Regional Flash Update #28

Syria situation crisis

22 May 2025



At the age of 103, Jassim returned to Al-Qusayr (rural Homs). His home is destroyed, three of his children buried by war, he told UNHCR. After a decade in exile, he pitched his tent on the rubble, he rebuilds not just a shelter, but a legacy of resilience, wishing to die where his heart never left. ©UNHCR Syria/Hameed Maarouf

Key Highlights

- As of 22 May 2025, UNHCR estimates that **507,672 – Syrians** have crossed back to Syria via neighboring countries since 8 December 2024. This brings up the total of **868,512 Syrian individuals** that have returned to Syria since the beginning of 2024.
- As of 22 May, **1,200,486 internally displaced persons (IDPs) have returned to their homes in Syria** since early December 2024, according to the latest data of the IDP Task Force. The fourth and fifth voluntary return movements from Areesha camp, facilitated by UNHCR, took place on 15 May and 18 May, benefiting 100 households (526 individuals) who returned to their areas of origin in Deir-ez-Zor. To date, **356 households (1,878 individuals)** have departed Areesha camp through either UNHCR-facilitated or self-organized returns.
- On 20 May 2025, following a Foreign Affairs Council meeting, **the European Union announced the political decision to lift its economic sanctions on Syria.** This decision is reversible and conditional. The easing of sanctions is crucial to improve access to essential services and support for vulnerable populations across the country as well as for the return of displaced populations including refugees. UNHCR has been advocating for the release of sanctions since the fall of the previous regime.

- During the week, **UNHCR distributed over 7,650 non-food (NFI) kits across all 14 governorates in Syria**, including in Roj, Tel Saman, and Al-Hol camps (Al-Hasakeh Governorate). **2,314 individuals** were reached through **child protection and education interventions**, and 1,370 individuals were reached through **gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response** and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) activities across Syria. UNHCR and partners provided **mental health and psychosocial support** to nearly **490 individuals**, while UNHCR's **legal support** reached nearly **500 individuals**.
- As of 22 May, and since the start of the transportation process on 20 January 2025, **UNHCR has supported more than 2,300 refugees to return from Jordan to Syria**.

Country updates

Syria

As of 22 May 2025, UNHCR estimates that **some 507,672 Syrians** have crossed back to Syria via neighboring countries since 8 December 2024. This brings up the total of **868,512 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 22 May, **1,202,074 internally displaced persons (IDPs) have returned to their homes** since early December 2024, according to the latest data of the IDP Task Force.

During the week, and 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.

Additionally, the fourth and fifth voluntary return movements from Areesha camp, facilitated by UNHCR, took place on 15 May and 18 May, benefiting **100 households (526 individuals)** who returned to their areas of origin in Deir-ez-Zor. To date, **356 households (1,878 individuals)** have departed Areesha camp through either UNHCR-facilitated or self-organized returns.

The notable rise in refugee and IDP returns since 8 December indicates that **many displaced Syrians feel the security situation has improved**. Nonetheless, ongoing hostilities and incidents in certain areas – including IDF military activities in Sweida, Quneitra and Dar'a Governorates and the uptick of ISIS activity in Aleppo, rural Homs, Deir-ez-Zor, and Al-Hasakeh – serve as a stark reminder that **significant risks remain in parts of the country**.

Meanwhile, the **European Union announced the political decision to lift its economic sanctions on Syria**. High Representative/Vice President Kaja Kallas stated in her press remarks that the decision is "reversible and conditional also on progress." Several international leaders, including Syrian interim Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani welcomed the announcement.

During the week, UNHCR continued its robust **protection monitoring** efforts across Syria. In response to the identified needs, UNHCR distributed over **7,650 non-food item (NFI) kits to 2,431 households (10,994 individuals)** across all 14 governorates in Syria, including in Roj, Tel Saman, and Al-Hol camps (Al-Hasakeh Governorate). In Al-Hol alone, 604 households (2,179 individuals) received essential items such as mattresses, sleeping mats, kitchen sets, and solar lamps.

