported improvement, 38% said there had been no change, and 30% said things had worsened. Idlib stood out most negatively: 32% of all respondents there reported that employment or livelihood conditions had worsened since return, compared with 17% in Homs and 14% in Aleppo.

Progress in access to healthcare was similarly subdued. Excluding respondents who had not sought healthcare, 31% reported improvement, 48% no change, and 20% deterioration. Homs again stood out for particularly adverse perceptions, with 27% of all respondents there saying access to healthcare had worsened and virtually none saying it had improved a lot.

"Return has been very difficult: the house is still destroyed, services are almost nonexistent, and job opportunities are few... Even so, there is a small glimmer of light that is growing... There is hope that the situation will improve, and a real desire to reintegrate into the community and start again. The road is long, but the first step has begun."

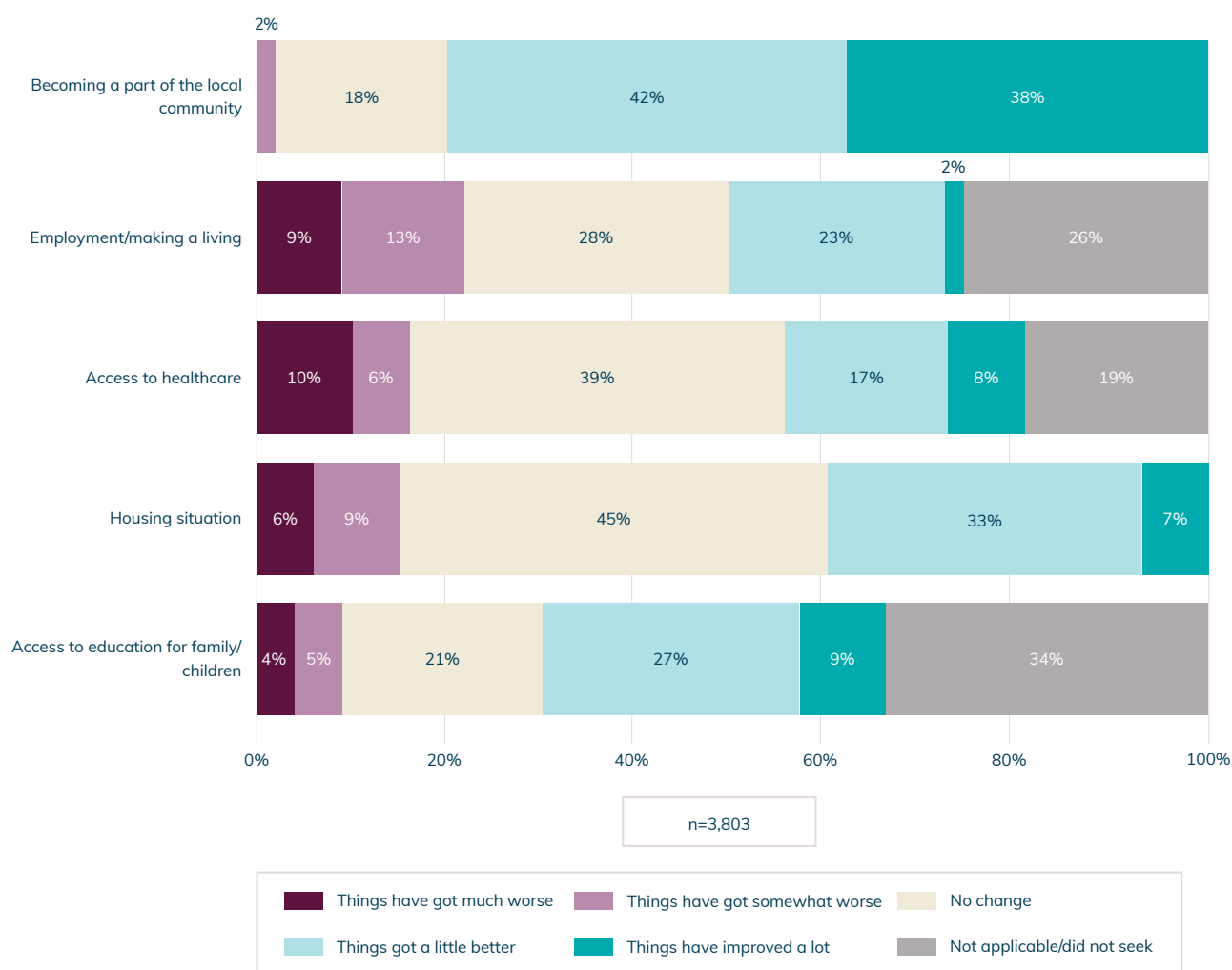
20-year-old woman, IDP returnee, living in Idlib

