

Refugees and asylum-seekers in Syria


January – March 2023

13,064
refugees


5,585
asylum-seekers

153 new individuals
registered
34 individuals recognized
as refugees

Population Demographics


8% of refugees are elderly



44% of refugees are children

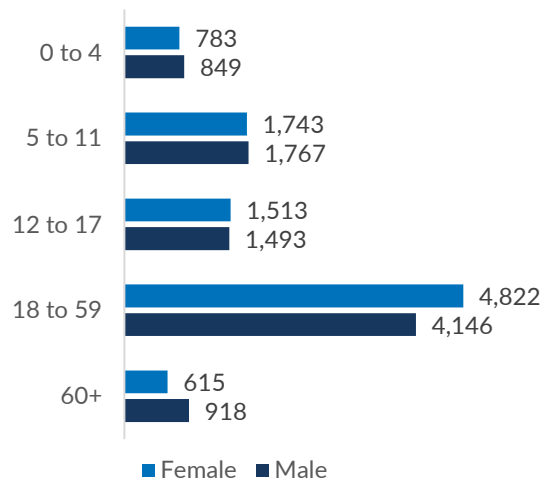


18,649
Total population



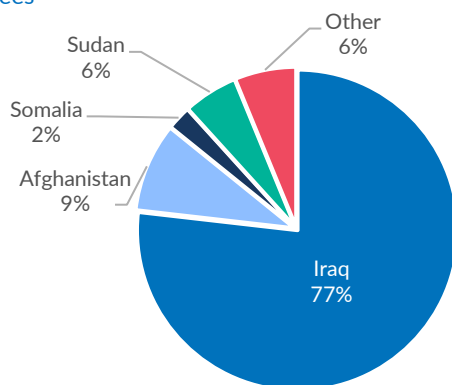
52% of refugees have special needs

Age Distribution

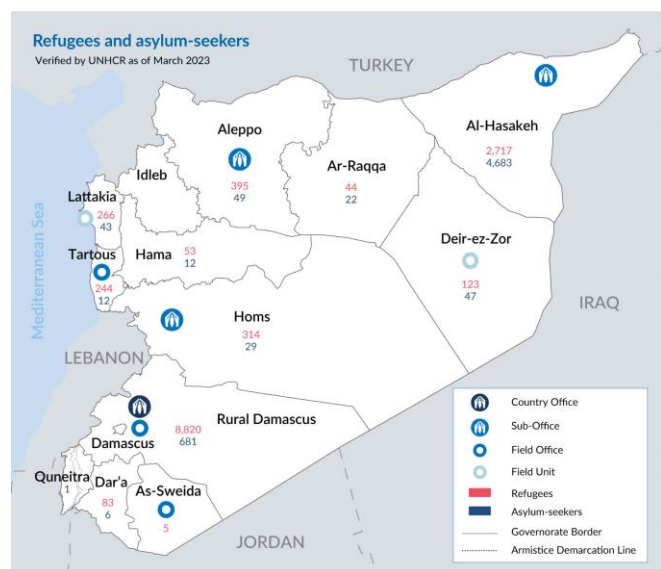


Country of Origin

Refugees



Asylum-seekers





Registration and Identity Management

Registration of people seeking international protection is critical, as it enables the **early identification of individuals with specific needs** and their **referral to available protection responses**. Additionally, registration provides comprehensive population data needed for programme planning, including for shelter, food, health, water and sanitation, cash-based interventions and other forms of assistance.

UNHCR Syria aligned its refugee biometrics systems with the global UNHCR Biometrics and Identity Management System (BIMS). UNHCR identification cards provided to refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR constitute proof of legal identity, can prevent arbitrary arrest and *refoulement*, and **facilitate greater freedom of movement**. The cards also enable refugees and asylum-seekers to apply for **legal residency, register vital events** (particularly birth registration) and access basic assistance in Syria.

In Q1 2023, UNHCR registered **153 new individuals** and issued **4,737 identification cards**. The registration helpline received 2,229 calls in Q1 2023.



Refugee Status Determination

Refugee Status Determination (RSD) is the legal or administrative process by which governments or UNHCR determine whether a person seeking international protection is considered a refugee under international, regional or national law. RSD is often a **vital process in helping refugees realize their rights under international law**. In agreement with the Government of Syria, UNHCR conducts RSD for asylum-seekers in the country.

In Q1 2023, interviews were conducted for **41 cases (62 individuals)**, **57 cases (89 individuals)** were submitted for review, and **51 cases (100 individuals)** were reviewed. Decisions were taken for **43 cases (81 individuals)**, out of which **23 cases (34 individuals)** were recognized as refugees, and **20 cases (47 individuals)** were rejected.

An **RSD helpline** is fully operational, providing counselling on the process and status to asylum-seekers and refugees on their individual cases. In Q1 2023, the RSD helpline received over **126** calls relating primarily to the status of individual cases and requests for cash assistance.



Resettlement

UNHCR Syria identifies and submits a few cases for resettlement including highly vulnerable refugees. In Q1 2023, **35** individuals were interviewed to determine resettlement eligibility and **1** refugee was submitted to resettlement country under the unallocated quota. In addition, UNHCR facilitated the departure of **9** individuals under resettlement.

As many refugees are keen on resettlement, although resettlement opportunities remain very limited, the resettlement hotline offers regular counselling to refugees, providing accurate information on the status of individual cases and trying to manage expectations. In Q1 2023, a total of **251 individuals** were counselled about their resettlement cases.