To support children's safety, well-being, and access to education, UNHCR and partners reached over **2,300 children and adolescents** through structured child protection sessions, recreational activities, and Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE). In Aleppo, preparations were finalized

to host **1,922 students** from conflict-affected areas for national exams, with safety briefings planned to mitigate UXO risks. More than **1,370 individuals** were reached through gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response efforts, including awareness sessions and the distribution of dignity kits in areas such as Damascus, Lattakia, and Aleppo. In parallel, nearly **490 individuals** benefited from mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services, including psychological first aid, group sessions, and individual counseling. In Lattakia and Tartous, over 120 individuals participated in awareness and recreational sessions to help communities cope with trauma and stress. Finally, legal support was extended to some **500 individuals**, with a strong focus in Lattakia and Tartous, where 340 people attended legal awareness sessions. An additional 79 individuals received one-on-one legal counseling, addressing issues such as documentation, property rights, and family law.

The Syria is Home platform continued to record visitors and to receive positive feedback, with the highest traffic being from Lebanon, followed by Türkiye, Egypt and Syria.

Türkiye

On 15 May, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan hosted a trilateral meeting in Antalya with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad Hassan Al-Shaibani. The talks focused on fostering positive developments in Syria and sustaining international engagement with the Syrian government. As a follow-up, a **Türkiye-U.S. working group** convened in Washington on 20 May to explore cooperation on stabilizing Syria, covering areas like counterterrorism, humanitarian aid, and joint efforts in northeastern Syria. Furthermore, in a notable move towards diplomatic rapprochement, Türkiye's Council of Higher Education announced the creation of a "**Türkiye-Syria University**" in Damascus. An agreement was signed to boost academic cooperation, student and faculty exchanges, and IT infrastructure in Syrian universities. Both countries also agreed on mutual recognition of academic qualifications.

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 20 May, Çobanbey / Al Rai, Zeytindalı / Jinderes and Yayladağı / Keseb are open for processing go-and-see visits.

Since early December 2024, over 200,000 refugee returns have been recorded. UNHCR has played a critical role in this process by conducting interviews with the vast majority of returnees to verify the voluntary nature of their decisions, ensuring that **returns are safe, dignified, and informed**.

Currently, **UNHCR monitors returns at 20 Provincial Directorates of Migration Management. (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 İstanbul and Ankara Esenboğa Airport as soon as the announced flights begin.

Monitoring of refugee returns to Syria highlights a **diverse range of returnee profiles**, including women returning alone and female-headed households. As with previous week, most were working-age adults, though children and older individuals were also present, with men slightly outnumbering women. Many returned independently, often due to the absence of dependents in Türkiye or to assess conditions before relocating family. Key motivations continued to include improved security, political changes, and family reunification, alongside economic hardship in Türkiye. Aleppo was the most common destination, followed by Idleb, Damascus, and Hama. Most aimed to return to their place of origin, though some faced obstacles like damaged property or ongoing insecurity. Property ownership and civil documentation played a significant role, with many returnees holding deeds and IDs, though some lacked official papers. In Türkiye, income came from informal work and aid; in Syria, many expected to rely on employment or family support.

Access to services in return areas varied, with some returnees reporting availability and others facing gaps or lacking information. **These findings underscore the importance of continued humanitarian support to ensure returns are voluntary, safe, and sustainable**.

During the week, UNHCR and a partner Refugee-Led Organization (RLO) engaged with a group of Syrian refugees in Yayladağı, following their go-and-see visits to Syria. Many participants expressed a **conditional willingness to return**, driven largely by emotional ties and a desire to rebuild their lives and communities. However, they also voiced serious concerns, including the destruction and looting of homes, the collapse of educational systems, and the lack of essential services, such as electricity, water, healthcare, and municipal infrastructure.

