SYRIANS ON THE MOVE

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.

Fourteen years since the outbreak of conflict, Syria remains one of the largest displacement crises globally. More than ten million Syrians continue to be forcibly displaced, including over four million Syrian refugees hosted in neighboring countries.

2025 has witnessed a notable increase in the number of Syrian refugees crossing back into Syria. As of 10 July, UNHCR estimates that, following the fall of the Assad-led Government, as many as 690,000 Syrians have made the journey back via neighboring countries.[1] With the vast majority self-organized returns[2] or facilitated to varying extents by host government return processes[3].

It is not only from neighboring countries that we are witnessing significant movement of those displaced. More than 1.5 million internally displaced people (IDPs) out of more than 7.4 million[4] are also reported to have returned to their areas of origin.

Following the fall of the Assad-led Government, Syria's displacement landscape remains characterized by simultaneous internal movement, IDP and refugee returns, and entirely new waves of displacement.

The future movement of Syrians will be a dynamic, and not necessarily linear process, highly influenced by evolving conflict patterns, security concerns, access to basic services, social networks, economic opportunities, and an overall changing perception of stability in both Syria and in host-countries.

Depending on how the situation inside Syria continues to evolve, it is likely that the number of people returning to their areas of origin will continue to rise over the course of 2025 and into 2026. The February 2025 Regional Interagency Preparedness Plan for Refugee Returns (IAPPR) estimates that up to 1.5 million Syrian refugees may return via

[1] This UNHCR figure is calculated based on a triangulation of data from Syria, Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt and is based on estimates and reported movements rather than direct verification. Source: UNHCR Regional Flash Update #35
[2] Self-organized voluntary repatriation or spontaneous return is at the refugees' own initiative and through their own travel arrangements. Self-organized voluntary returns can occur alongside facilitated returns affecting the same refugee population in one or in different countries of asylum.
[3] Where host governments organize or support groups or individuals who freely express the wish to repatriate. Facilitation can include provision of a repatriation grant/package or assistance with transport and should include an assessment of voluntariness of the return.
[4] Note this figure is from 2024 and does not account for the recent mass movement trends following displacement from Lebanon and Syria's Government transition. The IDP Task Force is currently analyzing and updating total IDP figures. Source: UNHCR Regional Flash Update #35

neighboring countries by the end of 2025[5]. This is under a 'best case scenario' that assumes the political process gains further traction, and that there are positive indications of stability and security in large parts of the country.

However, even under this best-case scenario, a significant majority of refugees currently hosted in neighbouring countries are unlikely to return in the near term. With many citing concerns over safety, lack of services, and limited economic opportunities in Syria.

CURRENT SITUATION INSIDE SYRIA AND BARRIERS TO RETURN

Since its formation, Syria's Transitional Government has initiated plans for a new constitutional framework, set a timeline for organizing elections within five years, and begun the fragile unification of various armed groups and factions into a centralized national army. This new political chapter for Syria has created cautious optimism amongst many of those forcibly displaced that lasting peace, stability, and inclusive governance may finally be within reach.

However, a myriad of challenges persist across the country that continue to act as barriers to large-scale safe, dignified, and ultimately sustainable returns. As UNHCR's current Position on Returns to the Syrian Arab Republic (December 2024) notes: "In view of the many challenges facing Syria's population, […] for the time being UNHCR is not promoting large-scale voluntary repatriation to Syria."[6] These challenges include, but are not limited to:

Ongoing security and safety concerns:
While large-scale conflict has generally subsided, clashes and localized conflict have continued, involving ex-Government loyalists, the Syrian General Security Service, armed groups, and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). These hostilities are reported to have resulted in civilian casualties, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and damage and destruction of critical infrastructure. They have also led to new displacement, as was witnessed in March 2025 when more than 90,000 Syrians fled into Lebanon following sectarian violence in Syria's coastal region, and more recently in Suwayda Governorate where upward of 120,000 people have been newly displaced due to fighting.

