



UNHCR CASH ASSISTANCE FOR SYRIAN RETURNEES 2025

MAIN OUTCOMES FROM POST DISTRIBUTION MONITORING

Photo: As winter grips Syria, displaced and returnee families continue to endure freezing conditions in damaged or inadequate shelters. UNHCR is on the ground providing winter kits and cash assistance to help the most vulnerable stay safe and warm. © UNHCR/Hameed Maarouf

SUMMARY

This document presents the results and key findings of UNHCR's Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) of cash assistance provided to vulnerable Syrian refugee returnees to support their initial transition and stability upon return. The assistance is intended to respond to a broad range of needs, including basic subsistence, shelter, health, education, and protection-related priorities. Cash continued to be effective in responding to people's immediate subsistence needs, improving living conditions and overall well-being upon return. Cash remained the preferred modality of assistance by displaced populations, and overall satisfaction with cash was at 92%. Cash is a cost-effective direct assistance modality, with bank fees ranging from 1% -5%, and significantly cheaper to deliver than other forms of assistance. The findings, however, also highlight unmet basic needs and protection risks requiring care and attention by both humanitarian and development actors.

The findings in this report are based on UNHCR's Post-Distribution Monitoring data. This survey was conducted on a representative random sample of households returning from different countries of asylum using a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error while maintaining proportional representation across all 13 governorates and accounting for an estimated 50% non-response rate.

UNHCR Cash Assistance in Syria

In Syria, UNHCR provides targeted **one-off cash assistance to vulnerable refugee returnees** to support priority needs and immediate stability upon return. Eligibility is based on vulnerability and limited to individuals whose cases were closed in the country of asylum due to return, who previously qualified for basic subsistence assistance. The cash assistance is designed to address a range of critical needs, including basic subsistence, shelter, health, education, and protection-related priorities, contributing to safer and more sustainable return. Until mid-November 2025, more than **36,000 refugee returnee families** (over **115,000 individuals**) were supported upon arrival to Syria through this assistance. Each household initially received USD 600.

In parallel, UNHCR provided **shelter grants to 6,194** vulnerable individuals, **including internally displaced persons (IDPs), IDP returnees, refugee returnees, and host community members**. Cash assisted household received USD 1,300- 3,500 for shelter repairs, with the amount determined by the level of assessed shelter damage. Assistance also included return grants for IDP returnees from Areesha camp. Complementing shelter and basic needs support, UNHCR delivered **cash for livelihoods assistance to 1,439 households**, amounting to USD 2.2 million, to support income-generating activities and strengthen self-reliance.

UNHCR continues to provide cash assistance to Syrian refugees in countries of asylum (Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, and Türkiye) to facilitate self-organized return. In Libya, UNHCR also facilitates the voluntary return of Syrian refugees, who then receive a cash grant in Syria upon the return based on assessed vulnerabilities.

UNHCR utilizes the **Returnee Assistance Information System (RAIS)**, a secure real-time platform that ensures coordinated delivery, de-duplication, and effective tracking of assistance and referrals. This system is also used by partners such as WFP and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to align support for returnees and strengthen operational coherence. Additionally, a dedicated WhatsApp Business account has been launched, increasing communication accessibility from 30% to 70% of individuals.

In close coordination with the Central Bank of Syria, UNHCR continues to strengthen the efficiency, security, and transparency of cash delivery. This includes advancing **digital payment systems and biometric authentication**, supporting the development of a secure and scalable payment ecosystem. With Central Bank approval, UNHCR became the first agency to deliver humanitarian assistance in USD, responding to ongoing liquidity constraints and enabling more reliable access to assistance.