Two of the weakest progress indicators concerned longer-term aspirations. Continuing education or learning skills had seen no change for 86% of respondents overall, and achieving personal goals had seen no change for 62%. In Idlib, the sense of stalled or deteriorating aspirations was especially marked: 28% said their ability to achieve their goals had worsened since return.

"It is good to have returned, but my goal of securing my economic future has not been achieved, because I am responsible for my family."

21-year-old man, returnee from abroad, living in Idlib

Figure 38. How much progress have you made in the following areas since the day you returned?



3.5.3 Overall assessments of return and current life

When respondents stepped back from specific indicators and assessed their situation more broadly, the picture remained mixed. Satisfaction with current life was more common than dissatisfaction, yet many still did not feel that return had left them better off than before their displacement/leaving Syria.

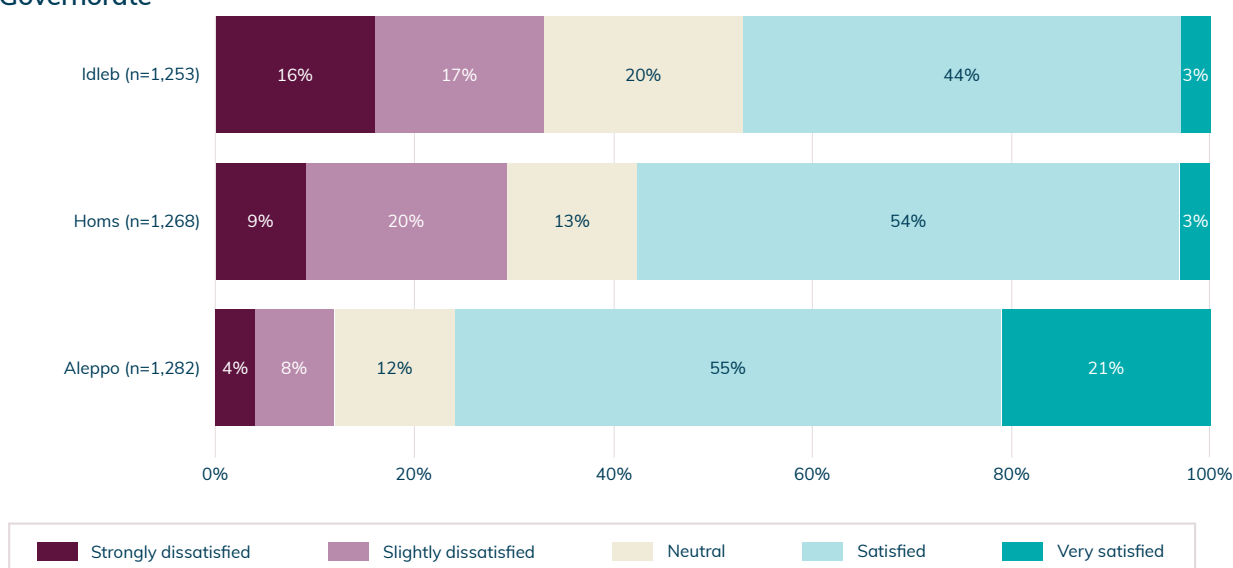
Overall, 60% said they were satisfied or fully satisfied with their life as a whole, while 25% said they were slightly or strongly dissatisfied and 15% were neutral. IDP returnees were only slightly more positive than returnees from abroad, which suggests that overall life assessment was broadly similar across the two populations.

Differences across governorates were again pronounced. Aleppo was notably more positive, with 76% reporting that they were satisfied or fully satisfied, compared with 57% in Homs and 47% in Idlib. Dissatisfaction was correspondingly much higher in Homs (29%) and Idlib (33%) than in Aleppo (12%).