Further, Protection Monitoring conducted by IRC in Syria between April and June 2025 highlights how explosive remnants of war (ERW) remains a widespread and life-threatening barrier to return. In some areas, 87% of Protection Monitoring respondents reported ERW within 10 kilometers of their homes, with children and newly arrived returnees most at risk. This is especially the case for those looking to return to homes or access agricultural lands in previous front-line areas where contamination is at its highest. These risks undermine public safety, restrict movement, and deter families from returning even where conditions may appear stable.

"My husband, who is 50 years old, returned to Syria last month to try to prepare the way for us to return. But he was shocked to see that there are weapons everywhere.

He told me that one of our relatives was recently killed for just offending someone. When his family tried to file a complaint, the authorities said that these are individual acts beyond their control.

In a country where the rule of law is absent, where there is no safety, I realized that returning could mean putting my family at serious risk."

Eman*, female, Syrian refugee living in Jordan

**All name's changed to protect identities throughout this policy paper*

Lack of access to basic services: Historical attacks on civilian infrastructure — including hospitals, schools, and water systems — alongside years of underinvestment have severely degraded access to basic services across the country. As a result of more than 14 years of conflict and crisis, 43% of Syria's hospitals, 63% of primary healthcare

[5] Regional Interagency Preparedness Plan for Refugee Returns (IAPPR)
[6] UNHCR Position on returns to the Syrian Arab Republic (December 2024)

facilities, 63% of water supply networks, 81% of electricity networks, and 33% of all schools are now either damaged or destroyed. Leaving millions without reliable access to these services. Today, humanitarian needs across Syria are at the highest they have ever been. With more than 16.7 million people currently reliant on humanitarian assistance to survive. For those displaced there are significant questions as to what services, if any, would be available upon their return.

"My husband suffers from chronic diseases and severe psychological pain because of the torture he endured while he was detained in Syria. It was a miracle that he survived, but unfortunately the physical and psychological effects will remain with him forever.

We are worried that Syria lacks the adequate health services for survivors of detention and torture, especially the mental health support he now needs. I think that returning could mean exposing him and my family to an unsafe environment.

Despite all the challenges we face here, including the stoppage of aid and restrictions on our being able to work, I think staying remains the safest option for us as a family."

Suha*, female, Syrian refugee living in Jordan

Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) & Civil Documentation Issues: Those who do return to their areas of origin risk finding their homes either uninhabitable, destroyed, or occupied. Nearly one-third of Syria's housing—1.3 million units—has been either destroyed or severely damaged, and households that the IRC support inside Syria increasingly cite financial constraints as a key barrier to accessing safe shelter. Forced evictions, particularly affecting low-income families and IDPs without formal documentation, are also on the rise. With women, older persons, and people with disabilities facing disproportionate barriers to reclaiming or securing safe housing.

Lack of civil documentation is another major barrier for returnees. Many fled without property deeds, rental contracts, or ID cards, and even where documents exist, returnees may struggle to validate ownership given that civil registry offices and public records were destroyed in multiple locations. The continued fragmented governance landscape further complicates the situation, with different authorities issuing varying forms of documentation, often not recognized across previous lines of control. As an example, recent IRC Protection Monitoring in Deir Ez Zor found that 66% of households lack a valid family booklet, and 34% lack a government-issued ID. Confiscation and loss of documentation, compounded by fears of approaching authorities and administrative gaps, have left many residents legally invisible. In turn undermining access to aid and public services, while also restricting freedom of movement, and complicating possible return to their areas of origin.

Economic collapse and lack of livelihoods: The Syrian economy continues to be marked by hyperinflation, widespread unemployment, currency depreciation, and liquidity shortages. Returnees risk finding scarce job opportunities, limited access to affordable housing to rent, and no safety net to draw on. Most displaced Syrians are already experiencing economic hardship with 90% of Syrians in poverty. Families that the IRC support, both inside Syria and in neighbouring countries, are already resorting to extreme coping mechanisms such as incurring debt, selling assets, and engaging their children in labor or pressuring them to marry. Without livelihood opportunities, or pre-existing savings to fall back on, many hold concerns that returning in the current conditions would not only risk insecurity, but also destitution.