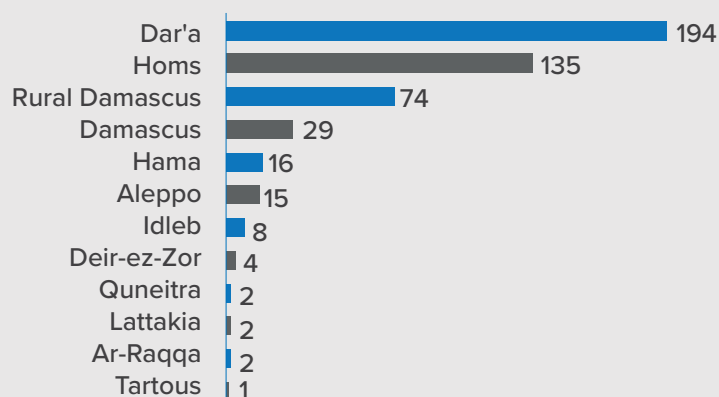
KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ Expenditures on food (72%) and shelter (48%), including rent and shelter repairs, ranked among the highest uses of cash assistance, underscoring the centrality of housing-related needs for returning families
- ▶ 99% of households preferred cash as an assistance modality
- ▶ 96% of households reported that cash assistance improved their living
- ▶ 94% of households reported that cash assistance reduced feeling of stress

RESPONDENTS PROFILE

Of the 482 respondents, %86) 415) returned from Jordan, 42 %9)) from Lebanon, %5) 22) from Egypt, and %1) 3) from Iraq. Most returnees resettled in Dar'a (%40), Homs (%28), and Rural Damascus (%15), as shown in Figure 2. Overall, %58 of respondents were male and %42 were female. In terms of age distribution, %24 were between 35–18 years, %60 between 59–36 years, and %16 were above 60. The average household size across all respondents was 5.34. Additionally, %64 of households reported having at least one member with a disability, while %36 reported none. Household composition consisted of %8 older persons, %43 adults, and %49 children. Among all surveyed households, the gender distribution was %52 female and %48 male.

GOVERNORATE OF RETURN



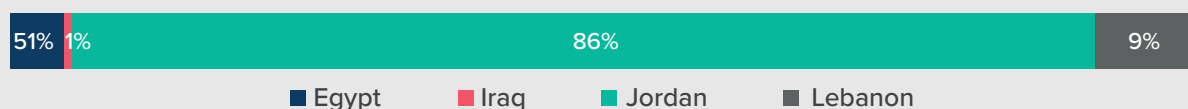
Um Ahmad, a widowed Syrian returnee who lived in Azraq camp in Jordan for 11 years, returned to Syria in August 2025 and soon received a message from UNHCR informing her to collect her cash assistance. With this support, she was able to install a window and a door as her shelter was destroyed, and buy a wardrobe, saying, "The cash assistance helped us after returning. We came back from Jordan with nothing but our clothes."

She now lives in her in-laws' house with her four children. Her eldest son, 23, is a software engineer but has not yet found a job, while the other three attend school. Um Ahmad dreams of receiving support to open a small sewing workshop, as she used to work as a seamstress, but currently has no source of income and relies on help from the local community.

