SYRIANS ON THE MOVE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since December 2024 the unprecedented developments in Syria have dramatically impacted the lives of millions of Syrians, both within and outside the country. For displaced Syrians, the evolving context comes with an added layer of complexity: the decision of whether—or when—to return home.

As of 10 July, UNHCR estimates that as many as 690,000 Syrian refugees have returned via neighboring countries following the fall of the Assad-led Government. However, while planning estimates suggest the number of returns could reach 1.5 million by the end of the year, a significant majority of refugees currently hosted in neighbouring countries are unlikely to return in the near term. With many citing continued concerns over safety, lack of services, and limited economic opportunities in Syria.

To better understand evolving return intentions, the IRC has conducted a series of Regional Rapid Intentions Surveys among Syrian refugees currently hosted in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Türkiye. To date, three rounds of surveys have been conducted at three-month intervals: Survey 1 in mid-December 2024, Survey 2 in mid-March 2025, and Survey 3 in mid-June 2025.

Cumulatively, over 3,000 surveys have been conducted by the IRC, representing approximately 17,000 Syrian refugees across the four countries.[1] With analysis across the surveys highlighting a refugee population grappling with the effects of protracted displacement, uncertainty about the future, and significant barriers to return. Key findings from the latest Survey can be found below, and for more detailed analysis please see *IRC's Syrians on the Move Refugee Intentions Briefing*.

Key Findings - Survey 3

- **Returning to Syria is not just a physical relocation—it remains a complex and life-altering decision given years spent building lives in host countries:** Over 80% have lived in host countries for more than a decade, with just 1% having left Syria in the last five years.
- **In host countries, economic exclusion and barriers to self-sufficiency remain a consistent challenge:** Only 22% reported having steady employment; 56% rely on partial or irregular work, and 23% are entirely unemployed. This widespread precarity makes it difficult for many to meet basic needs and may push some to consider returning before they are ready.
- **Legal status is another critical determinant of refugees' security and wellbeing**: Just 1% of respondents hold citizenship and 2% have valid work permits. Most rely on Temporary Protection IDs which offer limited rights. The temporary nature of such status can leave refugees in a prolonged state of limbo, especially as renewals become more difficult or subject to shifting national policies.
- **The percentage of those intending to return is increasing but remains the minority**: While 29% of respondents expressed an intention to return—up from 17% in March— this remains the least common response with 34% stating that they have no intention of returning at all and 37% remaining unsure. Suggesting that a significant proportion of refugees are likely to remain in host countries for the foreseeable future.
- **For many of those considering returning there remains little urgency**; Only 9% of those intending to return plan to do so imminently, and 16% within 6 months. Over half (56%) of respondents were unsure of their return timeframe, indicating a high degree of hesitation or dependence on external factors such as improved conditions in Syria or changes in host country circumstances.

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[1] It is important to note that the IRC Regional Rapid Intention's Surveys are not statistically representative of the entire Syrian refugee population in neighboring countries. Instead, they offer a snapshot of the perceptions, concerns, and intentions of those surveyed at the time of data collection. While they provide insight into broad trends, they do not represent definitive changes in individual intentions and should be interpreted with appropriate caution and context.