CURRENT SITUATION IN HOST COUNTRIES AND POTENTIAL PUSH FACTORS

The situation for Syrian refugees hosted in the region is also increasingly fraught. Many are experiencing deteriorating conditions shaped by deepening poverty, limited legal protections, and constrained access to essential services. These dynamics contribute to growing uncertainty and vulnerability for displaced Syrians, with refugee families caught between increasingly challenging conditions in host countries and unresolved risks in Syria. As a result, Syrian refugees' return intentions are often based on a comparative assessment: the weighing of gradual or perceived improvements back in Syria against current conditions and prospects in host countries where they have spent years building lives, families and communities.

Jordan: Jordan hosts an estimated 1.3 million Syrian refugees, of which over 600,000 are registered with UNHCR. The vast majority live outside formal camps in towns and cities across the country. While Jordan has offered a relatively stable and secure environment, the prolonged refugee presence has placed growing pressure on public services and host communities, especially as international funding continues to decline. Today, around 66% of Syrian refugees in Jordan live below the international poverty line of $5.50 per person per day, with poverty rates even higher outside of camps where access to subsidized services, such as healthcare and education, are limited. Economic opportunities remain scarce, with only a small proportion of Syrians in formal employment, and more than half of the refugee workforce engaged in informal, low-paying, and sometimes exploitative labor. The removal of work permit fee waivers in 2023 has further restricted access to the formal labor market, pushing more refugees into economic precarity. Vulnerability is particularly acute among women, youth, and households with limited legal documentation. At the same time, public sentiment and political rhetoric have increasingly shifted to an emphasis that the presence of Syrian refugees cannot be sustained indefinitely, with the Jordanian government continuing to advocate for the voluntary and dignified return of refugees as the only viable long-term solution. As of 1 July, more than 100,000 refugees registered with UNHCR are reported to have returned to Syria from Jordan following the fall of the Assad-led Government. With the pace of returns increasing in recent months and possibly linked to the conclusion of school exams and closure of the Emirati Refugee Camp in June.

Lebanon: Lebanon hosts an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees, the highest per capita concentration in the world. A significant number of refugees reside in informal tented settlements and substandard shelters across both urban and rural areas. The country's severe economic crisis, marked by currency collapse, inflation, and institutional paralysis, and greatly exacerbated by last year's escalation of conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, has dramatically worsened conditions for both refugees and host communities. Over 90% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon now live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than $3 per person per day. Access to livelihoods remain extremely limited, with only a small fraction of refugees able to work legally. Most are reliant on precarious informal labor that is irregular, poorly paid, and often exploitative. Women and youth are particularly affected by these vulnerabilities. In 2023, restrictions on employment tightened further, including the suspension of Legal Residency Pathways and the shutdown of businesses operated by Syrians lacking proper licenses.

"A couple of months ago my husband traveled to Syria to get a closer look at the situation there. How things are economically, in terms of services, security, and so on. When he got back to the area where his family are originally from, he was taken by armed men.

They accused him of being an ally of the previous regime. He was detained and beaten. They filmed it, and the videos of him were circulated on social media. When we saw the video, we did everything we could to get him out. After two weeks he was released, and he immediately returned to Lebanon. Now, our entire family are no longer considering returning to Syria. For us the situation there is still unsafe and chaotic."

Hala*, female, Syrian refugee living in Lebanon

IRC Protection Monitoring shows that child labor amongst Syrian refugees is rising, particularly in Baalbek El Hermel and Beirut-Mount Lebanon. This is primarily driven by barriers to school registration for Syrian children, coupled with reduced access to humanitarian assistance that forces families to rely on child labor to cover basic needs. Syrian refugees are increasingly facing evictions, legal insecurity, and growing hostility from local authorities. While access to health care, education, and shelter continue to deteriorate. The stance of successive Lebanese governments against local integration, coupled with rising anti-refugee rhetoric in public discourse, and instances of forced deportations, has made the environment increasingly hostile for refugees. While details remain scarce, the Lebanese

Government is reported to have finalized a national 'Returns Plan' that envisions the voluntary return of up to 400,000 Syrians by the end of 2025 while utilizing financial incentives[7].

