

# Regional Flash Update #2

## Syria situation crisis

11 December 2024

### Key Highlights

- An estimated 800,000 to 1 million people are internally displaced within Syria as of 8 December. Recent hostilities have caused further damage to civilian infrastructure and humanitarian assets, adding to humanitarian needs in a country where more than 16 million people already required humanitarian assistance.
- Despite the uncertain outlook, UNHCR is gradually resuming services. UNHCR community centers are expanding capacity, with 59 out of 114 centres now functional. Protection activities prioritize remote support for urgent cases, including medical and psychosocial assistance.
- UNHCR is also providing emergency assistance in the north-west and north-east. The UNHCR cross-border operation remains fully operational. All UNHCR-supported community centres in north-west Syria resumed regular operations by 10 December and winter support is being provided to 6,200 households in Idlib and northern Aleppo.
- Interagency contingency planning for refugee arrivals and return has been launched through established refugee return coordination groups within the 3RP coordination framework.



Syrian refugees in an informal settlement in Saadnayel, in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, on 9 December. The site is located a few kilometres from the Masnaa border crossing point Sunday 8 December. © UNHCR

## Situation Overview

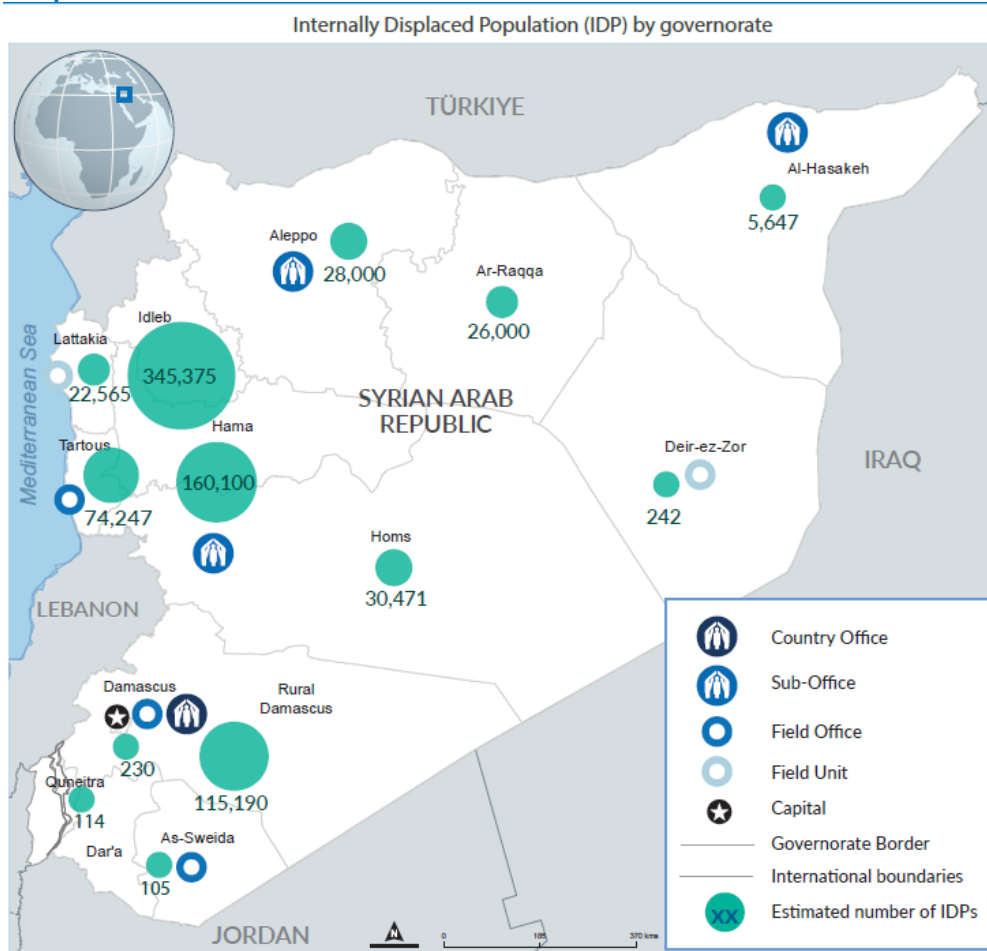
The escalation of hostilities since 27 November 2024 and the fall of the former Government on 8 December have brought about a fundamental shift in the situation in Syria.

The situation remains dynamic and volatile. More than one in five people are being displaced for at least the second time. Airstrikes and military operations, alongside civilian casualties, have been reported across the country. The Israeli military have reportedly carried out hundreds of air strikes across Syria over the past few days, hitting much of the country's strategic weapon stockpiles. Clashes have been reported in Aleppo and Deir-ez-Zor, and conflict has damaged civilian infrastructure and disrupted services in northeast Syria.

Pervasive insecurity and disruptions to transportation routes have severely impacted humanitarian operations. A number of warehouses storing relief items have reportedly been looted and humanitarian partners are working to verify the extent and impact of losses.