- **Underscoring the collective nature of the decision, and consistent with results from previous surveys, the vast majority (71%) would only return with their entire family.**
- **Although gender does not appear to be a major determinant of intention, gender differences were observed in relation to sources of external pressure:** Similar percentages of women (28%) and men (30%) expressed an intention to return, as well as no intention to return, women (35%) and men (33%). However, when asked about external pressures 31% of female respondents identified pressure from family or community as their primary concern, compared to only 2% of men. This disparity may point to a stronger influence of familial or societal expectations on women's decisions, though other factors, such as household dynamics, could also be contributing.
- **Perceived safety is improving slightly however a significant minority still feel unsafe**: Across all three survey rounds, only 5% of respondents said they feel it is "very safe" to return. In Survey 3, 40% reported feeling it was "unsafe," while 48% described it as "somewhat safe"—a notable improvement from Survey 2, where 73% said it was unsafe and just 18% felt somewhat safe. While this shift may reflect easing concerns, a significant proportion still perceive return as unsafe, underscoring the deep-rooted security concerns many refugees continue to hold.
- **While security remains a significant barrier, other return-preventing factors are becoming increasingly salient:** Security and safety inside Syria remains the primary factor influencing return decisions; however, this percentage dropped significantly from 48% in December to 26% in June. This could suggest that refugees are increasingly assessing return holistically—not simply as a yes or no security question.
- **Housing, land, and property concerns emerge as a growing barrier when making the decision to return**: Rising from 10% of respondents in December to 20% in March, and 23% by June. This could reflect growing awareness of the widespread destruction in Syria, and the practical challenges many will face in reclaiming or accessing adequate housing.
- **The availability of livable housing in Syria remains extremely low**: Only 10% reported having suitable accommodation available to them upon return.
- **Economic concerns within Syria have also gained prominence as key factors in decision-making**: The availability of jobs or economic opportunities as the main influencing factor has risen from 6% in December to 18% in June. Similarly, access to basic services, including healthcare, education, and utilities has risen from 10% in December to 13% in March, reaching 17% by June. These trends likely reflect growing recognition among refugees that any decision to return must be supported by functional infrastructure and access to essential public services to ensure a safe and dignified reintegration.
- **Indicating a strong emphasis on voluntary decision-making, the majority of respondents (80%) stated that if they were to return to Syria, it would be their own choice:** However, 12% said they would feel pressured to return, and a further 8% were unsure, highlighting a significant minority for whom return may not be fully voluntary.
- **Concerns about dignity during return remained consistent:** A lack of basic services and infrastructure in Syria remains the most pressing concern, cited by around 72-73% across all rounds. While less commonly cited overall, concerns about discrimination and lack of acceptance have grown, rising from 10% in December to 14% in June, possibly reflecting increasing anxiety around the challenges of reintegration and social cohesion upon return.
- **Support needed to ensure safe and dignified returns have remained relatively stable over time:** Housing support continues to be the most frequently cited need, ranging from 35% in December, rising to 41% in March, and decreasing to 33% in June. Other key areas such as financial assistance for travel and resettlement and assurances of safety and security have remained relatively constant, cited by around 20–30% of respondents across all surveys. Meanwhile, support for education, healthcare, and livelihoods has shown a gradual increase, rising from 10% in December to 15% in June, possibly reflecting a growing recognition of the longer-term needs required to sustain a viable return.
- **Access to information to make informed decisions about returns has deteriorated since the last survey**: Only 46% of respondents stated that they had enough information to make an informed

decision, down from 63% in March. There has been a significant shift in respondents moving from 'enough' information to 'some' between March and June. This may point to a rising demand for more tailored, in-depth, or location-specific guidance, particularly around legal processes, service availability, or the logistics of return.

- **Primary sources of information remain largely informal, with media, social media, and family networks continuing to serve as the dominant channels**: Notably, less than 1% of respondents in June reported receiving return-related information from either the UN or NGOs, signaling a persistent gap in formal communication on return issues.

Recommendations To Stakeholders

1. All Syrians have the right to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, and to reintegrate into their communities. For those who do decide to return it is critical that:

- All stakeholders ensure that returns are truly voluntary, safe, and dignified, with no legal or social coercion.
- All states uphold the principle of non-refoulement to ensure that Syrian refugee's fundamental rights are fully respected.

2. In parallel, to appropriately support refugees who decide to remain in neighboring countries and those communities hosting them:

- The international community must scale up sustained investments in shared national systems, access to basic services, infrastructure and livelihoods, to continue strengthening resilience capacities and maintaining cohesion and stability for both refugees and host communities.

3. Current conditions inside Syria remaining unconducive for large-scale voluntary repatriation. To respond to immediate humanitarian needs, prevent further deterioration, and strengthen early recovery efforts:

- Donors should urgently expand flexible, multi-year humanitarian and early recovery funding to Syria in tandem to restore essential services, rebuild critical civilian infrastructure, and support livelihoods.

4. Refugees must have access to all the information they need to make informed decisions about their futures:

- Host governments not already doing so should be encouraged to permit spontaneous returns and visits to Syria without the loss of refugee status, allowing Syrians the flexibility to assess conditions and any improvements in return areas.
- All stakeholders should work to provide trusted, coordinated, and localized information to refugees—delivered in accessible formats and appropriate languages.
- Humanitarian actors should strengthen communication on legal rights, return conditions, and service availability.