Türkiye: Türkiye hosts the largest population of Syrian refugees globally, with over 3.2 million registered under temporary protection. While the country initially offered broad access to services and relative stability, rising economic hardship and political pressures have significantly altered the environment for refugees. The ongoing economic downturn — marked by high inflation, currency depreciation, and rising unemployment — has strained host communities and increased tensions toward Syrians, particularly in urban areas. Approximately 70% of Syrian households now live below the poverty line, with many depending on informal or low-paying jobs lacking legal protections. Labor participation remains especially difficult for women and youth, while legal pathways to employment have become increasingly limited. Rising anti-refugee sentiment has also translated into policy shifts, including stricter residency regulations, heightened enforcement, and increasing public calls for repatriation. Many Syrians report facing discrimination, eviction threats, and reduced access to social services, particularly in municipalities experiencing political shifts. The government has reinforced its stance that returns are the preferred long-term solution, investing in cross-border infrastructure projects in northern Syria and encouraging voluntary returns[8]. On 2 July, Türkiye's Vice President announced that 316,000 Syrians had returned from Türkiye to Syria since 8 December 2024, while noting that the pace of returns has accelerated following the closure of schools.[9]

Iraq: Iraq currently hosts over 260,000 registered Syrian refugees, the vast majority of whom reside in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), particularly in Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah governorates. Approximately 60% of Syrian refugees live in urban, peri-urban, and rural settings, while the remaining 40% are housed in camps managed in coordination with humanitarian agencies. While the KRI has maintained a relatively accommodating environment for Syrians, the protracted nature of displacement, combined with Iraq's own political and economic instability, has deepened vulnerabilities among refugee populations. Access to livelihoods remains limited, with most Syrians reliant on informal and seasonal work, often in agriculture, construction, and service sectors, which offer little stability or protection. The phasing out of humanitarian aid and the absence of sustainable livelihood solutions have further undermined refugees' self-reliance. Women, youth, and those without civil documentation face particularly acute barriers to services and employment. Moreover, while the overall security environment in the KRI remains relatively stable, concerns over protection, freedom of movement, and future integration persist. Although the Iraqi government continues to support voluntary return as the preferred durable solution, interest among Syrian refugees in returning remains relatively low due to safety concerns and limited economic opportunities in their areas of origin.

PERCEPTIONS AND INTENTIONS OF REFUGEES TO RETURN

Just like the displacement landscape, the intentions of displaced Syrians to return to their areas of origin are also highly dynamic.

In February 2025, UNHCR released its *Ninth Returns Perceptions and Intentions Survey*—its first following the collapse of the Assad-led government.[10] The results painted a picture of renewed hope and optimism, with 80% of refugees stating that they hoped to return someday, up from 30% in April 2023, and 27% expressing their intention to do so within the next year, compared to just 1.7% in 2023. The survey was conducted with Syrian refugees registered with or known to UNHCR in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt. While Türkiye was not part of the study, similar percentages were reported to have been observed there.

[7] While termed voluntary the Lebanon Returns Plan includes financial incentives as well as legal and administrative measures that may encourage and/or exert pressure on refugees to return.
[8] The Turkish government officially promotes its refugee return policy for Syrians as voluntary, safe and dignified. It is important to note, however, that human rights organizations have documented cases where refugees reported being coerced into signing "voluntary return" forms, sometimes under threat of indefinite detention. Source: Human Rights Watch: Syrians Face Dire Conditions in Turkish-Occupied 'Safe Zone'
[9] UNHCR Regional Flash Update #35
[10] UNHCR Ninth Returns Perceptions and Intentions Survey

To better understand evolving refugee intentions regarding return to Syria, the IRC has also launched 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 completed by the IRC, representing approximately 17,000 Syrian refugees across the four countries. It is important to note that these 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.

IRC Rapid Returns Intentions Survey 3 - June 2025: Key Findings

The analysis of IRC's latest Returns Intentions Survey highlights a refugee population still grappling with the effects of protracted displacement, uncertainty about the future, and significant barriers to return.