 **Community-based protection**

As of end of Q1 2023, there were **114** UNHCR-supported **community centres**, of which one centre was established and implemented under the leadership of the community groups and located in north-east Syria, where many refugees and asylum seekers reside. UNHCR-supported community centres are designed as a “one-stop shop” which is critical to reach to the people in need, particularly in remote areas where availability of services is scarce. Moreover, community centres cooperate with other facilities and service providers to ensure complementarity in service provision. Refugees and asylum-seekers have access to all UNHCR-supported community centres and can benefit from a wide variety of protection interventions.

UNHCR also engages **104 refugee outreach volunteers** (RORVs) of different nationalities in Al-Hasakeh, Aleppo, Damascus, Rural Damascus, Homs, Latakia and Tartous Governorates. The RORVs promote community engagement and empower youth to design and lead community-based projects. Additionally, through follow-ups and home visits, the volunteers identify and respond to the needs of vulnerable households either directly or through referrals to community centres, other service providers including charity and local organizations or government entities.

 **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support**

During the reporting period, **31** refugees and asylum-seekers received **mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS)**, including individual and group counselling, with a smaller number referred to specialized mental health services such as psychiatrists and psychotherapists.

UNHCR and partners conducted **three social/recreational activities and awareness-raising sessions for 61 individuals**

 **Child Protection**

UNHCR and partners conducted awareness-raising sessions in Damascus as well as in Al-Hol camp and Tel Hamees in Al-Hasakeh Governorate targeting **134 refugee children and 18 refugee caregivers (152 in total)**. The awareness sessions covered topics on various child protection risks. As a result of the awareness raising sessions, a positive impact was observed on the children’s capacities and skillsets, especially in areas where there is lack of schools.

Two refugee and asylum-seeking children clubs and child welfare committees were established in Damascus, Al-Hol camp and Tal Hamees in Al-Hasakeh Governorate. The members of the child welfare committees and children’s clubs received several trainings, including on their role in the communities as well as child protection basics and referral mechanisms.

 **Gender-based violence**

Since the beginning of 2023, UNHCR and partners identified and supported 17 refugee and asylum-seeker survivors of **gender-based violence (GBV)** with psychosocial services, livelihood opportunities, legal aid and material assistance. Outreach volunteers helped link the survivors with support networks within their communities.

Additionally, UNHCR conducted **seven** GBV awareness sessions on psychological violence, deprivation of resources, opportunities and services, child marriage, sexual harassment, and physical violence, targeting **120** adolescent and adult women in Rural Damascus as well as in Al-Hol camp and Tal Hamees in Al-Hasakeh Governorate where of the majority of refugee communities are located. As a result of the awareness-raising sessions on behavioural change, higher levels of awareness and implementation of prevention measures designed by the communities were observed.

In 2023, **two** refugee **women's committees** continued their community involvement in north-east Syria to enhance the role of women in decision-making and designing activities inside refugee camps.



Cash assistance

Cash assistance continues to be the most efficient and dignified way to allow the people under UNHCR's mandate to meet their basic needs, especially in the prevailing economic situation. In Q1 2023, multi-purpose cash grant was extended to asylum-seekers in addition to refugees, specifically as of 1 March 2023. Additionally, winterization cash assistance, and exceptional financial assistance (for urgent and unforeseen protection needs) continued during Q1 2023. Multi-purpose cash grants (MPCGs) and winterization grant targeted both asylum seeker and refugee families who were prioritized based on demographics and specific needs. The assistance was provided in cash over the counter.

In Q1 2023, **monthly multi-purpose cash grants** were provided to **8,991** households (**125,648 individuals**). In addition, a total of **8,561** households (**116,720 individuals**) including both refugees and asylum-seekers received the second tranche of **winterization cash assistance**.



Legal Assistance

Lack of identity and travel documents, irregular status, and limited knowledge on national legislation and procedures are the main legal challenges encountered by refugees and asylum-seekers in Syria, affecting their ability to secure residency and register vital events, as well as limiting their freedom of movement and access to basic rights and services.

In response to some of these challenges, UNHCR provides **legal assistance** on a range of issues such as *refoulement*, residency, civil documentation, registration of vital events (particularly birth registration), detention, exit visas, prevention and response to GBV, and child protection issues.

The legal assistance includes counselling and support for legal interventions before courts and administrative bodies as well as awareness raising activities conducted either through

direct sessions or printed materials to disseminate information and raise the awareness of refugees and asylum-seekers on the applicable laws and procedures.

In total during the first quarter of 2023, UNHCR legal assistance programs have provided legal assistance to **2,349** refugees and asylum-seekers on various legal matters.

Legal advocacy

With reference to the **Legislative Decree 24/2022** issued on 21 December 2022 granting a general amnesty for some crimes, committed prior to its date of issuance, including some military service crimes, misdemeanours and offences, some crimes and certain penalties of financial nature were still excluded. UNHCR successfully advocated with the Directorate of Civil Affairs and the Directorate of Immigration and Passports to include relevant fines imposed for offences related to the Civil Affairs Law as well as the Law that regulates Entry and Exit of Non-Syrians and Arabs to Syria. As a result, **279** Ref and AS benefited from the amnesty and succeeded to renew their residency without paying the articulated fines.

Capacity building

In coordination with the Diplomatic Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), UNHCR Syria conducted a two-day workshop on the International Protection for Refugees on 24-25 January 2023. The workshop was attended by 44 participants, and it mainly targeted diplomats assigned to multilateral settings and to countries hosting refugees. The workshop was also attended by participants from both Ministry of Interior MOI and Ministry of Justice MOJ. The workshop aimed at, inter alia, highlighting the international legal frameworks related to refugee protection and the relevant basic principles, refugees' rights and obligations, durable solutions, challenges encountered by refugees, and the best practices that can be applied by governments to enhance the protection of refugees.