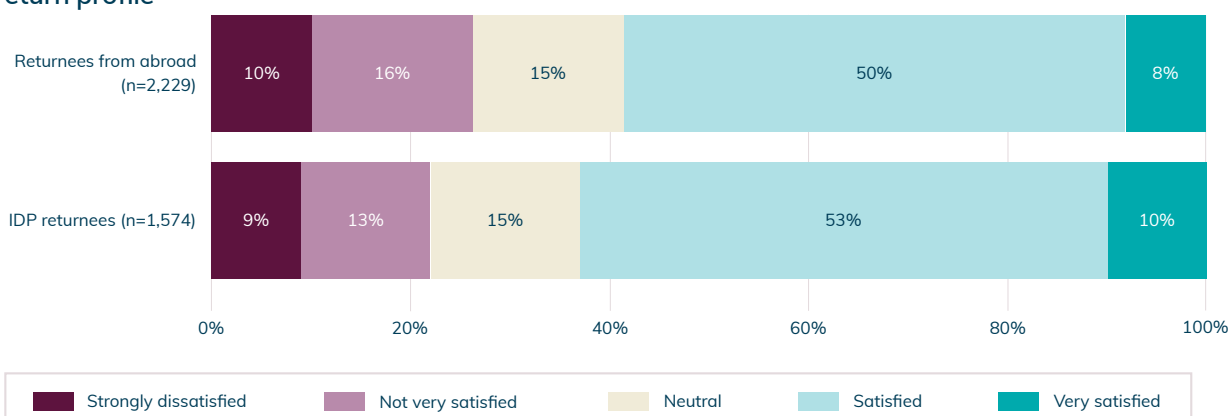
"Returning home is the best thing, and the feeling of security among your family and loved ones is irreplaceable."
27-year-old woman, returnee from abroad, living in Aleppo

Figure 39. All things considered, how satisfied are you with your current life as a whole?

By Governorate



By return profile



Responses to a separate question reinforce this more ambivalent reading of post-return life. When asked whether they were doing better now than before they had left Syria/their locations of origin, only 35% agreed or strongly agreed, while 47% disagreed or strongly disagreed. This again varied sharply by governorate. In Aleppo, positive responses (47%) outweighed negative ones (36%). In Homs, opinion was more divided, with 40% positive and 41% negative. In Idleb, by contrast, 63% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and only 19% agreed or strongly agreed. This suggests that while many respondents have re-established social ties and some degree of stability after return, a much smaller share feel that return has translated into clear overall improvement in their lives compared to conditions prior to leaving their home/Syria.

"... I deeply regret returning. I wish I could go back to Jordan, where I spent my youth. I fled because of fear of war and anxiety, and that fear still controls me."

20-year-old woman, returnee from abroad, living in Homs

4. Future plans and mobility intentions

Despite the fragility visible across much of the post-return data, respondents' future outlook was oriented more towards consolidation than renewed movement. Where plans for the coming months and years were articulated, they tended to centre on modest investments and staying put rather than on moving again.

4.1 Investment plans over the next two years

A narrow majority reported at least one investment plan for the next two years, but these ambitions appear selective and pragmatic rather than expansive. Business activity and housing featured most prominently, while many respondents still reported having no plans at all.