Situation in Host Countries:

More than 80% of respondents reported living in host countries for over ten years, with only 1% having left Syria within the past five. In some countries, this reality is even more pronounced: 100% of respondents in Jordan have lived there for over a decade, compared to 81% in Iraq, 75% in Lebanon, and 35% in Turkiye. For Turkiye, while a substantially smaller number have been in country for more than a decade, it is important to note that 98% of respondents stated they arrived from Syria more than five years ago. Across all contexts, these figures underscore how returning represents a profound and life-altering decision that would likely entail significant emotional, social, and economic disruption.

Economic exclusion remains a consistent challenge. Just 22% of respondents reported having steady employment; 56% rely on irregular or partial work, and 23% are entirely unemployed. This widespread precarity makes it difficult for many to meet basic needs.

The degree and impact of this economic insecurity, however, varies across contexts:

- In Jordan, only 6% reported having steady employment, with 69% stating their income was insufficient to meet their basic needs, and just 1% stating their income adequately covered basic needs
- In Lebanon, 22% were steadily employed, with 44% stating their income was insufficient to meet their basic needs, and 5% stating their income adequately covered basic needs.
- Türkiye showed the most positive employment outcomes, with 76% in steady jobs. However, 67% still reported being either unable or only somewhat able to meet their basic needs. Indicating that economic exclusion persists for a significant majority.

Crucially, prolonged economic hardship and an inability to meet basic needs in host countries may create push factors', and lead to refugees considering returning to Syria before they are ready, even in the absence of safe or sustainable conditions.

Legal status is another critical determinant of refugees' security and wellbeing. Very few respondents hold citizenship (1%) or valid work permits (2%). The overwhelming majority rely on Temporary Protection IDs: 100% in Jordan, 86% in Türkiye, and 99% in Iraq. While these documents can offer basic legal recognition and short-term protection, they rarely guarantee durable rights or access to key services. 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.

In Lebanon, legal vulnerability is particularly acute. Only 30% of respondents said they currently hold Temporary Protection IDs, while 64% selected "other." With most clarifying that they were once registered but their documentation has since expired. This points to a significant population now living without valid legal status, heightening their exposure to exploitation, restricted access to services, and risk of detention or deportation.

Refugee Intentions Concerning Return

The Survey 3 results reveal a notable rebound in the proportion of refugees expressing an intention to return to Syria—rising to 29%, up from 17% in Survey 2 that was conducted in March. This is the highest level recorded across all three survey rounds and may reflect either a perceived improvement in conditions inside Syria or a deterioration of conditions in host countries. Consistent with previous rounds, 71% stated they would only return with their entire family, underscoring the collective nature of the decision.

However, while 29% is the highest proportion of respondents stating an intention to return to date, it continues to be the least popular answer to this question. With 34% stating that they have no intention of returning at all and 37% remaining unsure. These figures suggest that a significant proportion of refugees are likely to remain in host countries for the foreseeable future, highlighting the need for continued support and durable solutions.

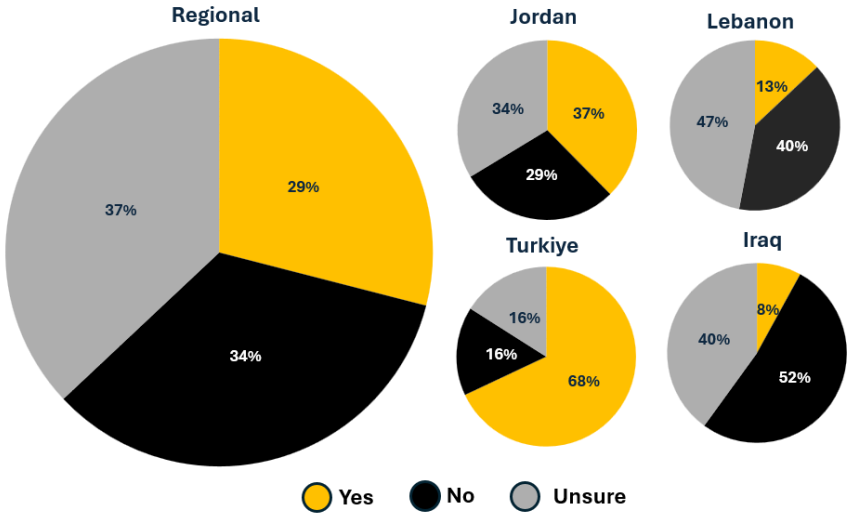

Chart 1: Survey 3 Responses to 'Do you intend to return to Syria?'

