

Syria Situation Crisis

Prioritized Response

January - June 2025



Cover image: A girl waits at Lebanon's Masnaa border with suitcases and bags to cross into Syria on 9 December 2024, the day after the overthrow of the government in Syria. © UNHCR/Ximena Borrazas

KEY FIGURES



6 million Syrian refugees primarily in neighbouring countries



Up to **1 million** projected refugee returns between January-June 2025



Over **2 million** IDPs between January-June 2025, and over **1 million** IDP returnees



\$310 million required

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is urgently seeking \$310 million¹ to address the critical needs of up to 1 million Syrian refugee returnees expected to arrive in Syria between January and June 2025 as part of spontaneous and host government organized movements from neighbouring countries. This appeal also includes support for 200,000 local community members who will be hosting the refugee returnees, as well as returning internally displaced persons (IDPs), in collaboration with other UN agencies and partners.

This comes in the context of recent dramatic developments in Syria that will affect millions of people both within the country and across the region. Amidst a rapidly changing environment, UNHCR remains committed to its protection principles while staying adaptable to respond to the evolving needs of those affected, wherever they may be.

While we urge host countries to respect Syrians' right to return freely and voluntarily, at a time of their choosing, and to allow them the flexibility to assess conditions through mechanisms such as "Go and See" visits, UNHCR is not advocating for large-scale repatriations to Syria at this time. However, we are preparing to assist those Syrians who will make the voluntary decision to return. Our response will be guided by the voices of refugees, reflecting the conditions they need to feel safe and secure in their decision to return home. In host countries, UNHCR maintains extensive outreach networks to refugee communities, helplines and call centres and is conducting intention surveys. Funding will ensure that preparedness and response activities are in place inside Syria, enabling comprehensive support for Syrian returnees and returning IDPs, as well as members of communities that are hosting them.

OVERVIEW

An offensive by armed opposition groups that began in north-west Syria on 27 November and quickly spread to other parts of the country, reached the capital, Damascus, on 8 December. By the end of the day, President Bashar al-Assad's 24-year rule had collapsed.

Recent hostilities displaced more than 1.1 million people within Syria from different areas including Aleppo, Hama, Homs and Idlib governorates, with more than one in five people displaced for at least the second time. The situation remains fluid with clashes continuing in some parts of Syria, and restrictions on movement hinder the delivery of humanitarian aid. There are reports of thousands of Syrians returning from Lebanon and Türkiye and fewer from Jordan and Iraq.

The country's infrastructure has been further devastated, deepening the needs of a population where more than 16 million people, or 90 per cent of the population, live below the poverty line and rely on humanitarian assistance for survival.

¹ This figure is provisional and is pending the finalization of UNHCR's Supplementary Appeal for Syria. In the event of any future revisions to HRP due to returnees, activities and costings within UNHCR's Syria Situation Crisis - Prioritized Response will be incorporated.

In the past 14 years, Syria has witnessed immense human suffering: over 13 million people have been displaced. Over 7 million Syrians are displaced inside the country while more than 6 million are living as refugees, primarily in neighbouring countries including Türkiye, Lebanon and Jordan, and also in Europe and other countries around the world.

Given that spontaneous returns are occurring, it is crucial to implement preparedness measures to enable UNHCR and its partners to address the urgent and prioritized needs amongst the 1 million refugee returnees projected to voluntarily return between January and June 2025, especially as winter deepens. This figure aligns with the regional inter-agency contingency planning being developed under the Syria 3RP, co-chaired by UNHCR and UNDP. In addition, depending on how the situation inside Syria evolves, there could be significant potential for further internal displacement. UNHCR is already tracking IDP movements, with over 1.1 million IDPs already displaced since the end of November; this number is expected to rise. In parallel, other IDPs are starting to return to their homes but desperately need support, especially in terms of shelter and basic services. UNHCR's efforts aim to ease the burdens on host communities which are already supporting returnees who arrived prior to the collapse of the former government, including an estimated 360,000 refugees who returned from Lebanon since 24 September 2024.

UNHCR will prioritize the most vulnerable returning refugees, new IDPs and IDP returnees, including large families and single-headed households, households with at least one member living with a severe disability, and unaccompanied or separated children. Assistance will provide vital support to ensure both returnees and their host communities receive the protection and services they need.

Outside the scope of this plan, UNHCR will enhance its efforts to assess and understand the motivations of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries considering return and will continue offering counselling and information to help them make informed decisions about their potential return to Syria.