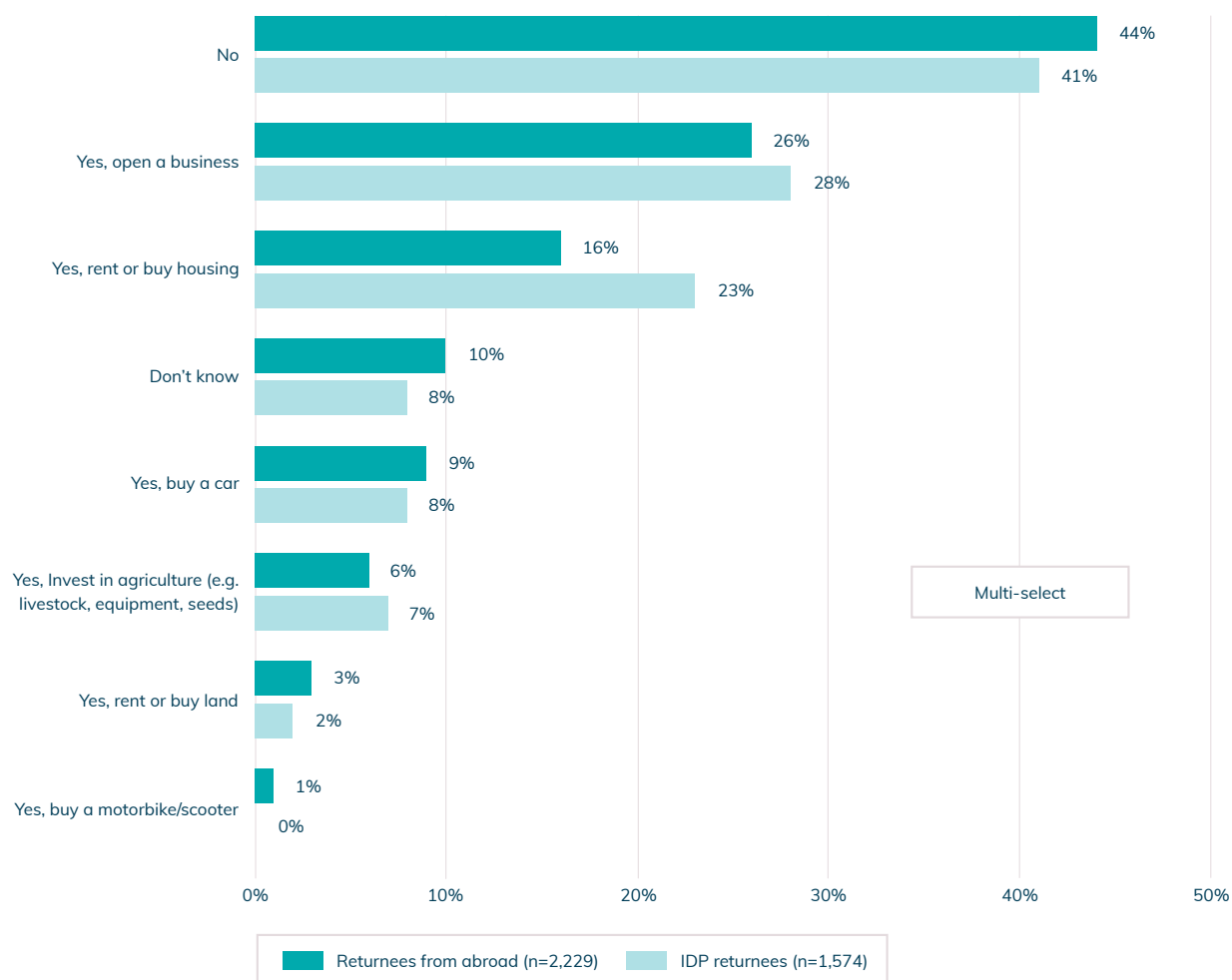
Overall, 57% reported at least one investment plan, while 43% said they had no plans and 10% said they did not know. Among the investment options mentioned, opening a business was the most frequently cited (27%), followed by renting or buying housing (19%), buying a car (9%), and investing in agriculture, such as livestock, equipment or seeds (6%). Respondents could identify more than one intended investment, which suggests that these figures reflect a range of overlapping aspirations rather than a single preferred pathway.

Differences between the two populations were present, but not especially pronounced. IDP returnees were slightly more likely than returnees from abroad to report at least one investment plan (59% versus 56%), and were notably more likely to mention plans to rent or buy housing (23% versus 16%). Business-related plans, by contrast, were reported at similar levels in both groups (28% of IDP returnees and 26% of returnees from abroad).

Differences across governorates were more revealing. Respondents in Homs appeared the most forward-looking in economic terms: only 27% reported no investment plans, while 37% said they hoped to open a business, 23% to rent or buy housing, and 12% to invest in agriculture. Respondents in Idlib, meanwhile, were much less likely to report any such plans. There, 60% said they had no investment plans, while only 18% mentioned opening a business and 14% renting or buying housing. Aleppo sat between the other two governorates on most investment indicators, though respondents there were more likely than those in Homs or Idlib to mention buying a car (15%).

Gender differences also point to unequal room to imagine or pursue future investment. Women were more likely than men to report having no investment plans (46% versus 39%), while men were more likely to mention opening a business (30% versus 22%) and buying a car (11% versus 5%). Housing aspirations, however, were fairly similar across the two groups (18% of men and 19% of women).

Figure 40. Do you have any plans for investment in the next two years? (By return profile)



4.2 Future mobility intentions

4.2.1 Whether respondents plan to move again

Near-term mobility intentions were strikingly settled. Even where return conditions remained difficult, almost all respondents in both population groups said they intended to remain in their current location over the next 12 months.

