



Flash Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria

Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon

Executive Summary

The rapid and dramatic fall of the Assad government on 8 December 2024 represents a seismic shift in the political and humanitarian situation in Syria and the region.

Syrians living outside of Syria, including the 5.5 million Syrian refugees in Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, have expressed elation and hope about the prospect of returning to their homes. Many have also expressed caution, waiting to see how this situation develops.

By early February 2025, UNHCR estimates that some 270,000 Syrians have returned to their country since the events of early December.

UNHCR has been carrying out regional surveys on Syrian refugees' perceptions and intentions on return since 2017, to

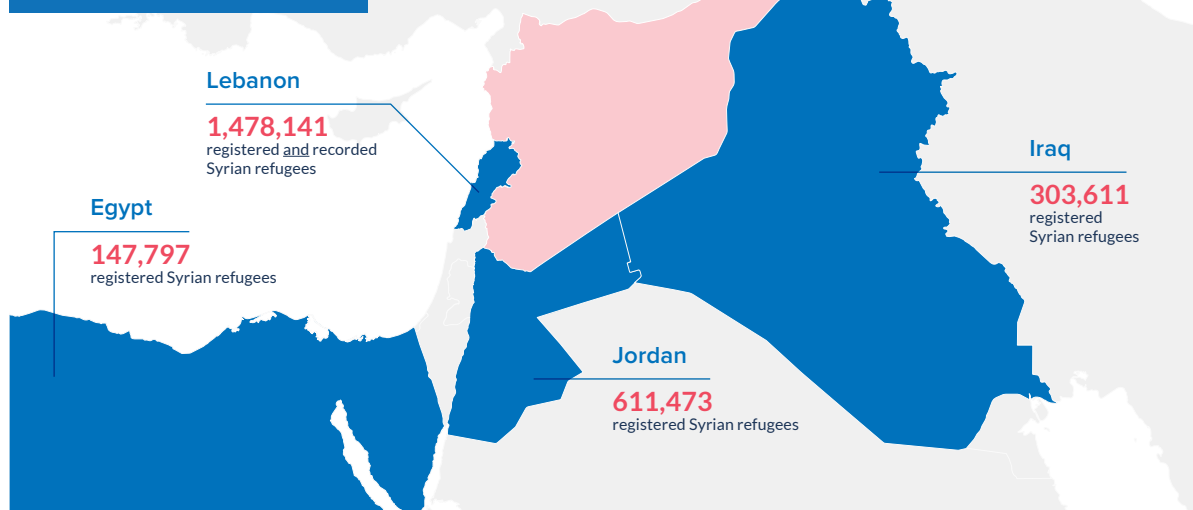
ensure refugee voices are at the heart of programme planning and discussions about their future. Following the recent events in Syria, UNHCR conducted a Refugee Perception and Intention Survey (RPIS) to better understand and quantify the views of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt¹.

A total of 4,500 Syrian refugees living in those four countries were randomly selected for this survey, and 3,368 of those were successfully reached. Among those reached, 80% of respondents were focal points, who are often head of households and primary decision makers². The findings of this report represent a regional aggregation of country survey findings. Variations between responses in each country are highlighted in the report where relevant.

Profile of respondents

- **38%** of respondents are female and **62%** male.
- **83%** of respondents are adults between 25 to 59 years old.
- **11%** of respondents are youth between 19 and 24 years old.
- **78%** of respondents are focal points³.
- **41%** of respondents are single parents or caregivers.
- **Over 95%** of respondents possess at least one valid document showing their Syrian origin.

Number of registered Syrian refugees as of 31 December 2024



These figures refer to refugees registered by UNHCR. For Lebanon, this includes registered and recorded refugees. Latest and official figures on registered Syrian refugees are available here: [UNHCR data portal](#).

¹ While Türkiye is not included in this survey, the Government of Türkiye is currently planning an intention survey with Syrian refugees. UNHCR is also conducting interviews on intentions with Syrian refugees who contact UNHCR's counseling line.

² Additional information on the methodology can be found under [Annex 1 - Methodology](#).

³ In UNHCR's corporate registration, identity and case management tool proGres, individuals are registered into Registration Groups. A Registration Group contains one or more individual(s). The first individual registered in a group is designated as the Focal Point and there can only be one Focal Point in a registration group.

Key Findings:

- ▶ Over a quarter of Syrian refugees intend to go back to rebuild their lives in the next 12 months.
- ▶ More than half of Syrian refugees who do not intend to or are undecided about return in the next 12 months intend to return in the next five years.
- ▶ The vast majority of Syrian refugees hope to return to Syria one day.
- ▶ Almost all refugees who plan to return in the next 12 months plan to return to their place of origin.
- ▶ Key barriers to return include concerns over available housing and status of refugees' own properties, safety and security, economic challenges inside Syria and concerns about available basic services.
- ▶ Over 60% of refugees consider it important to conduct a "go and see" visit before making a final decision to return.

