

Syrian Refugee Return Dynamics

Key Findings of the eRPIS, Wave 2 (November–December 2025)

Background

Syria's political transition in December 2024 prompted urgent questions about if, when, and under what conditions Syrian refugees would return home. To track intentions, UNHCR's Regional MENA Bureau and the World Bank launched a two-wave survey of 7,800 Syrian refugee households across Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon. Wave 1 (May–June 2025) was the baseline; In 2025, UNHCR and the World Bank expanded eRPIS into a panel survey to track the same households over time and better understand how intentions and return decisions evolve.

Purpose

This summary presents key findings from that data to support evidence-based planning for Syria's transition.

Key Findings

1. Short-term intentions have declined, but long-term aspirations remain strong

Short-term intent dropped from 18% to 14%, but 77% still hope to return one day, stable across all three 2025 survey rounds. The decline reflects persistent barriers inside Syria, not reduced desire to return.

[Declining short-term intent reflect perceived barriers on the ground](#)

2. Return intentions do not fully predict who returns

68% of those who returned between June and December had earlier said they did not plan to return within the next 12 months, this shows that stated intentions provide useful signals but capture only part of actual return behaviour, as intentions reflect people's views at the time of the survey and may change as circumstances shift.

[Pairing survey-based intentions with administrative data on actual returns in this survey gives a more accurate picture of return dynamics.](#)

3. Return is a whole-family decision, not an individual one

Return decisions are typically made collectively within households, with most families planning to move as full units. Nearly all intended returns involve the entire household, increasing from 93% in June to 95% in December, highlighting the central role of family-level considerations in return planning.

[Higher likelihood of return is associated with strong household ties to Syria, including prior family returns, regular communication with relatives, and the presence of older household members. Areas of origin must be prepared to support returning families, including children and older persons.](#)

4. Refugees' motivations to return reflect a mix of emotional and practical factors

In June, motivations centered on perceived security improvements, a strong sense of national identity ("Syria is my homeland"), rising living costs and limited job opportunities in host countries, shrinking protection space, and reduced assistance. By December, those surveyed placed greater emphasis on practical concerns like improved services, access to housing and property, reliable information, and family reunification.

5.	Construction and agriculture workers are driving actual returns
	<p>95% of construction workers and 92% of agricultural workers are day laborers, and both groups are overrepresented among actual returnees. Their skills transfer directly to Syria's recovery needs.</p> <p>Prioritizing this group for early reintegration support will accelerate returns at scale.</p>
6.	Security remains the dominant barrier to short-term return
	<p>In June 2025, 77% of refugees reported safety concerns about returning. By December that figure dropped to 69% but remained high. Concerns include armed actors, kidnapping, communal violence, weak law enforcement, and unexploded ordnance.</p> <p>Security is the primary factor that can either accelerate or reverse return momentum.</p>
7.	Property conditions are a critical barrier and an actionable one
	<p>Refugees with documented, habitable property report 21% return intent, above the 14% regional average. Property conditions are a critical barrier to return.</p> <p>Documented, habitable property is the strongest predictor of short-term return intention.</p>
8.	Return intentions show strong geographic concentration
	<p>Nearly one quarter of surveyed refugees originate from Homs, followed by Idleb, Aleppo, Dar'a, Rural Damascus, and Hama. Around 87% of those intending to return plan to go back to their area of origin, a pattern consistent across survey rounds and mirrored among recent returnees.</p> <p>Future return flows are likely to concentrate in specific governorates as conditions improve.</p>
9.	Returnees face acute early needs but intend to stay
	<p>89% returned as full households and 91% plan to stay permanently. But returnees report the same unmet needs as those still in host countries: energy, healthcare, housing, water, and food.</p> <p>Returnees and non-returnees cite the same gaps, early support determines whether returns last.</p>
10.	Economic vulnerability is widespread in host countries
	<p>While 90% of main income earners are employed, most work in unstable and informal conditions. Around 79% rely on daily labour, 57% report significant monthly income fluctuations, only 25% hold valid work permits, and nearly all households carry debt.</p> <p>Livelihood insecurity remains a structural constraint shaping refugees' ability to plan for return.</p>
11.	Growing economic vulnerability among refugees in host countries
	<p>As some households with relatively stronger resources return, economically more precarious families are increasingly overrepresented among those remaining in host countries. High debt burdens, unstable incomes, and limited access to formal employment continue to erode coping capacity.</p> <p>Return movements may coincide with rising socio-economic fragility among residual refugee populations.</p>

Advocacy asks

<p>A</p> <p>Addressing housing damage and documentation gaps</p> <p>48% own property in Syria but only 11% of it is habitable and 52% lack documentation.</p> <p>→ Refugees with secure, documented housing are 50% more likely to return.</p>	<p>B</p> <p>Concentrating recovery in areas of origin</p> <p>87% of intending returnees plan to go back to where they came from; predominantly Homs, Idleb, Aleppo, and Dar'a.</p> <p>→ Housing, services, and livelihoods must be available concurrently in these areas.</p>	<p>C</p> <p>Supporting workers who are already returning</p> <p>Construction & agriculture day laborers are over-represented among actual returnees and their skills match Syria's recovery needs.</p> <p>→ Targeted reintegration support for this group has immediate impact.</p>	<p>D</p> <p>Supporting the most vulnerable refugees in host countries</p> <p>As early returns take place, economically more vulnerable households are increasingly overrepresented among those remaining.</p> <p>→ Sustained livelihood and social protection support in host countries remains critical.</p>
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