Among IDP returnees, 94% said they planned to stay in Syria and in their current location over the next year. Only 5% said they had not yet decided, and just very small minorities mentioned any further movement, whether to another part of Syria or beyond. Returnees from abroad expressed a similarly stable outlook: 90% said they planned to remain in their current location in Syria, while 6% were undecided. The proportions considering onward movement were very small, including 2% who said they might re-migrate to their last host country and 1% who said they might re-migrate to a different country.

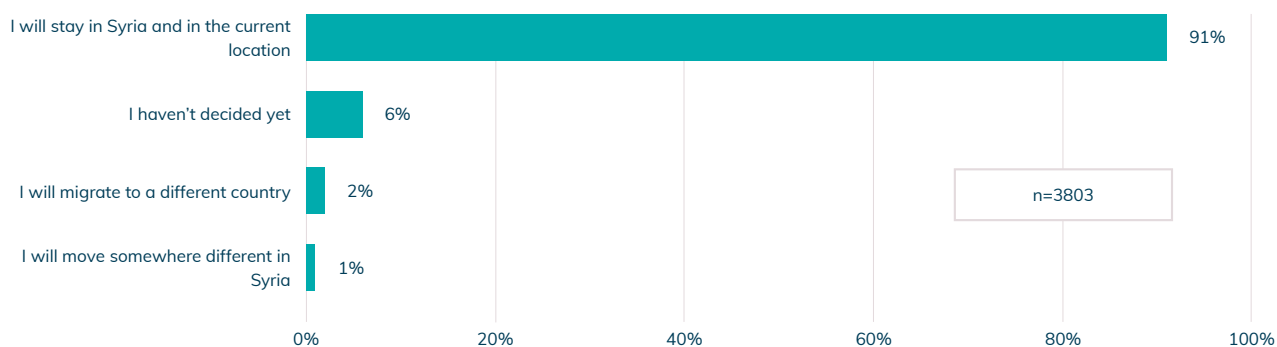
Across both populations, future plans appeared least settled in Aleppo. Among IDP returnees there, 87% said they would stay in their current location, compared with 95% in Homs and 99% in Idlib. Among returnees from abroad, the equivalent figure was 83% in Aleppo, compared with 94% in Homs and 93% in Idlib. Aleppo also had the highest shares of respondents saying they had not yet decided what they would do in the coming year.

Most respondents were therefore not looking beyond return towards another move, even where reintegration remained under strain.

"[Return] was a bad experience... In the host country, we had work through which we were able to meet our needs, whereas here the situation is bad. I will wait a little, and if the economic situation here does not improve, I will have to migrate again."

28-year-old man, returnee from abroad, living in Aleppo

Figure 41. What is your plan in terms of movement for the next 12 months?



4.2.2 Re-migration attitudes among returnees from abroad

Among returnees from abroad, the broader outlook towards re-migration also remained cautious.

When asked hypothetically, if they were to re-migrate, whether they would do it in an irregular manner, 87% said no, while 4% said yes and 8% said they did not know. This suggests that, although irregular travel had featured in many respondents' earlier migration trajectories, irregular re-migration was not widely envisaged as the next step. No clear regional difference emerged between respondents returning from neighbouring countries and those returning from outside the region, although the latter subgroup was very small and the comparison should therefore be treated cautiously.

A second question reinforces this reading. Among returnees from abroad, 60% said they would be unlikely or very unlikely to encourage others to migrate as they had, knowing what they know now. A further 20% were neutral, while 20% said they would be likely or very likely to do so.

Synthesis and implications

Key takeaways and conclusions

The findings point to a return context in which movement back to Syria has become more common, but reintegration remains highly uneven and often fragile. For many respondents, return appears to have been viable in the narrow sense of being possible, but much less secure in the fuller sense of being materially sustainable.

For many returnees from abroad, destination contexts had been precarious rather than stabilising, with legal status varying sharply by host country, informal or insecure work common, and **discrimination emerging as a major pressure shaping return decisions**. The findings point especially clearly to Lebanon as a more adverse context within the sample, combining more frequent irregular stay, lower perceived safety, and markedly more negative assessments of life abroad than the other main host countries.