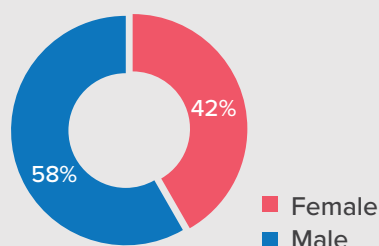


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Country of Asylum



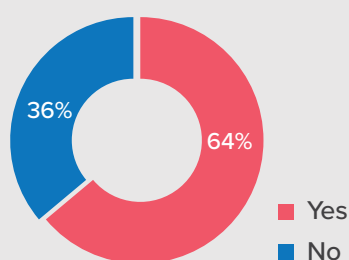
Respondent Gender



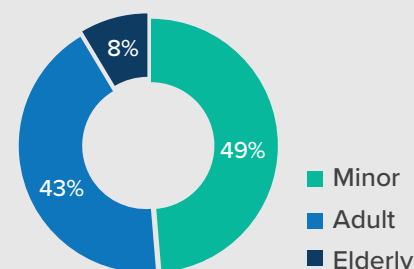
Respondent Age



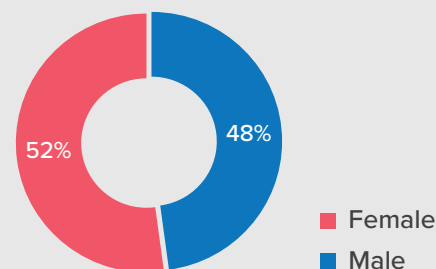
Disability in the Household



Household composition Age



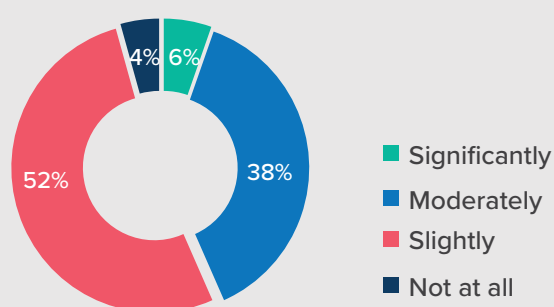
Household composition Gender



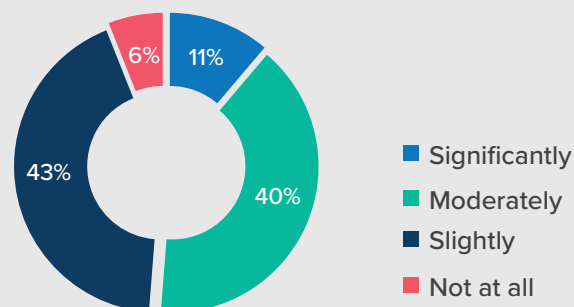
CASH IS A POWERFUL ENABLER OF PROTECTION, ENHANCING LIVING CONDITIONS AND PROMOTING THE WELL-BEING OF AFFECTED POPULATIONS

The cash assistance grant proved to be an important factor in improving the wellbeing of refugee returnees in Syria. The findings show that only 4% the respondents reported that the return grant did not improve their living conditions while 42% reporting moderate or significant improvement. Cash assistance gave a positive psychosocial effect on recipient's well-being as 94% reported reduced feeling of stress after receiving cash assistance.