As can be seen in Chart 1 above, intentions do vary considerably by host country. Potentially reflecting the influence of local conditions, policy environments, and lived experiences on return decisions.

- Türkiye stands out with the highest proportion of refugees expressing an intention to return to Syria—68%—alongside the lowest levels of both no intention (16%) and uncertainty (16%). This suggests a relatively strong inclination toward return among Syrians in Türkiye.
- In contrast, Jordan shows a more balanced distribution: 37% of respondents stated that they intend to return, while 29% do not, and 34% remain unsure. This indicates a more divided outlook, with a sizeable group open to return, but still a significant portion either hesitant or firmly opposed. This is possibly influenced by the long duration of displacement and deeper socio-economic ties in Jordan, alongside ongoing violence and widespread humanitarian needs in Suwayda and Dar'aa Governorates where many of Syrian refugees in Jordan originate from.
- Lebanon and Iraq present very different dynamics to those above. In Lebanon, only 13% of refugees are willing to return, while 40% are not, and nearly half (47%) are unsure. This high level of uncertainty may be linked to ongoing instability in Syrian governorates bordering Lebanon. Refugees supported by the IRC in Lebanon report

receiving troubling accounts from family and friends who have already returned, including continued conflict, kidnappings, and violence, which are likely to reinforce fears about the safety and viability of return.

- Meanwhile, in Iraq, return intentions are the lowest across all countries, with just 8% willing to return and more than half (52%) unwilling. The remaining 40% are unsure, reflecting widespread reluctance. This is likely linked to ongoing uncertainty about the future of Syrian Democratic Forces-controlled areas inside Syria, where the majority originate from, and possible cultural ties in KRI given that most Syrian refugees in Iraq are of Kurdish ethnicity.

These differences underscore that return intentions are deeply context specific. While some groups appear increasingly inclined toward return, high levels of uncertainty and opposition in other contexts indicate the importance of tailored, country-specific support strategies that address both the aspirations of those considering return and the longer-term needs of those likely to stay.

"I came to Jordan 11 years ago from Syria. I'm the breadwinner for my 6 children and wife. At one point, I lost hope of ever returning to my homeland again, but now everything has changed. I've decided to return with my family next month. I know that the economic and living situation in Syria is difficult, but the situation in Jordan has become so difficult too. Many of the organizations we relied on have stopped their assistance, and the yearly work permits have become an unbearable burden. Of course, I have many fears. In the area I am from I hear that weapons are widespread. I fear for my children's safety. There are also very limited job opportunities, and when we get there, we don't have a home to shelter us. But I feel like I have no other choice."
Walid*, male, Syrian refugee living in Jordan

Those who stated an intention to return were also asked their expected timeline, with the majority uncertain about when they might go back. 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.

A minority anticipate an imminent return, with 9% of those intending to return planning to do so as soon as possible, and another 16% within 1–6 months. A gradual increase is observed in those projecting a return in the medium term, with 19% planning within 6–12 months. This distribution suggests that while some individuals are beginning to consider return as a viable option, most remain cautious, with timelines that are likely contingent on future developments.

Gender Disaggregation on Return Intentions

Our analysis of gender-disaggregated data from Survey 3 revealed no statistically significant differences in return intentions between men and women. Specifically, 28% of women and 30% of men expressed an intention to return, while 35% of women and 33% of men indicated they did not intend to return. This suggests that gender may not be a major influencing factor in return decisions.

However, as detailed further below, some gender differences were observed in relation to sources of external pressure. Among female respondents, 31% 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. The cause of these variations requires further research into the gendered factors and dynamics that influence return intentions.