Meanwhile, **return was driven primarily by perceived improvements in conditions in Syria**, particularly in relation to safety, security and freedom of movement. Yet these perceptions did not always align with post-return realities. Many respondents returned to contexts marked by **weak livelihoods, limited services, housing strain and persistent needs**, which suggests that the conditions encouraging return were often more hopeful than durable. **This gap between the perceived feasibility of return and the actual conditions of reintegration is one of the report's clearest findings.**

Return was widely described as voluntary, but this should not be understood as meaning unconstrained. Most respondents reported agency in their return decision, yet that agency frequently operated within narrowed circumstances. Pressures in host countries or displacement locations, limited access to reliable information, weak support before departure, and, for some respondents, legal insecurity or coercive pressures all shaped the space within which decisions were made.

Economic reintegration emerges as the main constraint affecting return outcomes. Most respondents reported **insufficient household income**, and stable paid work remained limited. Material insecurity extended beyond employment, with widespread concern about food, unmet needs related to housing and utilities, and extensive demand for cash and livelihood support. Reintegration conditions also varied sharply by governorate, with **Homs and Idleb consistently emerging as more difficult post-return environments than Aleppo** across multiple indicators. As political pressure to accelerate Syrian returns has intensified in several host countries, including through renewed discussion of return arrangements, the findings suggest that Syria's economic absorptive capacity remains a key constraint. At the same time, reconstruction needs are now estimated at USD 216 billion, so current recovery support, while important, remains far below the scale required to make return sustainable at country level.⁵⁰

At the same time, the findings do not point to reintegration failure across all domains. **Social belonging was the area where the clearest progress was reported.** Respondents often described **strong ties with family and community, high levels of social acceptance, and a sense of belonging** in their current location. These dimensions appear to provide an important source of resilience, even where economic and material conditions remain precarious. Yet this should not be romanticised. **Psychological stress remained widespread**, suggesting that social anchoring does not remove the emotional burden associated with return under fragile conditions.

Post-return assistance was notably out of step with reported needs. Very few respondents had received assistance after return, and among those who had, most described it as only slightly useful or not useful at all. **This mismatch between the narrow reach of assistance and the breadth of unmet needs** is especially significant given the extent of reported pressures in livelihoods, housing, food security and service access.

Finally, respondents' future intentions suggest a form of cautious settlement rather than renewed mobility. Most planned to remain in their current location over the following 12 months, and a narrow majority reported at least one investment plan over the next two years. These patterns suggest that return was regarded by many as a viable current outcome. At the same time, the fragility of reintegration conditions means that the durability of these intentions cannot be taken for granted. The findings therefore point to a context in which many returnees are trying to stay and rebuild, but are doing so under conditions that continue to test the sustainability of return.

50 World Bank (2025). [Syria's Post-Conflict Reconstruction Costs Estimated at USD 216 billion](#).

Considerations for policy and practice

The findings underline the need to distinguish clearly between return taking place and return being sustainable. High or rising return numbers should not, in themselves, be treated as evidence that reintegration is secure or that return conditions are adequate. Policy and programming should therefore move beyond return monitoring focused primarily on movements and initial arrival shortly upon return and place greater emphasis on **what happens after return in the longer run**, including whether returnees are able to access livelihoods, housing, services and protection in practice.

Stronger local monitoring and protection-centred responses are also needed. Return decisions were often shaped by perceived improvements in safety, yet the findings show that post-return conditions remained volatile and uneven, with insecurity, explosive hazards and other place-specific risks still affecting many respondents. Monitoring systems should therefore be capable not only of tracking returns, but also of **detecting deterioration in local reintegration conditions and emerging protection risks over time**.

The report also points strongly towards the need for area-based rather than uniform national approaches to return. Reintegration conditions varied sharply across governorates, with **Homs and Idleb repeatedly emerging as more difficult contexts**, whether in relation to economic security, service access, housing precarity, food-related worry or perceived progress since return. Return policy and programming should therefore be calibrated to **local conditions, service availability, labour market realities and absorptive capacity**, rather than assuming that return prospects are broadly similar across Syria.

Economic reintegration needs to be placed at the centre of return policy. Low labour participation, weak income adequacy, frequent food-related worry and very high reported demand for cash and livelihood support all suggest that **economic insecurity is the principal threat to durable return**. Cash assistance remains important, but the findings point to the limits of stand-alone relief. More effective approaches are likely to combine cash support with **livelihood programming, job access, small business support, and interventions that are sensitive to household debt and fragile income patterns**.