The overall results provide a stark contrast to previous surveys and reflect the significant political changes in Syria that have created a window of hope among refugees that returning home may now be a possibility. Reflecting this, **52% of respondents stated that the fall of the Assad government influenced their decision to return.** Among those who expressed an intention to return, many noted that the 8 December developments increased the likelihood of them returning to Syria. They viewed the situation with optimism, citing improvements in safety and security, including exemptions from military service, renewed hope for reuniting with family, and a strong desire to contribute to rebuilding their homeland. Conversely, others indicated a reluctance to return at this time, preferring to wait for further stabilization of the country. Some voiced concerns about the new authorities and uncertainties regarding how the situation might unfold.

Overall, 80% of refugees hope to return to Syria one day. Only two months after the fall of the Assad government, this represents a major shift in refugee return intentions compared to the previous RPIS conducted in April 2024 when only 57% of refugees expressed hope to return one day.

Similarly, the intention to return in the short-term shows a sharp increase with 27% of Syrian refugees now expressing an intention to return in the next 12 months compared to 1.7% in the previous RPIS. The medium-term aspiration to return for those not intending to or undecided about return in the next 12 months also increased to 53% from 37% since the last survey.

Based on feedback received through direct communication with refugees, for those interested in returning, their main asks include assistance for transportation and cash grants to cover basic needs and support inside Syria to rebuild their homes and lives.

While increasing numbers of Syrians expressed an intention to return in the next 12 months, the survey also shows that **55% of refugees are not yet intending to return.** Concerns over available housing and the status of their property are cited as the top barrier to return by refugees, followed by safety and security concerns, economic challenges in Syria and the availability of basic services in areas of return (electricity, water, infrastructure,

education, healthcare). **Among the 61% of refugees who own a house/property in Syria, 81% report that it is either fully destroyed or partially damaged and uninhabitable and remains a major obstacle to their return.**

The survey findings highlight the importance of “go and see visits”, with over **60% of refugees interviewed indicating they would prefer to visit Syria before making a decision to return** more permanently. Flexible arrangements such as those adopted by the Government of Türkiye, allowing Syrians to visit their home country and re-enter their host country, could play an important role in ensuring that Syrian refugees have first-hand information on conditions at home.

While the survey shows that a significant proportion of Syrian refugees are now seriously considering returning to Syria, it also shows that many are adopting a wait and see approach. Based on the survey and information collected through community engagement, some prefer to see how the situation in Syria develops or are waiting for spring or the end of Ramadan, or the end of the school year before deciding. Even in the best circumstances, past experiences in other countries show that large scale returns often take several years to materialize.



Photo by UNHCR / Ximena Borrazas

“It's all very uncertain in Syria now,” Shadia says. “We want to go back, but we are afraid. I only wish the best for my country. We want to go back, the question is where.”

Note on methodology:

While intention surveys can provide valuable insights into refugees' hopes, intentions and concerns and are a useful tool, they represent refugees' views at a given point in time only and may subsequently change depending on a wide range of factors. As the situation inside Syria evolves, UNHCR will conduct additional surveys. Most respondents interviewed were heads of household and primary decision makers concerning return, which means male adults have a higher representation among respondents. Additional information on the methodology can be found in [Annex 1 - Methodology](#).

“
My dream is to help and rebuild my country and establish a new life for myself and my children. My country is free now, and I don't want to be labeled as a refugee anymore.

I don't want to return, I have built a life here.

I want to return but I cannot cover my travel expenses.

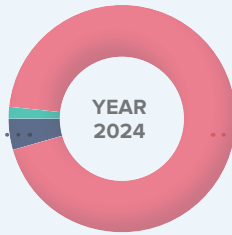
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At a Glance

All respondents were asked:

Q1. Do you intend to return to Syria in the next 12 months?

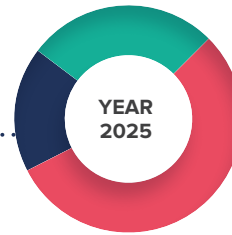
2024 Survey Findings



1.7% Yes
94% No
4.3% I don't know / I am undecided

If answered "No" or "I don't know / I am undecided"

2025 Survey Findings

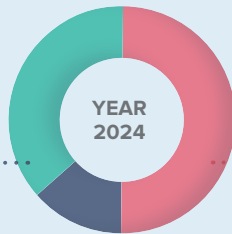


27% Yes
55% No
18% I don't know / I am undecided

If answered "No" or "I don't know / I am undecided"

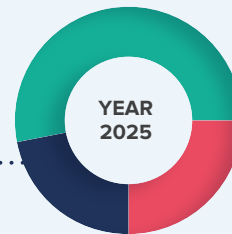
Follow-up question for respondents who answered the previous question with "no" or "I don't know / I am undecided":

Q2. Do you hope to return to Syria within five years?



36.8% Yes
50.1% No
13.1% I don't know / I am undecided

If answered "No" or "I don't know / I am undecided"

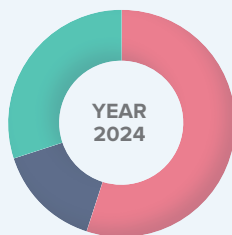


53% Yes
25% No
22% I don't know / I am undecided

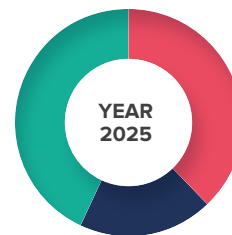
If answered "No" or "I don't know / I am undecided"

Follow-up question for respondents who answered the previous question with "no" or "I don't know / I am undecided":

Q3. Do you hope to return to Syria one day?



