

Regional Flash Update #27

Syria situation crisis

16 May 2025



Hayat Sarhan returned to her destroyed home in Baba Amro, Homs, after fleeing in 2012. Thanks to UNHCR's livelihood projects, she now trains women in sewing at a UNHCR-supported community centre, building community ties, and starting to rebuild her life and achieve self-reliance. ©UNHCR Syria/Vivian Toumeh

Key Highlights

- As of 15 May 2025, UNHCR estimates that **over half a million – 501,126 – Syrians** have crossed back to Syria via neighboring countries since 8 December 2024. This brings up the total of **861,966 Syrian individuals** that have returned to Syria since the beginning of 2024.
- As of 15 May, **1,200,486 internally displaced persons (IDPs) have returned to their homes in Syria**, including **344,733 returning from IDP sites** since early December 2024, according to the latest data of the IDP Task Force.
- On 13 May 2025, **President Donald Trump announced the lifting of all U.S. sanctions on Syria**. Several international – including regional and European – leaders welcomed such decision, signaling a broader diplomatic rapprochement and paving the way for the normalization of relations with Syria. Since the 8th of December 2024, **UNHCR has advocated for the lifting of sanctions to improve access to essential services and support for vulnerable populations across the country**.
- During the week, UNHCR continued its protection monitoring efforts. As of 15 May, UNHCR has reached out to **19,482 households** inside Syria across all 14 governorates.

Country updates

Syria

As of 15 May 2025, UNHCR estimates that **some 501,126 Syrians** have [crossed back to Syria](#) via neighboring countries since 8 December 2024. This brings up the total of **861,966 Syrian individuals** that have returned to Syria since the beginning of 2024. This figure is calculated based on a triangulation of data from Syria, Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and beyond.

In terms of internal displacement, as of 15 May, **1,200,486 internally displaced persons (IDPs) have returned to their homes**, including **344,733 returning from IDP sites** since early December 2024, according to the latest data of the IDP Task Force.

The significant number of refugee and IDP returns observed since 8 December suggests that many displaced individuals perceive an overall improvement in Syria's security environment. Nonetheless, **hostilities and security incidents continue to persist in some parts of the country**, highlighting ongoing risks in some areas.

Meanwhile, during his visit to Saudi Arabia on 13 and 14 May 2025, and following his meeting with Syrian Interim President Ahmad Al-Sharaa, President Donald Trump announced the **lifting of all U.S. sanctions on Syria**, a decision which was welcomed by several leaders globally and celebrated by Syrians across the country. On 13 and 14 May, crowds gathered in Damascus' Omeyyad Square in visible displays of joy, reflecting widespread public approval of the decision.

During the week, UNHCR continued its robust **protection monitoring** efforts across Syria, **reaching 19,482 households** and completing corresponding questionnaires, alongside 1,663 key informant interviews (KIIs). During the same period, the [Syria is Home](#) platform recorded 1,100 visitors, with the highest traffic from Türkiye, followed by Lebanon, Syria and Egypt.

As part of the **Facilitated Voluntary Return and Transport Assistance** programme, UNHCR continued to provide transport to returnee families at key border crossing points, including Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salama, Joussieh and Nassib, as well as to those arriving at Homs bus station in need of support to reach their homes.

In response to the pressing needs of the population, UNHCR distributed Core Relief Items (CRI) and non-food item (NFI) kits to 2,085 families—approximately 9,068 individuals—including over 4,000 individuals in Aleppo and 5,490 individuals in Al-Hol and Newroz camps (Al-Hasakeh Governorate), as well as in Raqqa and Tabqa stadium (Ar-Raqqa Governorate). In the shelter sector, assessments were conducted for 625 families in Aleppo, including 378 for shelter packages and 247 for house repairs. Shelter repair works also commenced for 100 families in Homs and Hama, while technical assessments began for the rehabilitation of 400 damaged homes in Rural Damascus. Additionally, 53 Emergency Shelter Tents were installed in Serekaniye/Talae' camp (Al-Hasakeh Governorate) in northeast Syria.