UNHCR RESPONSE

Current Return Response

In Syria, UNHCR and partners are maintaining a presence at border crossing points as they gradually reopen. This allows for regular monitoring of inbound and outbound movement trends, as well as the overall situation in these areas. UNHCR engages with returning Syrians, providing them with information on available humanitarian assistance and support in their areas of intended return, including UNHCR-funded Community Centres across the country—82 per cent of which have already resumed services as of the date of issuance, supporting IDPs and returning refugees and IDPs.

Additionally, UNHCR registers family profiles, intentions, needs, and contact details of those who voluntarily share this information, enabling further individual follow-up by UNHCR and partners. Analysis of this information will guide and inform UNHCR's response inside Syria as well as that of humanitarian partners.

Planned Response

As the situation evolves and stabilizes, UNHCR will engage with the Syrian interim Government and the Governments of Lebanon, Jordan and Türkiye to establish tripartite dialogue on voluntary repatriation of Syrian refugees in the three countries. Tripartite repatriation agreements set out how UNHCR will collaborate closely with the interim authorities, other UN agencies, and humanitarian partners inside Syria to implement its response. Drawing on over three decades of presence in the country and building on years of experience supporting refugee and IDP returns, as well as the recent rapid return of over 360,000 Syrian refugees from Lebanon under adverse conditions, UNHCR's return activities² inside Syria will expand existing programming to effectively address various scenarios and evolving population dynamics. Key components of the response inside Syria will include:

◆ Transportation Support

UNHCR will address the immediate travel needs of refugee and IDP returnees within Syria by providing safe transportation, facilitating their movement from key border crossing points to transit or destination areas across the country.

² Resources acquired through this plan will be allocated for emergency preparedness and response across the broader Middle East and North Africa region in the event of significant developments that hinder the implementation of the plan.

◆ Protection Monitoring and Response

UNHCR will scale up its presence at key border crossings to conduct protection monitoring, provide immediate material assistance (such as water, and emergency medical services), and offer legal assistance. This will include working with Syrian authorities to ensure returnees receive the civil documentation needed for freedom of movement, access to essential social services and reclaiming housing and properties. This support will help refugee returnees navigate entry requirements. Information collected from refugee returnees will help UNHCR predict return patterns, enabling a timely and effective protection response, targeting areas where returnees and host communities face the most pressing needs. Returnees are expected to encounter challenges related to civil documentation, housing and property issues, the recognition of birth, marriage, and death certificates from countries of asylum, as well as the validation of school and university qualifications, among other administrative matters. UNHCR will collaborate with relevant authorities to strengthen systems that can promptly address and resolve these protection concerns as they arise.

To manage the anticipated influx of refugee returnees while continuing to serve those already in need, UNHCR will expand its network of community centres (currently 122 nationwide), outreach volunteers (ORVs), and mobile units. These centres will offer vital services, including general and specialized protection, mental health and psychosocial support, gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response, child protection, and legal aid.

UNHCR will also provide multi-purpose cash assistance to support both IDPs and returnees, while stimulating local economies and benefiting host communities.

◆ Shelter Assistance

Most returning IDPs and refugees will be returning to homes that have been partially or fully damaged by fourteen years of conflict. As a result, many will initially stay with friends or relatives. UNHCR will prioritize repairing damaged homes for returnees and their host communities, integrating a WASH response at the household level to promote health and hygiene. Additionally, UNHCR will focus on rehabilitating and reconstructing communal infrastructure to foster social cohesion. Vulnerable households in rented properties will also receive cash-based interventions to ease their financial burdens.

◆ Livelihoods and Early Recovery

Additionally, returnees will receive comprehensive support through a range of livelihood and recovery initiatives, aimed at enhancing self-reliance and social cohesion. This will include improving access to basic services, introducing solar energy for electricity in return areas, creating short-term employment opportunities through waste collection, and installing solar-powered streetlights to improve safety. Local workers, including returnees and IDPs, will be employed to foster social cohesion and reconciliation. Furthermore, financial assistance, grants, and training will be provided to micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), with a focus on creating jobs for female-headed households.

COORDINATION

As part of an inter-agency response, UNHCR leads three sectors at national and field level: Protection, Shelter & Non-Food Items, and Camp Coordination and Camp Management, covering the whole of Syria.

Flexible funding

Given the very fluid nature of the environment, with various factions active under a precarious security situation in a divided country, UNHCR appeals for flexible funding to safeguard the lives, dignity, and well-being of asylum-seekers, refugees, IDPs, returnees and stateless people where and when needs are most urgent. Without immediate support, our ability to provide critical services will be severely compromised, leaving vulnerable populations exposed to even greater harm.