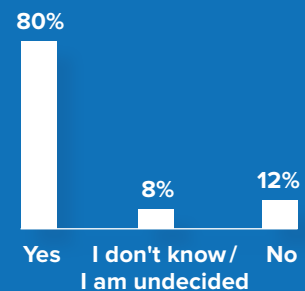
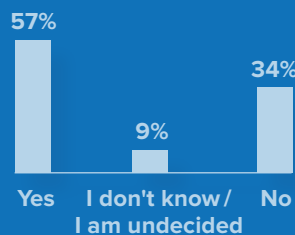
30.2% Yes
55% No
14.8% I don't know / I am undecided



43% Yes
38% No
19% I don't know / I am undecided

Overall hope to return

"Overall hope to return" comprises participants who intend to return to Syria within the next 12 months, those who hope to return within five years and also those who hope to return one day.



Snapshot of Findings

▶ Over a quarter of Syrian refugees intend to go back to rebuild their lives in the next 12 months.

- The intention to return in the next 12 months showed significant differences from one country to another, with Egypt (42% - approximately 62,000 individuals) and Jordan (40% - approximately 245,000 individuals) reflecting the highest intention followed by Lebanon (24% - approximately 355,000 individuals) and Iraq (12% - approximately 36,500 individuals).
- While the results differed across the countries surveyed, all showed a marked increase in the intention to return within 12 months compared with the last RPIS survey in April 2024 when results were 2% or less.
- Refugees in Lebanon put a significant emphasis on ensuring livelihood opportunities, access to their properties or alternative housing and improved safety security before making a final decision to return.
- In Iraq, over 80% of refugees who do not intend to return are concerned by safety and security.

▶ More than half of Syrian refugees who do not intend to or are undecided about return in the next 12 months intend to return in the next five years.

- This proportion is higher in Jordan (56%), Lebanon (56%) and Egypt (49%) than in Iraq (37%).
- A significant proportion of refugees indicated they wanted to see the political and security situation stabilize inside Syria before making a decision to return
- Among the 21% of refugees in Lebanon who were undecided about returning in the next 12 months, more than 70% intend to return in the next five years.

▶ The vast majority of Syrian refugees hope to return to Syria one day.

- The overall hope to return one day was consistently high in all countries: Jordan (85%), Egypt (83%) and Lebanon (81%), and Iraq (63%).
- This is a record high overall hope to return (80%) since the beginning of the Syria crisis, and also reflects a significant jump compared to 57% in April 2024
- The overall hope to return is significantly higher than the intention to return in the next 12 months (27%), suggesting the need for continued support in host countries alongside investment inside Syria to ensure conditions enabling sustainable return.



Photo by UNHCR / Firas Al-Khateeb

Returning Syrian refugee Mohamed and his family arrive in Syria, in January 2025. "I never thought this moment could materialize, and we could go back to Syria," Mohamed says.

▶ **Key barriers limiting return include concerns over available housing and status of refugees' properties, safety and security, economic challenges inside Syria and concerns about availability of basic services.**

- In contrast with previous surveys, while safety and security concerns remain a key factor impacting decision-making, refugees also highlight that practical considerations are becoming increasingly important.
- 77% of refugees stated they have incurred debts in their host countries which 49% consider a barrier to return.
- Other refugees highlight that limited resources in their host country are hindering their ability to return.

Khaled, his wife Zubaida and their son Mohamed and daughter Sarah, stand beside the ruins of their destroyed home at Qara in the Qalamoun mountains of rural Damascus.

▶ **Over 60% of refugees consider it important to conduct a “go and see” visit before making a decision to return.**

- Interest in “go and see visits” jumps for refugees intending to or undecided about return in the next 12 months or five years.
- Interest in “go and see visits” is particularly high for Jordan and Lebanon, respectively 70% and 61%.
- Refugees who do not express an intention to return to Syria show less interest in “go and see visits”.



Photo by UNHCR / Vivian Tou'meh

Country Spotlight

There are significant differences in the short-term intention to return depending on the host country. In Jordan and Egypt, respectively 40% and 42% of refugees intend to return in the next 12 months while 12% of refugees in Iraq intend to do so. In Lebanon, 24% of refugees intend to return in the next 12 months, however more than 21% are undecided about returning in the next 12 months, highlighting a more cautious approach.

These differences may also be partly attributed to conditions in different places of origin inside Syria. For instance, with large number of Syrians in Iraq originating from north-east Syria, where there is ongoing insecurity, a lower percentage intend to return. Across all countries, female respondents expressed a lower intention to return to Syria in the next 12 months (23%).