Barriers to Return

While insecurity inside Syria remains a major barrier to return, it appears that other factors are becoming increasingly influential in shaping refugees' decisions.

When asked what would most influence their decision to return, access to safety and security within Syria continues to be the top-cited factor. However, the proportion of respondents prioritizing it has dropped significantly—from 48% in Survey 1 to just 26% in Survey 3. This shift may suggest that some refugees perceive the security situation in Syria

to have improved or stabilized. Alternatively, it could indicate that decisions around return are becoming more multifaceted, with refugees weighing a broader range of considerations—including livelihoods, access to services, and legal rights—rather than focusing solely on security.

In line with this trend, perceptions of safety related to return remain low overall, though they show signs of gradual improvement. 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, it is important to note that 40% still perceive return as unsafe. Underscoring the deep-rooted security concerns many refugees continue to hold.

Perceptions of safety also vary notably across the host countries. Refugees in Türkiye reported the highest levels of perceived safety, with 12% saying return felt “very safe” and over half (56%) describing it as “somewhat safe.” In Lebanon, however, 53% of respondents said it was “not safe” to return, though 8% still described it as “very safe”. In Jordan, views were mixed: 61% felt return was “somewhat safe,” while 30% said it was “not safe.” Meanwhile, Iraq had the most pessimistic outlook, with 56% saying it was “not safe” to return and 0% describing return as “very safe.” These differences likely reflect the distinct demographic and experiential profiles of Syrian refugees residing in each host-country.

Beyond security concerns, a range of other critical factors appear to be increasingly shaping refugees’ decisions around return. Housing, land, and property (HLP) issues are emerging as a growing barrier, with concern in this area rising steadily—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. Related to this point, only 10% of respondents across the latest survey confirmed they have suitable accommodation available to them if they were to return.

“While everyone dreams of returning to Syria, I am frightened by the future that awaits my family if we decide to return. I fled to Jordan with my family 13 years ago, hoping to run from the difficult reality we were living. Since then, I have got married and had two children. My daughter is now 7, and my son 6.

But my marriage was done without my husband’s family's consent, and it has caused us lots of issues. Two years ago, the troubles with my husband's family got worse. My husband and I separated, and he returned to Syria. I refused to send the children with him. After December 8, he tried to contact and reconcile. But I refused. Since then, he and his family have threatened to kill not just me, but my family as well. This is why returning to Syria is simply not an option. We face difficulties here in Jordan, we don’t have enough money, or support. But it is still safer than what could await us there.”

Manal*, female, Syrian refugee living in Jordan

Economic conditions inside Syria also appear to be becoming more prominent in return-related decision-making. The percentage of refugees citing job availability or economic opportunity as a key influence has risen from 6% in Survey 1 to 18% in Survey 3, highlighting the importance of sustainable livelihoods in shaping return intentions. Similarly, access to basic services, including healthcare, education, and utilities, has shown a gradual increase as a factor in decision-making. This consideration rose from 10% in December to 13% in March, reaching 17% by June. This trend likely reflects 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

External Pressures to Return

The majority of respondents (80%) stated that if they were to return to Syria, it would be their own choice, indicating a strong emphasis on voluntary decision-making. 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. Among those who

anticipated pressure, the most cited source was pressure from host government or authorities (58%), followed by pressure from family or community members (19%) and lack of support in their current location (14%). A smaller share (6%) pointed to expiring legal status or documentation. It should be noted that 'pressure from host-community' was not included as an option in the survey and so further research is required to understand whether this is an emerging issue.

As already mentioned above, there are clear gender differences in the sources of external pressure: 31% of women identified pressure from family or community as their primary concern, compared to just 2% of men. In contrast, 73% of men reported pressure from host governments or authorities, while this was true for only 47% of women. These variations suggest that women and men may experience different forms of coercion, shaped by both their social environments and institutional contexts. Together, the findings underscore the critical need to uphold the principle of voluntary, safe, and dignified return, and to ensure that neither policies nor social dynamics in host countries push individuals into decisions that compromise their autonomy.