Improved living conditions



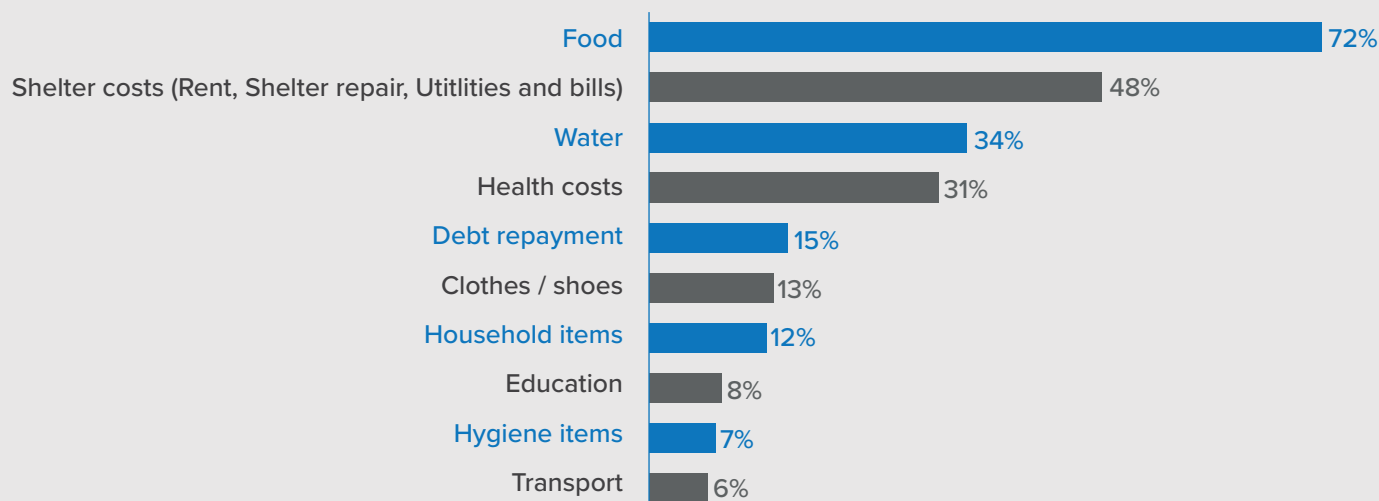
Reduced feeling of stress



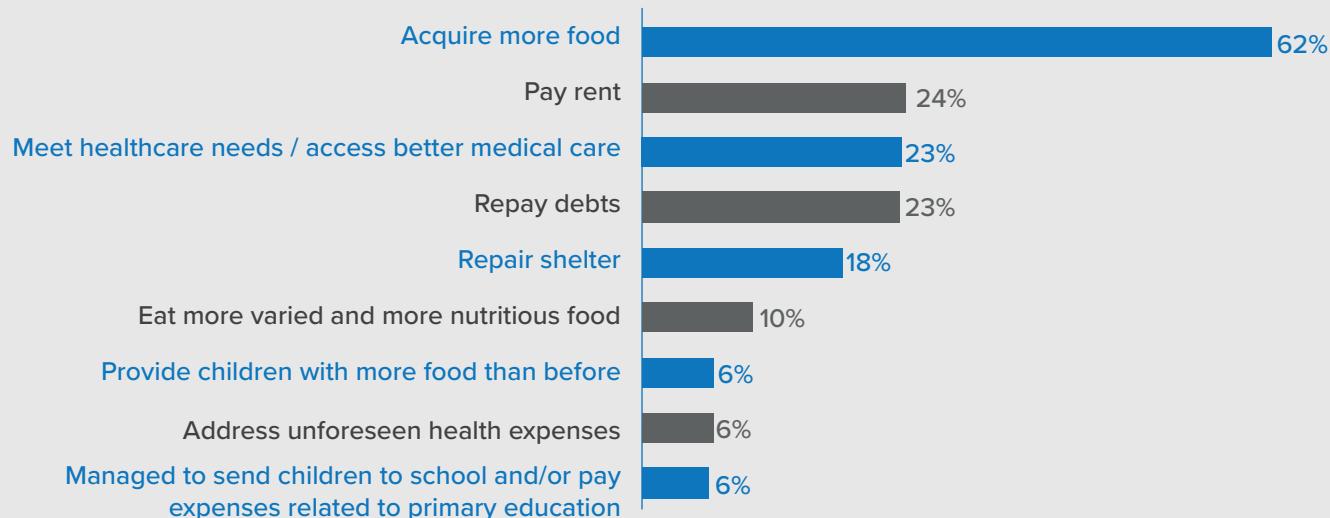
HOW HOUSEHOLDS USED CASH TO MEET PRIORITY NEEDS

The findings clearly shows that cash assistance has played a vital role in supporting returnees, particularly in meeting essential shelter-related needs that are critical during the early stages of reintegration. Alongside food that 72% of respondents spending their assistance on, shelter costs (48%) including rent, shelter repairs, utilities, and basic household bills emerged as one of the top expenditure categories, underscoring the significance of housing expenses needs for returning families. Similarly, when households were asked what they were able to do specifically because of the cash assistance, interviewed households highlighted that they could acquire to pay rent (24%), repair damaged shelter (18%), addressing essential household needs that would have been otherwise unattainable. The ability to cover shelter related expenses is significant in a return context, where inadequate shelter conditions can create more vulnerability and hinder sustainability of return. Beyond housing, cash also enabled households to acquire more food (62%) including more varied and nutritious options (10%), meet healthcare needs (23%) and repay debts (23%), while also supporting children's education (6%) and managing unforeseen health expenses (6%).