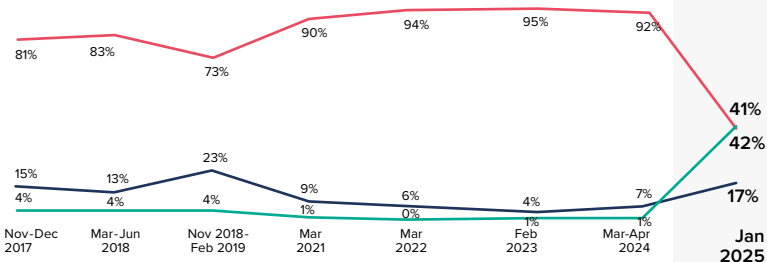
In Jordan and Lebanon, up to 90% of refugees who intend to return in the next 12 months plan to do so with all their family members or with their extended families, with only 6% to 7% intending to return alone. The latter increases significantly for refugees in Egypt and Iraq with 28% and 32% respectively, of refugees who intend to go back alone. The number one reason refugees mention for wanting to return alone is that their family is already in Syria or that they have no family in the host country. These respondents are mostly younger men between 20 to 40 years old.

Do you intend to return to Syria in the next 12 months?

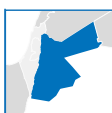
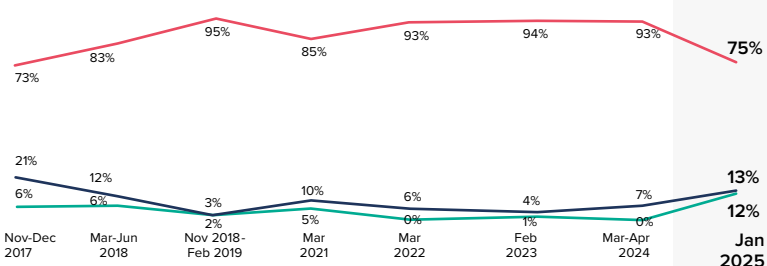
■ No ■ Don't know ■ Yes



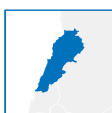
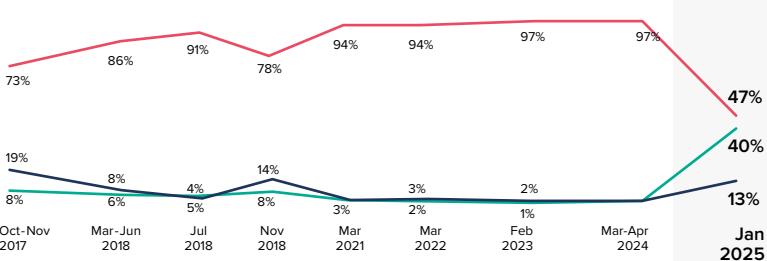
Respondents in Egypt