Lebanon

The hostilities in the Tartous, Lattakia, Homs and Hama Governorates of Syria in early March continue to displace people into the North and Akkar Governorates of North Lebanon. Newly arrived refugees are now located across 35 distinct locations predominantly in Akkar in 30 villages near to the border with Syria, **reaching 40,007 people in total** (26,771 in Akkar and 13,296 in North). Since 9 December, an estimated **95,015 persons have crossed into Syria**, though this does not fully indicate permanent returns. The continuing influx over preceding months is now becoming a protracted situation, with people still arriving in dire condition, while current response is greatly overstretched, insufficient to the growing needs and increasingly unsustainable due to lack of funding support.

As of 19 May, the Baalbek Disaster Risk Management (DRM) in the Bekaa is reporting **78,625 new arrivals** (an increase of 500 from 16 May), including approximately 21,644 arrivals in Baalbek Governorate, North Bekaa, residing in 165 informal collective shelters (CS), and approximately 56,981 residing in the community.

According to the GSO, 170 newly arrived Syrians have been granted humanitarian entry through the Masnaa Official Crossing Point (OCP) since 16 May. In total, 977 Syrians have entered Lebanon since 2 May, fleeing clashes in Ashrafyaa and Sahnaya in Daraya, as well as Jaramana (Rural Damascus Governorate) – most of whom reportedly belong to the Druze community.

Jordan

As of 17 May, **nearly 68,200 refugees registered with UNHCR have returned from Jordan to Syria** since 8 December 2024. The daily average number of refugees returning to Syria from Jordan noticeably increased during the reporting period, with an average of 430 refugees crossing the border each day, compared to an average of 510 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 22 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 20 and 22 May, **UNHCR facilitated transportation to Syria for 117 refugees from Azraq camp**. UNHCR observed increased demand for transportation assistance this week, particularly from Amman. 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 2,300 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 18 May, a total of **1,501 refugees registered with UNHCR have returned to Syria from Iraq** so far in 2025. Of these, 1,395 returned through the Peshkhabour border crossing point and were processed by UNHCR and local authorities at the Derabon return centre. Additionally, 106 refugees returned to Syria via Erbil airport, with airport authorities sharing copies of their UNHCR certificates upon departure. Furthermore, authorities at the Al-Qaim border crossing point reported that **7,534 individuals crossed into Syria**, including 164 refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR. It is worth noting that those crossing through Al-Qaim, including individuals registered with UNHCR, may have residency in Iraq.

Egypt

As of 18 May 2025, approximately **135,400 Syrian refugees** are registered in Egypt, around 300 fewer than the previous week. Syrian refugees now account for approximately 13.9% 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 19 May 2025, **almost 9,755 closure requests involving over 21,119 individuals** were submitted since 8 December 2024, averaging 94 requests per day – compared to just seven per day in November 2024. In addition, 13,450 individuals have been closed as spontaneous departures, reflecting a growing perception among many Syrians that return may now be viable.

On 13 May in Cairo, UNHCR held a focus group discussion (FGD) with members of the Syrian Druze refugee community in Egypt to explore their views on return to Syria, onward movement, and the protection challenges they face as a religious minority. Participants unanimously agreed that return to Syria is currently not a viable option due to the security situation. The group recommended launching awareness campaigns about minority groups in Egypt, improving access to employment and workplace protection, enhancing vocational training and remote work opportunities, streamlining residency-related appointments, and establishing safe, community-based reporting mechanisms.

On the same day, UNHCR held an **outreach meeting** with 45 Syrian refugees at the Terre des Hommes (TdH) Community Centre in Alexandria to discuss voluntary return, revealing frustration among the community. While nearly half of those in attendance said they would consider returning, they also mentioned that more support was needed for them to effectively return to their country. UNHCR continues to coordinate with Syrian refugee-led organizations (RLOs) to share updates and monitor trends.

Useful links

- Regional Flash Update #27, 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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CONTACTS
UNHCR Syria
SYRIAreporting@unhcr.org

For more information, please visit:
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