Child protection interventions reached over 614 children through educational, recreational, and mine-risk education (MRE) sessions across several governorates, including Homs, Hama, As-Sweida, Dar'a, Tartous, Lattakia, Al-Hasakeh, Ar-Raqqa, and Deir-ez-Zor. UNHCR also carried out gender-based violence (GBV) and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) activities, reaching 1,518 individuals from the IDP, returnee and host communities. In Aleppo alone, 60 GBV sessions were conducted, and 544 dignity kits were distributed. Legal assistance activities reached 678 individuals, with targeted counseling provided to over 40 people in Jableh and Datour (Lattakia) affected by the hostilities of early March.

Türkiye

On 12 May, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Hakan Fidan hosted a trilateral meeting with Ayman Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Jordan, and Asaad Hassan Al-Shaibani, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Syria. The meeting was followed by a joint [press conference](#), during which the ministers reaffirmed their shared commitment to Syria's security, stability, and sovereignty. As part of the ongoing diplomatic rapprochement, the reopening of the Syrian Embassy in Ankara was officially announced.

Processing of voluntary returns continues in provinces and at five border crossings: Cilvegözü / Bab al Hawa, Yayladağı / Keseb, Öncüpınar / Bab al Salama, Karkamış / Jarablus and Akçakale / Tel Abyad. As of 14 May, Çobanbey / Al Rai, Zeytindalı / Jinderes and Yayladağı / Keseb are open for processing go-and-see visits.

A substantial number of returns have been recorded since the end of 2024 recently reported going over 200,000 since 8 December, with **UNHCR interviewing a majority of those who have returned to ensure the voluntary nature of their decisions.**

This week, UNHCR started monitoring in Osmaniye, Nevşehir and Niğde. Currently, UNHCR monitors returns at 20 PDMM offices in 18 provinces and at four border crossings in the south-east and at Istanbul Airport. UNHCR is also ready for monitoring at Sabiha Gökçen Airport in Istanbul and Ankara Esenboğa Airport when the announced flights start – currently cancelled for the month of May.

Recent monitoring indicates that returnees to Syria represent a diverse demographic, including women returning independently and female-headed households. The primary motivations for return remain consistent, with individuals citing political and security developments, the desire for family reunification, and personal or economic challenges. While many return to their province of origin due to familial ties or property ownership, others settle in different areas as a result of housing destruction, family relocation, or better access to essential services.

Returnees span all age groups, with a slightly higher proportion of men. Some individuals return alone, often to assess conditions before facilitating the return of their families. Key challenges persist, particularly in relation to housing—where damage, destruction, or loss of property is common—and documentation, with many facing gaps in civil status records. Economically, returnees anticipate continued reliance on informal employment or family support, mirroring their experiences in Türkiye. Access to basic services varies significantly across areas of return, underscoring the ongoing need for coordinated support to ensure sustainable reintegration and address the complex needs of returnee populations.

During the week, **UNHCR continued to facilitate discussions with Syrian refugees to gather insights into their perspectives on voluntary return.** These discussions were conducted in coordination with refugee-led organizations and partner NGOs across Hatay, Gaziantep, and Konya.

In Hatay, a focus group provided a platform for Syrian refugees to share their **post-earthquake experiences and views on return.** While all participants expressed a desire to return to Syria, they identified significant barriers, including insecurity, damaged infrastructure, and the lack of basic services. Women participants emphasized the personal growth and empowerment they experienced in Türkiye, particularly in resisting early marriage and domestic violence. They stressed the importance of ensuring women's rights in Syria as a prerequisite for a safe and dignified return. Many participants also expressed a desire to maintain ties with Türkiye and to continue visiting in the future.

In Gaziantep and Konya, follow-up interviews and focus group discussions were held with refugees who had recently participated in go-and-see visits. While participants found the visits valuable, many

reported **emotional distress upon witnessing the extent of destruction** and noted societal changes that contributed to a sense of disconnection. Key considerations for return included security, employment opportunities, and access to education and essential services. Some participants indicated that the visits had helped inform their decision-making, with a few expressing increased willingness to return if conditions were to improve.

Lebanon

The hostilities in the Tartous, Latakia, Homs, and Hama Governorates of Syria in early March continue to displace people into the North and Akkar Governorates, **reaching 39,014 people** as of 13 May. Newly arrived refugees are now staying across 30 villages, including 24 collective sites.