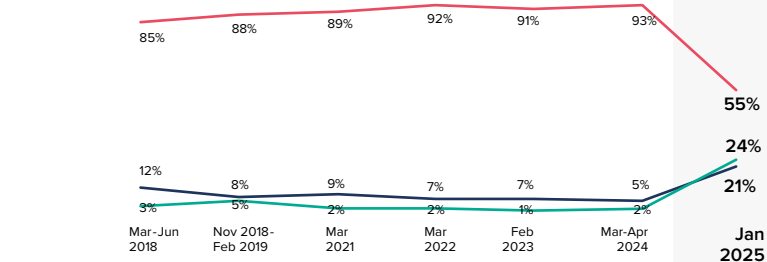
Respondents in Iraq



Respondents in Jordan

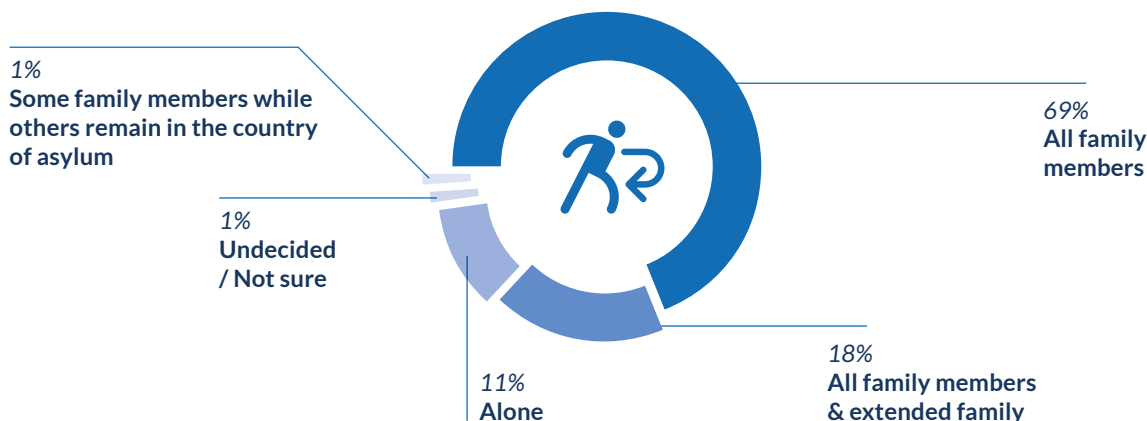


Respondents in Lebanon



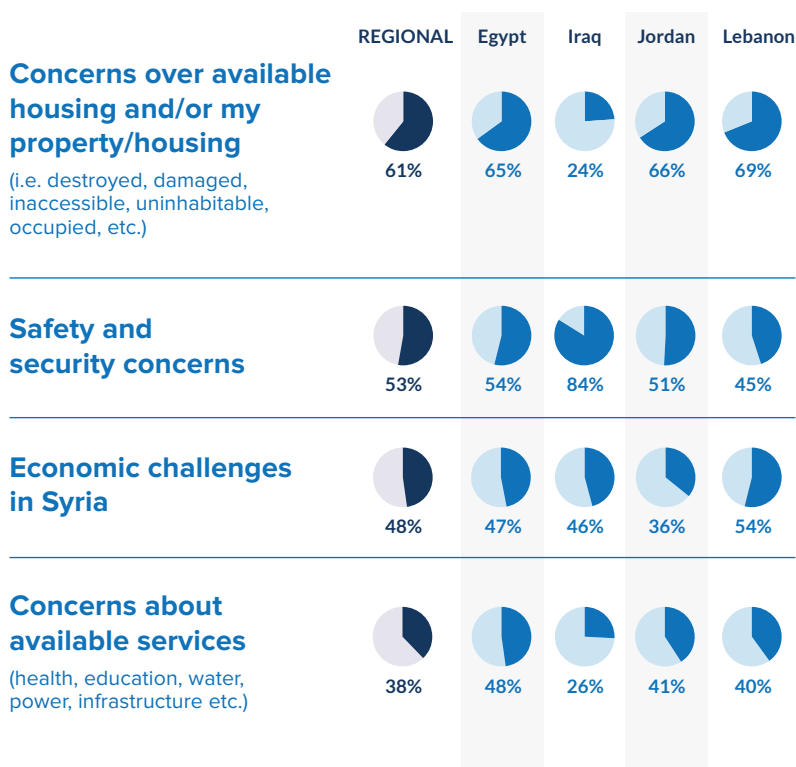
Disclaimer: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Whom are you intending to return to Syria with?



Refugees' main concerns about return differ from one host country to another. These differences may also be partly attributed to conditions in different places of origin inside Syria. Where refugees originate within Syria varies depending on the host country. In Lebanon, 69% mention housing as their primary concern, and 54% highlight economic challenges inside Syria as a barrier to return. Comparatively, refugees in Iraq consider safety and security as a main barrier to return, mentioned by 84%. Refugees in Jordan and Egypt present a balanced view between practical considerations and safety and security. Across countries, 4% cited concerns about family members with specific needs (such as but not limited to people with disabilities or serious medical conditions) highlighting the need for tailored responses for vulnerable groups.

What are the main reasons preventing you from returning to Syria in the next twelve months?

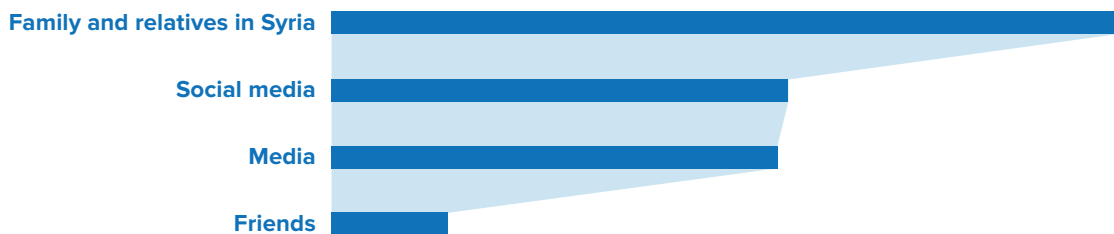


Access to Information and Knowledge

Access to information is critical for refugees so that they can make informed decisions about their return. Similar to results from 2024, 75% of refugees report that they have sufficient information to make an informed decision about return.

Refugees across the four countries explained that they consider information on housing or their own property, the security situation, employment and livelihood opportunities and the availability of basic services (education, infrastructure, water, education and healthcare) as particularly important for their decision-making process.

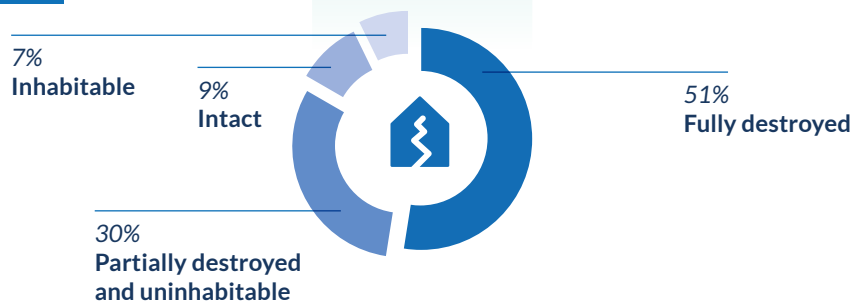
Main source of information



Do you or your family member own a house in Syria?