Dignity During Return

Concerns about the dignity of return have remained broadly consistent across all three survey rounds. The lack of basic services and infrastructure inside Syria continues to be the most pressing concern, cited by roughly 72–73% of respondents throughout the three surveys conducted. 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.

There are notable context-specific variations in how these concerns are expressed. In Jordan, Lebanon, and Türkiye, most respondents identify basic services as their primary concern—reported by 80%, 74%, and 72%, respectively. In contrast, respondents in Iraq report this at a significantly lower rate (45%), with lack of acceptance emerging as the dominant concern (44%), far higher than in other countries (Jordan 8%, Lebanon 14%, Türkiye 13%).

This variation is mirrored in the type of support respondents say they need for a dignified return: in Iraq, the most requested support is assurances of safety and security (57%), compared to just 19% in Lebanon, the next highest. Conversely, housing support, which is a leading need elsewhere (Jordan 29%, Lebanon 42%, Türkiye 32%), is cited by only 13% of respondents in Iraq.

When asked more broadly about the support needed to enable safe and dignified return, responses 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. Meanwhile, support for education, healthcare, and livelihoods has shown a gradual increase, rising from 10% in Survey 1 to 15% in Survey 3, possibly reflecting a growing recognition of the longer-term needs required to sustain a viable return.

Access to Information

Perceptions around access to information for making informed decisions about return have evolved considerably over the three survey rounds. In Survey 3, only 46% of respondents said they had enough information to make an informed decision, down from 63% in Survey 2. While the proportion of respondents stating they have 'some' information increased from 29% in March to 44% in June, and the proportion of those who felt they had no information remained relatively low and stable at around 10%. This may suggest a significant shift of respondents moving from 'enough' information to 'some' between the last two Surveys. 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.

Despite these changes, 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 Survey 3 reported

receiving return-related information from either the UN or NGOs, a decline from the already-low 2% in Survey 2. This signals a persistent gap in formal communication on return issues and underlines the need for improved outreach and clearer, more accessible messaging from humanitarian and international actors.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With significant uncertainties remaining for Syria's transition, it is crucial that Syrian refugees are given the time and information to make fully informed, voluntary, and dignified decisions about whether and when they return.

For Syrian refugees that the IRC have spoken to, personal safety and the safety of their families are often non-negotiable prerequisites for return. Without credible guarantees of protection and security these fears may lead many displaced Syrians to further delay, or reject entirely, the idea of going back to their areas of origin.

All Syrians have the right to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, and to reintegrate into their communities. 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.

While those refugees who want to return should be enabled to do so, the international community must in parallel sustain its support to refugees who decide to remain in neighboring countries. This support should focus on 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.

The level of destruction and humanitarian need in Syria will continue to be one of the primary factors impacting intentions to return. Ninety percent of people in Syria live below the poverty line, and basic services have been left decimated after more than 14 years of conflict. Given these conditions, the situation in Syria remains unconducive for large-scale voluntary repatriation. Recent cuts to humanitarian funding mean that organizations working in Syria are being asked to make difficult decisions concerning prioritization that directly translate into humanitarian needs going unmet.

At this critical juncture it is paramount that the international community immediately increase multi-year flexible funding for humanitarian and early recovery interventions in Syria. This will enable humanitarian organizations on the ground to respond to the immediate humanitarian needs that persist, prevent further deterioration of the humanitarian situation, while also strengthening early recovery efforts to provide Syrians with the opportunities, hope and dignity needed to rebuild their lives.

Ultimately, regardless of how the situation evolves inside Syria, any discussions or plans concerning returns must continue to center on the need for them to be truly voluntary, safe and dignified, and underpinned by refugees having access to all the knowledge - in appropriate languages and formats - they need to make informed decisions about their futures.

It is therefore essential that all stakeholders avoid applying legal, administrative, or social pressures that could coerce Syrians into unsafe or involuntary returns. Likewise, upholding the principle of non-refoulement remains paramount to ensure that no Syrian is forcibly returned and that their fundamental rights are fully respected.