As of 12 May, the Baalbek Disaster Risk Management (DRM) in the Bekaa is reporting **approximately 78,118 arrivals from Syria** since 8 December (a decrease from 9 May), including some 21,137 arrivals in Baalbek Governorate, North Bekaa, residing in 165 informal collective shelters (CS), and approximately 56,981 residing in the community.

According to the General Security Office (GSO) and the Qaymaqam of West Bekaa, a total of **777 Syrians** arrived since 2 May due to clashes in Ashrafiya and Sahnaya in Daraya and Jaramana in Rural Damascus.

Jordan

As of 10 May, **nearly 65,700 refugees registered with UNHCR have returned from Jordan to Syria** since 8 December 2024. The average daily number of refugee returnees noticeably increased during the reporting period, with an average of 510 refugees crossing the border each day, compared to an average of 380 in the previous week.

Demographics of returnees remained largely unchanged from previous weeks, with women and girls representing around 46 per cent of the total refugee returnees. Children accounted for around 41 per cent, and men of military age (18-40 years old) made up around 23 per cent of overall returns. The vast majority of refugees continue to return from host communities, primarily from Amman and Irbid. More details about the numbers and profile of returnees are available on UNHCR Jordan's returns dashboard.

On 13 and 15 May, **UNHCR facilitated transportation for 205 refugees from Amman and Azraq camp**. UNHCR observed increased demand for transportation assistance this week, particularly from Amman and Azraq. Similar to previous weeks, the majority of refugees accessing UNHCR transportation assistance intended to return to Homs.

Overall, since the start of the transportation process on 20 January 2025, **UNHCR has supported more than 2,200 refugees to return to Syria**. Before departure, in-person interviews are conducted to ensure that returns are voluntary and well-informed, with counselling and information provided on available services inside Syria. The return process is closely coordinated with the UNHCR operation in Syria to support refugees upon arrival at their final destination.

Iraq

As of 11 May, **a total of 1,449 refugees have returned to Syria from Iraq** so far in 2025. Of these, 1,347 returned through the Peshkhabour border crossing point and were processed by UNHCR and local authorities at the Derabon return centre. Additionally, 102 refugees returned to Syria via Erbil airport, with airport authorities sharing copies of their UNHCR certificates upon departure.

Egypt

As of 12 May 2025, **approximately 135,700 Syrian refugees are registered in Egypt**, around 220 fewer than the previous week. Syrian refugees now account for approximately 14% of the total refugee population in the country.

Since the regime change in Syria, there has been a significant increase in Syrians approaching UNHCR in Cairo and Alexandria to request the closure of their asylum cases. As of 12 May 2025, almost **9,533 closure requests involving over 20,342 individuals** were submitted since 8 December 2024, averaging 94 requests per day – compared to just seven per day in November 2024. In addition, 12,928 individuals have been closed as spontaneous departures, reflecting a growing perception among many Syrians that return may now be viable.

The majority of individuals intending to return to Syria indicated Damascus as their destination, accounting for 57% of responses, followed by 12% to Homs, 10% to Rural Damascus, 5% to Al Bab, and 16% to other locations across the country. Notably, 98% of these intended return locations correspond to the individuals' original home areas.

On 6 May, UNHCR Egypt organized a focus group discussion with 10 Syrian Alawite refugees residing in Egypt, as part of ongoing community consultations to better understand refugees' perspectives on return and current protection needs. Participants emphasized that return to Syria remains unviable under present conditions, citing ongoing **insecurity and targeted incidents** affecting the Alawite community in Syria. Participants also discussed challenges they face in Egypt, including access to documentation, education, and healthcare services.

Useful links

- [Regional Flash Update #26, Syria Situation Crisis](#)
- [UNHCR Operational Framework for Voluntary Return of Syrian Refugees and IDPs](#)
- [January 2025 Refugee Perceptions and Intentions Survey \(RPIS\)](#)
- [UNHCR Position on Returns to the Syrian Arab Republic \(16 December\)](#)
- [Syria Situation Data Portal](#)
- [UNHCR Help Site](#)

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