Status of house



Return Decision Making

This section explores the reasons and motivations for return as well as the support required. It is presented according to three broad categories to facilitate analysis. These are 1) those who intend to return in the next 12 months; 2) those who do not intend to return in the next 12 months; and 3) those who are undecided.

“
I personally want to return but I will wait until after Eid because my children are in school now.

For the first time in years it is now safe for us to go back.

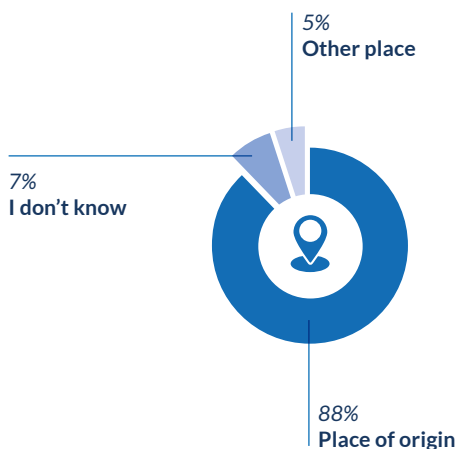
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1. Refugees intending to return in the next 12 months

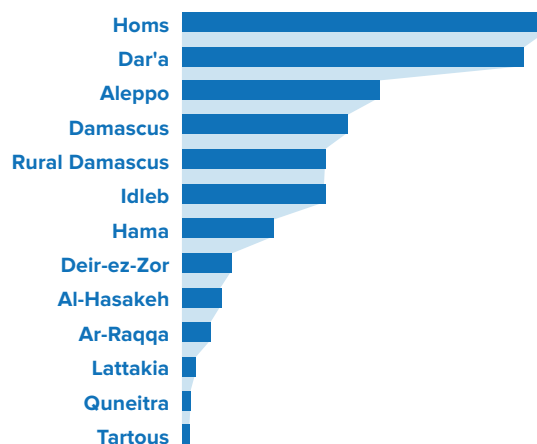
For refugees who highlighted an intention to return in the next 12 months, the main drivers are the improvement of the security situation inside Syria and the desire to reunite with family. Many refugees intending to return also highlight feeling home sick and wanting to go back to their own country and participate in its reconstruction. Other key drivers for return include challenges in the host country, including difficulties in accessing work permits or livelihood opportunities, fear of arrest and lack of freedom of movement.

88% of refugees who plan to return in the next 12 months plan to return to their place of origin. For most refugees who still have strong family ties in Syria, return planning reveals strong attachment to places of origin, with alternative locations primarily driven by family ties and safety considerations. Others are considering an alternative return location because it is safer than their place of origin, has more housing options or more job opportunities. Damascus is overwhelmingly the first alternative option for refugees in all four countries followed by Homs and Dar'a.

Where do you plan to return to?



Area of origin of refugees who intend to return in the next 12 months and who intend to return to their area of origin

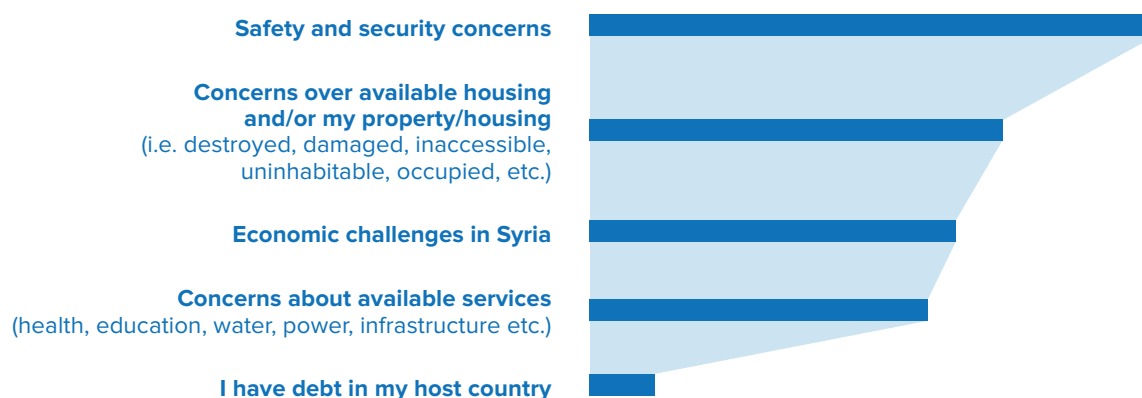


Up to 87% of refugees plan to return with all their family members or with their extended families. Overall, only 11% of refugees intend to return alone.

55% of those intending to return in the next 12 months still express concerns about returning, with the majority highlighting safety and security

concerns, concerns over available housing or condition of their property, economic challenges inside Syria and concerns about available services. Some also express concerns over having incurred debts in host countries, the cost of transportation to return and the kind of assistance they could expect to receive on return.