UNHCR continues to gradually resume services. The UNHCR border health/protection post at the Jdaidet Yabous Syria-Lebanon border is also set to reopen.

## Population Movements



In **Lebanon**, the Masnaa border crossing remains the main official border crossing point for traffic into and out of Syria. Movements of people continue in both directions at official and unofficial crossings. The number of Syrians returning are in the low thousands. With the non-functioning of immigration services on the Syrian side for some days, larger numbers of Syrians were seen requesting entry to Lebanon at Masnaa, resulting in bottlenecks in assessing whether they meet the entry requirements (including those with residency and onward tickets).

The situation at the main border gates between **Türkiye** and Syria remains calm and stable, with some Syrians crossing back and normal truck movements observed. Türkiye opened the Yayladağı/Keseb crossing in Hatay – closed since 2013 – for returns. The Presidency of Migration Management is setting up a mobile unit at the crossing to process voluntary returns; UNHCR will also be present. Authorities are preparing to increase the capacity of border crossings to process up to 20,000 people daily.

The situation at the **Jordanian** border remains quiet compared to the normal traffic, though more movements have been observed over the past days. Some Jordanian bus companies are providing transportation for Syrians to travel from urban areas to the Jaber border. UNHCR is in close contact with the authorities at all levels to monitor the current situation and discuss coordination of efforts.

On 11 December, UNHCR observed an increase in Syrians arriving in **Iraq** via the Peshkabour border crossing in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Approximately 800 Syrians crossed the border compared to the usual daily average of 400 individuals. While it remains unclear whether these individuals intend to seek asylum – given that entry through Peshkabour requires a valid visa – the increase marks a notable shift. The number of Syrians returning from Iraq to Syria through Peshkabour remains low; 64 Syrians crossed on 11 December, among which one individual was a refugee registered with UNHCR. The Al-Qaim border crossing in Federal Iraq has been closed since 8 December.

Refugees continue to express both interest and concerns about return. While the ongoing developments may be seen as a renewed opportunity to return, many have questions about the lack of services, infrastructure and livelihood options.

UNHCR reiterates the fundamental right of all refugees to return to their country of origin, at a time of their choosing. Any refugee returns should be voluntary, in safety and dignity. It is essential that the international community continue supporting Syrian refugees and the countries hosting them.

## Country updates

### Lebanon

UNHCR and partners are monitoring the situation at crossing points to better understand motivations and return patterns, with further missions planned. UNHCR operates a dedicated national call centre which includes a number of Interactive Voice Response streams, including related to voluntary return. An extensive Outreach Volunteer networks remain active across Lebanon, ensuring that refugees' issues and concerns are captured. Concerns include fears of sectarianism and reprisals, as well as worries over limited infrastructure, services and livelihoods.

The situation for refugees in Lebanon was increasingly difficult even before the recent conflict, including a constrained protection environment and increased administrative measures impacting access to residency, livelihood, and shelter. In addition, refugees also directly suffered the effects of the recent conflict, including destruction of homes and property, with limited access to temporary shelters. Refugees also cited evictions, increased rent charges, lack of availability of compensation for losses, and constraints on accessing education as factors in contributing to their decision of not returning to Syria.

### **Türkiye**

UNHCR continues to monitor return interviews in various locations, including at Cilvegözü/ Bab al Hawa and Oncupinar/Bab al Salama border crossing points in the south-east where an increase in movements have been noted. UNHCR is closely coordinating with UN agencies and partners, including the Turkish Red Crescent, in support of the government efforts.

The UNHCR Counselling Line continues to be the main source of information for refugees approaching UNHCR with questions. The majority of the calls received from Syrian refugees indicate concerns related to changes in procedures in Türkiye (suspension of temporary protection) or resettlement processing.

### **Jordan**

UNHCR maintains two-way communication with refugees through helplines, social media, focus group discussions, and other channels and community outreach activities. The reaction of refugees to events unfolding inside Syria is mixed, ranging from expressing hope and joy to sharing concerns about conditions for returns.

Concerns are predominantly related to livelihoods, security, and availability of humanitarian assistance in Syria. Some refugees mentioned challenges associated with the winter season and a lack of housing in Syria; others mentioned they were willing to return, had questions about exit formalities and did not share any specific fear about returning. Refugees have questions with respect to whether they can take their belongings back to Syria, once they decide to go back, noting that they will be beginning from nothing. Concerns were also expressed about the cost of the issuance of travel documents. Feedback from refugees also reflects their gratitude to the government and people of Jordan for their generosity and protection throughout these years.

UNHCR is increasing social media monitoring to detect and address fake news and fraud-related messages spreading misinformation among Syrian refugees in Jordan.

### **Iraq**

Refugees in all locations across the Kurdistan Region and Federal Iraq are closely monitoring the situation in Syria. Due to the ongoing uncertainty, they continue to express a wait and see attitude on return, with no questions on return or requests for return assistance reaching UNHCR or partners. Some refugees missing family members in Syria are seeking ways to establish contact with relatives, particularly in light of the reported release of prisoners.

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