

Regional Flash Update #1

Recent Syria Escalations

9 December 2024

Key Highlights

- Since 27 November, between **800,000 and one million people** have been displaced from many areas across Syria, including over 150,000 people experiencing secondary displacement. Women and girls comprise nearly 50 per cent of those forced to flee their homes. In parallel, there are indications that some internally displaced people (IDPs) are returning to areas of origin, including Aleppo.
- Refugees in neighbouring countries express elation and hope, but also caution as to whether to return. UNHCR is assessing movements across borders, which remain minimal from Türkiye and Jordan. Several thousand Syrians have reportedly crossed back into Syria from Lebanon through the Masnaa official border point, although there are also movements back to Lebanon.
- UNHCR operations from Damascus are resuming as security conditions allow. Community centres are gradually re-opening in Aleppo and Damascus and emergency assistance is being provided in the north-east. UNHCR's cross-border operation remains fully functional, providing crucial assistance to IDPs and host communities.



Following the fall of Syria's Government, some Syrians have crossed the border into Syria from Lebanon through the Masnaa crossing; Sunday 8 December. © UNHCR/Ximena Borrazas

Situation Overview

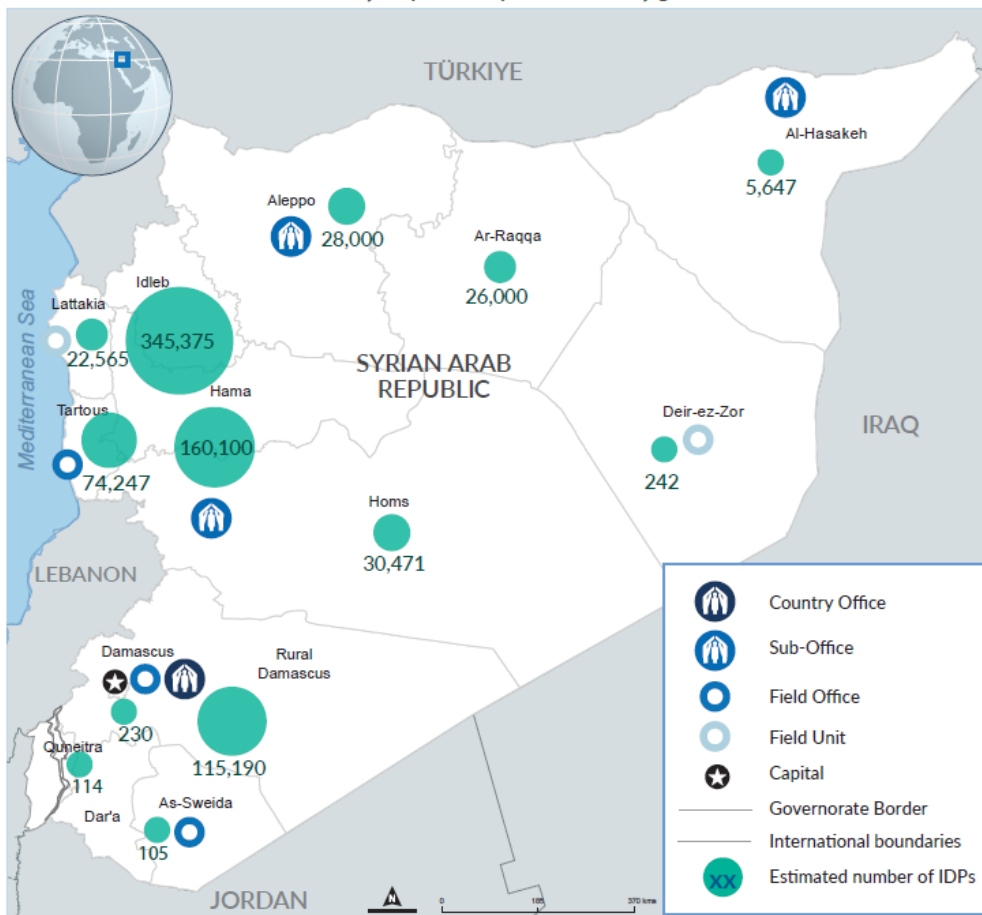
The collapse of the Assad government following the offensive launched by non-state armed groups on 27 November has resulted in elation and hope for the future of Syria. Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries are among those who are celebrating. However, Syrian refugees remain cautious, concerned as to how the situation will develop and what the future will hold. The security situation in Aleppo, Idleb, Hama, Homs and Damascus remains dynamic. There are multiple overlapping population movements, including major internal displacement within Syria, some IDPs returning home, movements out of Syria, and relatively small numbers of refugee returns.

The long-running crisis in Syria has had devastating consequences for the country and its people. More than 13 million Syrians had been forced to flee their homes over the past 14 years, and 90 per cent of people inside Syria require some form of humanitarian assistance. The recent developments across Syria will impact millions of people's lives both inside the country and within the region.

UNHCR is closely following the rapidly evolving situation. In the immediate term it is crucial that host governments are supported by the international community and that protection continues to be provided to Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries. As with any refugee situation, return of refugees must be safe, voluntary and dignified.