Return concerns for those intending to return



2. Refugees not intending to return to Syria in the next 12 months:

For the 55% of refugees who do not intend to go back in the next 12 months, the main barriers influencing decision-making include concerns over available housing and the status of their property, safety and security, economic challenges in Syria and availability of basic services. Other reasons for not wanting to return to Syria include a lack of resources to cover return-related costs and limited livelihood opportunities upon arrival. Some also mention that they do not plan to return to Syria as they have built a life outside their country of origin, with education, economic and family ties in their host country being the determining factors. Some have family members with specific needs that prevent them from returning.

For refugees with no intention to return in the next 12 months, the top four conditions that would change their decision to return include confidence in having enough resources and/or work/livelihood

opportunities, improved safety and security, confidence in accessing housing or their own properties, confidence in accessing basic services in Syria.

Refugees who do not intend to return highlight concerns over having acquired debts, with almost 77% reporting that they have debt in their host country, and 49% of them considering this a barrier to returning to Syria.

“

I would consider returning to Syria if there is economic stability, access to basic needs like a house and healthcare. I want to see the conditions improve, especially for my family and my husband to return.

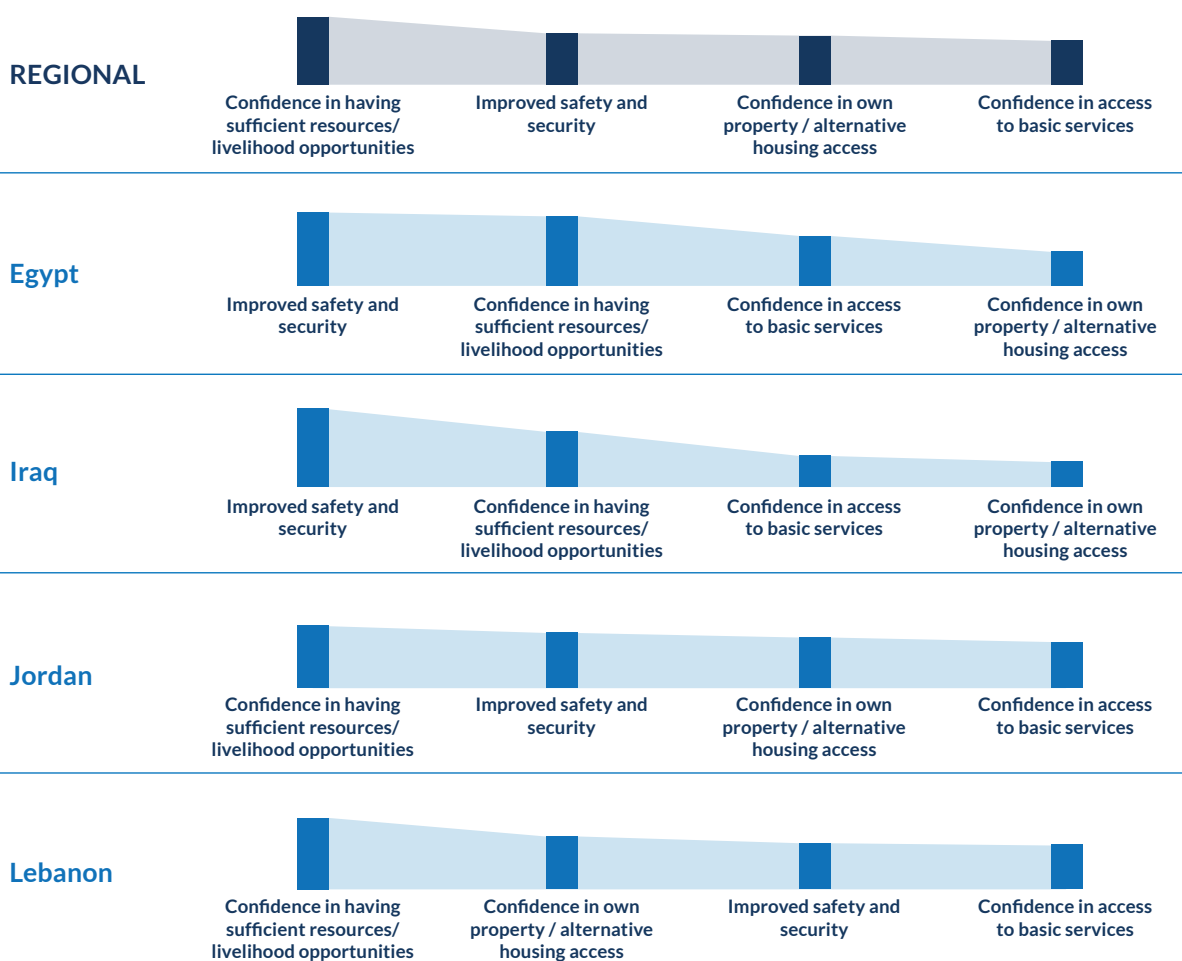
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3. Undecided about return

Among the 17% of refugees undecided about returning in the next 12 months, most highlight that confidence in having enough resources and livelihood opportunities upon return would help them make a decision. Improved safety and security represent the second factor, followed by confidence in accessing housing or their own properties. Access to basic services in their area of return is also a key consideration for many undecided refugees. When asked about the top three most important services for them, the majority rank electricity first, followed by water, infrastructure, education and healthcare.