Use of cash assistance, per expenditure category



What could you do or acquire thanks to cash assistance, that you would not have been able to do without the assistance?



LOW RISKS, MINIMAL TECHNICAL ISSUES, AND MARKET AVAILABILITY MADE CASH THE MOST APPROPRIATE MODALITY

An overwhelming majority of surveyed households (98%) reported facing no risks when collecting, keeping, or spending their cash assistance. Similarly, 95% indicated that they did not encounter any technical or other issues throughout the process of receiving, withdrawing, keeping, or using the cash. Most of those who reported facing a problem indicated that the main issue was the poor service at the financial service provider during cash withdrawal. In addition, 90% of households confirmed having access to the essential items and services they needed, and 86% reported that the quality of these goods and services was adequate. These findings demonstrate that cash assistance is both safe and problem-free for households in Syria and that local markets are effectively meeting the increased demand generated by cash assistance, including in more remote areas, underscoring the continued relevance of cash as an appropriate and responsive modality for returnees.

Huda Ali Naifeh, 67, a widowed Syrian returnee, mother of four (three daughters and one son) and grandmother of four, returned to Syria with her family in February 2025 after spending 11 years as a refugee in Burj Al-Hamam, Jordan where they were constantly at a risk of eviction, despite receiving regular cash assistance from UNHCR. One of her daughters suffers from a chronic illness.



Huda told us that after returning to her house in Al-Qadam neighborhood close to Damascus, which had been destroyed and required her relatives interventions to restore basic living conditions, she could not afford even a loaf of bread for her children and had to borrow a cup of rice from neighbors who were struggling just as much.

After receiving the cash for return and reintegration grant of 600 US dollars from UNHCR, she was finally able to secure basic necessities such as buying basic household items, essential medicines and eyeglasses for herself and her sick daughter, and most importantly food including

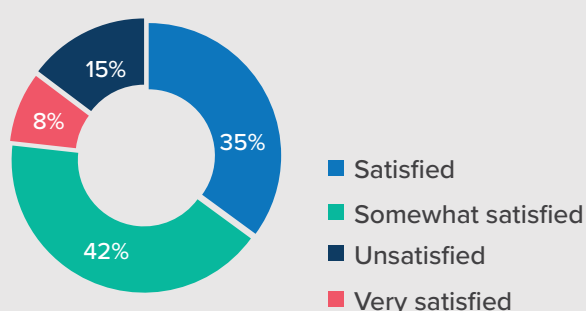
rice, bread, tea, and chicken. “May God bless everyone who helped me” she says. “You brought happiness to my heart and allowed me to live with dignity again.”

Huda is planning to restart her very small business of making and selling jarred goods such as pickles to be able to cover for her daily expenses. © UNHCR/Vivian Tohme

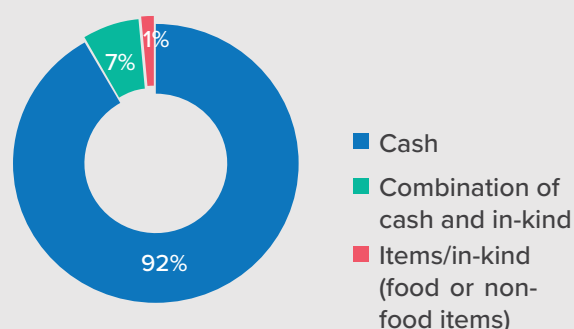
CASH REMAINED THE PREFERRED ASSISTANCE MODALITY, REFLECTED IN STRONG RECIPIENT SATISFACTION LEVELS

A clear majority of interviewed households expressed a preference for cash assistance or a combination of cash and in-kind modalities, with only 1% indicating a preference for in-kind assistance alone. Preferences for in-kind or combined modalities were primarily linked to perceptions of cash assistance being insufficient to meet needs. When beneficiaries were asked about their satisfaction with the CBI process, only 8% reported dissatisfaction. We believe that with improvements to program efficiency and enhanced communication with communities, this percentage could be further reduced.