Population Movements

Internally Displaced Population (IDP) by governorate



UNHCR Türkiye has been monitoring the voluntary return processes conducted by the Provincial Directorates of Migration Management (PDMMs) in various locations along the Syrian border and inside the country. On 9 December, UNHCR field teams observed return interviews involving 215 families (316 individuals), more than half planning to return to Aleppo, mainly due to the improved security situation and to reunite with family members. There has been a modest increase in the number of Syrian refugees returning to north-west Syria from Türkiye through the Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salam internal crossing points. Starting from 10 December, UNHCR partners will be present at Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salameh crossing points to monitor the return of Syrian refugees from Türkiye and collect information, including basic household-level data and intended destinations.

As of the morning of 8 December, Lebanon's General Security Office officially noted it would facilitate the return of Syrians to Syria. Masnaa border crossing re-opened the morning of 8 December. Preliminary indications are that approximately 2,000 people have crossed through Masnaa into Syria. Other official border crossings remain closed. There were also unverified reports of Syrians crossing to Syria through the unofficial crossing points in Wadi Khaled (Western Arida and Mutahida), monitored by the Lebanese Armed Forces.

At the same time, there have reportedly been some movements from Syria into Lebanon in Baalbek-Hermel Governorate since 7 December, highlighting people are on the move with official numbers not yet available. Assessments on the ground through partners and protection monitors in Hermel, Aarsal and Qaa suggests that families are staying in mosques, private vehicles and public buildings. Approximately 70% are Lebanese and 30% are Syrian.

In Iraq, UNHCR has not observed any changes in movements of Syrians through the Peshkabout border crossing in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The Al-Qaim border crossing in Federal Iraq has been fully closed for entry to and exit from Iraq.

UNHCR Response

The operational environment inside Syria remains challenging and dynamic. UNHCR remains on the ground and is committed to stay and deliver. Over the past 72 hours, UNHCR is resuming its humanitarian support, particularly to IDPs as well as other vulnerable populations, in a manner responsive to the security situation.

UN cross-border missions from Gaziantep, Türkiye resumed on 9 December, following a short suspension due to the past week's hostilities. The UNHCR cross-border operation remains fully operational, with UNHCR and partners continuing to provide assistance to IDPs and host communities.

In north-east Syria there has been an influx of IDPs with some 62,700 individuals being temporarily sheltered by UNHCR and its partners. Most of the families are hosted in Ar-Raqqa, in two stadiums that have rapidly been repurposed to host over 54,000 individuals, while others have arrived in Deir-ez-Zor and Al-Hassakeh.

In Aleppo where over 62,000 people have been displaced, as of 8 December UNHCR through its local partners has been able to reactivate six of its 30 community centres after a short interruption, providing health services, counselling, case management, as well as referring individuals to

available food, relief items and other humanitarian support. As the security situation gradually improves, more humanitarian assistance is expected to be delivered in the coming days.

In Damascus and rural Damascus, some 52,000 individuals have arrived fleeing violence thus far. They are mainly being accommodated in hosting centres in Sayyeda Zeinab, where UNHCR and its partners are providing food, NFI kits, blankets and mattresses. In Damascus, UNHCR's partner partially re-opened Community Centres in four areas. Hotlines and outreach volunteer networks are being activated to assess needs and share updates.

In north-west Syria (NWS), all UNHCR-supported community centres resumed regular operations, following a temporary closure due to recent hostilities. Partners are now providing a range of critical protection services in the centres and through outreach.

As of 8 December, the Protection Cluster has activated 45 community centres in NWS, providing protection and legal support to nearly 3,000 IDPs. To address the evolving needs of the displaced population, protection agencies, including UNHCR, are conducting ongoing assessments, delivering psychological first aid, deploying mobile protection teams, and responding to urgent protection needs. Coordination efforts are underway to enhance mapping of emergency services, streamline case referrals, and ensure the safety and wellbeing of displaced families.

UNHCR and partners continue to provide assistance to IDPs and host communities in NWS, as well as to refugees and IDP returnees. UNHCR, with its partner, is distributing cash for winter support to 6,200 households in Idleb and northern Aleppo. On 10 December, UNHCR will transport 1,500 core relief item kits to Idleb.

Lebanon

UNHCR Lebanon has a large network of outreach volunteers as well as Communicating with Communities channels monitoring the situation in Lebanon. Within Syrian communities, there are overriding feelings of elation coupled with concerns for the future and key questions on return, including with respect to changes in status with the fall of the Government in Syria and access to assistance. Many immediate feelings are of setting foot in Syria because it is now possible after so many years and to see loved ones, rather than making concrete plans or longer-term moves. Access to school is also a factor emerging in decisions.

Jordan

There have been very few movements at the Syrian border with Jordan, with unconfirmed numbers of Syrians waiting near the border to enter Syria. Reportedly, most have been in Jordan on different visas and are not registered with UNHCR. As of 9 December, UNHCR is aware of a few refugees, registered with the Agency, that left Jordan through the Jaber border crossing.

UNHCR is continuing to listen to refugees' plans, hopes and fears through Focus Group Discussions and other routine activities.

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