Service restoration should also be prioritised where constraints are most acute. The findings suggest that healthcare access, housing conditions and food insecurity are not evenly distributed, and that some locations face much tighter service bottlenecks than others. Programming should therefore focus not only on expanding provision, but on **identifying the specific service barriers that most constrain reintegration in different locations**.

The findings also point to the need to improve the quality of return information, not simply its availability. Information before return circulated overwhelmingly through informal personal networks, while institutional sources were largely absent. Return counselling, outreach and information provision should therefore be **realistic, specific and locally grounded**, covering housing, livelihoods, services, assistance availability and likely constraints after arrival. Improving return information is not only a technical issue; it is central to **enabling more informed and less destabilising decisions**.

Where returns are not fully self-organised, safeguards need to be strengthened. The findings on limited legal representation, weak procedural screening and the presence of some deportation- or expulsion-linked returns suggest that non-independent return pathways require more explicit scrutiny. Legal support, risk-sensitive screening and stronger procedural safeguards should not be assumed to exist; they need to be actively built into return-related systems and monitored accordingly.

The findings also support a household-centred approach to reintegration. Reintegration challenges were often experienced through family-based return, household income stress, schooling barriers, food insecurity and decisions about whether all family members could return together. Assistance and policy responses should therefore be designed with **household dynamics in mind** rather than focusing narrowly on the individual returnee.

A gender lens is also important, particularly where differences were most pronounced. Broad patterns of return were often similar for men and women, but women more often reported **lower economic participation, sharper basic-needs pressure, and greater emotional strain**. Gender-sensitive programming should therefore be embedded most clearly in **livelihood support, basic-needs responses, psychosocial support and interventions linked to care responsibilities**.

Finally, psychosocial wellbeing should be treated as part of reintegration rather than as a secondary or stand-alone concern. The report suggests that social belonging was one of the few domains in which many respondents perceived clear progress, yet emotional and psychological stress remained widespread. Reintegration support that focuses only on economic and material conditions risks missing **an important dimension of return experience**.

Evidence gaps and research priorities

This research highlights several key areas that merit deeper exploration in future studies:

- **Longitudinal monitoring of return trajectories:** Because the survey captures a relatively early stage of reintegration, one of the clearest priorities is longitudinal monitoring of return outcomes. More evidence is needed on how initial return conditions evolve, whether current intentions to remain hold over time, and which factors most strongly shape whether return trajectories stabilise or deteriorate.
- **Broader geographic coverage within Syria:** The sharp differences observed across Aleppo, Homs and Idleb underscore the importance of extending research to other governorates and local contexts within Syria. Return conditions are unlikely to be uniform, and broader coverage would help identify where current findings are location-specific and where they reflect wider national dynamics.
- **Closer attention to less visible groups with particular vulnerabilities:** Some groups are less visible within the current dataset but may face compounded vulnerabilities. These include returnees with functional difficulties, female-headed households, older returnees, and ethnic or religious minorities. More focused research on such groups would help clarify how reintegration challenges vary not only by location and return pathway, but also by social position and household structure.
- **Continued monitoring of pressures in neighbouring host countries:** Conditions reported by returnees from Lebanon were especially adverse across several indicators, suggesting that return pressures in host countries remain a critical part of the return equation. Future research should therefore continue to examine how legal status, access to services, discrimination, insecurity and livelihood constraints in host countries influence mobility decisions.
- **More targeted research on Syrians in Europe:** The small number of respondents in the sample who had returned from European countries reflects a broader pattern of lower return levels from Europe than from neighbouring countries. More targeted research could examine how legal status, socioeconomic integration, protection conditions, family dynamics and onward aspirations shape return decision-making in European settings.
- **Further examination of voluntariness, constrained choice and return sustainability:** The findings suggest that many respondents described return as voluntary while also reporting pressure, weak support, legal insecurity or limited alternatives. This raises important questions about how return choices are made in practice, and how policy and programming should interpret voluntariness in contexts where formal agency coexists with materially or politically constrained options.



MMC is a knowledge centre engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programming on mixed migration. MMC has regional hubs in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America, with a global team headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, and based in several countries worldwide.

MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise. MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based mixed migration responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

MMC is part of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). While its institutional link to DRC ensures MMC's work is grounded in operational reality, it acts as an independent source of data, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration for policy makers, practitioners, journalists, and the broader humanitarian sector.

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