Satisfaction with CBI process



Preferred modality of assistance

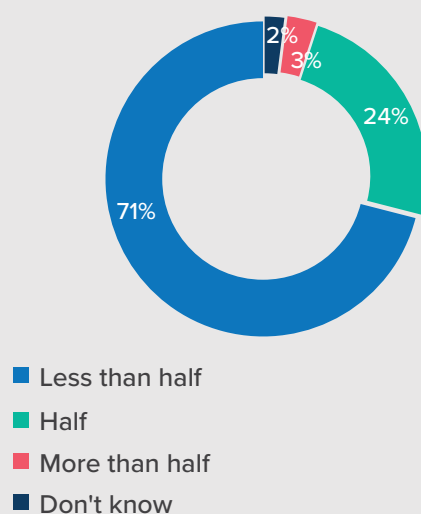


BASIC NEEDS AND PROTECTION CONCERNS

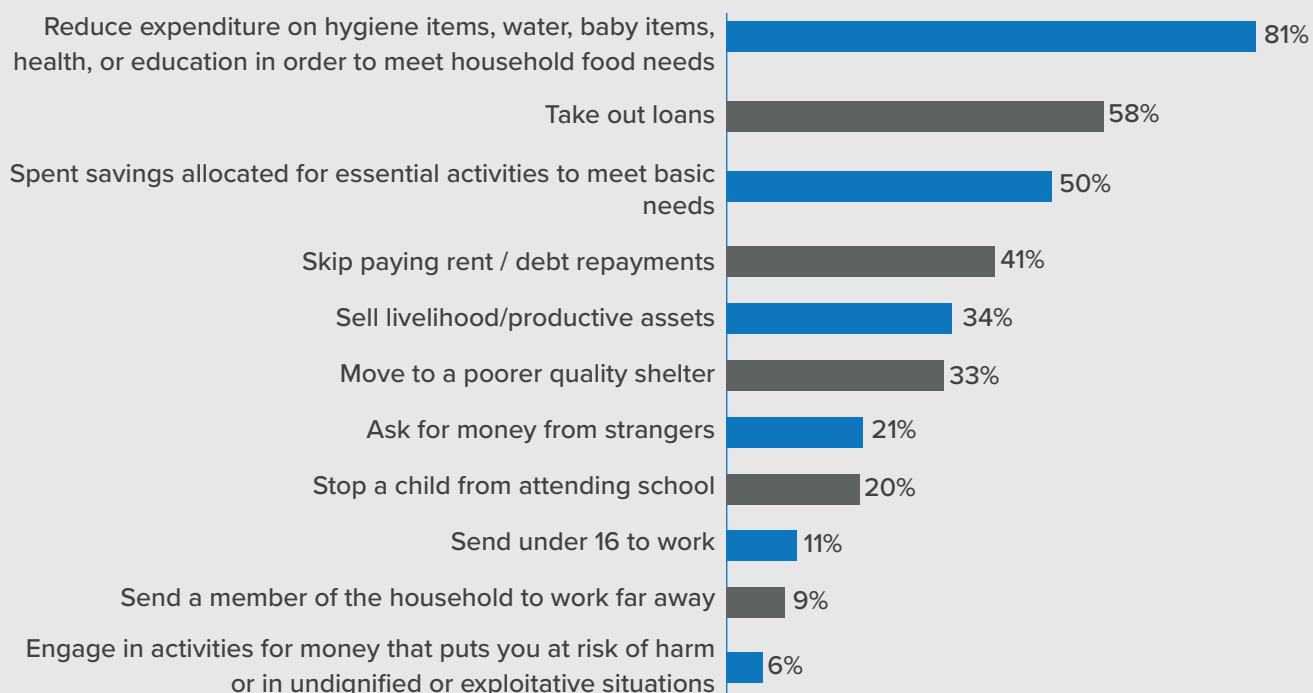
Although cash assistance undoubtedly provided a foundational layer of financial support upon return, many returnees continue to face unmet needs and protection risks. Overall, 71% of interviewed households were able to cover less than half of their priority needs while only 27% reported they could meet half or more of all their basic needs.