“
It is better to stay here where we at least know we have electricity and services rather than returning to the unknown.
 ”

What do you need to help you decide on returning to Syria?



Annexes

During the 2025 RPIS, conducted in January 2025, a total of 4,500 Syrian refugees residing in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan were contacted. Of these, 3,368 were successfully reached.

Profile of Respondents:

- **38%** of respondents are female and **62%** male.
- **83%** of respondents are adults between 25 to 59 years old
- **11%** of respondents are youth between 19 and 24 years old
- **78%** of respondents are focal points⁴.
- **41%** of respondents are single parents or caregivers.
- **Over 95%** of respondents possess at least one valid document showing their Syrian origin.

Additional surveys:

While Türkiye is not included in this survey, the Government of Türkiye is currently planning an intention survey with Syrian refugees.

UNHCR is also conducting interviews on intentions with Syrian refugees who contact UNHCR's counseling line.

Sampling strategy and data analysis

The RPIS is conducted through a common questionnaire which is used by all participating country operations. The aim of the sampling approach used for this survey was to generate a representative sample of the overall population of Syrian refugees known to UNHCR in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon. A random sample was drawn from UNHCR's databases in the four participating countries.

Limitations

Survey findings reflect refugees' intentions at a given point in time only and may subsequently change. Of those contacted for the survey, about 75% could be reached. Data from a sample can be used to extrapolate findings related to the population of interest. The small size of the sample compared to the overall population will add some uncertainty. Given the sample size of 3,368 respondents, the uncertainty around the estimates for the main variables of interest is rather low.

Although data collected through previous surveys provides an interesting perspective of trends over time, the survey methodology and questionnaire varied slightly between this RPIS and previous surveys (the questionnaire was simplified and reduced to ensure quicker data collection and analysis). Therefore, the analysis focused on the current data, comparing only the most reliable indicators over time.

Given the randomized sampling methodology used in this exercise, this survey may have limitations in considering the age, gender and diversity approach.

Use of the Survey Data

UNHCR will continue to use the data generated from the survey and associated analysis to generate insights and inform its operational response, programming, and policy and advocacy efforts in the region.

⁴ In UNHCR's corporate registration, identity and case management tool proGres, individuals are registered into Registration Groups. A Registration Group contains one or more individual(s). The first individual registered in a group is designated as the Focal Point and there can only be one Focal Point in a registration group.

Methodology

The margin of error (half the width of a confidence interval) for a proportion under simple random sampling has been calculated using the formula:

$$e = \sqrt{\frac{z^2 \cdot \hat{p}(1-\hat{p})}{n}}$$

This expression formalizes the fact that with sampling theory, it is possible to statistically generalize findings from a sample to a population, but a degree of uncertainty must be taken into account due to the fact that not everyone in the population group was interviewed.

RPIS Weighting Approach

The RPIS survey uses a sophisticated weighting methodology to ensure that the Syrian refugee population in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon is accurately represented in the final analysis. This approach is vital for maintaining the integrity and reliability of the regional level finding.

A two-step weighting methodology to ensure the representativeness of the RPIS results was used taking into account first an **original weight** based on the **population proportion** of refugees in each country to correct for unequal selection probabilities followed by a **response rate adjustment** to mitigate biases caused by non-response, ensuring that the final analysis reflects the true characteristics of the target population. The final weight was derived by multiplying the original weight by the response rate adjustment factor. This approach aligns with best practices as outlined by the **United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)** for statistical survey design and analysis.⁵

By applying this weighting strategy, the RPIS survey guarantees that its results provide an accurate reflection of the broader Syrian refugee population across all host countries, despite variations in country-specific response rates.

Multiple Response Analysis (MRA) for Multi-Select Questions

For survey questions allowing respondents to select multiple options, such as identifying "concerns for returning to Syria," a Multiple Response Analysis (MRA) approach was employed. This method ensures comprehensive analysis while maintaining statistical rigor and representativeness at both the country and regional levels. The MRA approach is especially valuable for multi-select survey questions, where respondents may choose more than one option, allowing a nuanced understanding of trends.

To account for survey flow and question logic, a nested binary approach was used for conditional questions. This ensured that weighted counts and percentages reflect only those respondents eligible to answer each question. This approach aligns with international statistical best practices, such as those recommended by UNSD, and provides insights that are both valid and actionable.

Significance of the Approach

- **Granular Insights:** Country-level percentages provide detailed insights into localized trends for single-select and multi-select questions.
- **Regional Comparability:** By aggregating weighted counts across countries, regional trends can be analyzed consistently.
- **Representativeness:** Weighting ensures results reflect the sampled and target populations accurately.

Photo credit:

Cover image:
UNHCR / Emrah Gürel

Design:

UNHCR / Julia Klement

UNHCR MENA Regional Bureau

www.unhcr.org

⁵ United Nations Statistics Division. "Chapter 19: Statistical Analysis of Survey Data." UNSD, 2020. <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/HHsurveys/finalpublication/ch19fin3.pdf>.



The RPIS was produced by the UNHCR MENA Regional Bureau.

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