To cope with these challenges, most households adopted multiple coping strategies. The most common was cutting back on essential hygiene, water, and healthcare expenditures, reported by 81% of households. Reliance on loans was also widespread, with 58% borrowing to make ends meet, while 50% of households tapped into savings intended for essential activities to cover basic food needs. 41% skipped rent payments, 34% sold livelihoods or assets, and 33% moved to lower-quality shelters. Additionally, 21% sought financial help from strangers, 20% withdrew their children from school due to economic pressures, and 11% sent children under 16 to work.

Ability to meet basic needs



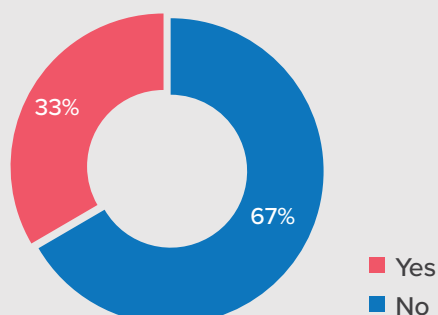
Coping strategies, per % of households



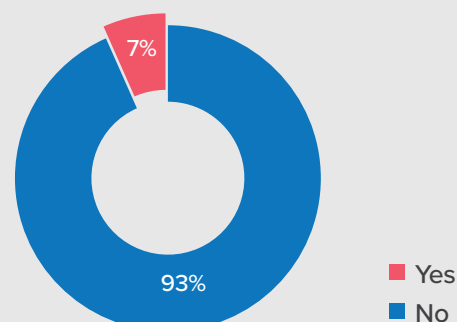
ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED POPULATION

As part of its protection mandate and commitment to Accountability to Affected People, UNHCR is taking steps to ensure that returnees have timely and accessible information about cash assistance through multiple channels. While the accountability and communication are continuously being strengthened, recent enhancements have been implemented following feedback from beneficiaries, and results are gradually improving. When asked whether they had received information on how to report complaints or provide feedback on cash assistance from UNHCR, only 33% of respondents said yes. To address this gap, UNHCR has launched a dedicated call center to support beneficiaries with any questions or issues related to cash-for-return assistance. Moreover, feedback and complaint channels include UNHCR-supported community centers. Despite the low awareness of reporting mechanisms, 92% of respondents indicated that they did not have any complaints or feedback to share.

Knowledge about Complaint and Feedback mechanisms on CBI



Did you have any complaint or feedback regarding the assistance



CONCLUSION

UNHCR's cash assistance to Syrian refugee returnees has demonstrated clear effectiveness in supporting early stabilization following return. The Post-Distribution Monitoring findings confirm that cash remains a timely, flexible, and protection-sensitive modality, enabling households to prioritize their most urgent needs, particularly shelter, food, healthcare, and basic household expenses. Most returnees reported improved living conditions and reduced stress levels, reinforcing cash as both a practical and psychosocial support mechanism in fragile return environments.

At the same time, the data highlights that assistance alone is not sufficient to offset the scale of needs faced by returnees. Gaps in access to basic services, coupled with widespread reliance on negative coping strategies, underline the continued vulnerability of returning households and the need for sustained and coordinated humanitarian and development engagement. While borrowing and use of savings reflect strong social networks and resilience, they also signal financial strain that cannot be sustained over time without adequate support mechanisms.

The findings reaffirm that cash assistance is not only efficient and well-received, but also a critical entry point for protection, dignity, and recovery in the return context. Moving forward, enhanced coordination, strengthened communication, and continued investment in cash-based interventions will be essential to support sustainable returns and mitigate protection risks for vulnerable Syrian returnees.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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